

Another View of CFS

Editor;

St. Thomas joined the Canadian Federation of Students in 1987. We were members for seven years, and were the first school to ratify the fee increase for CFS in 1991 by referendum. We even had the distinction of one of our students being elected national chair for two consecutive years. Each member school paid \$4.50 per student to CFS, allowing \$1.50 to CFS Services. Those figures equal about \$12,000 for St. Thomas students.

The past student unions at St. Thomas proposed joining CFS for two key reasons: a national voice, and equal influence. While having influence on a national scale, St. Thomas was to have access to information and statistics, national campaign material, a field worker to coordinate with the Ottawa office, and the opportunity to participate in a student organization with integrity and solidarity.

While having access to these assets, St. Thomas was to share in a "one member, one vote" system of representation at the national CFS level. Each member school had one vote, and so each had an equal voice and equal impact. This principle applied to schools with 1500 students or 18,000 students. It was ideal for small schools like ours. A paid staff would lobby government and propose pro-student policy with support from all member schools.

But something has gone dreadfully wrong. Over the past three years, St. Thomas' "equal voice", as well as the voices of the over 25 student unions who stand to leave or have left CFS, were being squashed and still are. The CFS executive is acting erratically and spending students' money on unimportant or ambiguous issues when you consider its mandate. CFS members "equal voices" were not evident when they

were not allowed to ask questions about a \$1,000,000 budget, or when an executive member burned a report she did not want members to see.

CFS's finances also have fallen into disrepute. With a current \$200,000 debt, the unquestioned million dollar budget adds another \$40,000 to that debt. Their bank, Toronto-Dominion, is so concerned with CFS expenditures that it recently cut CFS's line of credit by 41% and are still watching closely. CFS says that it makes no difference and has no impact on them. However, they apparently took it seriously enough to seek a new bank during their budget deliberations.

Notwithstanding, CFS has budgeted \$41,000 to spend flying people around the country to be present during the referenda. They spent \$3,000 to send three people to Mexico for a conference titled Social Reform Agriculture and Democracy. One of the MPs who attended this conferences meet the CFS member on the plane and when he returned to his home riding he contacted the UPEI Student Union to find out what reason CFS could possibly had to be there.

The biggest joke is the CFS budgeting process. There are many schools who have had their CFS referendum and decided to leave the organization. However, CFS has decided not to accept their referenda and still budgets them every year. One school CFS has budgeted for has not paid them any fees in four years! And even though the political body of CFS gets up to \$4.50 per student from some schools, it constantly fails to balance its budget every year. CFS solves this problem by taking money from CFS-Services profits to balance its budget. Instead of operating within its means, CFS

takes money needed for financial maintenance of CFS Services and cuts Services stand when they need a little more.

CFS lobbying one of its primary mandates, has also taken a radical shift away from students interests. Only four years ago CFS was running up to nine national campaigns a year. Last year they ran only one. During one of the most crucial time in Canadian history for students considering the impending federal cuts, CFS arranged meetings with less than 10 MPs and did not write one new policy alternative to the social policy review, even with a paid staff worth over \$500,000.

CFS does have public concerns though; they just do not directly concern students. CFS regularly meets with workers' union locals (CUPE, CUPW instead of MPs). They spent tens of thousands of dollars on anti-Gulf War campaigns, El Salvadorian coffee bean campaigns, anti-NAFTA campaigns, boycotting Coke and Pepsi and picketing the Royal Bank and the Toronto Stock Exchange. The Deputy Chair of CFS recently identified the chief student concerns as Wal-Mart in Canada, plain packages on cigarettes and parties contesting the Mexican elections.

At its most recent meeting in Winnipeg, 19 students unions walked to protest the closed-door firing of the executive directors of CFS-Services and their replacement with two inexperienced students. Even though those schools who walked out represented over twice the students that remained in the meeting and did not have enough members led in the meeting to legally vote, CFS went ahead with the meeting anyways. York has over 35 thousand students. When the

representatives from your school walked out of the meeting to protest the CFS-Services mismanagement, the CFS executive acted like nothing happened. I found they do not care about your voices unless you agree with them.

CFS has fallen away from its mandate to spend students fees responsibly, to lobby government and to maintain the democratic integrity of its national forum. New Brunswick schools have lobbied CFS for two years to reform their actions and new policies, but with no impact. Out of the 60 motions for CFS reform which New Brunswick universities and colleges brought to the last national meeting, they were allowed to debate only 15.

Consider this record when you vote in the CFS referendum. The focus and mandate of CFS has fallen into a shameful and ineffective rut that it driving them not only into financial death, but to death as an effective choice for students. You can draw your own conclusions from the evidence. Personally I feel that no longer we let these inaccessible, insensible, and irresponsible people speak for students, the greater the damage we do to our national voice. CFS doesn't speak for me, and I urge you to consider whether these are the people you want representing you.

Shawn Rouse
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