

tended to have about a third of its potential membership actually join the organization) and in the fact that its fee was only 30 cents per student, which, if you take inflation into account, was about twenty percent of what people have been paying last time they belonged to a national organization. So there was a low fee and a low membership which caused all sorts of problems for NUS. It had to prove itself and it took a while to do that. It has only been in the last year or so that NUS could show that it could once again get the support of every student union in the country that cared, keep up to date with what was happening with student aid and tuition, and get student input on student aid review boards. Now student unions across the country are taking less of a wait-and-see attitude and are beginning to join the organization. We've lost very few referenda. More campuses have voted in favour of national work this year than ever before.

Also, NUS has been able to do a lot in getting regional organizations established outside of Ontario. AFS has drawn heavily on NUS research and information. The only regional campaign that AFS ran last year was an extension of an NUS campaign. The same sort of work has been done in BC and Alberta, and off-and-on with Quebec students as well.

Things are comparatively rosy. The next academic year will be the first time in a long time that students will have made a substantial financial contribution to working together. We will have an organization with good membership distributed across the country with representatives in Ottawa. We will be able to start to get together again in terms of actual campaigns to work on student aid, housing, tuition and the problems of women students. Students really have to pull together if they want to get the kinds of programs that are going to benefit students.

**Gazette:** People are going to judge NUS on results, they are going to want to see some benefits from their financial commitment and their support. What kinds of things has NUS done in the past and what programmes are planned for the future?

**O'Connor:** I think I should make it clear that I don't think that NUS had been doing nearly enough up until now. There are some very clear reasons, as well, why it was impossible to do all the things it should have done. However, it would have been unrealistic to have expected much more than it has done.

With that in mind, I still think NUS has done a hell of a lot with the resources and commitment that it was offered by student leaders around the country. It has re-established strong links of communications among student leaders across the country. Right now when something of importance happens in province "A" people in other provinces are finding out about it a lot faster than they were in the sixties. Not only do they find out that it is happening but they also find out how it fits in the national picture and with their campus picture. This year we have seen tuition increases and student aid decisions that have been disastrous but people are finding out about it all over the country. NUS and the various regional and local student organizations were aware, ahead of time, of the government plans in employment and student aid, and therefore, were able to have input into those things.

For instance, UNB is a place where, last year, tuition increases were coming through there and the student council really wasn't even aware that the tuition increase was likely, although anyone who had been watching the scene at all would have known that a tuition increase was logical at that place. As well, those at UNB that were aware of the proposed increase didn't see any way of fighting it. They had no idea of all the policy ramifications one way or another. So it went through with no student opposition. This year they are a lot more involved provincially and nationally, and aware of the fact that tuition increases are happening and that you can gain a lot and can never lose by opposing a tuition increase. Now they know a lot more about how to oppose one. This year again, tuition was going up at UNB but people were looking for it and were ready to organize against it.

Governments and faculty are definitely paying a lot more attention to student needs and concerns than they were before

NUS got going. It is still far from what it should be but it wouldn't have even occurred to government or university committees to find out what student opinion was on something a few years ago but today it is just assumed by them that they will try, through NUS to find out what students are thinking. It allows us input and they at least make a token response to that input.

**Gazette:** Is the situation at UNB this year (tuition increases and students organized against them; student aid cutbacks and students organized again) a foreshadowing of events to come in the rest of the country, and what students can expect to have to do?

**O'Connor:** That's hard to say. The answer to that obviously doesn't depend on the students, it depends on the governments. If other governments are going to have as bad a post secondary education policy and attitude towards post secondary education as the New Brunswick government, and on top of that original bad policy and attitude are going to get stubborn about it, then students may very well have to realize that their only hope lies in the kind of action that the New Brunswick students took. I think students are going to realize that you can't turn a government around simply by giving it a brief you have to show that you care about what's in your brief and you have to show that when you say something that you mean it and are willing to act on it. It is pretty clear that that's the kind of pressure a government responds to.

**Gazette:** Could you say, would you say, then, that one of the functions of NUS is to watch governments and developments, and prepare students in various regions for the potential government positions on student issues?

**O'Connor:** Yes, to my mind that is one of the main purposes of the organization. People sometimes think that the organization should go onto a campus and educate the local people as to the potential developments at that campus and should then tell them to go on strike. That's different from what the organization does.

