

CFS alienates Moncton campus

VICTORIA (CUP) — Seventy-five strange faces filled the lecture hall, but Eric Roy's wide, bewildered eyes stood out at the back.

His jaw dropped as student politicians from across Canada finally discussed the issue that concerned him the most — providing \$500 in legal fees for Universite de Moncton students who staged a dramatic occupation there last spring.

"Sure, the cause is great," said one Albertan student. "But where are we going to get the money?"

Roy sat for a moment when the motion was passed. The students at his institution would get lip service but no money. Then he began shuddering, and tears squeezed out of his eyes.

CFS chair Brenda Cote, who also participated in the Moncton occupation when she was a student there, put her arms around Roy. They sat at the back, alone, and then Roy walked outside.

"I'm not going back in," Roy said later. "If solidarity doesn't come to more than this then CFS is dead."

Inside the lecture hall, the final plenary of the second national conference for CFS went into its fourteenth hour. Debate continued but the mood was oppressive. Delegates voted to give \$500 to Moncton if two B.C. institutions soon paid their CFS fees, but it was too late. The national student movement had just alienated its most active campus.

Roy said Moncton would probably drop out, and everyone knew he was right.

Ironically, about an hour before turning down funds for Moncton the week-long conference reached its most productive moment when delegates agreed to launch a campaign aimed at "exploding the myth" of fiscal restraint.

Dreary delegates became energetic when members of the campaign committee came before the plenary with three balloons which read: "Fuck this fiscal fixation." The students cheered as the balloons were exploded and the campaign idea was overwhelmingly adopted.

As the committee's report stated: "By stressing a campaign against restraint we will multiply the number of people who will support us, we will overcome the cynicism and apathy of our membership, and we can share the resources of our alliances."

These goals are the key to the survival of CFS. Though the two-year-old organization represents about 500,000 students, few Canadians are aware the group exists or what its function is.

Most students do not participate in CFS activities nor has CFS built solid outside alliances.

Fighting fiscal restraint is a long-term campaign, but the immediate short-term goal is employment. CFS plans a week of information for the first week of February, then a week of action early in March. The campaign plan is solid, but if the mood of the conference is any indication, CFS will have a hard time pulling it off.

The conference began awkwardly Nov. 8 when the opening plenary started an hour late. The first motion, which ratified the plenary chair, created a 15-minute debate. It took an hour for the plenary to accept an agenda for the conference.

When the bus from the University of Victoria to the downtown hotel had to leave at 11:00 p.m., delegates stormed out of the plenary before business had been completed. There was not even a motion to adjourn.

Throughout the week most workshops were poorly attended. There was a clear split between those interested in the services aspect of CFS and those interested in the political.

Thirteen committees composed of provincial representatives met late at night to propose motions for the final plenary. But half of those did not make it to the plenary floor because the 15-hour meeting ended, once again, before all business had been dealt with.

Many delegates came to the conference with specific criticisms of the organization, but there were few opportunities for them to be voiced. Specifically, delegates failed to

deal with the complaints from the Student Union of Nova Scotia, that CFS provides services and hinders provincial autonomy. SUNS members said they want the freedom for institutions to join the provincial organization and not the national, but this is not possible according to current CFS guidelines.

SUNS' complaints came up briefly Thursday morning when delegates demanded an accountability session with the CFS central committee and services board. Committee members hung their heads and looked braced for a firing squad as questions were shot at them:

"Why wasn't a translator hired as mandated at the last national?"

"Well, uh, we had too many mandates for research so we hired a researcher instead."

"Where was CFS when Nova Scotia students fought last summer to prevent an entire institution from closing down?"

"It was a mistake. What else can we say?"

"Why was the week of information (planned for October) such a failure?"

"Um, we didn't get much support from the institutions plus the materials weren't mailed out in time."

At the session, the central committee took flak for being bureaucratic, undemocratic and ineffective. But none of those complaints were addressed at the final plenary because time ran out. The result? Delegates dumped resolutions that didn't hit the floor on the central committee.

The final plenary began at 11:00

a.m. Nov. 13. Debate focused on the technicalities of CFS services until 9:30 p.m. Only then did delegates, already exhausted by a week-long conference, begin to discuss their organization's political role.

They scored a major victory when they ratified a campaign intended to activate students by fighting fiscal restraint. But the same evening they lost the most active campus in Canada, Moncton, because they couldn't spare \$500. They complained the central committee was undemocratic yet left half of their policy motions for the committee to decide.

They said they wanted to involve more students in CFS, but newcomers to CFS conferences were left mystified.

As one first-time delegate said, "I feel useless here, I don't know what it's all about."

Discrimination: Foreign Students

MONTREAL (CUP) — Cold weather is not the only thing international students face when they study at Concordia.

A recent Concordia study concluded the university's foreign students face discrimination, language barriers, bureaucratic hassles and higher tuition fees. This contributes to the feeling that nobody cares, said one foreign student.

Foreign students interviewed for the study said discriminatory attitudes exist among the people they study and work with. "Professors mark lower because they have doubts that work done is our own," claimed one student.

Another student said staff deliberately misinform international students because of their foreign origins, citing bogus directions to information centres for example.

Students cited other examples of discrimination: they are accused of lying, cheating and being too demanding, while Canadians are referred to as normal.

Differential fees, which tripled two years ago in Quebec, were also

seen as discriminatory. "I think foreign students should pay more because they're not citizens here. But to pay three or four more times more than Canadian students, that's too much," said one international student.

The effect of large differential fees "is like telling us not to come here," said another student. The current differential fees at Concordia and McGill are among Canada's highest.

Many students interviewed said understanding spoken English is a major problem. "I don't always understand professors (when they speak), especially when they get into something abstract or slang," said one foreign student. "Sometimes they are joking and all the rest of the class is laughing and I just sit and look at them. I feel alienated."

The report blames the students' poor oral skills on the emphasis on grammar in English courses taught abroad.

Before admittance to Concordia students must pass written English competency exams.

"Their (foreign students') ability in English is an asset in written exams, but in Canada a student must be able to communicate with the teachers," said Jane Magnam, assistant co-ordinator of the Learning Development Centre, which was involved with the report.

Difficulty in communicating with professors was also attributed to culture. One Chinese student said "we are brought up in the Chinese way so we do not usually tell our problems to teachers. We don't relate. One must behave honestly, obey teachers, and not argue with them."

Bureaucracy is another large problem for international students. "If you have a problem, you have to talk to 25 people in 25 different offices. You might never find the right person to talk about the right problem in this university," said one student.

The report recommends improving language courses, emphasizing oral skills and requiring first year on-campus residences to help combat culture shock.

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