

NUS Fall Conference Long On Policies, Short On Strategy

Fredricton (CUP) ---- The fall conference of the National Union of Students (NUS) held here the weekend of October 17-20 was long on debate and discussion but short on concrete strategy and planning.

More than 64 student delegates, representing post-secondary institutions and student organizations from Newfoundland to British Columbia, attended the three day sessions to hammer out policies and programs on political strategy, the student aid campaign, the Fiscal Arrangements Act, and student radio.

By the time of the fiscal plenary session on Sunday afternoon, general consensus was reached on the major policy directions for the national union.

But, as the conference ended, it was clear that not much had been accomplished in terms of commitment to specific tactics for organizing students in support of those policies.

Active Support Missing

The delegates, mostly student council representatives, showed little inclination to put their credibility on the line by committing themselves to any activity which would require organizing active student support.

Paul Kellogg, the delegate from York University, repeatedly called for a campaign of nationally organized rallies to demonstrate concern

over student aid and the financing of postsecondary education.

He argued that "student leaders" had a responsibility to show leadership and to organize active student support around NUS policies. Opponents reacted by claiming that leadership was not the issue. Increased awareness of problems facing students and the post-secondary sector must be developed, they said before "action-oriented" plans could succeed.

"We've no shortage of problems", one delegate lamented, "but the biggest one on my campus is that students don't think they have problems."

Delegates finally voted to put the emphasis on "educating" students through a nation-wide "conscious-raising campaign".

The campaign, to be organized by NUS in conjunction with regional, provincial, and local student groups, will focus on the problem of student aid and post-secondary financing.

NUS is to produce a newsletter and a leaflet. However, there was no indication of what these publications would tell students, or of the exact content or organization of the national "consciousness-raising campaign".

Moreover the delegates did not make any commitment to actually carrying out the campaign.

Student Aid Campaign

NUS fieldworker Bob Buckingham, speaking on behalf of the Central Committee, conceded at the final plenary that "concern has been expressed that a specific strategy for the student aid campaign has not been outlined".

He reviewed the campaign over the course of the past year and claimed that "due to pressure from NUS and other student organizations, the government cannot ignore the student aid lobby in Ottawa."

He said that student aid has been a unifying issue across the country" and that a "continuous organizing and building process" must be sustained until NUS achieved its ultimate goal - "universal accessibility to post-secondary education".

As for the immediate future, Buckingham said the first issue to be dealt with is representation on the Canada Student Loans Plenary Group, a high level federal-provincial body which formulates student aid policy nationally.

Buckingham did not outline the NUS strategy for pressuring the government into seating students on the Plenary Group. A brief to the group about student representation was passed but there was no discussion about an earlier plan to organize a delegation to attend the Penary meeting in Ottawa on October 23.

Moreover the chair of the Plenary Group said two weeks ago NUS would not be allowed to address the secretive student aid group as it would set a bad precedent.

Buckingham predicted that "students may not be concerned about a refusal for representation" but added "no matter what happens, we organize, and continue our person to person information program."

He made no comment on how NUS, with a single fieldworker for the entire country, would "organize" students.

As for the petition currently being circulated at some campuses supporting the NUS student aid demands, Buckingham described it as "a useful device to reach students" but did not answer the major question about the petition campaign - will it continue?

The petition ran into difficulty earlier this fall when the Ontario Federation of Students decided not to commit resources to the campaign. Workshop discussions

at the conference also revealed that many campuses which are trying to encourage students to sign the petition are having difficulty. Many more are simply doing nothing at all.

"We may be upset that we don't have a lot of support but we haven't reached a lot of students yet", Buckingham said.

He concluded by stressing, "a national lobby is important but not without local effort".

Jim Gray of Regina commended the statement made by Buckingham, and pleaded with delegates "to be serious about getting to our members."



Fiscal Arrangement Policy

A major part of the workshop discussion centered around formulating a policy on the Fiscal Arrangements Act (FAA).

The FAA is a complex federal statute which determines the amount of federal monies to be transferred to the provinces in support of post-secondary education.

In the 1975-76 academic year the total operating cost of the post-secondary sector is expected to rise to about \$3.03 billion, and about half of this cost is to be met using funds transferred from the federal to the provincial governments.

The FAA, which governs these transactions, is presently being renegotiated and is due to expire in 1977.

Under the terms of the FAA, the federal government agrees to pay a flat per capita sum to support the provinces' post-secondary sector, or to match the province dollar for dollar for all approved operating expenditures made in this sector, whichever is greater.

The major objection delegates raised was that the federal government considers tuition fees as provincial