We want to do the kind of research and examination that individual campuses do not have the time nor expertise for. We also want to make sure that the benefits of this work gets to the student body so that students at various campuses become aware of the issues and can do something about it. We want to get students to the stage where they can examine the problem and decide to do or not to do something. From each student putting in a little bit of money we have an organization that can work for students on all campuses. The direction, as opposed to the assistance, comes from the students.

**Gazette:** One of the criticisms levied at NUS since its establishment is that it has spent too much of its energy holding referenda for membership and too little time actually working for students nationally. Probably, this criticism is vocalized more by campuses that are already in NUS. Could you comment on this?

**O'Connor:** Well, it is true that this year most of the energy has gone into membership drives but certainly not all of it. NUS was able to give strong and really useful support to campuses which they wouldn't have gotten otherwise as well as working on the campaign to get more members. However, we haven't had the resources to do a big national effort on something.

The thing this year is that when a NUS worker went into a province for three weeks that at least two-and-a-half of those weeks would be spent at campuses that were having referenda. One good thing is that no campus that was already in NUS has rejected the dollar fee per student. But it has been a bit of a strain on the old members.

However, they should remember that this is very much to the advantage of those that have already joined. While NUS was content to sit on its fairly small membership and did not ask for much commitment of them then people were not only making that small commitment but they were not getting very much back. There was basic communication and co-ordination of activities but it was pretty rudimentary. It was not anywhere near what a national organization should have had.

Credit should be given to those twenty or so campuses that stuck with NUS through thick and thin: Dalhousie, St. Mary's and King's are three of those loyal campuses. But if they had merely left it at that plateau the organization would have fallen apart because it was a pretty low plateau. Since they had been in NUS since the beginning they came to take for granted the benefits they were receiving, however minimal. Dalhousie is now quite used to having input to a lot of decisions like housing, and having the input for what is happening elsewhere in the country.

So, partly, the campuses are taking NUS for granted and it's partially true that in this year the resources were limited but for this short term sacrifice people are getting an organization that is much larger in terms of campuses and students; the people in it are making a greater commitment and giving the proper attention to the organization. From that one increase campuses are going to get a many-fold increase in the quality of support from the organization. There will be someone working at least half of their time in the Atlantic region helping the Atlantic students. That is just a quantum leap ahead from having someone make a two week trip twice or three times a year. Instead of having two people in an office fighting to keep the phone answered, add to that five people who can take time to do research at a fairly constant level, a good communication network, and detailed monitoring of government activities.

**Gazette:** Could you be more specific about the changes for NUS next year? There is going to be a fee increase, a staff increase and an increased budget -- where is it all going? What are the priorities in terms of budget allocations?

**O'Connor:** Well, I can't give as good an answer as I'd like to because there are two really if-y qualifications to the answer. Number one is that there are two major campuses that are still up in the air in terms of whether they are going to be NUS members at the dollar next year. They are UBC with 20,000 students who would obviously have a big impact on the budget and the University of Western Ontario with 16,000 students may join in either March or October of '76 and depending on that the budget would be affected accordingly.

If we exclude both of those campuses the budget is going to be \$160,000 to \$170,000 dollars for next year.

The budgetary decisions have not been made yet. The NUS executive is going to get together a few weeks from now and look over what the budget is going to be and, in terms of what feedback they've had from campuses as to what they expect from the organization and keeping in mind what can be realistically done with the money, they will put together a proposal. This will then go to the members and at the national conference in May the actual decisions will be made.

Meanwhile, there are some broad guidelines. At any time the organization will make sure that at least fifty percent of the resources are spent on local campus work and not on the Ottawa office: on fieldwork and communications, to get information into students hands.

**Gazette:** What was the budget this year and last?

**O'Connor:** This year we are operating on a budget of nearly \$60,000 and last year it was between \$45,000 and \$50,000.

**Gazette:** Obviously there will be a staff increase...

**O'Connor:** Yes, next year the staff will be somewhere between eight and fourteen. This year there are three full-time people.

