

Why Student Unionism?

The concept of student unionism is based on the fact that students share common problems by virtue of their common social role and life situation. Most students are faced by the same material conditions - unemployment, inadequate housing, insufficient student aid, etc.

More basically, they share the same social role. Students not only share (along with the rest of society) the problem of powerlessness vis-a-vis their own lives and environment, but they are also involved in producing themselves to function as agents in continuing the societal structure.

Students lack control over the content and direction of the educational process of which they themselves are to be the products.

The basis for student unionism must be in these common problems.

The fundamental demand of student unions must be for control over the learning process and the decision-making process at all levels. The basis for this control is not a belief that students constitute an elite, but the principle that control over one's material and social environment is a fundamental democratic right.

Student unions must induce students to examine and act on features of their educational and social environment which, without conscious reflections, they have come to accept as "natural and therefore inevitable."

The aim of such a program should be to stimulate discussion of educational and social issues among the greatest possible number

of students and to encourage students to come to grips, individually and collectively, with the problems they share by virtue of a common role and life situation. Student union should create awareness amongst students of their social responsibility to act collectively to solve these problems.

It must be the union members who have democratic power.

Student councils are merely selected as organizing agents for the union and as such, their methods must become political rather than bureaucratic - democratic rather than elitist. Councils must devolve power to the members of the union - the students - through the mechanisms of mass meetings, course unions, newsletters, pamphlets, seminars, teach-ins, the campus newspaper, etc.

Student unions need to organize at the national level to discuss these problems, to develop direction for union activity in Canada and to establish supportive agents to aid them in this work. The national union must be closely related to the provincial and regional unions to deal with specific geographical or jurisdictional aspects of the national problems.

National, provincial and regional unions must work together to avoid duplication and useless territorial battles. The focus of student union activity is on campus - national, regional and provincial unions exist to support and co-ordinate that activity.

WHY

Orientation Restricts Creativity

The roots of the present orientation programs are clear. Existing orientation programs generally are a specific examples of a socialization process by which the student's individual creativity is unnecessarily restricted.

WHEREAS orientation programs in the past have not served to introduce the students to the process of critically analyzing the university and the society of which it is an integral part.

AND WHEREAS orientation should serve to emphasize the high and university situations, and lead the students towards a critical analysis of the university and society.

Therefore be it resolved that:

(1) CUS encourage all universities in Canada to establish orientation programs which encourage students to think about their position in society rather than urging upon them a spirit of competitiveness and a desire to "succeed" in society as it now exists.

(2) Orientation programs be a dis-orientation from the ideas and myths acquired in the

secondary school system, and be an introduction to a continuing program geared to structures, education, the political realities of university life, and the relationship of the university to society.

(3) Orientation problems should in no way attempt to be a crash course in student government and university life.

(4) Orientation programs cease in any way to suggest that freshmen are inferior individuals, and eliminate activities based on hazing and other degrading activities including those which perpetuate oppression in social relationship - between men and women currently prevalent in our society (e.g. shame auctions of Freshettes, Queen Contests, Kangaroo Courts).

(5) CUS encourage all universities to extend to all members of the university community, (student, faculty, non-academic staff) full participation in all aspects of University Orientation.

