

# GATEWAY features

# CUS Seminar: Held At...

Edited by  
Janis Kostash  
and  
Don Sellar

Edmonton sent six delegates and two observers to the seventh annual seminar of the Canadian Union of Students, held at Laval University, Quebec city, during the first week of September. Analyzing the topic, *Towards A New Concept of Confederation*, were delegates Jim Dube, law 1, Janis Kostash, arts 2, Syliva Malm, science 4, Michael McGarry, graduate studies, Maureen Stuart, arts 2, and Ian Walker, science 2. David Estrin, arts 3, and Francis Saville, law 3, acted as observers. In this feature, the delegates express their reactions to the seminar.

Everything had to happen in one short week.

In the course of that week, we Western Canadians listened, absorbed, adjusted our attitudes and turned over our minds to a whole new way of thinking. And it was difficult.

It was difficult to listen to some of the Quebec students express pent-up resentment against the English-Canadians, again and again, in discussion groups, plenary, and conversations and to sit back quietly and say little—because what they were saying was generally justified.

The seminar was the French-Canadians' show. We were there to listen to them and to try to clarify for ourselves what the issues were. We explained the attitudes of the West when called for, but this was not the central issue.

We encountered every attitude that could possibly exist. We met avid separatists, "moderate" separatists—who held division up as an ideal, but who felt it wouldn't work practically—moderates who wanted to consider a constitutional framework for one country. We met concerned non-French Canadians, indifferent ones, bitterly negative ones, and belligerent ones.

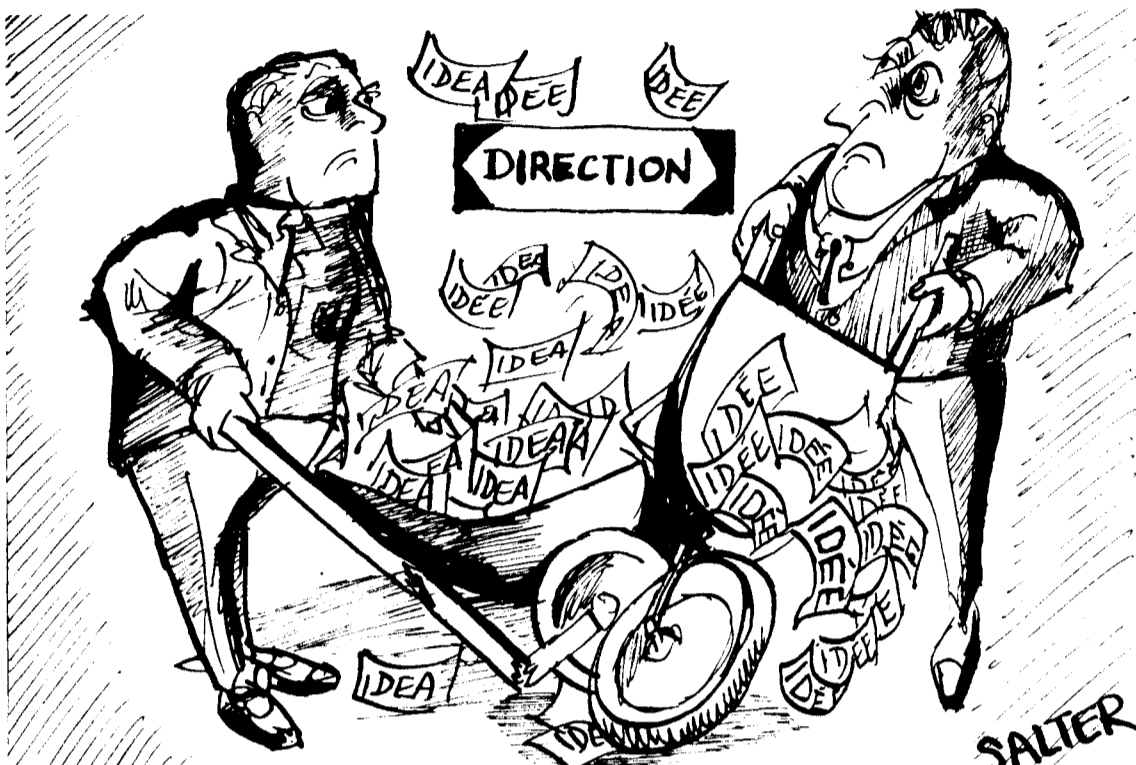
We talked. We talked in organized groups, at the banquets and cocktail parties, at the receptions and the coffee breaks. Most of the delegates seemed urgently aware that in the one short week, we had to understand each other and try to decide something, at least in our own minds.

## FEELING INTENSE

We were aware of the intensity of the feelings of the Quebec students, an intensity that sometimes made discussion touchy.

The attitude of Western Canada was fairly easy at present, because we felt it was a fairly unified viewpoint. Unified through misunderstanding, perhaps, of the situation in Quebec, but unified nevertheless. We presented the West as being indifferent or negative towards the French-Canadian demands, an attitude that was generally understood but not accepted by the eastern students.

The easterners' attitudes, less unified, were more complex to



present and understand. And the Maritimers were the ones who were always there to remind us there are more provinces east of Quebec. Their position was a slightly desperate one—they could not afford to lose ground in a possible re-negotiation of confederation.

