

HISTORY OF
THE NATIONAL FEDERATION
OF CANADIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS
1926 -- 1948

Compiled by the
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HISTORY OF N.F.C.U.S.

In the Spring of 1926 the Imperial Debating Team toured Canadian universities in a series of international debates. One of the members of this Team was Ralph Nunn May, immediate past president of the National Student Union of England and Wales. In the course of the tour Mr. May met with members of the various S.A.C.'s and urged strongly the formation of an N.U.S. in Canada. The University of British Columbia gave an impetus to such a step in a letter to the S.A.C. at Varsity. Late in February of that year (1926) the University of Manitoba Students' Union contacted all Canadian universities as to their views regarding the formation of such a union. On March 1st Percy Davies of Alberta wrote to Varsity suggesting the holding of a conference for such a purpose. After discussion the S.A.C. of Varsity wrote to all Canadian Universities that it was ready to participate in such a conference.

During the summer of 1926 Davies, President of Alberta S.A.C., and Bannerman, secretary-treasurer of Varsity S.A.C. were in charge of collecting opinion and information. In October Varsity sent out invitations to a conference to be held at McGill during the Christmas holidays. A conference was called to take place at McGill on December 28-31, 1926. Ten universities and an affiliated college were represented by twenty delegates. Mr. H. A. MacKenzie (Professor of International Law at Varsity) represented the International Confederation of Students (Confederation International des Etudiants) with its seat at Brussels. Five commissions were set up to study the scope and activities of the proposed organization. A constitution was drawn up and other details studied. The following concrete activities were recommended:

1. Arranging and promoting debating teams between the eastern, central and western sections of Canada.
2. The promotion of exhibition tours of athletic teams between the various sections of Canada.
3. To investigate the possibilities and feasibility of promoting a Canadian Universities Newspaper Assoc.
4. To collect and arrange information concerning the manner in which each university meets its problems in student administration. This would form the basis for a clearing house of information in student activities.
5. To investigate and make representations to the Governments and the Board of Railway commissioners for special consideration in transportation tariffs - such as reduced fares for student organizations or student representatives travelling between universities in Canada or student business, exhibition games and debates.
6. To investigate the present rates as they affect students in the various universities who attend them from districts outside the university area. To make representations for a special seven or eight-month return fare for such students. To study the commercial travellers system and endeavour to secure a somewhat similar arrangement.
7. To encourage and arrange for tours of students from Canadian universities to cross Canada during vacations.
8. To investigate the existing systems of student tours to Europe, to recommend improvements and if necessary after a few years take over the promotion of such tours.
9. To investigate any methods of co-operative purchasing of student supplies in the various universities and to prepare a report for the information of each of the universities.
10. To investigate the comparative basis of the curricula of the various universities and prepare a report for each university for use of students moving from one university to another. Also where necessary to press for changes which will be of general assistance to students.

A budget of \$1,200 was drawn up (\$25 fee and the rest by per capita levy, the \$25 fee to release 100 students for levy purposes) and it was recommended that the name N.F.C.U.S. be adopted by the new organization if and when ten or more universities decide to join. It was also suggested that all international contacts of N.F.C.U.S. be through the C.I.E.

- 1927 -

In the year following the first conference N.F.C.U.S. made slow but steady progress in various universities. The work outlined at the 1926 conference was commenced with good results in some instances. Exchange scholarships were one important phase of activity and representation was made to the annual conference of the N.C.C.U., held at London that year regarding exchange. No negative replies were received, the attitude of the universities was encouraging and by December of 1927 seven universities had accepted the scheme--some with reservations.

Inter-university debates were arranged beginning with a Maritime Tour which was later extended to include the whole of Canada. The debaters--from the Maritimes--presented debates in several instances before non-university audiences with great success. Steps were taken to bring British debating teams to Canada and send Canadian debaters to the U.S.A.

