

Administration gives in

# MUN student occupation successful

ST. JOHN'S (CUP Special to the Cadre) - Students of Memorial University ended their occupation of the arts and administration building last Friday - ten days after it began - when the administration of the university finally gave in to the students' demands for the right of self-determination.

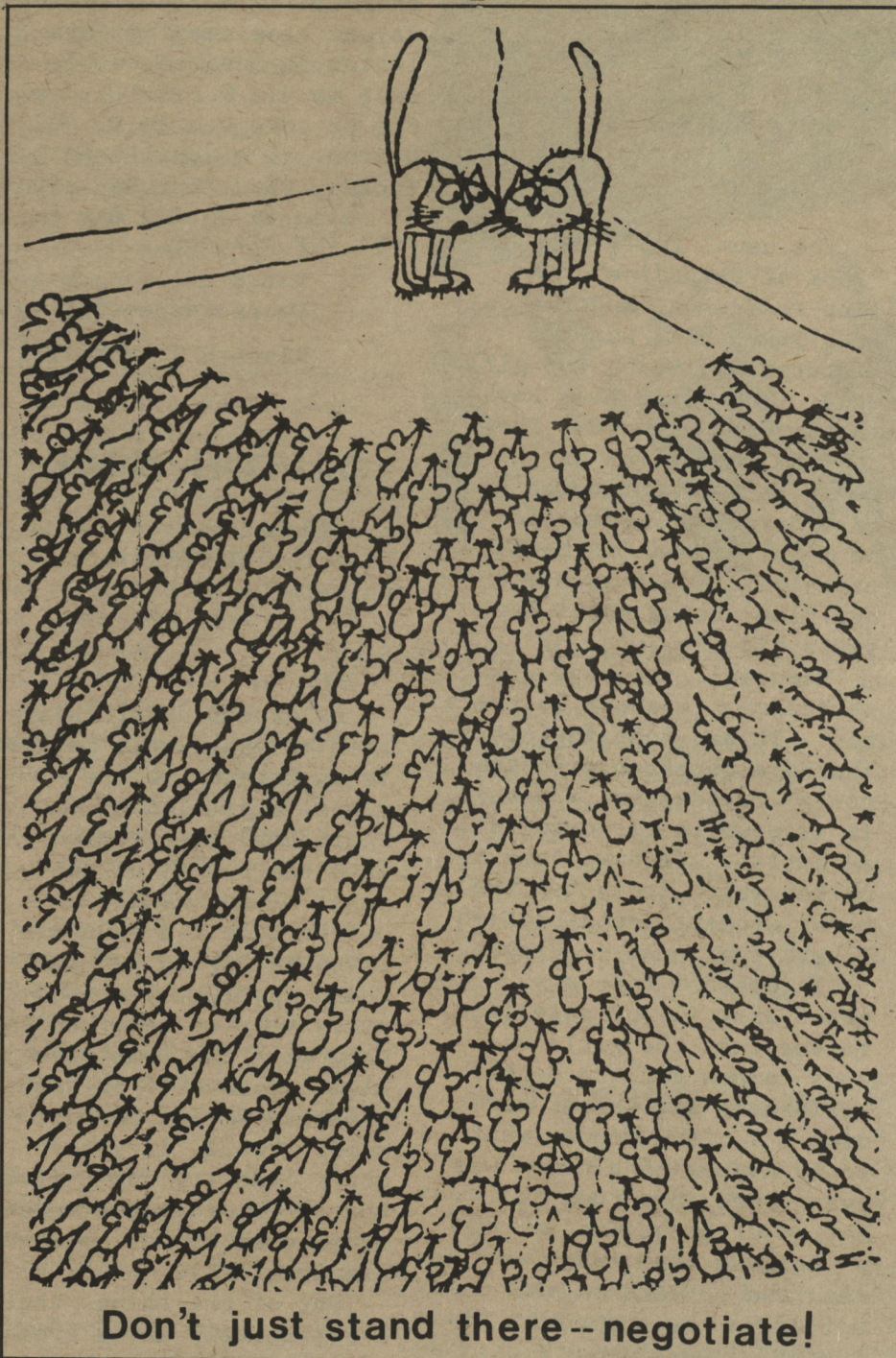
The occupation came about as a reaction to the decision of the university's Board of Regents, announced November 9 by university president Lord Stephen Taylor, to discontinue collection of compulsory student union fees. The decision would put the union's future on very uncertain legs, as it would be unable itself to enforce compulsory collection. Though the decision could very well have spelled the end of the union, the administration made it unilaterally, without any consultation with students.

