

FEATURE

Fear and loathing at the CFS National

"I think if people came here with the worst possible expectation of what's going to happen, I think a lot more people would walk out of here feeling good and that it wasn't a total disaster."

—Jennifer Howard, Brandon University delegate

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BY JEFF HARRINGTON

TRUDGING TOWARD THE hal-
lowed halls of Parliament on a brisk
Sunday morning, a shudder of wisdom
rises from my stomach and escapes my
lips: too much Scotch, too little sleep and
way too much Egg McMuffin an unhappy
reporter make.

Turning left down Metcalfe St., I'm al-
ready half an hour late, late for an important
date. Another bastion of democracy had just
wound up its annual general meeting, that
treasured 10-year-old baby, the Canadian
Federation of Students.

And what a birthday party it had been.
Two hundred and fifty delegates, represent-
ing over 400,000 Canadian students, got
together for seven days and nights to chart a
course for the next six months. They wound
up beating each other with the compass.

It's 10:30 a.m. and I'm half an hour late for
the post-mortem, the only meeting of the
14-member CFS national executive until
January. I hate being late for meetings: ev-
eryone looks at you funny as if you shouldn't
be there, they whisper "fucking reporter"
and other compliments.

**"The problem is... I'm
not clear. I've been
here a long time and
I'm nowhere near my
rational capacity"**

But CFS makes it easy for me. As I traipse
into the empty meeting room, Kelly Lamrock,
who had been re-elected as chair of CFS the
day before, looks up from his piles of reports.
He doesn't look too happy to see me.

"It'll be pretty boring stuff today...I don't
think anyone is in the mood to discuss any-
thing controversial," he mutters.

I nip upstairs to the federation suite to
make a phone call, pause to survey an
officescape of beer bottles and swollen ash-
trays, and elevator back down. Kelly — cross
Ronald Reagan with Yogi Bear and you get
the picture — lumbers upstairs to start mak-
ing wake-up calls to the Skyline Hotel, five
blocks away.

The only other person there is Kevin
Wood, the new graduate student rep on the
national executive.

"I guess we're not going to start until after
lunch," he says. "I've only been to one other
general meeting — it wasn't quite so vicious,
people weren't attacking one another."

At 1:15 p.m., the meeting finally begins,
with nine of 14 national executive members
present and accounted for.

ing the energy of what passes for a student
movement in Canada. Formed in October
1981 by the National Union of Students,
the Association of Student Councils
(Canada) and five provincial student fed-
erations, CFS now has 70 members and a
\$1.5 million budget. Half a dozen of those
members are French or bilingual institutions
outside Quebec, which has its own splintered
student move-
ment.

Students at
member schools
pay three dollars
a year to CFS and
one dollar to
CFS-Services,
which runs the
travel agency
Travel CUTS,
the Student
Work Abroad
Program
(SWAP) and the
Studentsaver dis-
count program.
CFS also provides
a computer net-
work for student
unions, a health
and dental plan
and an interna-
tional student
card for budget-
minded travel-
ers.

On a political
plane, it runs
campus cam-
paigns on educa-
tion policy and
social issues such
as racism and
AIDS awareness.

Perhaps most importantly — or so its consti-
tution goes — CFS lobbies the federal gov-
ernment "with one united voice" on behalf
of Canadian students.

Redundant rhetoric aside, CFS' "ultimate
aim" of a high-quality post-secondary sys-
tem that is accessible to all sounds just hunky-
dory. But any success CFS has had — and
that isn't much — getting its message across
has come despite general meetings seem-
ingly designed to be as divisive as possible.

NOV. 4, 2 P.M. The delegates file into a
large hall for opening plenary, the first of
two sessions in which motions are (some-
times) debated and then voted on. Many of
them are clutching translation devices and
each delegation has a giant white or yellow
voting card with their school's name on it.

The student press contingent is spied by
Marcella Munro, one of the Carleton dele-
gates and a member of the "left caucus."

"Ah, the press," she sniffs. "Those who
can't do, write."