**Gazette:** Where are these extra people going to be placed within the organization, what are they going to be doing?

**O'Connor:** I can only say what I would personally like to see and what I am going to ask the executive to consider. I do not know whether the executive will pay any attention to me and further whether the membership will pay any attention to them. So, with that qualification, what I would like to see if there are to be eight staff would be three or four working in Ottawa; one working full time in the Atlantic region out of Halifax; one working full-time in Winnipeg and to have three people traveling full-time and working in the national office when needed. The traveling should be split up among those in Ottawa so that there is one person always in Ontario and perhaps two people in the west.

# NUS is US

**Gazette:** What about students in Quebec, aren't they a big consideration?

**O'Connor:** It isn't as big a question as some people think it is. Quebec students have not been working with other Canadian students for twelve years now. Although there is, on the surface, sentiment among Quebec student leaders that they might want to work with other students it isn't at all clear that it is a sentiment shared by the rest of the students in Quebec.

And even if it is, considering the linguistic and political differences between the two student movements, it is going to take a long time for any more than superficial co-ordination to happen.

It hasn't been a high priority with NUS because things that can be accomplished more quickly and effectively are getting the priority. There has been slow movement and communication back and forth and there have been a lot of problems. It is pretty clear that the Quebec student organization (ANEQ) has fallen prey to sectarian politics. There are a couple of left-wing sectarian groups that are battling each other for control of the student organization. That makes the organization ineffective and that makes its policies subject to change. It has tended to pollute ANEQ's relations with other student organizations.

There is a lot of criticism of ANEQ but that shouldn't be seen as criticism of Quebec students. It has gotten to the point where people are saying they just don't think that the ANEQ executive represents Quebec students. That is a problem on top of all the others and I have no idea what is going to come out of it. At the moment no one even knows what ANEQ is going to be like in a couple of months.

**Gazette:** Could you discuss NUS's priorities for the next year?

**O'Connor:** NUS sees its priorities in terms of issues rather than particular activities. The number one issue for certain is going to be the combined one of student aid and tuition. That issue leads into another one that is obviously going to be big and that's employment. Those student aid and tuition policies pretty well mean that you have to get a good summer job if you want to have financial security at all or if even want to be able to get back into university. The student unemployment situation is worse than its ever been and it looks like governments are increasing rather than decreasing student unemployment. As long as we do have the present student aid and tuition policies then work on student unemployment is vital.

As well, housing fits into the picture. Housing is a problem that faces low income Canadians and students are in the picture because they are low income Canadians as well as being students.

The problems faced by foreign students are an issue. It is least noticeable in the Atlantic region because, to its credit, the Atlantic region has far less bias against foreign students than any other region. It is clear that the governments are willing to use and increase the dislike of foreign students in order to emotionally blackmail each other into increasing their portion of the costs of post secondary education. The provinces say to Ottawa that they will ignore foreign students unless they get more money from the federal government, and then Ottawa does the same to the provincial government.

Another issue that is going to remain a priority is the whole issue of women students. There is yet an awful lot to be done everywhere in terms of real equality of men and women at the student level. Those being the major priorities, there are a lot of other activities that we are going to try to give attention to but they tend to be things about which we cannot do a lot unless people voluntarily do work at the local campus level: insurance programs for students, student radio stations to organize to work on the federal government policies about student radio, communications, course evaluations, tenure, unionization within university, decision making within university, and on and on.

Outside of the strict student issues are the problems of students at community colleges and the state of adult education programmes: these two issues are priorities within NUS as well.

**Gazette:** Rumour has it that the National Union of Students is going to be publishing a newspaper. Can you tell us anything about this?

**O'Connor:** There is going to be a national student newspaper which should be coming out before students write their exams this year. It has the problems faced by anything the NUS has to do out of its central office. One person can only do so much a day. The newspaper is called *The Student Advocate* and its going to be distributed, if we can afford it, in Quebec in the French language institutions outside of Quebec. It is definitely going to have distribution in the Anglophone institutions in and out of Quebec. There are going to be at least 50,000 copies of the first issue.

**Gazette:** Could you explain then the NUS position on freedom of the student press on the individual campuses?

**O'Connor:** The NUS position is the same as the student newspapers. That is a decision that was made by the student unions in NUS and has been agreed to by most of the potential members of NUS. Basically, it is that they respect the principle of Canadian University Press: that adds up to freedom for the student press.

