

Editor's Note: The views expressed in this article are not necessarily those held by the Brunswickan or the SRC.

By AILLEN ARMSTRONG

The National Union of Students

SRC president Jim Murray in his comments two weeks ago on the upcoming National Union of Students (NUS) membership referendum "Nuts to NUS" and "It's Up to You", The Brunswickan, Sept. 23, p.3, is misleading rather than leading student opinion. Murray's position is that students at UNB are not getting enough for their money to justify the \$1. per student NUS membership fee, and that we don't need a national organization to try to tell us how to run our own affairs.

But it is precisely because of the irresponsible and misleading opinions of student leaders like Murray, with the mentality they reflect, that membership in a national student union is so important to this campus.

First, let's get the facts straight. NUS membership fees per member campus are \$1 a student, and have been so for years. Any kid who passed Grade 3 arithmetic could figure out that with student enrolment at about 5,700 this year. The total cost to UNB is \$5,700, not the \$55-60,000 claimed by Murray. Since this \$55-60,000 figure was quoted in two separate articles, it is two things are obvious: Murray can't multiply, and The Brunswickan failed to check the accuracy of their "facts."

Murray also claims that UNB is getting ripped off on the NUS travel pool. This is totally unfounded. National student organizations in Canada have employed the travel pool for years as a democratic ring of equalizing the costs for representative from member campuses to attend national conferences. While UNB may pay considerably more under a travel pool than its actual expenses to attend a conference in Halifax, it pays considerably less to attend the next one out in Vancouver. Thus it cost no more in the long run.

In trying to convey the impression of the tremendous cost of NUS to UNB students, Murray also flings around the figure of "an extra \$35" for the NUS newspaper The Student Advocate. In fact, the paper costs 3.5 cents a copy; Murray's figure of \$35 is for 1000 copies, which, for typesetting, printing, and shipping, is a below cost figure.

But if the SRC doesn't even order it, the cost to UNB students is zero. Many of us would like to see the paper, which comes out six times a year, to find out what's happening on other campuses, what the important student issues are, especially now that The Brunswickan has seen fit to withdraw from Canadian Univer-

Nassettes

Ten California women have volunteered to help the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) prepare the way for women in space. The women will undergo extensive medical tests that will eventually help other women into orbit.

According to a spokesman for NASA, women are certain to be abroad the NASA space shuttle when it begins regular flights in the 1980's. The first of these gigantic spaceships which will orbit the earth, carry passengers, and launch satellites, has already been built and is currently being tested. (Earth News)

sity Press (CUP) the national student press service. *Student Unionism: What's It All About?*

It is important that these comments not be continued as personalist attack; the issues of student unionism are much broader than the notions of one misinformed student council president. National student unionism had its origins in Canada in 1926 with the founding of the National Federation of Canadian University Students (NFCUS) largely due to the influence of the National Union of Students in Britain, and the efforts of the Student Christian Movement (SCM) in Canada, which recognized the political advantages to Canadian university students flowing from the formation of a national union.

Since then, NFCUS, which was to become the Canadian Union of Students (CUS) and then NUS, helped to spawn much worthwhile organizations as the Canadian University Service Overseas (CUSO), the World University Service of Canada (WUSC), and the Company of Young Canadians (CYC).

NFCUS was responsible for the federal government's introduction of the Canada Student loan program in 1963. In response to rising unemployment among young people, CUS lobbied the federal government successfully for specific employment generating programs such as OFY, LIP, and now Young Canada Works.

CUS's concern over the student housing situation in the 1960's led it to develop considerable expertise in the housing area, resulting in the development and construction of numerous student cooperative housing projects across the country, including here at UNB. UNB, like many other campuses, also benefitted from CUS assistance in the design and construction of its student union building. CUS became active in this field in response to a general need for expanded student service facilities, due to the rapid increase in student enrollments in the 1960's.

Membership in the national union provides services in the individual student level as well. Students from member campuses can travel on charter flights to Europe at greatly reduced rates, and are eligible for International Student Cards entitling them to significant discounts in travel, food and lodging while there. In the past, the CUS travel service was responsible for the introduction of student standby rates in Canada and special student excursions to interesting but out-of-the way places over Christmas and March break.

