

ECONOMICS COURSE UNION FORMED

By Martha Mac Donald

Economics students, following the example set by the Sociology Students Union, have begun to organize. An Economics Students Union now exists, although as yet it has no constitution, no power, and limited participation.

The instigator of the project is Brian Gifford, a second year combined Economics and Sociology Honours student who was active in the Sociology Union last year. He began work on the Economics Union during Orientation by distributing an informative pamphlet and collecting the names of interested people. However people are often more willing to sign

their names in support than they are to show actual physical and mental involvement. There now exists a nucleus of about twenty enthusiastic economics students who are actually contributory members of the union. Hopefully this number will multiply when the union gets down to working on relevant things after getting over the hurdles of organization.

A beginning, however, has been made. The general purpose of the union is to enable students in economics classes to vocalize their needs and hopefully implement reforms. The course union functions to "stimulate and collect student opinion, clarify this opinion, and give this opinion effective voice at appropriate levels." The spectrum of goals includes (a) improved teaching methods and grading systems to promote active rather than passive learning, and eliminate competition for marks, alone, (b) reform in the content of specific Courses, (c) greater flexibility and variety in offered, (d) greater flexibility degree programs offered in economics, including improvement in the calendar, and in the departmental advisory system, (e) an evaluation and understanding of economics as a discipline; its unattentiveness to outside students, common misconceptions concerning economics, and its relationship to the university, the community, and the "real" world.

It has been decided to work on a

committee basis. At present, four committees have been set up. These are the open committees, which will elect their own chairmen (if necessary) and formulate goals and actions within their own specific areas. One committee has been set up to deal with the Learning process, to experiment with new ideas in course presentation and evaluation, and to handle complaints about the various courses. A second committee on Curriculum will deal with the broad area of course content - existing courses, recommended courses, and degree programs. The final two committees are on economics as a discipline, and an executive committee, including the chairmen of the previous three committees, which will coordinate work, and ensure the continuation of union programs.

This temporary structure has not yet had time to prove itself. The process of initial organization is tediously long and unfortunately disinteresting to most people.

One glaring omission from the structural outline is the economic method of implementation of proposals. This question has been hotly debated by the union. The consensus of feeling was that parity, or other forms of student-faculty decision making, should not be "fought" for until the union has something to offer, has organized itself and has real issues. Therefore implementation of ideas will for the present time come only through informal recommendations to faculty. If this optimistic view of the receptiveness of the faculty proves unreal, as some union members are certain it will, then more concrete steps will be taken. Official representation and confrontation with the faculty will come about only when members have been made to see the

need for it, only when and if they meet unreasonable opposition to their demands and are stepped upon by the power-holders.

At present, the union has three representatives on the department's informal curriculum reform committee, which has not met yet this fall. Mr. Gifford, who has been the main liaison with faculty feels that "so far, reception and co-operation by the faculty has been cautious, but generally good, and at least some faculty feel that professors are very enthused about the potential of this student feedback."

The first undertaking of union will be a course evaluation questionnaire, including questions on courses now offered, recommended courses and general departments criticisms and recommendations. With this collection of opinion, the union will move out of the organizational stage and into the work it was set up to do.

Brian Gifford's view of the future of this and other unions is cautiously optimistic. "There is a tremendous, well recognized apathy on Dal's campus, and on most Canadian campuses. Our main purpose in being at university is supposedly to expand our minds - to cause us to think about theories of our world and our lives. At present, university education consists of a series of courses and we find very little stimulation in these courses - hence apathy. If students are interested in their education in the least bit, they must be interested in working towards a better environment for learning. Course unions are the immediate vehicle. They deal with what students live every day of their university lives. Surely course unionism will catch up every student wanting a good education... (hopefully)".

Yes, Virginia...

There really is a Dent rep...

...isn't there?

By Steve Wright

"(1) When any member of Council has failed to attend three consecutive meetings of Council without reasonable excuse, Council shall declare his or her position vacant." - By-law XV, Constitution of the Student Union.

The above extract makes the role of Council, in such a situation abundantly clear. Thus, when, at last Tuesday night's Council meeting, one Roger Porter made an appearance after a vacation of seven months, Council's course of action was predetermined. The member in question, the

Dentistry representative a full time student, - has been attending the University since early September. Therefore it seemed highly unlikely that Council would excuse the representative and allow him to remain on Council. But the all-knowing body after a lengthy debate, concluded that Porter's excuse of not knowing about Council meetings this year was reasonable, and his seven month absence was condoned by Council when a vote was taken, allowing Mr. Porter to remain seated on the Council. Does this

establish a precedent? Does this vote mean that no action can be taken against Council Members who choose not to attend Council meetings? The Council has been acting very rashly in recent weeks, without taking into account the effects of their actions. The budget meeting, and the decision on Roger Porter, are proof of this new mood of irresponsibility. Hopefully Council will come to its senses in the near future and will begin to act like the responsible body it is intended to be.

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