I think people recognize that a controlled press on a campus is not going to be a good press at all, students aren't going to get full or adequate coverage of what is happening with student council or the general community. Those newspapers are going to say only what council wants them to say so NUS recognizes that for students to get the kind of coverage that they need the student press has to be independent.

That policy decision is not completely binding on the member campuses; if a paper is being controlled by the council NUS could, and probably would, tell council that they were being short-sighted and foolish in the matter. NUS might also go beyond the council to the general students of the campus to save the student newspaper. If NUS has to choose at any time between serving the students at a campus and serving the student council, it will always serve the students.

**Gazette:** Generally, what do you expect to see happening in education in Canada in the next couple of years?

**O'Connor:** I think the next two years are going to see real struggle over general educational policies. It is now clear beyond a shadow of a doubt that governments in Canada, regardless of what party is in power, are interested only in cutting back on education. That is going to be the focus of the struggle. There will be increasing pressure for tuitions to go up, there will be more reports like the Graham commission in Nova Scotia. They make really incoherent, but to the government welcome, arguments for high tuition. The governments are glad to listen to those arguments because they no longer have any commitment to universal accessibility to post secondary education.

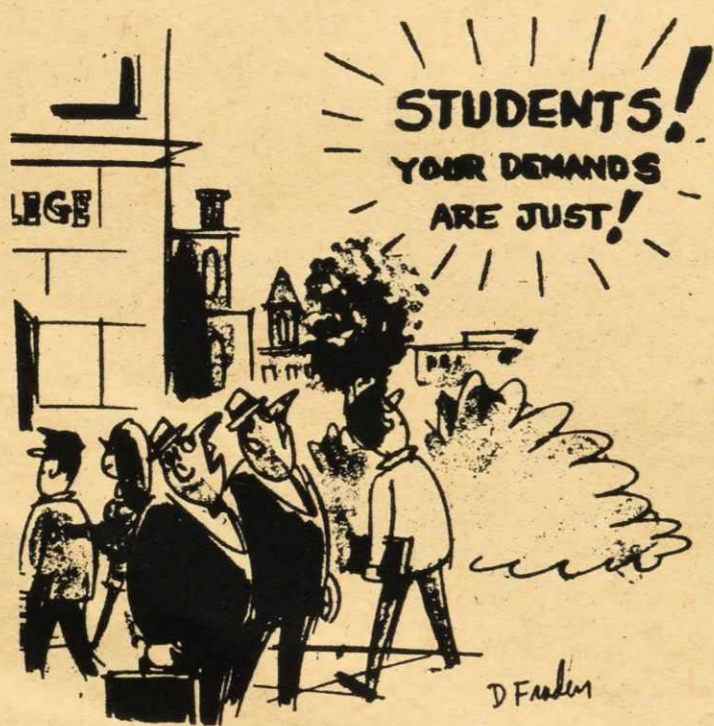
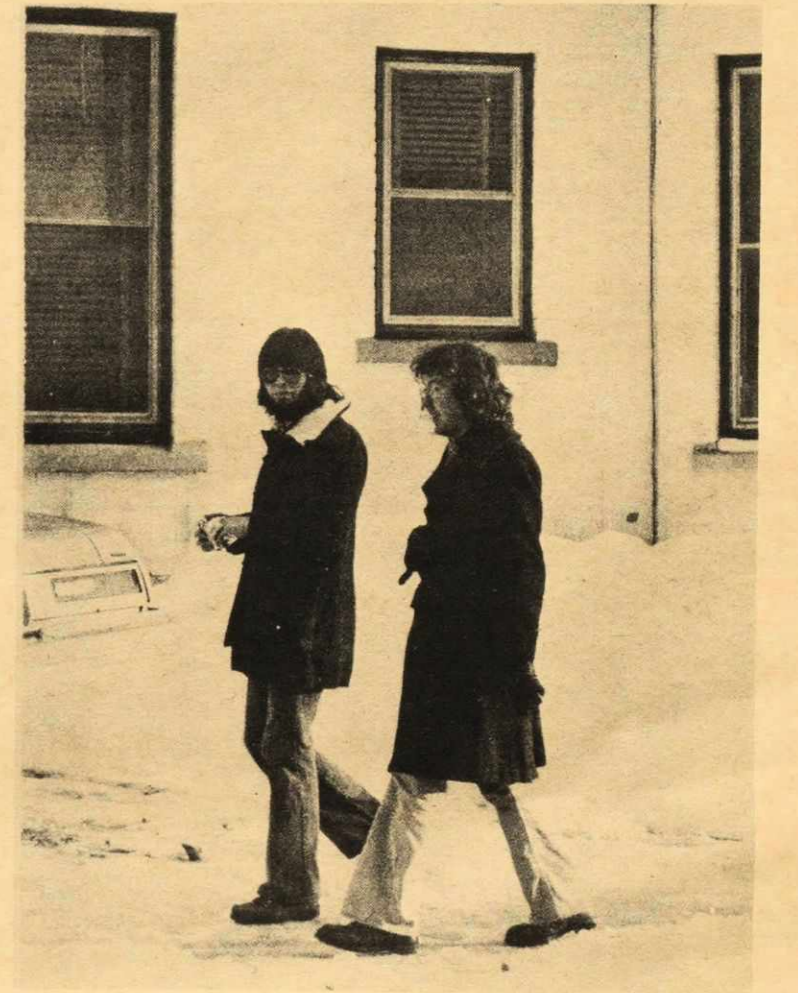