During the year A. C. Spalding & Bros. were contacted as to possible reduction in cost of athletic equipment to universities. The following concessions were obtained: 33-1/3% reduction on all Canadian sports goods handled by the Spalding firm: 15% to 20% reduction on all non-Canadian sport goods; further discount of 2% for cash or if paid for in 10 days and in all cases a 30-day extension of credit.

The League of Nations Society in Canada had been approached by N.F.C.U.S. regarding possible liaison. No definite commitments were made by either side but the L.N.S.C. agreed to send an observer to the 1927 Conference.

In the fall of 1927 C.I.E. was approached by N.F.C.U.S. which was admitted to membership effective in February, 1928. N.F.C.U.S. representative at the C.I.E. Council meeting held in Rome from August 24th to September 4 was Escott M. Reid, a Canadian Rhodes Scholar from University of Toronto.

The first annual Conference was held in December at the University of Toronto. Delegates from seventeen universities were present as well as representatives from England, Scotland, the S.C.M. and the Canadian League of Nations Society.

- 1928 -

The year 1928 saw an extension of N.F.C.U.S. work. While it became evident as the year progressed that some of the phases of work decided upon at the 1927 conference were either impractical or difficult to attain, other fields were developed to a greater extent than before. The Canadian Passenger Association refused to grant its support to the N.F.C.U.S. demand for reduced railway rates and the C.I.A.U. declared that the national Inter-varsity athletic union proposed by N.F.C.U.S. was not feasible. During the year N.F.C.U.S. played host to two parties of foreign students--one from England and one from South Africa. A debating team from the Maritimes was again sent across Canada with a very great

degree of success. A Canadian team was sent to England and arrangements were completed to draw up a series of debates between various Canadian and American universities. A team from Australia was also invited to debate in Canada.

The matter of undergraduate exchanges met with some difficulties but it became evident that these would be ironed out and that more and more universities were in favour of it. The setting up of an Endowment Fund of \$50,000.00 was suggested as this would ensure financial stability of N.F.C.U.S. Canadian Press, Ltd., was approached and it agreed to handle N.F.C.U.S. publicity of more important news value. It was also discovered that Canadian university publications were entitled to telegraph press rates for all news stories.

N.F.C.U.S. invited the Imperial Conference of Students to come to Canada for the second Conference of that body. The invitation was accepted for September of 1929. The University of Montreal agreed to act as host for the occasion. N.F.C.U.S. undertook to raise \$3,500 to cover miscellaneous expenses of this conference.

Queen's University was the scene of the Second Annual Conference of N.F.C.U.S. which was held on December 26 - 29, 1928. Seventeen universities were represented and an eighteenth applied for membership at the conference. Little new work was undertaken. The old was consolidated. A conference of the three major Intercollegiate athletic unions was called for late spring of 1929 and an invitation from the N.U.S. of England and Wales to organize a party of Canadian students to visit the U. K. was accepted. It was also agreed that the officers of the Federation would approach the Federal Government to gain its cooperation in placing students in the Civil Service and other positions through Government employment bureaux.

- 1929 -

The greatest successes of the Federation in this year were in Debating. An Australian team was entertained in Canada while a Canadian team was sent to the U.S.A. A team from Western Canada toured the various Canadian universities with great success. The application for reduced railway rates met with a rebuff. Only students travelling under the undergraduate exchange scheme were offered hope of reduction. This scheme commenced with the 1929-30 academic session. Finances made it impossible for N.F.C.U.S. to take any active part in the C.I.E. The projected U.K. tour was cancelled because of a poor response on the part of students. The athletic Conference had been held in the spring and arrangements were made to draft the constitution of the proposed body.

The Annual Conference was held at the University of Montreal. The universities represented at the 1928 conference again sent delegates. No new work was undertaken.

- 1931 -

Because of the financial difficulties connected with The Imperial Conference and the financial failure of the European Tour no conference was held in 1930. In 1931 however McMaster University, Hamilton, was the scene of the fourth annual conference.

