

Two sides square off

Referendum debate heats up

by Ryan Stanley

A certain referendum has got a handful of Dal students very riled up.

Whether Dal students will pay \$6 to remain members of the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) is not a question that has captivated student voters, but those campaigning on the 'yes' and 'no' sides make up with the 'yes' and 'no' sides make up with numbers.

Opponents of the ten-year-old national lobby group call it top heavy, bureaucratic and out of touch with average students, while its supporters say it is Canadian students' best hope for getting government to listen to them.

Passions flared at an impromptu debate moderated by the *Gazette* Tuesday night, held in place of a public forum at Shirreff Hall for which no one showed up.

Waye Mason, a student council member, said the organization, which has over seventy member student unions, has become too embroiled in the contentious social issues of the day to be able to speak for all students on the issues that concern them.

"If you're going to run an effective federation," he said, "if you want to have complete inclusiveness, you have to go for the lowest common denominator when it comes to your common politics." CFS conferences have spent much of their time debating issues such as abortion, women's and aboriginal rights, racism and Canadian foreign policy.

The CFS constitution obliges member schools to adopt policies decided by the organization as a whole, even if they disagree with them. Mason said this approach has driven some big schools away, so



Lisa Lachance makes a point for the 'yes' side.

PHOTO: LISA WAMBOLT

they don't take part in CFS' lobbying and thus leave it weak.

"Their constitution could bind us to things we don't agree with," he said. "As a member local we should have the right to opt out of things."

But Lisa Lachance, another council member, said these issues concern students too. "I don't stop being a woman when I become a student," she said. "You don't stop being a gay, lesbian or bisexual when you go to class."

Anthony Roberts agreed, saying it's "incredibly important" for CFS to take stands on social issues.

"Our society at large reflects what happens within post-secondary institutions," he said. "Access to institutions is controlled by what's going on outside of the institutions. So by

addressing those issues on a larger scale, you're going to be a lot more effective."

Chris Whynacht, on the 'no' team, said CFS wastes money on causes that have little to do with students. He said CFS staged a conference in Mexico last year to oppose the North American Free Trade Agreement. "My money for student lobbying should be going towards student loans and established program financing," he said. "Spending money on NAFTA is not the way my student lobby money should be spent."

Lachance disagreed, saying the three-country deal has a lot to say about education that students need to know about.

She and Roberts insist CFS is

worth the small amount of money Dal students put into it. She said the federal government often consults the organization when it debates policies which might affect students.

But Mason said the more important issue is the way CFS is run. Big schools, which contribute large amounts of money to the organization, get only one vote, as do small schools.

As well, he said, "Member locals are subject to and bound by the decisions that are made at the general meetings," he said. "I don't think it's acceptable for the union to be in an organization that's structured that way."

Voting is scheduled for March 28 and 29.

Provinces may shoulder loan burden

by G. Bruce Rolston

TORONTO (CUP) — The federal and provincial governments are in confidential negotiations over the future of the Canada Student Loan program.

The Liberal government has said it wants to carry out an election promise made by defeated Prime Minister Kim Campbell and hike the weekly loan maximum on Canada Student Loans for the first time in 10 years.

Under the federal proposal, the weekly loan maximum on Canada Student Loans would increase by \$60 a week.

But Richard Jackson, who is heading up negotiations for Ontario, says the federal Ministry of Human Resources Development is planning to do this without increasing the amount it actually spends.

Jackson said the new formula may shift more of the burden onto the provinces.

Both the provinces and Ottawa run student loan programs. The federal government suggests increasing the annual Canada Student Loan limit for a 34-week school year, from \$3,500 to \$5,600. If approved, students could choose to go in debt to the Canada Student Loan program by nearly \$2,000 more each year, which Ottawa says will improve accessibility to university education.

But in return, the federal government wants to see the loan formula

fundamentally changed so that even low-need students have to rely in some part on provincial aid.

Currently, all student loans under \$3,500 are covered solely by the federal loan program. Provincial loans only kick in for students needing larger amounts. Ottawa's new proposal would make the provinces cover 40 per cent of all student loans, regardless of their size.