We were made intensely aware of the basic difference between French-Canadian and non-French Canadian mentality. This difference, so important in helping to explain the Quiet Revolution, is not often recognized or accepted out west. But if westerners could hear Micheline explain that for twenty years she is schooled in the French-Canadian way of thinking, then to make her way in the business world of her province she must adjust her mind to the English-Canadian mentality, they would recognize that this problem does, in fact, exist.

Although aware of a difference, however, it was not as easy to define the difference, to pinpoint just where the two groups were thinking on different plains. "Pragmatic" was a term tossed about all week, applied to the English-Canadians, as opposed to the more "idealistic" French-Canadians; the delegates generally accepted this distinction.

## DISCUSSIONS DIVIDE

They also recognized the practicalities-versus-principles division the discussions generally took. Some groups were characterized by the French-Canadian stating his feelings and his wants, and the English-Canadian referring to his constitutional law books to keep the discussion realistic and practical.

The delegates spent much of their time trying to answer the now-tedious question—what does Quebec want? From a four-hour session of the eight rapporteurs—four French-Canadian, four non-French Canadian—came the following ideas, carefully worded, much discussed:

"An important point revealed... was the need to recognize the changes which are desired by Quebec. Very often, it is thought that separatism is the ultimate goal of the French-Canadian population, or at least a considerable segment of it. This is an error. Separation is not desired (nor is any form of constitutional revision) merely for its own sake: rather the ultimate goal of the

new French-Canadian generation is *l'épanouissement du peuple canadien-français*. *Epanouissement* implies the attainment of cultural maturity, the right of free and individual self-expression, the right to live in a society congenial to the vast majority of its members.

## NEW ASPECT

"When seen in this light, separatism and/or the desire for constitutional revision becomes an exciting and positive philosophy. French-Canada in general does not wish to revise Confederation because it feels that the BNA act is primarily responsible for the present problems of Quebec (though it may have contributed considerably to these problems); rather it sees that the maximum potential for *épanouissement* lies within a different constitutional framework. What form the constitutional changes will take remains to be seen; but it is important to remember that these changes are merely means to an end."

Delegates also argued their way to a general acceptance of the fact that Quebec must be granted a special status. Special, because it represents a concentrated group of people who are basically different from the rest of Canada's people. It is not often recognized—especially in the West—how vital it is for the French-Canadians to be responsible to themselves alone, to be free agents. If they are not granted this free agency within the framework of a single nation, they must then look outside this framework to attain this essential goal.

There is something powerful happening in Quebec today. And the young Quebecois is willing to adapt his pattern of life to the changes taking place in his province. He is willing to forego marriage because he feels there is something more significant to gain by dedicating his personal life to the Quiet Revolution.

But it is impossible to grasp these feelings of the Quiet Revolution without living in the middle of it all. And the dele-

gates found that one week is scarcely enough.

## PRACTICAL SOLUTION

Why 1867? The delegates decided that confederation was a practical solution to practical problems, but they placed a different emphasis on the importance of various forces—economic, political, and military—which led to confederation.

And what did we get in 1867—a federation or a legislative union? A unanimous conclusion was impossible to reach, though the feeling was that 1867 produced a quasi-unitary state. But the terms of the BNA act were vague enough to give Sir John A. Macdonald confidence that he could engineer a legislative union.

In fact, though, subsequent events foiled Sir John A.'s scheme. The decisions of the Privy Council combined with other forces to exert a decentralizing effect.

## PAST ONWARD

Discussions moved from Canada's past to its present. A vital part of this present is Quebec's Quiet Revolution, a growing consciousness among French-Canadians of themselves as a nation.

The basic characteristics is the changing attitude of French-Canada from conservatism, based on a desire for survival, to liberalism, based on a desire for *épanouissement*. This has led the people of Quebec to look to their government as the agency for regaining economic control of their province. Consequently, in the eyes of the French-Canadian people, the Quebec government needs more and more powers.

Then on to A New Concept of Confederation. Few of the delegates accepted the BNA act as it now stands. The atmosphere thickened when proponents of a constitution guaranteeing explicit provincial rights met delegates wary of an inflexible set-up. Innumerable hare-brained schemes and a few plausible solutions were submitted.

One of the more reasonable proposals that the delegates got around to in their saner moments was that of co-operative federalism, the principle of consultation before decision, including the right of any province to opt out

# Fun And Frolic In

Communication was no problem at the seminar.

It was especially easy over a mug of beer—thoughtfully provided by a local brewery at a beer party—or a cocktail—thoughtfully provided by the university hosts.

Language was no problem. The French spoke French and the English spoke English. Most of us understood each other. For the unilingual, the bi-lingual translated.

And there was always the obliging Quebec male who gallantly escorted the English-Canadian female to see the sights, carefully including the smoky bar, or the sophisticated lounge of the Chateau Frontenac.

## WINNING WEST

Then there was the touch football game on the Plains of Abraham, with the mighty men of the West defeating the... men of the East. The cheering squad, all females and leftover males present, was incredible.

The seminar's social life was frighteningly well-organized. There were buses from out of the blue to protect the tender students from "between the buildings" rain; folk-singers to fill an otherwise empty evening, and an air of smooth operation and serenity that probably covered up many hours of hectic work.

The interplay of French and English was fascinating to observe.

