

On the CFS Referendum

By STEPHEN DEGRACE

When the issue of the UPEI Student Union's membership in the Canadian Federation of Students came up last year, I took a (belated) interest and began to look into the particulars of the matter.

My inquiries, quite apart from making up my mind, only left me feeling more ambiguous as to how I should vote. On one hand I was disturbed by some of the charges against the CFS, but on the other hand I was also disturbed by the Student Union's apparent lack of thought as to what should replace the CFS. I remain convinced that national student organisations are a necessity in our times in order to protect our interests in the current climate of cuts and fiscal restraint. Disgusted with both sides, I was one of the (as I recall) nine people who voted to abstain. However, having had a chance to observe how both parties have responded (or not responded) over the past year with regard to the points raised during last year's referendum, I feel that I can now state an opinion as to which course I think would be best for UPEI. I chose to express my ambiguity publicly last year in a letter to the Panther Prints, and this year once again I feel the irresistible urge to vent my spleen. I would be most obliged if you'd bear with me.

I will vote no to CFS. The reason is that while the CFS has shown no signs of addressing the concerns I have with them, or even remote awareness that these issues are concerns, the anti-CFS party has quite adequately addressed my concerns with their position.

In my opinion the CFS is a seriously flawed organisation that does a poor job of representing students in the areas in which it has any business representing students, and actively mis-represents students in a number of areas in which they frankly have no business sticking their collective nose. The CFS's hard-left, strident "education is a

right" knee-jerk response to the issue of tuition increases is, in my opinion, a poor long term strategy for getting the best deal possible for students. (And it is precisely these kinds of bread-and-butter issues which should, in my opinion, properly form the organisation's mandate.) I believe that such rhetoric only serves to disgust the average Canadian taxpayer, thus playing into the hands of the right wing, which would quite like to see us move to the system of stratospheric tuitions favoured by the Americans. The fiscal crunch that is causing governments to reduce funding for public services across the board is a fundamental reality of our times. Everybody has to help bear the burden; whining, however forcefully, that students should

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be exempt will only destroy the very public sympathy that is currently indispensable to our long term interests.

What really annoys me about the CFS, though, is their dabbling in political issues on which they have no right to represent their constituents. Quite frankly, the miasma of left-wing politics surrounding the organisation makes me nauseous. To take specific examples, the CFS has chosen to take positions in favour of access to abortions and against the death penalty. In effect, they are saying that these are the positions of *students*. I don't recall being asked at any time by the CFS how I would like to be represented on these issues. The opinions of students span the entire broad spectrum of political thought; although I am pro-abortion (I will not mince words) I respect the opinions of students I know who are anti-abortion,

and I am angry that these students are being effectively misrepresented as pro-abortion by their national student organisation. And more personally, as one in favour of the death penalty, I am incensed that the CFS, of which my school is a member, dares to lobby *against* the death penalty in my name. In my opinion, this superfluous political meddling on the part of the CFS is a travesty, and one for which I have not seen one iota of remorse in the year at least since these issues have been brought up.

At the same time, the Student Union Executive's stated preference for CASA sets me at ease with regard to my concern that the anti-CFS party was thoughtlessly leaving us with no larger representation at all. My major reservation about CASA, the criminal allegations of embezzlement against their former acting president, have been addressed by Chris Burns; unless I see believable information very strongly suggesting that the contrary is true, I will take him at his word that there is little danger of a repeat performance.

My one criticism against the anti-CFS party this year is that I would like to see more information on what kind of perks CASA offers; the CFS (wisely) places a large part of the focus of its campaign on the perks *it* offers, so if CASA makes similar offers it would be a good idea if we were told so explicitly.

The criticisms levelled against CASA by Amber Allin as quoted in the December 3 issue of the Prints profoundly failed to move me. She says there are undercurrents of elitism in CASA; seeing that as University students we *are* an elite of a sort, the allegation fails to alarm me. However, I do invite Ms. Allin to explain further, as perhaps if I knew what exactly she meant by "undercurrents of elitism" CASA's position on education rights that post-secondary education is a "necessity" as opposed to a "right" does not strike me as an unclear stance

as was suggested in the article. On the contrary, it strikes me as a suitably wise and moderate stance which is more likely to get us approximately what we want (given the climate of the times) than the more radical stance espoused by the CFS. Rather than being concerned by CASA's stance on this issue, I am encouraged by it. I like the idea of representation by population; I think that it is fair and that it is more likely to make people take the organization seriously. If an organisation has rep by pop, one may be more sure that its pronouncements are truly re-

flective of the opinion of the majority of its members. Even the allegations that CASA has been lobbying the PEI government (for what we are not told) do not bother me; for one thing, no substantiation has been offered for these allegations, and for another thing these allegations would not bother me even if they were true unless it turned out that CASA were actively trying to rig the vote. If they are simply lobbying on our behalf, then I say more power to them; let them by all means show us what they can do for us.

Building Fund Mandatory \$20 Fee

By KENT DRISCOLL

Only two councillors voted against making the \$20 donation to the Building Fund a mandatory fee at Sunday night's council meeting.

This means that students can no longer opt out of this Student Union program, and will no longer receive a \$20 refund upon request.

VP Finance Lindy MacKenzie said, "Without this fee, we will absolutely not be able to build a new student union building."

This donation was mandated by last year's council to aid the administration in renovating the Cass Chemistry Building. It formerly existed as a \$10 refundable donation to the UPEISU SUB 2000 campaign, which is responsible for building the new student union building. Through the deal council made last year, it was raised to \$20, with \$10 of that going to the Cass Building fund. In turn, the administration will give the Student Union back the total they received from students for the Cass Building in 2002, when the new student union building will be built. The administration also agreed to help the Student Union fundraise for this new building.

The trouble began when students, who hadn't realised

that they could get a portion of their student fees back, began requesting this money. Over 700 students requested their money back in the first semester, causing a shortfall in funds. Council combatted this shortfall through an information campaign over the Christmas holidays, which each student receiving a letter detailing the importance of the donation. This campaign was largely unsuccessful, and a large number of students requested their donation back in the second semester.

Some councillors believed it is an issue of representing future students. Jonathan Seller, VP Operations, said, "Is our legacy going to be dropping an annoying fee, or building a new SUB? [Students] drop twenty bucks at a bar any night of the week." Seller's beliefs were echoed by Student Union President Chris Grey, who said, "This council doesn't want to be known as the council that killed SUB 2000."

Some discussion was raised about whether next year's council would change the decision to make the donation a fee, and in response, Chris Grey said, "I don't think a well informed council would change this decision."