

# Isolationist attitudes Strength and stability always problems

## Continuous existence

who should take part in the working class struggle at home and abroad.

A point of consensus changed the name to CUS in recognition of NFCUS's somewhat elitist base and the expected growth of non-university post-secondary education.

The agreement on restructuring was not enough to hold the organization together. The split came when in elections for the executive the service oriented English speaking members prevailed over the politicized members and elected a conservative Quebecois as President.

That decision and the growing sense of independence in Quebec led quickly to establishment in 1964 of l'Union generale des étudiants du Quebec (UGEQ). By 1966 both the French and English CUS members from Quebec had left CUS and joined UGEQ. However, federal failure to begin making large grants to post-secondary education that both organizations took the political path after 1963, leaving the services somewhat in the background.

CUS concentrated almost exclusively on education, campaigning for lower financial and social barriers to post-secondary education, universal accessibility to and open decision-making within the institutions. Education was seen as part of the economic, social and political structure and a part which should be consciously involved in changing that structure and which should realize that it reflected the larger structures' values.

In 1966 and 1967 opposition within CUS grew as a result of the policy and fostering of on-campus debate on national and international events which had no obvious direct effect upon students. Simultaneously CUS emphasized more than ever the need for local work around issues and policies with which it was involved. The regional conferences of CUS were abolished and the role of CUS staff expanded to include fieldwork as well as the established work in research, communications, lobbying and student travel.

In most predominantly English speaking provinces the student governments formed independent associations to discuss the provincial aspect of issues filling in the vacuum left by abolition of CUS regional conferences. Unlike CUS these provincial associations had no per capita fee and staff. There was apprehension that they would appear to some as a substitute for CUS, or as a first level of external activity rather than a means of co-ordinating local work on the issues and policies important to students in Canada.

In 1968 CUS continued to develop policy on education, Canadian society and international affairs based upon a radical analysis. It also endorsed confrontation as a politicizing tactic, including confrontation between CUS and its student members. The fieldworking system was strengthened, but poor communications with student unions and individual students was still a problem.

The mass media used confrontation to portray CUS as a violent organization. CUS leaders tried to convince students of the value of confrontation and involvement in "non-student" issues rather than sell the organization as a source of services (which it still was) and a vehicle for the exchange of ideas among students. The result was that 31 campuses held referenda on their CUS membership with 18 deciding to leave.

By the summer of 1969 a rebuilding effort had begun, founded on rejection of

unrealistic rhetoric and willingness to accommodate most student viewpoints in deciding CUS policy. Before the change could be implemented the 1968 image resulted in several more referenda losses, cutting membership to 13 student unions with about 35,000 members. CUS ceased operations in November 1969.

UGEQ wound up in 1969 when faced with similar problems and such fragmentation of the politicized students that even many local student unions were rejected and destroyed. Only the travel departments of CUS and UGEQ survived, and they have continued as separate organizations although without the larger organizations support they are weaker and have less impact at the campus level.

### EFFECT OF THE COLLAPSE ON CUP

The high tide of isolationism after 1969 had an adverse effect on CUP. The lack of organized student co-operation dried up what had been the major source of national student news. NFCUS and CUS announcements and activities had been reported through CUP but treated by newspapers as local news.

After 1969 there was no national or international consensus among Canadian students, no forum for discussion of issues except CUP itself. This caused an increase in the quantity of political debate within CUP. The situation is reflected by the tran-

sfer of many members of the last CUS national office in the 1969-70 CUP national executive.

### RESURGANCE OF COMMON ORGANIZATION

From 1969 to 1971 several student organizations discovered that the CUS problems had so frightened student leaders that very few were willing to start building a replacement. Radical student action had won many victories in the late 1960's and early 1970's but the prevailing myth was that radical action and radical organizations had been a miserable failure. Provincial and regional organizations sometimes little more than voluntary associations arose and fell. Sometimes they met with success but few had more than one satisfactory year and several lasted for only a few months.

The atmosphere changed in 1972. Various provinces were reviewing post-secondary education. Fiscal arrangements negotiations raised the possibility of greatly increased tuition in all provinces. For the first time most students realized the problems of graduating with a large debt. An effort was made to build new provincial organizations. It was recognized that a national organization was essential to channel student view into the financing negotiations, to provide lobbying and research services and to restore the exchange of ideas among students.

Almost immediately there were division over how the national structure should reflect regional differences. At the founding of NUS the Quebec and Atlantic delegations walked out because they felt the majority of delegates favoured a structure which was too centralized.

Promoters of NUS had been so sure that the organization's necessity was self-evident they did not anticipate the regional differences and made demands for a program of action.

