

Joining Student Federations ... Yes or No?



Editorial

dave macrae

A question which has been floating around Student Union circles lately is whether or not we should join both or either of the recently formed student organizations- the National Union of Students (NUS) and/or the Atlantic Federation of Students (AFS) at a cost of \$1500 and \$75 respectively.

The executive has felt that membership in the NUS is not worth the expense- \$1 per student is a fairly high amount. But consider it- it is largely due to the Canadian Union of Students, which collapsed in 1969, that we now have student aid plans in all ten provinces. In the interval between CUS collapse and NUS founding, student aid programs have largely remained the same despite inflation, the expansion of most other social services, and crimination against the poor. Some provinces have now actually decreased the grant portion of aid. It may well be if a national student organization had existed for those five years, then students would not find themselves in the serious financial straits which they presently do.

If that is true- and the establishment of NUS can do anything to revert the trend- then, on that basis alone, \$1. per student may be the cheapest investment you or I ever made.

The other advantage of NUS, if it gets working properly, are myriad. It will facilitate better communication between student unions from away. Thus, if it is known that Alberta students have obtained better or cheaper housing from the provincial government, we will immediately be able to go to our government and demand the same with the full backing of a half mil-

lion students. If U of T gains a bigger grant, then we will be able to use that as justification to go and do the same. And further lobbying on the federal government is a task beyond the resources of any individual student union.

It may be argued, though, that benefits such as those do not warrant the high cost or that, if even they do, NUS would be nearly as useful an organization to us if we did not join. After all, our contribution would necessarily be minimal - the organization would operate essentially as well without us.

It is important to note that NUS would do no lobbying on the provincial government, nor provide us with any support.

It may well be that to decide the pros and cons of such a large investment are beyond the mandate of the Student Union. A referendum should be held on the issue. Since the Student Union budget is so tight this year, funds would probably have to be raised. How about it? Are you willing to spend an extra buck to join NUS?

While it is reasonable to think that, due to the high cost, NUS would not make a good investment, AFS is an entirely different question altogether. It offers all the advantages that NUS does (although to a lesser degree) plus a few others which NUS cannot possibly give- all for 5% of the cost.

The Atlantic Region is an area which has unique needs and problems. NUS, being a national organization, tends to appeal to the lowest common denominator, or worse, to lean towards the needs of its most powerful members. Too of-

ten, "national", in this context, means Ontario with a Quebec affiliate. Since no Quebec school is in NUS (Quebec having its own national student union) the imbalance in NUS may be even worse. AFS, by its very nature, will concern itself totally with our problems, and to a poor region like the Atlantic Provinces, student aid, especially grants, becomes a necessity, not a sop to greed. Without increased student aid, post secondary education will become the preserve of the rich.

Further, the Atlantic area has much need of programs of types not fully exploited within the region- courses and/or departments in Veterinary Medicine, Agriculture, Fisheries, Marine Sciences, effects of Tourism, studies in Underdevelopment, etc. All of these areas of study are both valuable to the region and not sufficiently developed within it. It is to be hoped that the AFS would serve as an efficient lobbyist agency for such proposals to provincial government and higher education commission, particularly the Maritime Higher Ed-

ucation Commission.

But of all advantages of AFS, the greatest would be the creation of a far better communications medium. Within the Atlantic Region of the Canadian University Press an exchange of research into such topics of relevance to the region as a whole is at present underway. AFS could and should inaugurate a similar type exchange for student unions in the same manner as we newspapers do. Further, such an exchange would go farther than simply materials to methods of attaining objectives- which at present is lacking among students. There is too little ability to perceive what makes successful campaign and what does not.

Hence, the advantages of joining AFS, both to the individual student and to the Student Union as a whole, are so apparent, so various, that for our Student Council to table the motion to join is a complete lack of foresight. Let's all give our support to this proposal. If all we ever got out of AFS was communication with other student unions, then it still would be worth the seventy-five bucks.

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Staff and Faculty: students have already paid for the paper. Pay yours; just \$2.50, send to Cadre c/o J.P.E.I.

