

A RAMBLING LOOK AT STUDENT UNITY

PROSE AND CON

By Les Cohen
Features Editor

Canadian university students treat their national union like Quebeckers treat Confederation. From Victoria to Saint John's, the National Federation of Canadian University Students is alternately condemned, praised and questioned. Yet it is the only organization representative of Canadian university students.

The aims of NFCUS are good — to promote a better understanding among Canadian students, more co-operation and a greater correlation among all Canadian Universities, in order to keep an effective watch over the progress of student interests; to make Canadian students more familiar with their own nation; to formulate and carry out a definite policy, providing a plan of action to benefit the students of Canada; and to furnish a means of creating international ties with groups of students in other countries.

With secretariat headquarters in the nation's capital, NFCUS has an annual budget bordering on \$100,000.00. It's biggest source of revenue is a national per capita student levy (60c at Dalhousie), with industry, government, foundations and council grants making up the remainder. And this is the main issue, raised yearly in campus papers, is NFCUS worth its cost. The average student asks, especially frosh, "What does NFCUS do for me?" Very few question the real need for student unity, only the worth of the returns it brings for their money. The attitude has resulted in NFCUS trying to serve the student community as a "service" organization.

In an attempt to make NFCUS meaningful to the average student many local committees sponsor lecture or seminar series, dances, football weekends, blood drives, and book stores. Sixteen universities participate in the national student discount service (discounts range from ten to twenty percent). Only in Ottawa and Vancouver have difficulties arisen. At Memorial University of Newfoundland, a St. John's laundry does all of a student's laundry at \$25.00 for the college year. A local insurance company also agreed to low cost group accident coverage.

The students at the University of British Columbia wanted a national student magazine. They persuaded the National Congress at Sherbrooke of its virtues and accepted the mandate. Now every student shares the benefits of Campus Canada, underwritten by UBC.

The last Congress also drafted a Charter on Student Rights. At present it has not come into effect because it lacks the one third majority membership ratification needed to pass it. The preamble is proving a stumbling block. Mr. Jordan Sullivan, S.A.C., President of the U. of T., has been mandated by the Ontario region to re-write the preamble to make it acceptable to those universities which have indicated opposition. It will be submitted to the National Congress in Edmonton this fall.

In an editorial sent to member papers, President Roger McAfee of Canadian University Press commented on NFCUS.

"Most people seem to agree NFCUS has to be meaningful to individual students on the various campuses. How then is it possible for NFCUS to reconcile this with one of its major objectives: 'The promotion of better understanding among Canadian Students; the institution of greater co-operation among student organizations; the advancement of legitimate student interests.'"

"Many NFCUS supporters claim this means the Federation must work almost entirely on the national level to achieve these ends. This is only partially so.

"It is true that national pressures which reduce textbook tax, make university fees income-tax deductible and reduce transportation costs are advancements of 'legitimate student interests.'"

"However, any local program which gives students in one section of the country an insight into the problems of another section, is surely contributing to 'better understanding among Canadian students' and at the same time making NFCUS a useful part of campus life. The 'French Canada Week' slated for next Fall at UBC will bring top Quebec political and economic figures to Vancouver for a discus-

sion of French-speaking Canada, and is an excellent example of this type of program.

"Travel has long been recognized as an integral part of education and an excellent method for developing a 'better understanding' among people. With this in mind NFCUS has been operating a travel department since 1952."

This year NFCUS took over administration of the KLM trips to Holland for summer employment. It is planning to put the same type of operation into effect with upwards of five airlines next year.

Moreover, the Canadian Debating Association, the Canadian University Press, Art, Short Story and Photography Contests are among the annual NFCUS activities which receive wide participation and support.

NFCUS represents Canadian students abroad through its International Affairs commission. Ironically, NFCUS is better recognized outside of Canada than inside. This is mainly due to the number of energetic Canadian students and ex-students, many former NFCUS Chairmen or Presidents, now in Europe representing NFCUS. They have given Canada an extremely high prestige in the international student world. When going abroad many students may now prefer to wear a NFCUS crest, the design of which has not been finalized.

A dilemma facing NFCUS today is one of identification. Who does it represent? Where do its grass roots lie? Does NFCUS represent 39 councils through their presidents or 106,000 Canadian university students?

National President Stewart Goodings, (B.A. Hon., Queen's), in his "information and action" bulletin to council presidents and NFCUS Chairmen had this to say:

"I have often felt that NFCUS occasionally suffers from a lack of communication between the 'brass and the grass.' In other words, the students very often don't know what their local committee or council is doing or why they are doing it."

