

SUNS pushes on motherhood issues

by John Parsons of Canadian University Press

A weekend meeting of the Students Union of Nova Scotia has turned the organization's energies towards gaining student representation where it counts.

But the SUNS chairperson is calling on its nine member institutions to pull their weight in the campaign, designed to have Nova Scotian students represented on government bodies dealing with post-secondary education.

Delegates at the SUNS plenary, held in Halifax at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, planned a letter-writing campaign, urging Education Minister Terence Donahoe to support the appointing of students to government education committees. They cited the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission and provincial student aid authorities as targets for the appeal.

"We're disturbed by the lack of student representation on bodies dealing with content and funding in education," said chairperson Loretta Mullen. She said a recent appointment to a quickly-assembled committee for student aid recommendations brought home the representation issue.

Kirk Sievert, a Dalhousie business student, had been named by Nova Scotia student aid director Gerald Knickle to a Maritime provinces student aid advisory committee during the previous week. Don Perry, a fieldworker for the National Union of Students, said he had been told by Knickle the appointment was based on Sievert's experience with the provincial Higher Appeals Committee for student aid. Student officials had not been consulted on the move.

Mullen said the Sievert appointment was upsetting because it had been mistakenly indicated that students were being directly represented through the move.

Plenary delegates intend to follow up their letters to Donahoe with a continued effort to publicize their call for student input. "We'll be hitting the student populations," said Mullen. "This is an issue students will be able to get involved in. It's hard to bring up arguments against student representation."

Gord Owen, Dalhousie Student Union president, told the plenary plans should be made to meet the report of the federal Task Force on Student Aid, expected early in the new year. The task force has been charged with suggesting changes to the Canadian student aid system, and has held hearings throughout past months.

"We should have a pamphlet on student aid ready for distribution in the first week of January, before the report is released," he said.

"Then, a second pamphlet should be produced in rebuttal to what the task force says. We need something to put in front of students, even if they don't read it."

Mullen said the groups' ideas were "full of potential. But who'll do the work? We'll have to know exactly who'll do it, or nothing can happen!"

SUNS structure requires each member student union to operate a campus committee, responsible for informing students of SUNS activity and gathering the opinions of the campus community to use in making union policy.

Few members, said Mullen, actually have functioning campus committees.

Mike McNeil, St. Mary's student union president and former SUNS chairperson, called the student aid report and student representation campaigns "motherhood issues".

"We'll get a lot of mileage out of these two issues," he said.

The main problem faced by the provincial organization is "getting known by students," said Jeff Champion, the unions' secretary-treasurer. "We need issues to bring things home to students." He said many student organizations do "too much talking on behalf of students, and not enough listening to what the students think."

Champion criticized the SUNS delegates for attempting to make policy decisions without all members present. He rejected efforts to take stands on social issues in Nova Scotia "until we have the facts." He said decisions to oppose Nova Scotia regulations that require international students to pay extra for health insurance care in the province "should be held until another plenary."

Owen had suggested SUNS attack the practice of charging international students \$95 per year for health coverage, when provincial sales tax, paid by all, actually covers health costs.

"We should lobby to have these students exempted from the yearly charge," Owen said.

"We should do our homework," Champion insisted. "Let's call the government and find out what the rationale is, so we don't run the risk of being embarrassed. Now let's move along."

Delegates did not consider a motion on the international students issue.

NATIONAL STUDENT MOVEMENT RESTRUCTURED

Decisions at the plenary included an examination of the national student organization of Canada. The National Union of Students is developing plans to merge its political lobbying operations with the Association of Student Councils, an affiliated body providing services to Canadian students.

"The basic principles on redesigning NUS and AOSC had been passed by SUNS," Mullen said. "It's a matter of updating the material."

She said student unions should have taken the information on NUS restructuring to their individual councils for feedback, "but that hasn't happened." Some councils, she said, have not considered the restructuring issue yet.

Delegates locked horns over external decisions concerning other student groups. A motion, previously approved by a SUNS conference, had given support to the United States Student Association "in their condemnation of U.S. draft policies." Dal representative Gord Owen proposed a motion to rescind support for the American student group's stand.

The move was turned down by delegates, leaving SUNS in

opposition to the U.S. draft activity.

Mullen said individual personalities had an effect on SUNS decision-making. "External affairs divides into the personal opinions of people who were there over whether or not SUNS should deal with it."

NOVA SCOTIA GROUP TO MEET IN NEW BRUNSWICK

The next plenary of SUNS is slated for January 17 — at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick.

"This will give an opportunity to New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island institutions, who don't have provincial organizations, to participate in MPHEC recommend debates."

MPHEC policy funding recommendations are made to the three Maritime provinces at the same time, leaving each to actually name its official funding levels.

Conference participants felt the other provinces would be included "to expand the issue of student representation."

"Because there exists a Council of Maritime Premiers and an MPHEC, said Mullen, "it makes sense that we encourage co-operation between the province's students."

McGill committee protests investment

MONTREAL (CUP)—More than 200 McGill University students demonstrated outside a board of governors meeting November 17 to protest the university's failure to divest its multi-million dollar interests from banks and corporations dealing with South Africa.

Meanwhile, the board was reviewing its first written report on divestment from its committee on social responsibility.

"At this stage of its deliberation, the committee is not convinced that divestment is the only answer or even the best answer and wishes to explore all possibilities in order to determine the approach that would be the most effective within the parameter

of its mandate," said the report.

The committee on social responsibility was formed last year in response to pressure from the McGill External Affairs Committee on South Africa. Over 3000 signatures were collected last year on a petition demanding the divestment of university funds.

Barbara Jenkins, president of the McGill External Affairs Committee on South Africa, told the demonstrators before a march across campus that "we have a right to express our opinions on action taken by the board of governors that we feel are wrong. McGill is not a multi-national. It is an institution of learning. It should show principles in its actions."

The demonstrators marched


across campus shouting "McGill out of South Africa" and "no support for the racist state" and gathered in front of the building where the board meeting was in progress.

"We'll show the board of governors what we want," committee member Richard Flint told the crowd. "If they don't act, it will be up to us to act."

Jenkins said many of the governors have direct links with corporations who deal with South Africa. "It's not in their best interests to divest."

The demonstrators said they were unhappy with the board's inaction. "It really seems that they're trying to bury the issue and hope the students will forget about it," said Flint.

Students' Union of Nova Scotia



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