

# "How Goes The Battle?"

by BARRY RUST  
(CUP Staff Writer)

OTTAWA — "How goes the battle, General?"

"The centre holds firm, we are advancing on the left and closing up the right," could well be the reply of CUS president Doug Ward.

Asked the same question a few years ago, a CUS president could equally well have responded, "I didn't know we were fighting."

A significant and very dynamic change during the past two years characterizes CUS. The "smaller and tighter" union Ward spoke of following the University of Alberta's withdrawal, is also a very different union.

The new union is definitely politically-oriented, geared, in the words of Ward, "to impinge on society". Its leaders seldom speak of the "organization" now, but rather of the "movement" of the "program".

The change has also brought with it the so-called left-right split of student leaders. (Although the term "right" is really a misnomer since those labelled with it really disclaim the union's responsibility for political expression).

The left leaders claim that students must take active roles in national and international politics. They feel CUS can enter the political field on grounds that the majority of students agree with their principles.

The right similarly advocates student responsibility in politics, but claims CUS as a national organization should not be politically involved. According to right leaders, the union can never hope to represent the political opinions of all students.

The new political direction of CUS was apparent at the organization's 30th Congress in Halifax last month. More resolutions on education policy and international affairs were passed at that congress than at any other in recent years. Of real significance are the number of directives for achieving the union's objective of universal accessibility to post-secondary education, that were given to the national

executive. Among the mandates on means are demands on government for student salaries, solicitation of support from labor unions for CUS objectives, and demands on the government to relinquish certain taxing powers to the provinces. In the past, CUS has been content to study and compile information on what it considers to be student problems, and leave means to the politicians.

The concentration on education policy and international affairs also meant a corresponding decrease in resolutions on non-political student problems. A resolution promoting student mental health, for example, was given top priority among proposals concerned with common student problems, but it only placed tenth in the overall list of priorities. It is here that the so-called student right draws its line. The Canadian Union of Students, says the right, is meant to promote the interests of all students, not to be a political sounding board or, worst of all, a political activist.

Undoubtedly the right leaders' fight to keep CUS non-political is encouraged by a fear that increased political involvement will destroy the common meeting ground of students. They can point to history to validate their fears. Traditionally, interest groups can choose between two alternatives. They either concentrate on promoting and giving expression to the common interests of their members, or they select certain specific, principled ends and stick to them come proverbial hell or high water.

Two agrarian organizations, the United Farmers of Alberta and the Progressives, learned a bitter lesson by attempting to maintain their interest groups while still giving them political expression. Despite political success, both

organizations lived relatively short political lives. UFA died because it developed a political ideology, the Progressives because they sought to operate in the political sphere without one. Interest groups, particularly agrarian ones, have made a general point of staying out of active politics since the experience of the 1920s.

Whether it likes it or not, the Canadian Union of Students may be forced to consciously choose one of the alternatives, if indeed it is not already irretrievably committed. For the astute observer, the handwriting may have been on the wall since the formation of l'Union Générale des Etudiants du Québec four years ago. In any event, there is no doubt that the writing is there now. It has been made very bright by the five universities who have told CUS during the last month they no longer wish to have any part of the union.

CUS was in enough difficulty to claim it was a bona fide national student organization even without the ideological split that developed in Halifax. Four universities served notice of withdrawal even before the controversial resolution affirming CUS' right to become involved with politics was passed. With the subsequent withdrawal of Alberta, CUS is now devoid of support in Newfoundland, has only token support from the English-speaking student of Quebec, and represents only a small minority of the students in Alberta.

CUS leaders explain while arguing in favour of free education and student stipends against loan systems, that the student is going to repay society for his education through taxes when he graduates, so "why force him to worry about loans while he attends university". The real point, of course, is that the graduating student is going to pay taxes regardless of how he is financed through university. Free education and student stipends really mean that the general taxpayer must bear the burden of re-

leasing the student of financial responsibility in education. Justification of this policy relies on giving the taxpayer something in return. This can be done, left leaders say, by virtue of increased economic benefits accruing to the economy as a result of the increased graduates the system will produce. The general taxpayer will be guaranteed an eventual greater proportion of the economy's wealth through government control of the economy, heavier taxation of "big business", and heavier taxation of high income groups (includ-

leaders. This they claim is a violation of a fundamental democratic right.

Right leaders maintain that political expression is guaranteed to all citizens through the right to form political parties and voluntary organizations. Even if CUS were to assume the right to give student political expression, the right says representations made on behalf of students could not be considered democratic since the main body of students do not elect the CUS executive. As well, student leaders are seldom elected along political lines but rather on their ability to administer student government. The role of student government according to the right, is to promote the general interests of the student body, not to be a sounding board for political ideologies.

The majority of right leaders feel that most universities can provide their students with enough services to make independence from the new CUS worthwhile. Alberta's withdrawal has sparked the imagination of a number of right leaders across Canada. More serious questions are being asked now about CUS than even Alberta leaders thought was possible. Now that Alberta's council is committed to withdrawal, the success of the right reaction will depend very much on the ability of Schepanovich and his executive to unite Edmonton students behind independence.

This concludes Part One of a two part CUP feature on the Canadian Union of Students. Next week the Brunswickian will conclude this supplement.



Edmonton's Schepanovich

ing, of course, the university graduate) according to the scheme.

The fact that all students do not favour such far-reaching socialism, nor are they all aligned with the left side of the political spectrum, leads to the main contentions of the right wing. The rightists point out that all students are automatically members of CUS as soon as they step on a campus affiliated with the union, and thus have no choice but to be publicly represented by the political views of CUS

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