

CUS--

NEW POWER ON THE LEFT?

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OTTAWA--'How goes the battle, General?'

'The centre holds firm, we're advancing on the left and closing up the right,' could well be the reply of CUS president Doug Ward.

Asked the same question a few years ago, a CUS president could equally well have responded, 'I didn't know we were fighting.'

A significant and very dynamic change during the past two years characterizes CUS. The "smaller and tighter" union Ward spoke of following the University of Alberta's withdrawal, is also a very different union.

The new union is definitely politically-oriented, geared, in the words of Ward, "to impinge on society". Its leaders seldom speak of the "organization" now, but rather of the "movement" of the "program".

The change has also brought with it the so-called left-right split of student leaders. (Although the term "right" is really a misnomer since those labelled with it really disclaim the union's responsibility for political expression.)

The left leaders claim that students must take active roles in national and international politics. They feel CUS can enter the political field on grounds that the majority of students agree with their principles.

The right similarly advocates student responsibility in politics, but claims CUS as a national organization should not be politically involved. According to right leaders, the union can never hope to represent the political opinions of all students.

The new political direction of CUS was apparent at the organization's 30th Congress in Halifax last month. More resolutions on education policy and international affairs were passed at that congress than at any other in recent years. Of real significance are the number of directives for achieving the union's objective of universal accessibility to post-secondary education, that were given to the national executive. Among the mandates on means are demands on government for student salaries, solicitations of support from labor unions for CUS objectives, and demands on the government to relinquish certain taxing powers to the provinces. In the past, CUS has been content to study and compile information on what it considers to be student problems, and leave means to the politicians.

The concentration on education policy and international affairs also meant a corresponding decrease in resolutions on non-political student problems. A resolution promoting student mental health, for example, was given top priority among proposals concerned with common student problems, but it only placed tenth in the overall list of priorities. It is here that the so-called student right draws the line. The Canadian Union of Students, says the right, is meant to promote the interests of all students, not to be a political sounding board, or, worst of all, a political activist.

Undoubtedly the right leaders' fight to keep CUS non-political is encouraged by a fear that increased political involvement will destroy the common meeting ground of students. They can point to history to validate their fears. Traditionally, interest groups can choose between two alternatives. They either concentrate on promoting and giving expression to the common interests of their members, or they select certain specific, principled ends

and stick to them come proverbial hell or high water.

Two agrarian organizations, the United Farmers of Alberta and the Progressives, learned a bitter lesson by attempting to maintain their interest groups both while giving them political expression. Despite political success, both organizations lived relatively short political lives. UFA died because it developed a political ideology, the Progressives because they sought to operate in the political sphere without one. Interest groups, particularly agrarian ones, have made a general point of staying out of active politics since the experience of the 1920's.

Whether one likes it or not, the Canadian Union of Students may be forced to consciously choose one of the alternatives, if indeed it is not already irrevocably committed. For the

systems, that the student is going to repay society for his education through taxes when he graduates, so 'why force him to worry about loans while he attends university?' The real point, of course, is that the graduating student is going to pay taxes regardless of how he is financed through university. Free education and student stipends really mean that the general taxpayer must bear the burden of releasing the student of financial responsibility in education. Justification of this policy relies on giving the taxpayer something in return. This can be done, left leaders say, by virtue of increased economic benefits accruing to the economy as a result of the increased graduates the system will produce. The general taxpayer will be guaranteed an eventual greater proportion of the economy's wealth through government control of the econ-

political question to produce a compromise.

There is little reason to believe that will happen, however. Of more likelihood is that the 'movement' will push forward, regardless of how small or tight it has to get. Its leaders are dedicated to social action, and they have a strong core of left wing campuses, particularly in Ontario, to support them.

Whatever the result of the left-right conflict, no one can seriously suggest CUS will cease to exist. But it's a different union from the one English-speaking students are used to seeing. For the first time in many years, it is dynamic and alive.

At the present, CUS is decidedly left wing. The leaders love it.

The fact that all students do not favour such far-reaching socialism, nor are they all aligned with the left side of the political spectrum, leads to the main contention of the right wing. The rightists point out that all students are automatically members of CUS as soon as they step on a campus affiliated with the union, and thus have no choice but to be publicly represented by the political views of CUS leaders. This they claim is a violation of a fundamental democratic right.

Right leaders maintain that political expression is guaranteed to all citizens through the right to form political parties and voluntary organizations. Even if CUS were to assume the right to give students political expression, the right says representations made on behalf of students could not be considered democratic since the main body of students do not elect the CUS executive. As well, student leaders are seldom elected along political lines but rather on their ability to administrate student government. The role of student government according to the right is to promote the general interests of the student body, not to be a sounding board for political ideologies.

Probably Alberta is the best suited of any Canadian campus to adopt the role it has. In recent years Alberta has done more to promote CUS student affairs than any other university. Since 1962, Alberta has assisted CUS out of a financial crisis, promoted the two largest interprovincial student activities (French Canada week in 1965, and Second Century Week which Alberta is to sponsor this spring along with the University of Calgary) and provided a national president (Dave Jenkins in 1963-64) who, significantly, as council president of Alberta once refused to allow his council to become involved with James Meredith's attempt to break racial barriers to education in Mississippi.

As well, Alberta is very well-equipped to withstand the pain of losing CUS services. Alberta now has an enrolment of about 12,000 students and expansion could provide up to 8,000 more in the next decade. The 65 cent fee levy which would normally have been channelled to CUS could be used by Alberta to establish a number of its own services programs. In fact, Alberta has already entered some of these service areas on its own in recent years. As the largest university between Toronto and Vancouver, Alberta should have little difficulty maintaining contact with major student affairs in Canada, and it could conceivably develop a reasonably powerful education lobby of its own.

The strongest challenge thus

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CUS President - Doug Ward:

'ONCE UPON A TIME ...'

astute observer, the handwriting may have been on the wall since the formation of l'Union Générale des Etudiants Québécois four years ago. In any event, there is no doubt that the writing is there now. It has been made very bright by the five universities who have told CUS during the last month they no longer wish to have any part of the union.

CUS was in enough difficulty trying to claim it was a bona fide national student organization even without the ideological split that developed in Halifax. Four universities served notice of withdrawal even before the controversial resolution affirming CUS's right to become involved with politics was passed. With the subsequent withdrawal of Alberta CUS is now devoid of support in Newfoundland, has only token support from the English speaking student of Quebec, and represents only a small minority of the students in Alberta.

CUS leaders explain, while arguing in favour of free education and student stipends against loan

omy, heavier taxation of "big business", and heavier taxation of high income groups (including, of course, the university graduate) according to the scheme.

Inherent in 'universal accessibility' is free education and student stipends. Architects of the theme see it as being only the first step in an overall scheme to allow CUS to work for greater government economic control, and government-administered social reorganization.

'If you don't like it, get out,' was the occasional taunt thrown at Alberta in Halifax. Alberta has got out. Its leaders must now convince the students they acted in the university's best interests. If they are successful, the student right could prove to be much more powerful than was first expected.

The right's big hope, of course, is that it can force CUS away from its resolve to become political. If threatened with several withdrawals, it is conceivable CUS leaders will see sufficient value in a comprehensive national union to back down enough on the