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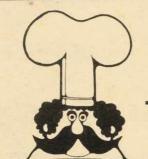
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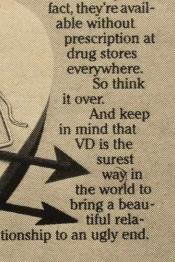


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British students' fight cuts in education

By BILL MITCHELL

he British university system has been severely cut by government economies, but students are fighting back.

The cuts have not been accepted without protest. British students under the National Union of Students (NUS), which has branches in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, have been spearheading a campaign to end cuts for several years.

The NUS is an equivalent to the Canadian Federation of Students except the NUS is far more cohesive. Britain being a smaller and a more densely populated nation has much closer ties to the far reaches of the country. That is one reason for the closer links. The other is the vastly greater interest and activism in student politics and student issues

Persistent lobbying is claimed to have swayed the stubborness of the Thatcher Government. An attempt to replace the grant system of funding student expenses, was defeated and kept out of the 1983 general election conservative manifesto. And more recently, NUS has won a series of important concessions for overseas students, as well as acting to protect the money that goes into the local student unions for the provision of sports and other facilities in each college.

The most respected work of the NUS is research. The NUS research department is probably the most comprehendsive in its field, respected by media and politicians alike.

NUS carried out a massive research programme into student grants, something that no individual student union could ever contemplate doing. The NUS believe that it is only through these programmes that lobbying of decision makers can take place, and weight and credibility can be given to the student point of view. Only through a national voice, can British students hope to have any say in their education, their welfare and their future

Some criticize NUS for being too bureaucratic, and too distant from student life. It especially applies to the strong regionalism in Wales and Scotland, who see only a tenuous connection between themselves and NUS headquarters in London. Consequently, the NUS

has placed more emphasis on the regional element. Scotland and Wales have their own NUS headquarters.

Stirling University Students' Association (SUSA) is linked with the NUS. The Association reflects strongly the NUS interest in student welfare.

SUSA consists of various elected members. The president and vice president are elected once a year, in May. They are sabbatical posts, thus they are full-time employees of the association. The elections for the posts are party-political. The Labour Party, Social Democrat-Liberal Alliance, or the Left Alliance (a group of left-wing students, ranging from Young Liberals to Communists). There are rarely any Conservative Party candidates.

The main bulk of SUSA's business is carried out at general meetings. These are held monthly or more frequently if desired. The quorum is 10 per cent of the student population, which is high even for British student unions. SUSA believe that democracy is a crucial element in the decision making process.

The SUSA response to the education spending cuts has been mass meetings, demonstrations, letterwriting, debates, social events and street theatre.

SUSA involve themselves in international issues too. One of the most controversial actions was a General Meeting decision to twin with Hebron University, on the Israeli occupied West Bank. At Hebron, the students have less academic freedom than in Britain and Canada. Courses are often stopped, and many students have been arrested for demonstrating against violence. A professor of English at Hebron came to Stirling, and told students about scenes of students being shot on the campus.

Both the NUS and Stirling's Students' Association are politically active. Active in presenting the interests of their members to government and society, and in the support of international issues. The result has been that the worst of government economies have been avoided, and there has been an increase in awareness of important political issues.

Bill Mitchell is an exchange student from the University of Stirling, Scotland, studying at Dalhousie this year.