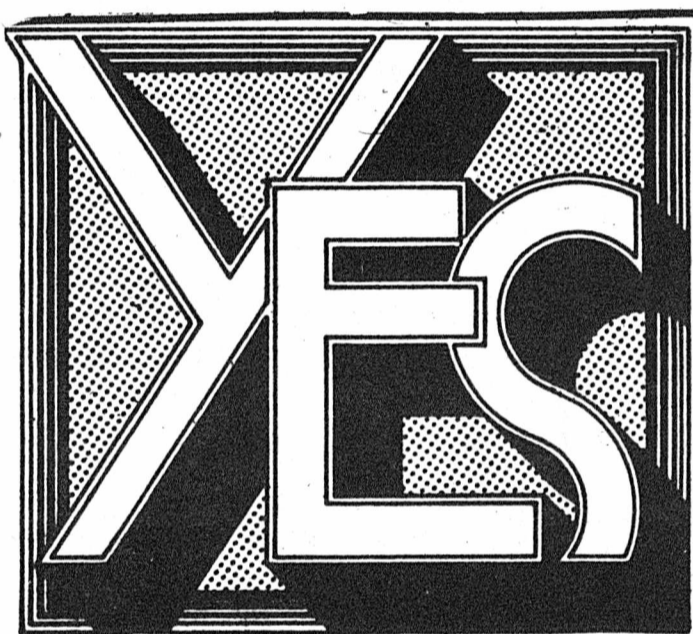
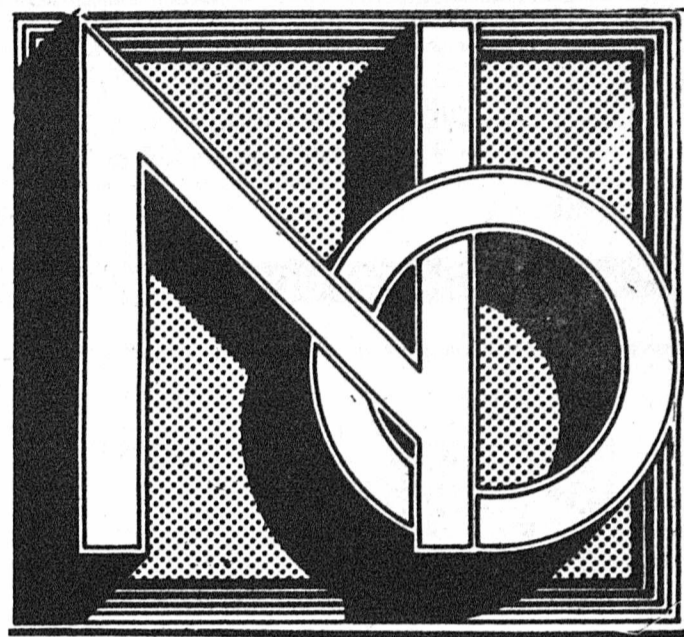


First time in nine years...

National Student Day



Day
of
protest
or
education?

by Gary Watson

National Student Day (NSD) this Nov. 9 may be an important event for all students: the first time in nine years such an event has been organized on a national scale.

NSD was conceived at the fourth annual convention of the National Union of Students (NUS) last year in an attempt to highlight problems faced by post-secondary students across Canada.

Alberta NSD co-ordinator Noel Jantzie outlined NSD objectives while he was on campus last week.

"We want to get students concerned about what is happening to post-secondary education all across the country," said Jantzie, adding "the question at hand is just who will be able to attend universities in the future."

Four main areas will be featured on Nov. 9 — cutbacks in education accompanied by tuition fee increases; employment prospects before and after graduation; student aid and housing.

Let's take an area by area look at why these issues have become important.

Cutbacks

In the past year most provincial governments have placed spending ceilings on education. The Alberta government has restricted spending this year to an 11 percent increase. According to Jantzie, this 11 percent figure is actually misleading.

