

And they should go-go elsewhere

By BRIAN CAMPBELL

The CUS board meeting in Ottawa and the local response to it was another example of what makes me sick and tired of Canadian student leaders.

By and large student leaders are immature and incapable of tackling the job before them. They are incompetent, egocentric, self-righteous excuses.

First, consider the CUS mess.

The U of A delegation came back from the Dalhousie Debacle and told council they must withdraw because the Canadian Union of Students was taking stands in the international and national political arena.

Students have no right to hold an opinion after CUS has represented Canadian students as being opposed to American involvement in Vietnam, they said.

They went on to say other delegates booed and hissed when they spoke and didn't consider the philosophical issue.

They told council U of A was the best-prepared delegation at the congress.

GLORY ROBES

In short, they covered themselves in holy robes of selfrighteousness and credited their failure to the stupidity of other student leaders.

Branny Schepanovich told The Gateway many students at the congress were "misinformed and even uninformed on major national and international political issues, yet these same students, in their naive and arrogant approach would like to think of themselves as members of a world parliament."

Don't ask the delegates what

happened in Halifax—they aren't talking.

Broach the subject with students' union president Branny Schepanovich and he says "you are questioning my integrity."

The implication is "be careful or I'll sue."

CUS chairman Owen Anderson and students' union secretary-treasurer Al Anderson reacted the same way.

Only Marilyn Pilkington could add anything.

On Monday of the week-long conference, she had given a speech outlining U of A's position. The delegates, she said, listened quietly and attentively.

SCHEPANOVICH SPEAKS

When she finished, students' union president Schepanovich got up and said no one had listened to them and that they had been treated rudely since they arrived.

Anyway the delegates considered U of A's position all Monday, and Miss Pilkington said more progress would have been made if some "alternatives" to the directions CUS was taking were offered.

They pushed U of A's philosophy to the back of their minds as the congress moved to other business.

I don't know how they presented their case for the rest of the week—I wasn't there—but several friends of mine who were at the congress said U of A's approach alienated a number of the delegates.

You can't teach someone who hates you the two times table, let alone a complicated philosophy.

What annoys me even more are the things our delegation didn't tell council.

They didn't tell them how much money CUS was spending on these

horrible projects or what CUS is doing with the money it has now.

It turns out the first political project is 20th in line and this project is Indian affairs and education. None of the rest have priority.

MUTUAL INTERESTS

It also turns out CUS is interested in the same things delegation members say are close to their hearts—university affairs and educational reform.

"I suppose Branny will be arriving in a couple of minutes, so I'll spell things out.

"He knows exactly what I'm going to say, and I know what he'll say, so I don't think it will be an unfair advantage for him not to be here at the beginning."

That was Doug Ward starting his speech at Lister Hall last month. Branny Schepanovich did know what Doug Ward was going to say, and Doug Ward said things I had not heard about CUS.

Perhaps it slipped Schepanovich's mind.

More about the CUS mess later—there are more important problems facing Canadian campuses.

Canadian universities are growing too large too fast.

The Canadian campus is becoming an ugly multiversity overnight, and it is suffering the discontent and the anxiety that go with it.

Look at mental health figures for college students. The suicide rate is double the rate for non-students. Things are not getting better.

DOOMSDAY NEAR

If something is not done soon, the university is going to destroy itself like a mad scientist's machine.

The classes are large and impersonal, and the education inside the

poison ivy-covered walls doesn't measure up.

Students and students' unions will have to make a concerted effort to avoid another Berkeley here and all across the country.

Students' unions will have to change to meet the challenge, and most students' unions will have to change leaders to meet it successfully.

Education is a provincial concern according to the BNA Act, but university reform and change worries students everywhere.

And we can learn from others. We can profit from their mistakes and we can profit from their triumphs.

But everyone knows students' union leaders don't make mistakes. Branny Schepanovich, himself, has implied as much.

ALL THE SAME

Stephen Bigsby at UVic says the same thing, and the delegates at the CUS director's meeting in Ottawa spent time exonerating themselves from any errors they didn't make.

In the past students' unions rolled along administering their budgets so each club got its appointed share. And student leaders went merrily out into the larger world to run for parliament and take a role in community affairs.

They had experience in student politics and would become the John Diefenbakers and Lester Pearsons of tomorrow.

Old students' unions didn't worry about university—it was eternal.

The students were happy even though they didn't have a voice in the community. Things were all right.

But times change and a new student leader is needed now.

A leader who can be wrong. A leader who can learn from his, and other's mistakes. A leader who is tolerant.

The leaders now are none of these things.

SEE THE ZOO

Go to council and watch the arrogance. Watch the smart remarks which cut down other councillors. See the petty hatreds and the cliques. See the union paralyze itself.

On the national level it is the same thing.

There is no communication. Branny Schepanovich told the Western Regional Conference of Canadian University Press a strong CUP would take the place of direct communication.

I don't think this will work.

Canada-wide communication must be established at a personal level.

CUS IS SICK

And the CUS director's meeting—vindication and counter-vindication ad nauseum.

"Childish conduct."

"Branny didn't know how to put his ideas across at the congress."

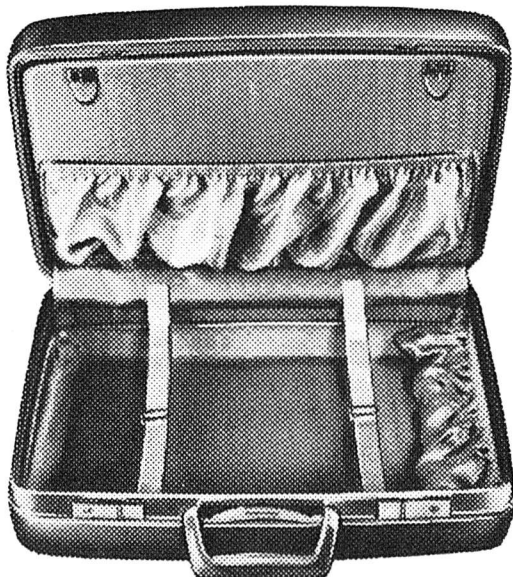
"Thus the only alternative left to us was to withdraw from an organization whose principles are as firm as the Sargasso Sea."

The whole performance reminded me of nothing so much as the Progressive Conservative Party Convention in Ottawa last week.

Student leaders in this country are tin-pot John Diefenbaker-Lyndon Johnson combinations—and that's not good enough.

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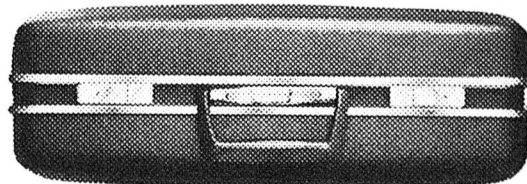


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