N.F.C.U.S. disaffiliated from the C.I.E. because of financial difficulties and because of certain undesirable tendencies of that organization. Instead it lent its full support to the I.S.S. and was instrumental in sending twelve Canadian students to the I.S.S. Conference in Switzerland.

The year 1930-31 again saw a very successful year as far as debates sponsored by the Federation were concerned. A team from New Zealand toured Western Canada: one from Central Canada visited all the universities in the Dominion west of Montreal as far as Vancouver, B. C. An American team debated at Canadian universities east of Montreal and a British debating team took part in a series of debates across the country.

During the 1931-32 academic session eighteen undergraduates took advantage of the exchange plan. The athletic conference which was held in 1929 had recommended the formation of a Dominion-wide Athletic Union but nothing more was done except the drafting of a constitution. In view of the economic conditions no European Tour was planned for 1932. During the year Queen's had dropped out from the Federation.

- 1932 -

Because of ever-increasing financial difficulties it was decided in 1929 to hold national conferences bi-annually. Thus there were no conferences held in 1932, 1934, 1936 or 1938. This caused a serious difficulty because in many cases continuity of office or experience was endangered and because of this interest and activity lagged.

In spite of this 1932 saw the acceptance as valid of N.F.C.U.S. claims by the Canadian Passengers' Association and by the various railways so that for the Christmas of 1932 a special 1¹/₂ return rate for students was set up which has continued ever since.

The National Conference held at U. W. O. expressed the desire that N.F.C.U.S. re-affiliate with the C.I.E. but was again faced by the prospect of making affiliation nominal because of a lack of funds. Again, the most successful phase of work was in the field of debating--inter-national and inter-regional. Some debating tours sponsored by N.F.C.U.S. brought a profit (one of 72¢) but others, not unexpectedly met a slight financial deficit. Because of the failure to organize a Dominion-wide athletic union the C.I.A.U. was approached to change its anomalous title by prefixing the word "Central". It was difficult to achieve this as the autonomy of the C.I.A.U. made it independent of student criticism and so that matter had to be left in abeyance.

- 1934-35 -

The next two years saw little change in the work of the Federation. By 1935 N.F.C.U.S. had sponsored or promoted over 500 debates since its inception. Debating continued to be one of the Federation's most successful undertakings. Due to the generosity of private donors, a Mr. Johnston was installed in Canada House in London, England, and became among others Travelling Secretary for N.F.C.U.S., his function being to advise and plan itineraries for Canadian students visiting in Great Britain or on the Continent. The Federation continued to follow closely the work of the C.I.E. but took an active part in its activities. Exchanges continued in full swing and in December, 1935, an agreement was reached

with Samuel French (Canada) Ltd. granting the "irreducible minimum" rate to all Dramatic Organizations associated with members of the Federation in the matter of Play Royalties.

- 1937 -

The next positive achievement of the Federation was the organization of the C.U.P.--Canadian University Press in Winnipeg late in 1937. This was the outgrowth of work undertaken by a N.F.C.U.S. Committee on the Press and the C.U.P. which had been set up at the 1935 conference with the power to add to its members. A grant of \$125 yearly for the next two years from N.F.C.U.S. funds was voted. A constitution was drawn up and provisions were made for the new organization to function independently of the old. This was facilitated when university papers became eligible for press telegraph rates. This group itself came into actual existence January 1st, 1938.

- 1939 -

By the time the 1939 national conference was convened in Montreal (at McGill) war had broken out and a general curtailment of activities unconnected with the war effort was beginning to be felt. The National Headquarters were transferred from Clyde, Alberta, to the University of Toronto where E. A. Macdonald took over the duties of national secretary-treasurer from Percy G. Davies. The ill-effects of an organizational slow-down began to make themselves felt by this time. The fact that conferences were held but once every two years which resulted in a general relaxation of effort was perhaps the main reason for this. At this time another student organization came into being--the Canadian Student Assembly--which had been organized at a National Conference of Canadian University Students in December, 1937. This body for a time vied with N.F.C.U.S. for the right to represent Canadian students but after its 1939 conference, when certain delegates accused it of being both "anti-British and anti-war" it declined. At the 1939 conference Sidney Hermant of Varsity became national president and continued in this capacity throughout the war. By 1940 it became evident that the Federation would have to cease its activity because of the war and thus N.F.C.U.S. became dormant.

