

SMU to hold CFS pull-out referendum

by Cathy McDonald

The Canadian Federation of Students' existence at Saint Mary's University may die at the young age of two, if a referendum there fails next week.

Saint Mary's is holding a referendum to review its membership in CFS, the national student organization. The students' representative council grew dissatisfied with CFS this year, and a majority of reps want SMU to pull out.

"I don't feel CFS is representing Nova Scotia students here. Until that changes, we don't want to be members," said Drew Franklin, VP Internal, and co-chairperson of the "no" campaign.

The no-campaign posters reading "Thanks for Nothing" are plastered over the campus. Dissatisfaction with CFS became focused last summer when students in Nova Scotia opposed new restrictions on student aid, and CFS did not provide needed support at that time, Franklin said.

Saint Mary's students were scheduled to pay \$18,000 to CFS last year, or \$4 each. This year's fees were withheld by the council.

The referendum question "Should Saint Mary's Student Association Incorporated remain a member of CFS?" needs a two-thirds Yes vote to pass, giving a strong advantage to the anti-CFS campaign.

The SMU student constitution requires a referendum to have a positive wording, and that two-thirds of those voting must vote "yes" in order to pass it.

When asked if he thought the needed percentage was fair, MacArthur said "It's fair in that they (pro-CFS campaign) won't even come close to (getting) 50 per cent."

Asked if the opposite referendum wording, such as "Should SMU pull out of CFS?" would have given the pro-CFS campaign the advantage, MacArthur agreed. He explained the council simply had not worded it that way.

A 33 per cent "no" vote will pull SMU out of CFS, and only another referendum would get it

back in again, MacArthur said.

Dalhousie and the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design student councils are also considering holding a CFS membership review. Both postponed a decision on whether to hold a referendum until after a special CFS "National Provincial Meeting" in Ottawa last week, held to discuss problems in the organization.

Christine Soucie, one of the people fighting to keep SMU in CFS, claims that major complaints about CFS are now being addressed. She pointed to the Ottawa conference last week, where CFS members agreed to give provincial components more autonomy, one of the main bones of contention with Nova Scotia.

One of CFS's services is the Youthsaver discount card, available to all students in member institutions. Franklin said the cards are not being honoured at some Halifax stores supposedly participating in the program.

But Soucie claims the discount card was a big asset for CFS' popularity on campus.

"And of course there are the political benefits," Soucie said. In part because of CFS lobbying, the federal government recently decided part-time students could qualify for the Canada Student Loan program, Soucie said.

Soucie was optimistic about the referendum. "The mood is very positive," she said. But others are just as sure about its failure. Joe Osborne, editor of the Saint Mary's Journal, the student newspaper, predicted a solid vote to leave CFS. "There doesn't appear to be much support either on council or among students," he said.

VP External MacArthur said he considered running for President of SMU student union this year, but withdrew his application in order to run the CFS pull-out campaign.

Christine Soucie, off-campus rep on council this year and former N.S. rep on the CFS national executive, is running for President. She said she tries to keep her personal campaign separate from the referendum, however.



Brenda Cote, the chairperson of CFS, addressed a Dal student council gathering recently. Saint Mary's CFS pull-out referendum and potential referenda at Dal and NSCAD could threaten CFS' future in the Atlantic.

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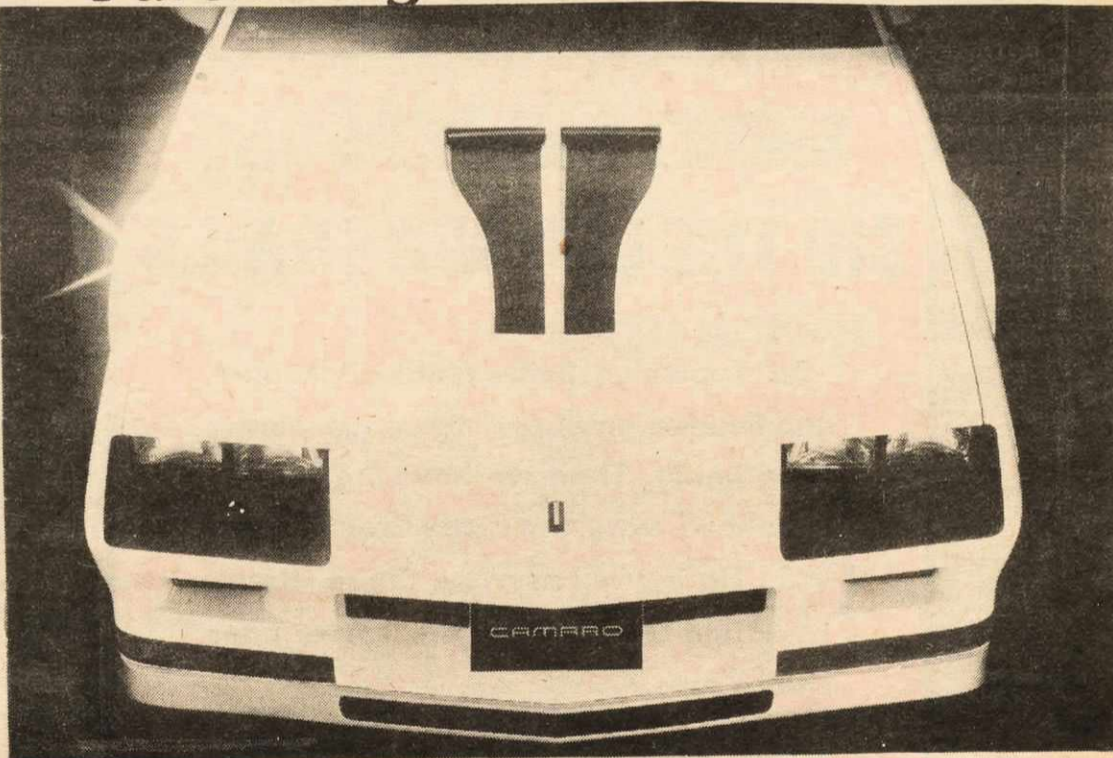
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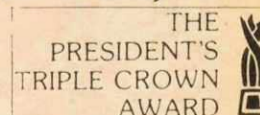


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