

An old issue

comes to life

Let's reconsider the Canadian Union of Students

By RONALD YAKIMCHUK

Fellow students, permit me to raise the issue of the Canadian Union of Students again.

Let me assure you I am not condemning, nor condoning our withdrawal from that organization last fall, but I do feel someone should acquaint you with more of the facts than have yet been revealed.

CUS, my friends, is not the greatest show that has ever been invented. But then, neither is our almighty president Al Anderson.

CUS is made up of people, people like you and I who eat and sleep and go to classes and bitch about parking.

But unlike most of us, they think they know how to get rid of the parking problem and how to improve our classes and how to sleep more with more people.

Not only that, but they want to do these things right now, all at once, and over the dead body of whoever objects.

They are known as militant activists and are predominantly of the socialist kind. There is also the red Tory kind who is not socialist in his thinking but likes to see a lot of action anyway.

In the last couple of years, these people have managed to take over the union and force out such conservative bastions as U of A and Bishops University simply by refusing to listen to them and thereby making them very angry at CUS. You all know how mad Branny Schepanovich was last year.

On the other hand, we have our own University of Alberta students' union which is controlled by conservatives who consider themselves to be very sophisticated in their handling of the students' union.

They will not make pronouncements on the war in Vietnam, or the Indian discrimination problem, or the need for conservation of our national resources, nor on

makes it hard for the ordinary joe like me to make up his mind about which camp he is going to settle in.

Anderson accuses the activists of not knowing what they are doing in fields where they should not be doing anything.

"Someone presented a brief on how we shouldn't be selling our water to those capitalist Americans at the last conference," he said. "It was hastily put together, and didn't make much sense."

CUS does not concern itself "with the operation of student government on the campus."

The activists feel the students are the leaders in the community, says Anderson.

"But I would question whether this is so. They feel the students are the people who are studying and are in fact obligated to speak out.

"One leads by trying to change the environment of thought. CUS can get leaders to think about education. I am a better leader because of CUS."—Westdal

"I think this implies the rest of the community is not thinking of society, and I would question this of course".

CUS congresses are conducted in a very improper manner, says Al Anderson.

"The euphoria that takes place there is unbelievable!"

He blames this on inexperienced persons attending the conference, and on militant leftists dominating the conference.

He feels the CUS executive has too much authority.

"You see, there is only one week per year in which

"I don't care where they (U of A) stand; they just refuse to take part," says Westdal.

Westdal accuses U of A student leaders of many things including "aimless affluence", "irresponsible leadership", and "running a service union".

"One leads by trying to change the environment of thought", says Westdal. "CUS can get leaders to think about what education is."

"I am a better leader because of CUS."

Westdal is one of the more conservative CUS leaders because he is able to talk with true conservatives like Al Anderson.

"I like Anderson, but some of his ideas are bad," says Westdal.

But the far left CUSsers would say, "His ideas are bad, therefore he must be bad." They do not stop to analyze the facts behind the ideas of the opposite viewpoint.

And herein lies the whole crux of CUS-nonCUS, activist-nonactivist, and left-right relationships.

The left accuses the right of warmongering, and the right accuses the left of being irrational, and then they get mad at each other and have a big fight.

"So what happens? Nothing. These people are so busy running each other down and taking care of their own interests they forget to do what they are PAID to do and that is look after the interests of as many students as they are representing AND leading.

Nobody gives a damn about that freshette who comes to campus and can't find any friends except one and he isn't much of a friend because he knocks her up, and she gets pregnant because she knows nothing about anything—not even enough to go and hear Dr. Vant—and then she jumps off the low level because the high level is too high.

And everybody figures it's a panic when those guys in res find the most exciting thing they can do Friday night is have a drunk and someone jumps out the sixth-floor window because the house committee is coming, and a guy could get kicked out for having booze in that place.

So who cares about these people?

Well, you and I do, but I have this goddam paper to put out and you have to get to your next class, and you'll be busy tonight and can't waste your weekends; so nobody ever does anything about that dumb prof who puts you to sleep in History 370 three times a week.

Al Anderson says there is nothing wrong with running a service union. In fact he says that it is wrong for him to exert any pressure on society in the name of the student.

Although I don't fully agree with him on that count, let's forget about that. Let us ask him whether he is in fact taking good care of all that concerns the student.

Start with the freshman. Whatever did happen to Freshman Introduction Week this year? How many frosh learned anything they couldn't have got elsewhere for a bit less money?

What about that course evaluation which everyone has been talking about for so long? Last spring, students' council authorized a bit of spending on that. It was supposed to be done over the summer, but I don't see any course evaluation guides lying around. And they have not included anything for it in this year's budget so maybe they feel we don't need one after all. But then who worries about their profs or their courses? It's getting that diploma that counts.

So who cares about these people?

Well, you and I do, but I have this goddam paper to put out and you have to go to your next class, and you'll be busy tonight and can't waste your weekends; so nobody ever does anything.

And another thing—what about that little construction project that is going to take place in North Garneau in the next few years?

Since students are going to be using it, perhaps they should intimate to the architects some of the things they would like done there.

So you see, the issues are not all clear cut into good and bad. Sure the Canadian Union of Students has a lot of hot heads and activists who could go off at any time, and who stick their fingers into every pot they can find, but some of the conservatives are not fully performing the role they have set out for themselves either.

And there are many things neither group has the time or interest for.

So what's to do?

First, get all the facts, no matter how hard it may be for you to stomach some of them. Any fact is relevant to an issue.

Second, listen to other people's interpretations of the facts. Never scorn other people's opinions because they could do the same to yours and where does that leave anyone?

Thirdly, don't be afraid to act as your conscience dictates. If you figure CUS is not worth the time, money, or effort, say so.

But don't do something just because Al Anderson or Branny Schepanovich asks you to.



AL ANDERSON (LEFT) AND CHRIS WESTDAL (RIGHT)

... "aimless affluence" or "euphoria"?

the price of eggs in China. They say they cannot speak for all the students on these matters; therefore, they will not speak for any of the students.

What they do speak about is how much shall we spend on entertainment this year, how can we solve the parking problem, who the new director of U of A Student Radio should be, and whether or not Treasure Van should be held in the art gallery.

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Sometimes they do a good job of this, but nobody really notices.

Both the conservatives and the activists can put up fairly good arguments for their respective positions. This

the member campuses can say, 'No, you are not doing the right thing,' or 'Yes, you should go ahead and do that.'

This leaves the executive quite well on its own for most of the year.

But what has the other side got to say about our system? Perhaps they think we are running a queer system, too.

Well, as a matter of fact, some of those way-out kids really do think we're just a trifle stodgy.

To them, anyone who doesn't want everyone to get an education is nuts. They want education to be made free, and they want it to be better. They don't care what it costs or who is going to pay for it.

They care about the world peoples' revolution, or why Che Guevara was murdered, and why the people of Vietnam are being wantonly slaughtered by American capitalists.

Birth control and abortion should be made easier to get, and the use of marijuana and LSD ought to be legalized, they say.

But, ultimately they want involvement, total involvement, in their way of thinking. Even the more conservative CUS members such as University of Manitoba students' union president Chris Westdal agree on this point.