

NUS campaign...

## Student Aid Petition

OTTAWA (CUP) - Students across Canada this fall are being asked to sign a petition demanding "student participation" in student aid decision-making, aid eligibility criteria which are "flexible and realistic", and removal of "the financial barriers to education - no more student debt."

The launching of the National Student Aid Petition Campaign was announced August 29 by the National Union of Students (NUS), the three year old organization which represents students nationally.

But whether students in all provinces will get an opportunity to sign the petition, and whether the national campaign will succeed at all, depends to a large extent on the response of local and provincial student unions to the NUS proposal.

Just what that response will be is not certain at this time. The Atlantic Federation of Students (AFS) has given its unqualified support to the campaign according to NUS executive secretary, Dan O'Connor.

The Ontario Federation of Students (OFS), the largest provincial student organization in the country, has supported the petition "in principle" but has refused to commit staff or resources to the campaign.

And the British Columbia Student Federation (BCSF) has said they will support the petition and work on it, but only after priority issues such as housing are dealt with early in the fall.

Individual student unions at Memorial in Newfoundland, Calgary, the University of Alberta, Winnipeg, Brandon, and the Kelsey Institute in Saskatoon have already responded favourably to the campaign. Since the materials explaining the campaign have only recently been released, O'Connor expresses optimism that more will soon be responding favourably.

### THE DEMANDS

The first of the three demands of the petition is to: "Make student aid decisions without secrecy and with participation by student representatives."

According to a pamphlet being prepared to accompany the petition, this demand arises because "at most post-secondary institutions it has

been recognized that student participation results in better decisions."

"Despite the institutional trend," the pamphlet states, "students have virtually NO say in the decisions regarding student aid programmes."

The result is that "decisions are usually made by isolated government bureaucrats with some advice from institutional officials" who fail to realize "the problems that individual students face when dealing with student aid regulations."

Students should be involved at all levels of decision-making which affect their lives and the quality of their education, and should be represented on federal-provincial policy

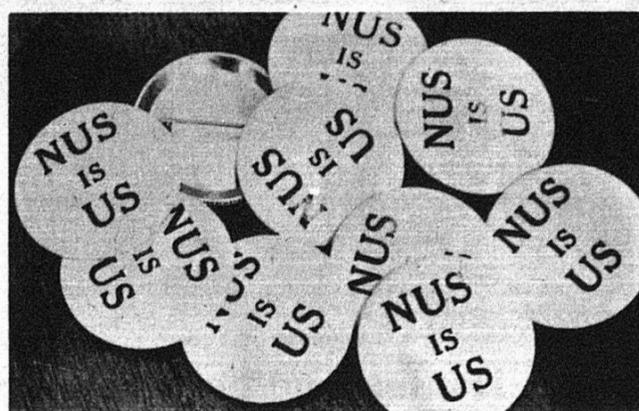
barriers to education - no more student debts."

NUS takes the position that grants should form the basis of the aid system rather than loans, and says that loans deter people, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, from attending post-secondary institutions.

The pamphlet cites recent examples of provinces and the federal government raising the loan ceilings and reducing grant portions of the aid package "at a time when people need more, not less, support."

### NATIONAL CO-ORDINATION

Calling the petition "the students first national



the absence of an effective national lobby.

Provincial campaigns, NUS says, can be "safely ignored" by federal and provincial authorities because they have "little national coordination."

The one provincial organization which seems least impressed with the need for "national coordination" is the OFS which NUS president Pierre Ouellette described in an interview as "the trouble spot".

OFS chairman John Shortall,

that they disagree with the petition tactically.

A petition campaign in Ontario last year met with limited success, and some feel that the situation in Ontario has developed to the point where students are prepared to "go beyond the petition" as a form of political action.

According to Shortall, it is "difficult to change our strategies and priorities to include a campaign with which we disagree tactically."

But he does not rule out the possibility that OFS might change its mind as a result of discussions with NUS and the other provincial organizations.

"We don't want to go against the rest of the country, and we still may not do that," he said, but added that although OFS doesn't want to "look like Ontario Chauvinists" they "might have to."

Shortall expressed hope that a planned series of meetings beginning in October between NUS and the provincial organizations to discuss their mutual roles and structures will resolve some of the problems which have been occurring in coordinating provincial and national strategies.

"Students have virtually NO say...

regarding student aid programmes."

groups, provincial student aid committees and appeal boards, NUS says.

The second demand is for "flexible and realistic eligibility criteria" - specifically:

- a more flexible criteria for what constitutes financial "independence" of a student;

- aid for part-time students;
- lowering the amount of money which parents are expected to contribute to support a dependent student;

- increasing the maximum amount of money which students can receive, which is presently "well below the poverty line", and

- rolling back the unrealistic increases in the amount of money a student must save through the summer earnings, despite the high summer unemployment rates.

The third and final item on the petition is to "remove the

manifestation of their demands" on student aid. NUS says the object of the petition is to provide "visible support" for the demands that student organizations have been making "through the collection of the signatures of a significant proportion of post-secondary students."

Once collected, NUS plans to have the signed petitions presented to Parliament and the provincial legislatures sometime in the late fall "to restore a strong lobby" for student aid reform.

According to the NUS release, the Canada Student Loans Plan came into existence in 1964, "as a result of a strong student lobby". NUS feels that, since then, and with the collapse of the Canadian Union of Students in 1969, many of the current problems in the aid system have developed due to

tall, President of the Student Federation at the University of Waterloo, outlined OFS's dissatisfaction with the campaign.

He said they were not given sufficient opportunity to discuss the campaign prior to the decision by the NUS central committee, and had the whole thing "sprung on us", after the fall program from OFS had already been set.

Another serious reservation according to Shortall, is

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1. The name, address and phone number of a responsible member of the organization.
2. The number of members in the organization and the services which it provides to members and non-members.
3. The reasons an office is needed, what facilities are needed (eg: phone, filing cabinets, private or shared office).
4. The period of the year which the organization is active.

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