Since Taylor's announcement had been timed to coincide with the first day of the mid-term break, students had to wait until the following Tuesday, November 14, before taking action.

Their first move was to hold a general meeting of students noon Tuesday. About 3000 showed up for this meeting - a remarkably large number for this apathetic campus of 7500 students - and about half of these marched over from the meeting in the student center to the arts and administration building to begin the occupation.

From the outset, the administration was totally unwilling to negotiate, and it took ten days of increasing pressure before they backed down and agreed to talk with the students.

The ten days of occupation were a remarkable period for the students. Morale went up and down in stages, as did the numbers of people occupying the building. Very efficient food and clean-up committees worked long hours, and there were security and strategy committees as well. At least 100 people remained in the building overnight each night, and the high point



Don't just stand there-- negotiate!

in terms of numbers came November 16 when more than 1200 students showed up for a meeting in which they agreed on the principle, and thrashed out the wording of a referendum.

The referendum, held the next day said "resolved that the president and the Board of Regents do not have the right to alter or interfere with the structure of the student body, that the Board of Regents should rescind its decision of November 9 (to discontinue collection of fees), and that the students should have the right to make the decision themselves." Students were asked to agree or disagree. In the largest single day voter turnout in Memorial history, more than 58% of the students voted, of whom an overwhelming 91% voted "Agree."

Yet the administration still refused to negotiate, even in the face of the overwhelming referendum result. Taylor, whose arguments were being knocked out from under him one by one, could no longer use his favorite claim that only a small minority of students opposed the administration's decision, and ended

up mumbling that the referendum was typical of "Hitler at his silliest." Apparently, he felt that the wording of the referendum was unfair.

Students got a bit of a setback November 20, the seventh day of occupation, when faculty members failed to take a stand, voting 70-50 against a strongly worded resolution which would have wholeheartedly supported the occupation while sharply criticising the Board of Regents.

The next day, however, was a key one. Richard Cashin, president of the Newfoundland Fish Food and Allied Workers Union gave solid support to the occupying students, holding a press conference in his office in the morning, and drawing a standing ovation from 600 students in the occupied building in the afternoon. On both occasions he lashed out strongly at the administration, particularly Taylor whom he accused of using "outlandish rhetoric and McCarthyite tactics" in defence of his stand on the issue.

That same night, several hundred residence students met to discuss the possibility of a strike, and they called a general student meeting for the next day. More than 3000 students showed up, and they were almost unanimously in favor of calling a student strike and picketing the academic buildings for the next two days, Thursday and Friday.

This strike never came off, however, as the administration, that same night, agreed to begin negotiating with the students, and the organizers of the strike decided to postpone it for a day. Negotiations all day Thursday finally proved fruitful 1:00 Friday morning when students and administrators finally reached an agreement that saw the students vacate the building a few hours later, after they had cleaned it up.

The key points to the agreement were that the administration would rescind its decision to discontinue collection of union fees and that the students would clear the administration building. Until students direct it otherwise, the administration will continue to collect compulsory union fees as a condition of entry to the university.

The administration also agreed that there would be no reprisals against students involved in the occupation, and that the Senate - the university's highest academic body - would give special consideration to the academic situation of students who had fallen far behind in their work by being involved in the occupation.

The students' only compromise in the final agreement is that they have a referendum before the end of February over whether the union is to be voluntary or compulsory. This is not a major compromise on the part of the students, however, as a great many of the occupying students wanted such a referendum anyway. What they wanted and what they eventually got was the right of self-determination.

While the strike did not go ahead on Thursday and Friday, there were no classes anyway. Because of the chaos surrounding the occupation and the negotiations, the administration cancelled classes for those two days.

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