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More than meets the eye in \$4.00 fee

by Brent Jang

The \$4.00 fee that students are being asked to pay into the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) in this Friday's referendum could be compared to giving up a couple of beers but such analogy belies the ingredients of the Students' Union political brew.

The fee is divided into \$3.00 for the political wing and \$1.00 for the services wing. This financial set-up can only be changed at CFS conferences. Still, several student councillors are already questioning the political efficacy of the fledgling national student organization.

"The benefit of the services side can really be seen. I wonder if the political side is really worth it. I question whether \$3.00 for the benefits of political lobbying is really worth it," said Michael Grant, General Faculties Council Representative.

"I'm a little nervous about supporting it," said Gord Stamp, Science proxy at last Tuesday's Students' Council. "CFS should be a service, not a different type of FAS (Federation of Alberta Students, now-defunct). I refuse to believe that we'll get anything constructive out of lobbying or marches. I think it should be up to voters to direct where the money goes."

VP External Andrew Watts supports CFS but he also has a long list of complaints. "While it's a good idea for the U of A to be involved at the national level, it's awfully difficult to be effective at that level. The U of A only gets one vote in CFS. To be selfish about it, you have to wonder if the U of A shouldn't be given more power in proportion to our size. I think the voting system in CFS should be changed."

SU President Robert Greenhill disagrees: "You have to remember that although we only have one vote on paper, our influence at a conference is greater than just one vote because of our size. Other delegates become aware of our concerns and they can give us support."

Watts maintains that the relationship between students and CFS is a tenuous one: "We have to represent the U of A. Students are going to have to look at whether CFS is going to adequately represent students. I worry that CFS talks too much. The organization is so vast, so big, it's difficult to maintain that contact with students."

Jim Weir, speaking for the 'yes' campaign, admits that the problems in CFS will not be easily overcome. Nevertheless, Weir says the issue in Friday's referendum is a broader one: "It's obvious if we don't have CFS lobbying on students behalf, there won't be any other group that will be looking out for our interests."

Greenhill has kept out of the 'yes' campaign because he says that "if the SU exec were to lead students by the nose, then it wouldn't be students supporting CFS."

Watts says even though he likes the idea of a national student group, he has too many reservations about CFS and therefore opted not to work for the 'yes' campaign.

Greenhill is more vocal of the two executive members in their low-profile support for CFS: "This new organization is far more practical and pragmatic than its predecessors. It's far more reasonable in getting comments from students."

Stamp says CFS was negligent in informing student councillors about the organization. He says Student Council couldn't take a stand: "We didn't have any facts. I think the 'yes' campaign should have had the information out a long time ago for councillors. I'm not going to help if they're campaigning under the table. They're just asking us vote 'yes' without explanation. I have a feeling there's going to be a very low turnout. CFS hasn't given us any facts. Why should we give them money if they're just going to sit on it?"

Grant says the Students' Union executive office is being taken over by CFS supporters or at least filled with 'yes' campaigners lobbying councillors. "Most of the

talk around there has been about the referendum," said Grant.

Watts agrees that the atmosphere is not a healthy one, saying that U of A students are ironically being forgotten in the excitement of joining a national group. "CFS isn't in touch with the current thought of students," he said adding to his list of complaints. "We have to temper our involvement on the political side. If students want to vote 'yes' then they should look at the services in CFS like Travel Cuts."

Again, Greenhill was more positive about CFS: "Some may not understand the overlap in the political and services wings. The services wing can generate revenues."

Weir says that the "political

side is a lot more expensive." He added that the service component of CFS is a tremendous attraction but the political side makes the organization whole.

"The idea of having services and political wings in one organization is a new one. NUS (National Union of Students) didn't have that," said Weir.

In a referendum in February 1979, students were asked whether they wanted to join NUS, then the Holy Grail of the national student organization scene. U of A students overwhelmingly turned the group away, with 36.5 per cent of the voters saying 'no' to NUS. In three other referenda at the U of A asking for national support, none have been successful.

"I really can't see that entering into their minds," said Weir, referring to student reaction to past losses. Weir says CFS is a group for the 1980s and the people involved hold a more professional attitude towards students.

Dawn Noyes of the 'yes' campaign voted 'no' to the NUS campaign in 1979 and Weir says he wasn't even at the U of A when NUS made their attempt. "CFS is a completely different group," said Weir.

"There aren't that many people radically opposed to CFS," said Weir, observing a major difference between today's CFS venture and yesteryear's NUS venture.

CFS chair speaks out on issues

by Ken Lenz

The Gateway recently spoke to Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) chair Graham Dowdell about some of the issues which CFS is concerned with.

On Student Aid...

"We have significantly reached our initial goals with the Student Finance Board. CFS managed to get the changes in the student loan system passed by parliament despite the back-up with the Crow-rate legislation (Dowdell is referring to three recent changes - an increase in the federal loan limit for students from \$56 to \$100, an arrangement which makes loans for part-time students possible and an increase in the interest free period a student is entitled to after finishing his education from 6 months to 18 months). It was because we lobbied the New Democratic Party and other caucuses in government that the legislation went through.

"Recently the banks have been pressuring the government for extra administration costs when dealing with student loans. We are presently lobbying the government to make sure that firstly, students won't have to pay these costs and secondly, that the money will not be taken out of the student loan pool.