- 1944 -

In 1944 the U. W. O. called a conference to revive N.F.C.U.S. This conference declared itself to be a conference of the executive and R. M. Dibbs of U.B.C. became wartime chairman while S. Hermant remained actual president until a plenary conference was called to elect a new executive. In December of 1945 such a conference was called at McGill. This conference marked the resumption of N.F.C.U.S. activities.

- 1946 -

For a number of reasons including lack of funds (only one university paid its fees) the executive appointed at the McGill conference found it impossible to carry out the programme outlined for 1946. The re-birth of N.F.C.U.S. actually dates from the tenth conference which was held at the University of Toronto in December, 1946, with representatives from sixteen universities present. At this conference Maurice Sauve, of the University of Montreal, was elected president, D. G. Seldon of McMaster University succeeded E. A. Macdonald

as secretary-treasurer, and an ambitious programme of activities was entered upon with a do-or-die spirit.

- 1947 -

The chief aim of President Sauve was to make N.F.C.U.S. a truly representative National Students' Union and to achieve this end he travelled the breadth of the Dominion outlining the past achievements of N.F.C.U.S., and emphasizing the importance of the Federation in international and national affairs as the official voice of Canadian university students. The results of his work were to become apparent at the next conference when delegates from 21 member universities, the largest membership in N.F.C.U.S. history, were to attend the conference. At that time N.F.C.U.S. represented some 65,000 Canadian university students. The eleventh N.F.C.U.S. conference was held at the University of Manitoba in December, 1947, with 70 delegates and observers representing 21 member institutions.

Under the heading of Students' Exchanges, the Regional Exchange of Undergraduates Plan was reviewed (it was reported that two exchanges had been satisfactorily arranged for the 1947-48 session) and a new plan for the exchange between Canadian and American universities was presented by the University of Toronto Committee and given approval. Among the many administrative problems discussed, the most important was the possibility of establishing a full-time N.F.C.U.S. officer, either a full-time paid president or a secretary-treasurer. The merit of this proposal was not questioned, but it was agreed that N.F.C.U.S. was not yet in a strong enough financial position to make the plan feasible. The perennial question of a Dominion Intercollegiate Athletic Union was again discussed and it was decided to send a brief on this subject to the National Conference of Canadian Universities. Recommendations were made on a number of miscellaneous subjects including national tours, exchange exhibitions in fine and applied arts, text book exchange, etc. The conference forwarded to the Canadian Olympic Committee a request that it should hold a National Inter-collegiate Basketball Tournament in order to select Olympic representatives. Commissions of inquiry were set up to investigate the following subjects: student income and expenditures, the organization of student councils and achievements, university radio, reduced railway rates for students, student free loan fund, and exchange of information.

The presidents of the four Canadian University Debating Leagues attended the conference and drew up a constitution for a Canadian University Debating Association under which national debating championships could be held. The constitution, which included a provision that the secretary-treasurer of N.F.C.U.S. should be the secretary-treasurer of the Debating Association, was given approval by the conference.

Most controversial issue discussed at the conference was that of affiliation with the International Union of Students. There was general agreement that the I.U.S. was Communist-dominated and carried on many political activities which N.F.C.U.S. could not endorse. Final decision was that N.F.C.U.S. should join the I.U.S. conditionally, for a period of two years the conditions to be: (1) the clear definition of its legitimate political activities, and (2) the establishment of an equitable system of representation; with a further provision that if these conditions were not met within a two-year period, N.F.C.U.S. should not merely dis-affiliate but further should actively promote the formation of an alternative World's Student Union. Robert S. Harwood of the University of British Columbia was elected president for the ensuing year.