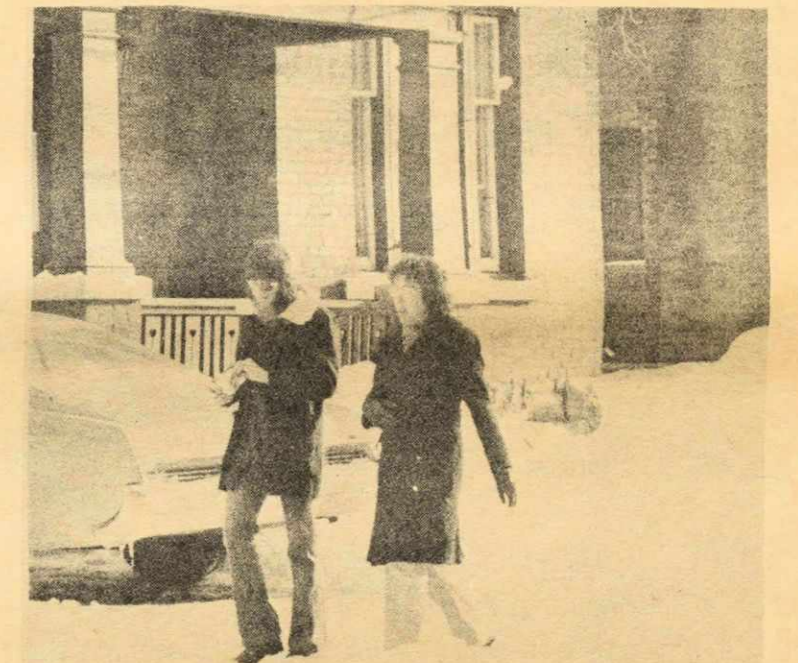
I don't know where it is going to lead to. No government has yet come out and said that they don't want universal accessibility. But you do get the premier of Manitoba saying that he doesn't want the tax payer paying for the education of a millionaire's daughter and so cutting student aid. Correctly, one student union president reminded him that there weren't that many millionaires daughters in Manitoba and if it meant cutting aid to the needy students then they would prefer to pay for the few millionaires as well.

There was an international study of Canadian education done by the OECD (an organization comprised of the twenty-four richest countries in the world, Canada being one of the members) in which they looked at the problems of the system. They said that Canadian education is dominated by powerful interest groups who want no change, whose only concept of planning for the future is to plan for more of the same. They concluded that our government discourages discussion about education among the public and even among those in education. They were amazed by the secrecy and hypocrisy with which the Canadian government dealt with education. This group advised that the education system must be changed or Canada would face a serious deterioration in its education.

Right now the governments are re-negotiating their system for paying for post secondary institutions and for student aid and they are going to do what they think the public wants or what they feel they can get away with.

I think it is in student's hands what the eventual result will be. I think the next few years will be really exciting, but I have no idea about the eventual outcome.

**Gazette:** Thank you.



"Now, there's 'outside agitation'!"