This situation is not unique to NFCUS. Mr. Mitchell Sharp, Liberal candidate in the Toronto riding of Eglinton, has hit upon the same subject, as reported in the Globe and Mail of March 5th.

"No political party can survive without strong roots, roots that are deep and extensive, drawing nourishment from many directions. . . The urgent need is to provide channels of communication from the bottom up and the top down."

"Most students think that the local committees are responsible to the national office," points out Dalhousie Vice-President Graham Read. They tend to think of NFCUS and the local committees as separate bodies existing apart from them and their campus. This attitude is known as the "they" complex. In fact, NFCUS on the local level is responsible to its student council; NFCUS on the national level is responsible to all the member student councils in Canada. The Federation is not a directing body located in Ottawa; NFCUS is a directed body. NFCUS is each university.

It is our sounding board. We should take full advantage of the opportunity offered. We must not shirk our duty. We must play our part to the full. NFCUS works for the welfare of the student community. The NFCUS programme includes studies of education; research and information (on student needs and problems); services (like life insurance); and leadership and representation (with documentation of student opinion). The sponsoring of national and regional meetings, seminars, weekend exchanges, Inter-Regional and Exchange Scholarships, and a Travel Department have been instrumental in realizing the aims outlined.

The key to success is a well informed participating membership in constant communication with each other. At present the Atlantic region suffers from a breakdown in communications and as a result is disorganized. In addition, some delegates to the recent Atlantic Conference had not done any homework. Regional President Fred Aresenault considered the resolutions dealt with of a practical nature such that could be acted upon with immediately foreseeable results. But he failed to realize that many of the matters discussed were a repeat of

the 1959 Conference. One resolution was passed before in 1961. Granted a great deal of business is often transacted at socials, most delegates felt the same amount of business could have been considered in a shorter time. Here the fault lay in poor organization and preparation. And by such a showing, NFCUS lays itself wide open for sever criticism that it does not always deserve.

Students must be well informed if NFCUS is to progress. They must have a complete understanding of NFCUS. As was demonstrated at MUN, the local committee must first be aware of the organizations potentialities if their student body is to appreciate it. At present the local committee lacks organization and a realization of what NFCUS is and does. They claim a lot of the NFCUS program does not apply to Memorial. They expect NFCUS to come in from the outside and impose itself upon the campus, while in fact it can only act effectively in support of the local committee's initiative and positions on issues. MUN is weak at the grass roots level where the student body is quite young.

The result of Memorials negative attitude was a demonstration by some thirty Memorial students at one of the morning sessions of the conference. The signs read, "Pourquoi la FNEUC?; Let's revolutionize starting now; Not apathy, antipathy; NFCUS (with a thumb pointing down). Yet these people were not questioning the need for student unity anymore than they do confederation. They want guidance.

If we do not agree with the Federation's dealing with certain matters, our duty is to state our position as such.

A case in point is the situation revealed at the Atlantic Conference.

The MUN NFCUS committee fails to see the importance of NFCUS dealing in student welfare. The MUN administration forbids political figures from speaking on the campus. Earlier this year NFCUS National President Stewart Goodings and Canadian University Press President Roger MacAfee spoke to Premier Joseph Smallwood on the subject. At the time Smallwood denied the ban but promised to rectify the situation. He has not. Yet this restriction in their freedom was not considered suitable for NFCUS' interest. But as Stewart Goodings pointed out, it is for the purpose of improving the lot of the student, on the local campus as well as nationally, that NFCUS exists. "The only raison d'etre of NFCUS is that it acts in the best interests of student."

By more vigorous action in NFCUS—proposing motions on our part and registering our favour or protest against measures we feel NFCUS shouldn't deal with — instead of letting our votes fall automatically one way or the other on matters that other universities propose, we can more effectively control what NFCUS engages in. NFCUS belongs to those who take the most interest in it. Council represents our views on international, as well as national affairs through NFCUS.

As Mr. McAfee stated:

"Each student body, through its elected representatives and the NFCUS committee, has both the right and duty to direct policies of the Federation.

"If the student doesn't like the amount of money he is paying for the service the Federation provides, his representatives can work to get it changed. If he doesn't like the travel plan, it too can be changed. If he doesn't like the NFCUS policy on international affairs, change it.

"Students and student councils must look on NFCUS as 'we' not 'they' if the organization is going to be of any use to anyone."

There is no excuse for not participating fully and not being well-informed. We should leave university better informed than when we entered. We should be the educated elite of the public. NFCUS provides us this opportunity. We will never command respect until we demand respect. We must speak and speak forcefully to be heard. NFCUS provides us with a single national voice supported by over 100,000 Canadian students across the Dominion. NFCUS's importance lies in providing us with unmatched strength.