Ah, Marcella, and those who do, do
doodoo. Resigned to my fate, I continue
scrawling away in my diary. Some entries,
cleaned up of course for the sake of coher-
ence:

• the first motion of any substance to hit
the plenary floor highlights the rift between
the left- and right-wing delegates: the ratifi-
cation of Calgary's DeVry Institute of Tech-
nology, a private vocational school, as a

prospective member. The left wants a com-
mittee to discuss the implications of admit-
ting CFS' first non-publicly-funded mem-
ber. But the right wants to vote immediately
and defeats the suggestion 28-21. DeVry is
then accepted by an overwhelming majority

• University of Ottawa student Marc
Molgat is trying to chair the plenary, but his
grasp of Robert's Rules of Order is tenuous at

best. He refers to
amendments as
motions, allows
debate on non-
debatable moti-
ons, calls for
discussion on
motions which
haven't been
sponsored by two
schools, and
calls for votes on
amended moti-
ons without
telling delegates
what they're vot-
ing on. He gets
an A for effort,
but he's out to
lunch in both of-
ficial languages

• dinner
looms and the
time set aside to
question the na-
tional executive
is cut short

• after dinner,
plenary starts as-
signing motions
to 12 different
committees for
further discus-
sion. Of 172 moti-
ons, 100 are left

over from the "semi-annual" meeting in May.
Twenty-four of those are from the meeting
before

• the translators are supposed to stop
working at 9 p.m., but agree to work half an
hour longer, extending the session into time
reserved for graduate students to meet. The
grads move to adjourn the meeting, but the
motion fails and they walk out. Motions not
referred to committees will have to wait
until next spring

Nov. 5, 5 a.m. Hotel staff discover alco-
hol missing from a kitchen fridge, and hotel
management go to the room of Nicolas
Plourde, president of the Federation
Etudiante Universitaire du Quebec. Later
that morning, a woman in his room is ar-
rested by Ottawa police and charged with
theft under \$1000. (Plourde later tells the
McGill Daily he met two women in a bar in
Hull, Que. and invited them back to a party
in his room.)

On each of the next two days, the dele-
gates have a morning provincial meeting
and then break up into the so-called "special
interest groups" the right wing claims are
taking over the organization. The six groups
— francophones, international students, stu-
dents with disabilities, aboriginal students,
students of colour and lesbian, gay and bi-
sexual students — are allotted three hours
over two days to discuss issues that concern
them. Women and graduate students also
have time slots during the week.

There are no seminars at this general
meeting, student politicians having little to

learn. At the last meeting, few bothered
showing up. Instead, the delegates are herded
onto the 12 standing committees that, in an
ideal world, would get all the work done. On
planet CFS, however, they maximize effi-
ciency with committees that average 20
members, including staff and national ex-
ecutive members who act as resource peo-
ple.

"The budget committee room was like an
oversized sauna," as treasurer Lyndon Surjik
later described it.

**"My one wish is that
all the (homophobic
delegates) of the world
have raving
dykes for children"**

Surjik himself feels much of the heat that
day, thanks to a \$67,000 discrepancy be-
tween CFS figures on membership fees and
the auditor's report. Rumours of an im-
peachment motion and secret backroom
meetings swirl through the conference.

An Acadia University delegate demands
his resignation as the committee begins its
work, but Surjik refuses. He instead asks
deputy chair Allison Lewis to run the com-
mittee and goes over the membership fee
receipts one by one in an attempt to con-
vince the members the budget is legit.

The right-wing schools opposed to Surjik
walk out of the meeting, which continues
until 9 a.m. the next morning.

NOV. 7, 8:30 A.M. CFS Chair Kelly
Lamrock cancels a three-hour lobby session
with MPs from all three parties after only 40
delegates get out of bed.

At two in the afternoon, a workshop on
CFS' history and founding principles is al-
ready half an hour late. As people trickle
into the room, no effort is made to speed
things up.

CFS has hired professional mediators from
Catalyst Research to facilitate what under
normal circumstances might be a bloody
war on the plenary floor.

"I know this week has been quite frustrat-
ing for all of you, but this will be fun and
inspiring, whether you like it or not," says
Catalyst's Lynne Tyler in a soothing tone.

She takes all the fun out of it by telling
the delegates they can't interrupt, shout or
personally attack or abuse each other. But
unfortunately, none of the right-wing big-
wigs from Alberta, Saskatchewan and New
Brunswick attend. Few right-leaning dele-
gates bother to return after the supper
break and the wrap-up session turns into a
warm, fuzzy love-in for the left: CFS is
beautiful, we can compromise a little and
overcome our differences.

NOV. 9, 2 P.M., Palais de Congres, Hull,
Que. The two delegates sleeping behind a
curtain have long since cleared off. The
bubble is about to burst.

"They're going to be at each others' throat
this afternoon," says Duncan McCue, an

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CFS IS THE LATEST attempt at harness-