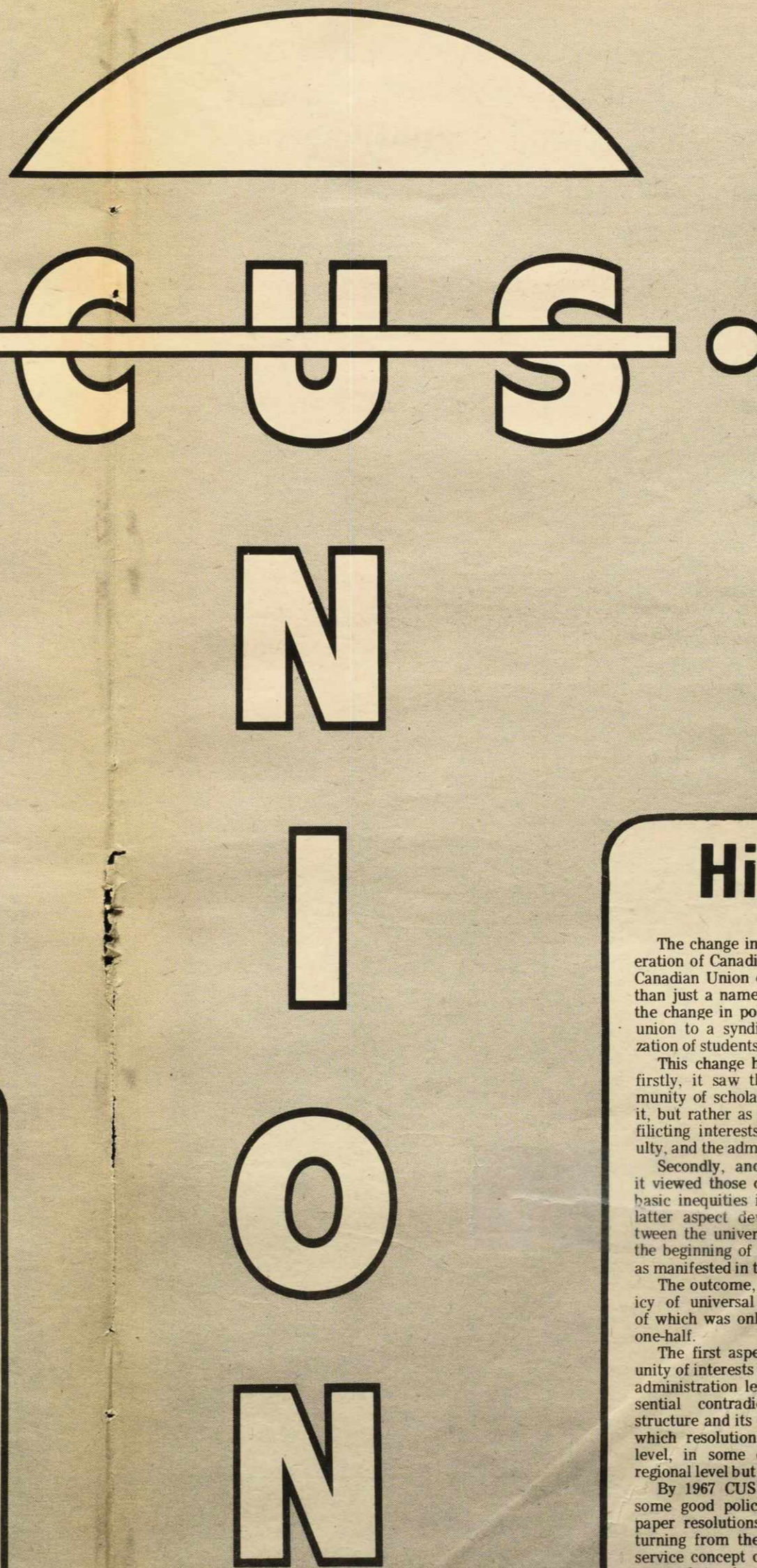
(6) The member unions be mandated to

prepare comprehensive criticisms of their orientation programs this fall, and that the secretariat prepare a synopsis of these for distribution, and that the secretariat be mandated to conduct a training seminar for orientation program organizers for next fall.

WHEREAS orientation programs in general have ignored the relationship of the individual to the learning process.

AND WHEREAS students just out of high-school have a hierarchical conception of education and, this conception foster teacher-pupil relationship as opposed to a learning relationship of consultation between student and teaching staff as resource people.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED CUS urge the member institutions to emphasize in their orientation programs that learning and struggle outside of set course structures while using the resources of the institution, such as staff, other students and libraries, to this end. The concept of intellectual struggle as a method of analysis should be emphasized as well.



Compulsory

The necessary power basis for students to solve their common educational and social problems comes from their ability to act collectively and consciously as a union.

Bargaining strength derives from the indispensability of students to the educational process, and their consequent ability to act collectively on the process. The need for a union as a vehicle for this action, as a means, becomes more obvious when one considers the present distribution of power to unified faculty groups and administrations within the university, and more fundamentally, to a unified ruling elite in society.

Such a union can only have power if all students are members.

Voluntary membership weakens the position of any union, both in demanding solutions and diverting energies away from solutions to recruiting members. In addition, non-members of a voluntary union often become parasites on the activities and work of the union. To advocate a voluntary union is to deny the social responsibility of all students to act collectively to solve their common problems.

The arguments that have been presented against voluntary unionism at the local level apply equally to the national level.

The strength of CUS, is proportional to the number of members and commitment, particularly in dealing with the organized powers at the national level.

History of Unionism

The change in 1964 from the National Federation of Canadian University Students to the Canadian Union of Students (CUS) was more than just a name change. It reflected in part the change in policy from an old-style service union to a syndicalist concept in the organization of students.

This change had two important aspects - firstly, it saw the university not as a community of scholars, as the popular notion had it, but rather as an institution which had conflicting interests; those of the students, faculty, and the administration.

Secondly, and probably more important, it viewed those conflicts as a reflection of the basic inequities in the Canadian society. The latter aspect developed the relationship between the university and the society and was the beginning of a class analysis of the society as manifested in the university.

The outcome, however, was an idealist policy of universal accessibility, the resolution of which was only begun in the past year and one-half.

The first aspect dispelling the notion of a unity of interests between faculty, students and administration led to the sharpening of an essential contradiction in CUS - between its structure and its content - a contradiction for which resolution was sought at the national level, in some cases at the provincial and regional level but nowhere at the local level.

By 1967 CUS realized that while it had some good policy statements they remained paper resolutions and that local councils returning from the annual congress retained a service concept of their local union affairs as opposed to developing a consciousness and organizational forms which would allow students to come to grips with their problems

collectively. The solution to the problem was sought in increased communication with, and a tighter relationship to the students' council.

Provincial representatives from the local campuses which would compose a national board overseeing the operations of the union and the institution of fieldworkers seemed to be the solution in 1967. The enlargement of the National Council and the reassignment of fieldworkers to specified regions was the response of the 1968 Congress to the failure of local students' council. There was and remains a contradiction between the basis of CUS policy, which demands radical change, and the basis of the students' council, a politic which has had the function of fragmenting attempts at change, while performing as a prize-fighter for the status-quo.

While attaining some semblance of syndicalism, i.e. some autonomy as students, the parliamentary electoral process does not come to grips with their transiency and, in the general case, the handing over of individual political power to representatives which has historically developed our elitist governing structures.

Adding to the failure to deal with the structure of the local students' union was the unexpected radicalization of CUS policy, policy which remained radical only at a rhetorical level. For while the nature of the fundamental problem was discovered, CUS was forced to divert most of its resources into defending itself in the many red-baiting referendums of the past year rather than creatively developing alternatives.

Unless the local student union begins to take a serious look at its structure CUS* can be expected to expend its remaining resources defending the union and belying up by Christmas.