

Free Trade opponents meet

by Pat Mandin

"The most important debate since Canadian federation is taking place this year. The debate concerns whether we will continue to have a Canada," stated Dave Werlin, Alberta Federation of Labour president.

Werlin was addressing a gathering of a hundred people at the U of A Humanities Centre. Werlin's speech was part of a free trade forum put on by the U of A New Democrats last Thursday night.

Speaking at the anti-free trade forum, entitled "Stop the Sellout", were Werlin and Professor Larry Pratt of the U of A Political Science Department.

Bob Hawkesworth, the New Democrat MLA for Calgary Mountainview, was also scheduled to speak but was unable to attend.

Werlin began his address by stating that he was not aware that he would be speaking to such a pro-labour crowd, in which case, he said, "I'll dress the part." As Werlin removed his sports jacket, an audience member shouted, "Stop right there!"

Werlin stated that as a long standing trade unionist, he had "never been so lucky" to have entered negotiations with the "kind of negotiators that represented Canada for the recent trade pact."

"I've never yet met an employer," Werlin said, "who would let me make up an agreement and sign it without reading it, or one who would sign an interim agreement and let me fill in the details."

Werlin said that he was not surprised by the negotiating process since "these negotiators were not representing Canada, as being the Canadian people. They represented the interests of the large, monopolistic multi-national corporations."

Werlin also criticized the process

for being clouded in secrecy. "In fact," he said, "we got most of our information from the American press. If it is such a good deal why aren't they telling us more about it?"

Werlin maintained that the Mulroney government has never had "any mandate from the Canadian people" to institute a policy with so many implications for the public. "Not a single party campaigned on this issue in the last federal campaign."

"Apparently," he continued, "it was an issue that could not get them elected by the Canadian public." Werlin quoted a statement made by Brian Mulroney at the PC nominating convention in 1983, when Mulroney stated, "Free trade affects Canadian sovereignty and we will have none of it. Not now, not in the future."

Werlin spoke of the implications of the new policy on the job market. "If I were in university, I would be concerned," he said. Werlin claimed that the statistics indicate that "it has been small business people that have been providing the new jobs for Canada while the US companies have decreased the number of Canadians employed while doubling their profits."

The figures cited by Werlin were compiled by the Council of Canadians. They suggest that US companies operating in the Canadian goods producing sector had decreased employment by 61,000 jobs in the last seven years.

Werlin predicted that the trade policy will mean Canada becoming "a warehouse of production."

Werlin warned that the new trade policy threatens to "do away with Canada's economic, political and cultural sovereignty." It will make Canada the 51st state," he concluded.

Professor Pratt stated his prefer-

ence for a "third option" which he considered "to be more progressive than the defensive rationalism of the free trade opponents or the continentalism which the present agreement will give us."

Pratt emphasized his preference by employing a graphic image. "I don't want to be in bed with either David Peterson or Don Getty."

Pratt talked of the pressure that was brought to bear on Canada by the United States during the 1940s for a customs union.

At that time, he said, "Canada rejected free trade and opted for multilateralism. In 1987 we are doing the very opposite. We are pushing for bilateral trade. Bilateral trade is not the same as free trade when it is based on an unequal agreement."

Pratt claimed that "it made no sense to think that we could have negotiated an equitable arrangement given the very unequal powers involved." Although Pratt said the favoured trade liberalization as a means of dealing with world wide economic problems, he believes that Canada will receive none of "the so called market enhancement." "It looks to me that we got very little of the give that we needed, for instance, the countervail."

Pratt criticized not only this specific trade treaty but also the government policy that surrounds it. "In any kind of free trade arrangement," he said, "you need strong government intervention, almost simultaneously, to help people adjust to this sort of massive government program with job re-training, job creation and regional disparity programs. This is what happened in Europe. It is 'what must happen here. Not only to win popular support but to make it morally defensible."

Pratt pointed out the type of problems that the present pact may produce. "It is not clear how pro-

vinces will be able to regulate pricing. It will probably require a Supreme Court decision." He also spoke of Canada's vulnerable position should an international energy crisis occur.

"What is missing," Pratt maintained, "is any sense of where Canada belongs outside of this continent. Our economic recovery depends highly on what happens in the world context, on the recovery of Latin America, for example."

"We need some kind of multi-lateral solution to the crisis in the world economy."

Pratt gave his opinion that the crucial factor in the North American situation "is not the American deficit but, rather, the international debt crisis that overhangs the Third World."

"A very large of the American deficit," Pratt said, "is due to the fact that Latin America is importing virtually nothing from the United States. The financial flows that ought to be going south are actually going north through interest payments."

Calgary fasts for funding

by Roberta Franchuk

The University of Calgary will be holding a series of rotating hunger strikes beginning November 16 to protest cutbacks to education funding.

"It's more of a symbolic thing than anything else," said Calgary Students' Union VP External Mike Beaton.

At least 10 student volunteers will be going without food each day. They will also be circulating an anti-cutbacks petition among the student body.

The purpose of the hunger strike, said Beaton, is to "raise awareness around campus and off campus in the community at large" of the implications of the cutbacks.

Reaction on the campus has been mixed. "Some students think it's a dumb idea, some think it's great," said Beaton.

The program will run until Dec-

ember 4, to leave the last week of classes free.

The idea originated with Jonathan Paige, a member of the External Commission for the Calgary Students' Union.

Paul LaGrange, U of A VP External, said the idea was one that the Anti-Cutbacks Team (ACT) would look into to see if something similar could be set up on this campus.

"It might be worth doing as a challenge."

Jonathan Paige, a member of the External Commission, said that about one hundred people had expressed interest in participating. "We're hoping for double that," he added.

At least 10 student volunteers will be going without food each day. They will also be circulating an anti-cutbacks petition among the student body, and displaying "I'm starving for education" stickers.

Controversy over student debt load

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with high debt loads, we were surprised to find that the majority of students have debts less than \$10 thousand."

"That does not mean there's not a problem," added Meloshe, "Debt at any level can be a problem depending on ones resources."

Rompkey feels that the government underestimates the problem: "Their [the government's] attitude underlying this is that students are

privileged, that students are lucky."

Meloshe feels the seriousness of debt must be related to personal situations. "If a medical student comes out of final year with a high debt load, is that necessarily a problem?"

"Most debts are at the low end of the scale," said Crombie.

In conjunction with the debt study was an announcement for a

new advisory group that will undertake a "comprehensive" review of the Canada Student Loan Act.

Crombie expects the review to last til 1988, when changes to the Act will be introduced.

Rompkey has specific recommendations for the review. "We have got to change the whole philosophy away from loans and towards a system of bursaries."

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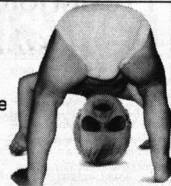
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