Jackson points out that, because Ottawa is only covering 60 per cent of the total loan a student needs, only very large loans — over \$6,000 — will benefit from the increased loan limit. Most students will still be receiving less than \$3,500 from the government.

"From zero to \$6,000, the federal government is saving money," Jackson said.

Carl Gillis, chair of the Canadian Federation of Students, says the proposed changes are little more than a public relations ploy.

"If that's what they're pulling, it is a public relations exercise rather than any substantial reform."

The federal government also wants to change the way students' needs assessment formulas are calculated.

Many provinces calculate students' needs based on their family's income. They are resisting federal government plans to adopt a uniform national type of assessment that includes assets as well as income.

Several provinces, along with student lobby groups, say including assets in the

calculation would be inequitable.

But Gerry Godsoe, student aid policy chief for the federal ministry, said a uniform system is necessary. "We're trying to get a system that's totally equal across the country."

Godsoe pointed out that some provinces, including Alberta and Nova Scotia, already include some form of

assets in their assessments.

Godsoe said he could not comment on the negotiations, as they are still ongoing.

"There has been no announcement by the minister [Human Resources Development Minister Lloyd Axworthy.] Until there's an announcement I can't tell you anything."

Liberals promise social services overhaul

Youth may lose UI

by Graham Cook

VANCOUVER (CUP) — The federal government has proposed sweeping steps to reduce the number of young people on social assistance — by asking them to relinquish their claim to welfare and UI.

"I think it's tragic that the first, in a sense, paycheque that so many young people get is a paycheque from the government," minister of human resources development Lloyd Axworthy said in a CBC radio interview.

Axworthy proposes that young people between the ages of about 18 and 24 be given a "guarantee" to receive job training, apprenticeship, or education, and in return they would give up

their right to social assistance benefits. The "guarantee," however, does not promise any wage.

Debra Brown, an assistant to Axworthy, said the proposal is only one of several being considered over the summer in the current "revamp" of social services, which will also include changes to student loans and a "youth service corps."

The overall outlook for those 15 to 24 is bleak.

According to a recent Statistics Canada study on labour and income, the employment rate for young people peaked at 62.3 per cent in 1989, but now languishes at about 50 per cent. An increasing number of young people are turning to post-secondary edu-

CFS, DSU argue over legality of vote

by Ryan Stanley

Behind the debate on the merits and demerits of the national organization, CFS, the Dalhousie Student Union, and the Dalhousie Arguing over whether the whole exercise even counts.

Carl Gillis, CFS Chair, says the DSU didn't follow the CFS constitution when it decided to hold a referendum on membership. As a result, he says, the process isn't legitimate.

"The results of the referendum are not binding on us," said Gillis. "It's not a referendum and it's not valid."

DSU council members are outraged that CFS has promised not to recognize the results of the vote. DSU sources said Gillis has threatened legal action if Dal students vote to leave the organization.

The CFS constitution says that in order to pull out of the organization, a student union must give it six months notice and send copies of the questions and referendum rules to CFS.

Ironically it was Lisa Lachance, the outgoing Vice-President External and a member of the pro-CFS campaign, who was responsible for sending the documents to CFS back in September when the DSU council decided to hold a referendum. She admitted she didn't do it exactly as required.

"We did screw up," she said. "I screwed up, and I'll admit that."

Jefferson Rappell, the outgoing DSU President, said the DSU's lawyers advised him CFS "does have a bit of a case, as do we." He said the lawyers found the complex rules which CFS insisted on "very strange".

But Gillis called the regulations "very simple". Asked about the DSU's referendum, he said, "I've worked at referenda across the country, and I've never seen such juvenile behaviour."

Waye Mason, on the 'no' team, said CFS should realize the DSU was operating in good faith.

"I don't think the student union was trying to jury-rig it either way," he said.

cation to increase their prospects, with full-time enrolment up seven per cent since 1989.

And while the burgeoning service sector is known as a home for starving students, 14 per cent of the drop in youth employment has been in that sector.

According to the StatsCan study, many young people have decided to drop out of the labour force completely, including about 100,000 young single mothers.

As for Axworthy's promised "guarantee" of training or education, so far the proposal has few details about how accessibility to education will be increased.