- 1948 -

Normal N.F.C.U.S. activities during 1948 were somewhat overshadowed by the preparations of the N.F.C.U.S. delegation headed by Grant Livingstone of the University of British Columbia, to attend the I.U.S. council meeting in Paris in September of 1948.

The problem of I.U.S. affiliation is much too involved to be discussed in this brief history. Suffice it to say that political developments in Europe in the spring of 1948 plus the refusal of the I.U.S. to accept the N.F.C.U.S. application for membership without additional assurances made the work of the N.F.C.U.S. delegation very difficult. Absence of support from the Students' Unions of other democratic countries made the hope of reforming I.U.S. appear to be even further removed. By the fall of 1948 many universities, notably those in the Maritimes, felt that the national programme of N.F.C.U.S. was being prejudiced by the emphasis placed on international activities.

There were several achievements on the national level. The National Conference of Canadian Universities endorsed the N.F.C.U.S. proposal that a Dominion Intercollegiate Athletic Union should be formed, and called a meeting of the various university athletic directors to work out the details. The first National Debating Final was held at the Ontario Agricultural College in the spring of 1948, thus bringing to fruition the work done at the Winnipeg N.F.C.U.S. conference. In the student exchange field seven regional exchanges were arranged and the Canadian-American Exchange plan reached the stage where it could be put into effect in the fall of 1949. In the athletic field again the Canadian Olympic committee invited the intercollegiate basketball champions of the Western and Central regions to take part in a tournament for the purpose of selecting Olympic representatives and several members of the University of British Columbia team played on the Canadian Olympic team in London. Other matters such as reduced theatre rates for students, student exemption from unemployment insurance premiums, and negotiations with the American Federation of Musicians as regards college productions reached no definite conclusions.

The 12th N.F.C.U.S. conference was held at the University of Montreal in December, 1948. Of the 21 universities which attended the Winnipeg conference, two, St. Francis Xavier College and Queen's University, had withdrawn their memberships and Macdonald College did not send a delegate to Montreal: (Queen's renewed its membership a few months later). However, both Queen's University and Macdonald College had observers at the conference. Nearly all delegates arrived at the conference with a firm resolve that the I.U.S. question should not be permitted to monopolize conference time at the expense of "national" business. Further, delegates from the Maritimes were prepared to make an issue of I.U.S. affiliation, and threatened to withdraw from N.F.C.U.S. if affiliation were approved. After hearing the report of Grant Livingstone and reading the reports of the other two delegation members, Cliff Smith, formerly of the University of Manitoba and Bob Rambusch, formerly of the University of Toronto, the conference decided not to affiliate with I.U.S. but to send observers to the next I.U.S. Congress meeting provided funds could be secured through voluntary contributions.

The conference once again reviewed the question of establishing a full-time secretariat and again shelved it for a further period. An Action Committee consisting of the president, secretary-treasurer and the vice-presidents for Ontario and Quebec was formed, this being a compact group which could meet fairly frequently to follow up the N.F.C.U.S. programme. The conference renewed

a large number of items which were carried forward from previous years, and initiated three new projects of major importance. The first of these was initiated by the University of Toronto committee under the heading of "Fees Brief", but was expanded into an appeal to the Federal government to assist higher education in Canada through the continuation of maintenance grants to the universities (along the lines of the D.V.A. sustaining grants) and enlargement of the Dominion-Provincial Scholarship Plan, the aim being of course to make higher education available to a wider group of Canadian youth. The second project, also initiated by the Toronto committee, was to reduce the cost of text books. The third was the inauguration of plan whereby students might travel to Europe during the summer either by air or by sea at reduced rates.

Gordon Gwynne-Timothy, president of the University of Toronto Students' Administrative Council, was elected president for 1949. It was decided that the next conference should be held in September, 1949.

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