### NATIONAL UNION OF STUDENTS (NUS) AND THE MOVEMENT'S REBUILDING

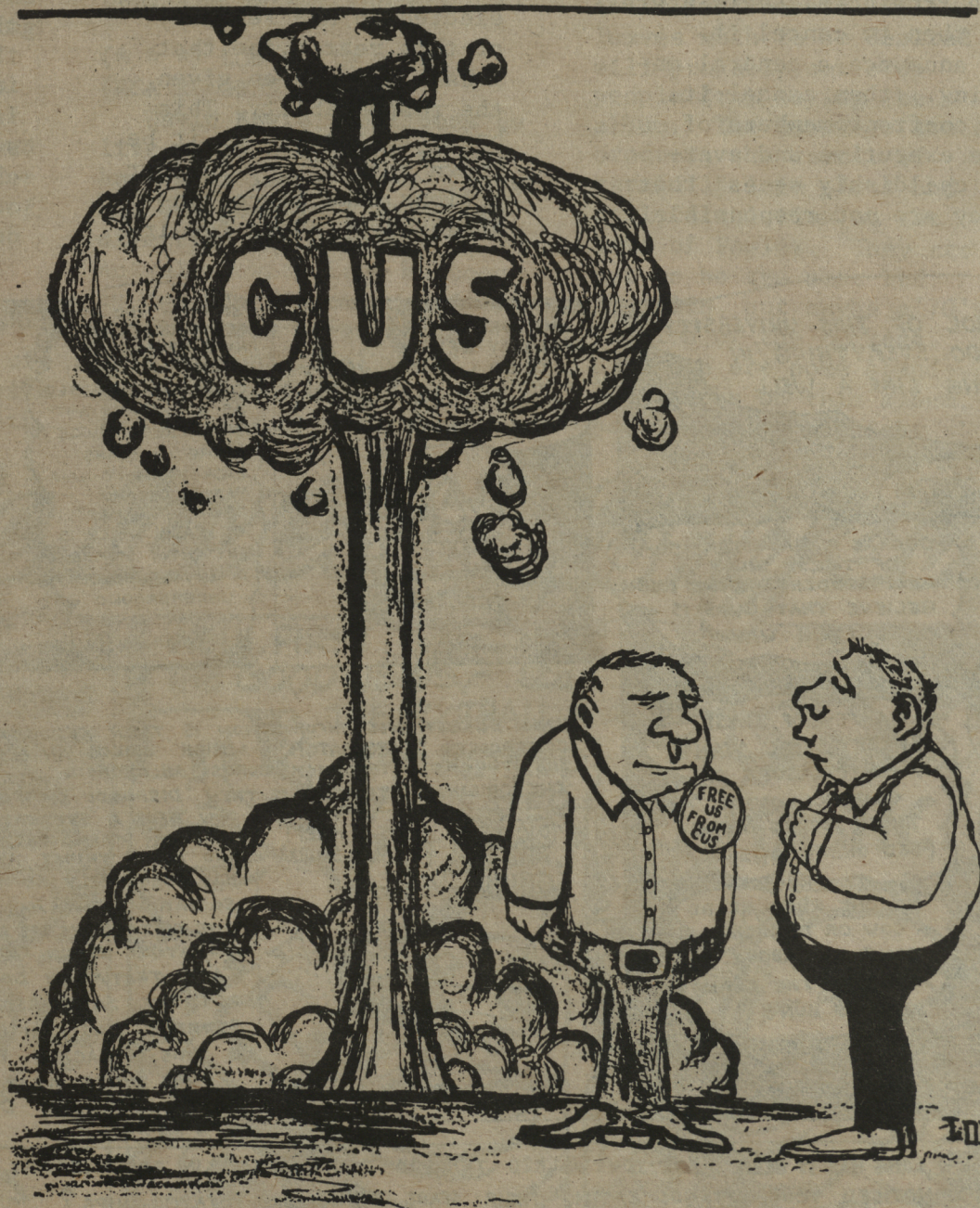
The NUS founding conference approved a constitution but no one was certain that a national organization had been established. Working out of a Vancouver office, the executive rebuilt belief in the possibility of an organized student movement in Canada. CUP and its member papers, acting on the basis of their principles, provided a forum for the NUS executive to explain the role and purpose of a national organization.

It was an exciting surprise when NUS was able to hold a first annual meeting in Halifax in May 1973. More surprising was the realization that 27 student unions, representing 125,000 students from all regions, had joined the new organization. The years since that conference have demonstrated that, in the large and varied post-secondary system of the 1970's, it takes a lot more than a successful conference to build a strong student movement. NUS was crippled by a lack of internal continuity, inexperienced leadership and the still-strong isolationism of many student governments. It was only in the spring of 1975 that student leaders felt confident about NUS's survival.

There are now student organizations of varying age and strength in the Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. Saskatchewan and Manitoba are planning the foundation of their own provincial organizations. One factor is common to NUS and the provincial organizations. They are in the midst of their development.

The organizations have successfully renewed the exchange of ideas and information among student leaders, the awareness among students on one campus that they have a common interest with students elsewhere. Still, none of the organizations has reached its goal in terms of membership, resources and activity. While member campuses look upon their provincial organization and NUS as "established", there are many campuses on which the organizations are fairly alien. None of the organizations is yet providing a full range of services and activities to its constituents. The challenge for each organization is to defend student interests and maintain a valued presence on the base campuses while taking the risks and making the mistakes essential to the process of development.

The Canadian student movement has fifty years of achievement behind it. even a brief study of the student movement demonstrates that students play an essential role in the development of education and so ciety in this country. That essential role depends upon the vehicle of an organized movement. In the next five years, and the next fifty years, the student organizations will be working to overcome past limitations and play an even more vital role in Canada.



"Don't worry - once we drop out of their silly little movement they won't be able to contaminate us."