Efforts of the national union to improve the quality of university education led to the establishment of course unions, counter courses and course evaluation on many campuses, and to student participation in provincial education policy-making bodies.

The national organization has also made a significant contribution in recent years towards democratizing university government, and, while student interests are still underrepresented in all aspects of university government, students now have some say in the Senate, the Board of Governors and the Faculty Council on many campuses.

It is evident the advantages of national student unionism in Canadian universities have been considerable. By pooling resources, sharing information and developing expertise, the national union has been able to provide a higher level of services than could ever be provided by local councils acting alone. Lobbying federal authorities would be impossible on the individual council level, because of the time and money involved in maintaining a person in Ottawa. Yet the benefits of a national lobby are very tangible: student loans, CUSO, Young Canada Works to name a few.

Obviously, the cost of operating a national organization which is involved in such a wide range of student issues across the country is going to be high. But the burden per individual campus is really pretty small: UNB's contribution is less than 4 percent of the total

NUS budget of \$160,000. The revenue to operate NUS comes from 160,000 student fees collected from 37 member campuses. Of this NUS spends \$83,000 on wages and benefits of eight workers (four office staff and four fieldworkers).

This staff, made up of students on leave and recent graduates, must be largely motivated from a sense of commitment to the national organization, because the salaries they draw, less than \$10,000 a year apiece, are not very much, considering the levels of skills required and the amount of travelling involved in the work.

Next to wages, a major cost of the program is field allowance for travel, food subsidy, and accommodation, when a worker is in the field. Telephone costs are \$3,900; printing is \$4,000. The rest of the budget goes for rental of an office (located in Ottawa) audit fees, resource materials and equipment rental.

Even More Important Here

Murray's simplistic and inaccurate version of what a national student union is all about leads him to make several unfortunate statements. Commenting on the relevance of NUS on the federal level, "Murray said they don't actually have a voice, but had to lobby someone in power already". But acting together students do have some power; the strength of a national union is that it provides a vehicle for making our interests known to others. Our role as member campuses is to participate in dialogue with the national union and other councils to work out common policy on issues that affect us all.

Part of this function is achieved through attending conferences. Murray's comment that we attend conferences "to voice personal

sentiments" shows how little he understands this process. Our role at conferences is not to voice "personal sentiments" but well worked out collective (i.e. from the campus as a whole) positions. Conferences provide us with this forum for dialogue and a chance to learn from the experiences of others in situations not unlike our own.

Murray's final point is that "what they (NUS) usually did, was, in essence try to tell the union how to run their own organizations." He "felt this was presumptuous" and that "students did not need to pay someone to tell them what they already know". It is tempting to ridicule the arrogance and banal complacency of such a statement, but what concerns me more is the separatist mentality that it reflects. Murray represents an element at UNB in both the SRC and the Bruns, that seems intent on isolating itself from what's going on in the rest of Canada! It is unfortunate enough that The Brunswickan has withdrawn from CUP; to withdraw from NUS would leave this place a backwater, out of touch with what's happening on other campuses across the country.

The upcoming NUS membership referendum is the third one called at UNB in the last three years. Surely the SRC has better things to do with its time and energy, and student money, that to put us through this greatly ritual.

Fortunately, the majority of students here have supported NUS membership in the last two referenda. Let's hope they do it again.

I want to make it clear that I'm not suggesting NUS is perfect; what organization ever is? But if criticisms are justified, it's up to us to change it. No one ever made things better by taking his marbles and going home.



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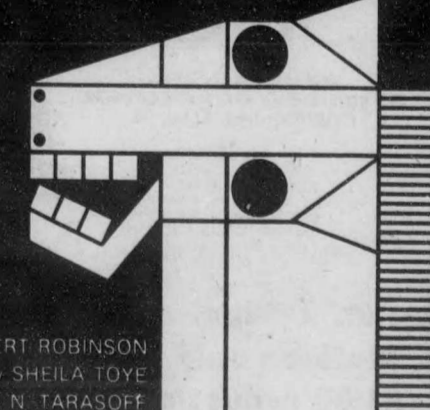
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