"The bulk of funds are going to special projects. The actual increase is only 6 to 7 percent. Inflation costs for post-secondary institutions are approximately 15 percent. Universities and Colleges in Alberta are therefore falling 8 percent short."

As a result, the quality of facilities has deteriorated and the costs to students have increased. Courses and sections are being dropped. Class sizes are getting larger. Libraries are purchasing fewer books and library hours have been shortened. Residence and cafeteria costs have increased. Funds for new research equipment are drying up. And, of course, tuition fees have been hiked.

Fees are from 10 to 25 percent higher this year than last at many Canadian universities and colleges. A recent study estimates that every \$100 tuition fee increase results in a drop-out rate of 2½ percent! Critics have called fee increases for international students "a pathetic attempt to blame 5 percent of the entire student population for the problems facing the other 95 percent."

Jantzie described a result of the impending increases at the U

of Calgary: "There are fewer than 100 new foreign students at the U of C this year. That represents a drop of more than 50 percent. In addition, foreign students are admitted on a last priority basis."

Universities and Colleges are moving in the direction suggested by the federal Peitchinis Report of 1972. It recommended shifting the entire burden of post-secondary education onto the students. At today's prices, including living expenses, it would cost as much as \$7000 to attend university for one year. That's \$28,000 for a four year degree. At those prices, it is not difficult to speculate who can afford to attend university in the future.

Employment

Federal government estimates put student unemployment this past summer at 15 percent. This is 3 to 4 per cent higher than 1975. The elimination of Local Initiative Program and Opportunity for Youth grants have had a substantial effect on student employment. As well, with the imposition of anti-inflation controls, student earnings have not kept pace with the rate of inflation. Many students are entering this university year with smaller savings than in the past.

Employment after graduation is also a major problem. According to Jantzie, the unemployment rate for recent graduates is at least twice the national average. National unemployment figures do not repr-

sent much underemployment because part-time workers are excluded. "Masters degree holders are being forced to take jobs which don't nearly relate to their fields of study. The B.A. degree is not worth a great deal anymore."

Student Aid

Student aid programmes are at best inadequate. Nearly everyone on student aid has their own horror story. Restrictions are placed on those eligible for financial assistance. For example, an individual student's parents are expected to contribute a proportion of their child's total annual expenses. Students who have lived independent of their families for as much as a year are still required to divulge their family's yearly income.

Existing aid programs are also being changed. In Ontario, which has a loan/grant program, the first \$1000 is now considered to be a loan. This is an increase of 25 percent over 1975/76. Alberta does not offer any grants in its student aid program. Every dollar received by an Alberta student through student aid must be repaid with interest after graduation. Remember the Peitchinis Report? Imagine attending graduation ceremonies with a \$28000 debt hanging over your head!

Housing

Housing for students in Alberta is a disaster. Jantzie cited

the situation at the U of C. "Students are dropping out because they can't find places to live." The vacancy rate around the U of A is less than one tenth of one percent. Instances of discrimination against non-white students are commonplace. Furthermore, many students are forced to sacrifice personal privacy in choosing accommodation. It would be interesting to find out how many U of A students sleep in someone's living room. When the Alberta rent control legislation terminates in June 1977 students may very well be forced out of rental units because of prohibitive prices.

Students are confronting these problems throughout Canada and in Alberta, where almost two billion dollars sits in the Heritage Trust Fund. NSD has received an enthusiastic response in Alberta, Jantzie said. Committees are actively building Nov. 9 in many universities and colleges. Work is well under way at Grant MacEwan Community College, Red Deer College, Mount Royal College, SAIT, the U of Lethbridge, and the U of Calgary. The U of A is somewhat behind other campuses but support is building. The Students' Union has in principle unanimously endorsed NSD. Local organizers are now hoping for active support from U of A students. Jantzie summed up his remarks optimistically. "After all, the situation here is just as critical as elsewhere. And as the largest campus in the province NSD at the U of A has great potential."