"In the future we intend to lobby the government to simplify the appeals procedure, to lessen or eliminate the debt load imposed on students and to generally make the student-aid program more responsive to students.

"Ultimately, we want to have a student assistance program that will effectively remove the barriers to post-secondary education."

On Student Unemployment...

"We have got a student unemployment crisis in this country and most of the information points out that it will probably not get any better for the next 3-5 years.

"The work force is taking the part-time jobs which students used to take to make extra money.

"CFS has managed to get an extra 50 million dollars put into the federal student job creation program which is now up to 170 million dollars per year.

"We'll be meeting with John Roberts, minister of employment and immigration in the future to discuss the problem faced by students because of unemployment."

On Government Underfunding...

"You can't talk about quality without talking about accessibility. The university administrations are choosing to restrict enrollment, focusing on the quality of the system, without seeing that accessibility is tied in with the issue.

"We are trying to institute changes in the federal government's policy concerning transfer payments to the provincial governments. At the present

time the provinces are not legally bound to spend the money intended to go into education on education. Often the money goes into things like road construction."

On Why We Should Belong to CFS...

"I think it is important for students on this campus in a political sense to coordinate the work they are doing on the issues which students face nationwide.

"It is important for the students on this campus to have a voice in Ottawa, CFS provides that for them.

"CFS also provides the provinces - and the campuses with the resources to organize themselves around the issues.

"This is a pivotal year on all of the major issues and it is important for students at the U of A to play a role in how these issues are to be dealt with."

Yes - CFS campaign optimistic

By Suzette Chan

Only one party, the pro CFS group, will participate in the referendum campaign. The group opposing CFS failed to register last Friday.

CFS campaigner Jim Weir explains that in the past year alone, the CFS national lobbying wing has been "instrumental in increasing the interest-free loan period from six months to eighteen months, (securing) loans for part-time students, and increasing the maximum federal loan subsidy from \$56 to \$100."

However, the actual loan ceiling in Alberta has not increased from last year's ceiling of \$6000 per annum.

Although several politicians, including Alberta Minister of Advanced Education Dick Johnson, had denied that CFS had any influence on passing a federal bill respecting student aid, Weir insists that "CFS was responsible for getting the all-party agreement needed to get it through.

Included in the services wing of CFS are the Canadian University Travel Service and the Student Work Abroad Program.

Weir says that if the U of A decides not to join CFS, CUTS and SWAP will continue to operate. Students will also still have to pay \$5 for an International Student Identity Card (ISIC), which entitles the student to discounts on merchandise and services across Canada and around the world. CFS members are issued ISIC cards free.

Politically, the U of A would not have input into CFS policy-

making if it pulled out. Weir believes that the U of A "does not have the resources to lobby on the federal level, and can't afford to fund researchers, keep in touch with other universities, or hire a coordinator of demands to keep a consistent point-of-view will all universities.

"CFS is in continual contact with the federal government," Weir says. "A united student voice is important."

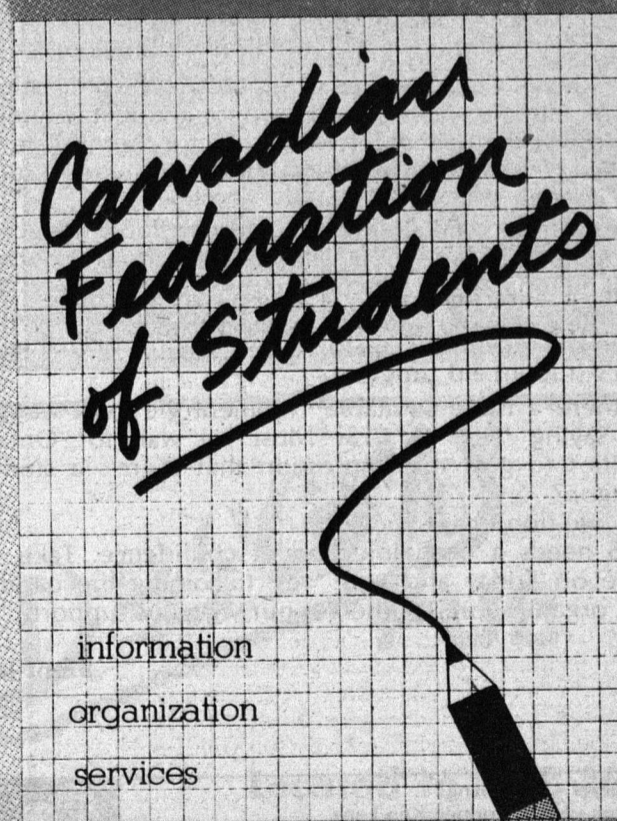
Weir also states that CFS policy is not binding. "Members

are not required to follow whatever CFS says."

With only relatively small institutions making up its membership, and since the University of Toronto recently rejected joining CFS with a clear 61 per cent no vote, the support of the U of A campus is extremely important to the organization.

"Alberta would be the biggest member by far," says Weir.

He adds, "I don't think that CFS would fall apart if Alberta did not join."



Join the Gateway. Staff meetings are held every Thursday at 4:00 PM in Room 282 SUB. Everyone is welcome.