

5e congrès annuel
Union nationale des étudiants

National Union of Students
5th annual meeting

Charlottetown
I.P.E. P.E.I.

le 10-14 mai 1977
May 10-14, 1977

SUITE 201, 230, LOBBY 1, 1000, WILSON AVENUE, OTTAWA, ONTARIO, CANADA, K1P 1H7, TELEPHONE (613) 927-7491

CONFERENCE STRUCTURE

This conference has four types of sessions scheduled:

- A) Action workshops B) Information workshops C) Caucuses D) Plenaries

Workshops provide a forum where reports to the plenary or activity on various issues are developed. It is in the workshops that resource papers and reports to the conference are first discussed.

A) Action workshops provide detailed consideration and information-exchange on a particular matter, with a view to recommending policy, strategy or activity, as needed, by NUS, provincial organizations and/or campus student associations.

B) Information workshops provided detailed exchange of information on a matter, so that those present are more aware about and can better deal with it at the campus and/or provincial level. It is assumed that topics before an information workshop do not require or cannot get (due to limited resources) active NUS involvement in 1977-78.

C) Caucuses are sessions where people with unique shared interests within the student movement exchange information on how to deal with those interests and plan ways that the common resources of students can be used fairly to serve the needs of the caucus members.

D) Plenaries are the meetings of all delegates. It is only in plenary session that the conference can make decisions. All reports, recommendations and motions that need NUS action or policy should be brought to the plenary. Anyone can speak at the plenary but only NUS members may vote on motions that will bind the organization. Motions for which proper advance notice has been given to members become policy if passed in plenary. Other motions creating new policy, if passed, must be voted on in a vote by mail of the members. "Straw votes" of all those present can be taken and some questions are best decided by all delegates rather than by NUS itself.

The annual general meeting is also the corporation's business meeting and this is part of the plenary session.

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AN ORIENTATION TO THE

NATIONAL UNION OF STUDENTS

Post-secondary students in Canada formed a country-wide organization in 1926. It led a generally successful, although up-and-down, existence. At one of the lowest points — the summer of 1969 — president Martin Loney said that:

Anyone who supposes that we can continue to play games with national unionism is clearly out of touch with existing realities. If CUS does not win a larger number of referendums in the early fall then we will not only be politically impotent but financially bankrupt

No doubt in two or three years a National Union will reemerge but student unionism will have suffered a setback. In the interim students' councils will find that the circulation of ideas has slowed down, that there is no attempt to articulate national policy and that when the crunch comes they are on their own.

The Canadian Union of Students (CUS) had made too many mistakes to survive past 1969, but Martin Loney's prediction of a new national union was fulfilled. It had proved impossible to sustain effective provincial organizations in the absence of CUS. University student unions just tried to have yearly meetings at the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada conferences, while other student unions had no Canada-wide meeting place.

Fiscal arrangements were being negotiated in 1972, with an inter-provincial study proposing full-cost tuition fees and an all-loans aid scheme, while Ottawa proposed a substantial cut in government funding of post-secondary education. Most student governments were looking for friends and for help, sparking a resurgence of plans for provincial unions. The Ontario Federation of Students was being formed for strong action against a provincial report on education.

The University of Windsor Students' Administrative Council called for creation of a national association. In May 1972 twenty-six student unions met in Windsor and over three days came to approve the concept of a new association. (Re-forming CUS was narrowly rejected.) The priorities for the new association were to be the transfer of information between students' unions; co-operation on student services; and, political research and action.

The Windsor conference elected a financial committee which, in co-operation with OFS, sponsored a mid-summer conference on education financing which helped turn the tide against immediate implementation of regressive proposals. A steering committee was also chosen, and it prepared the November 1972 founding conference on structure for the new association. The steering committee worked through an office donated by the University of Manitoba Students' Union.

A third interim committee had been approved at Windsor — intra-provincial communications. It failed to meet its goals of wide-spread on-campus discussion of the national association, with the result that when 50 student unions came together to found NUS the Atlantic and Quebec delegates walked out after rejection of their respective plans for a regional level of NUS activity. The majority of delegates (Ontario, Prairies and British Columbia) established an organization with campus membership and no provincial level. Ontario was preoccupied with the establishment of OFS and its campaigns, and felt national work to be unimportant, while the western regions opposed any strong concentration of effort at the provincial level!

The founding conference elected NUS's first Central Committee. Most members of the interim steering committee were elected to the Central. Some community colleges and technical institutes became involved from that conference. NUS began to work out of the Alma Mater Society offices at UBC. The first Central Committee spent five months publicizing NUS and soliciting membership. The only income was donations and subsidies from student unions, and many people were not sure if the organization really existed.

That committee's work led to the first annual general meeting, held in Halifax. Negotiations by the Central Committee had shown that a fee of 30 cents per full-time two-semester student was a fair accomplishment, and the Halifax conference struck that fee despite doubts that it would be too low. The 24 founding members accepted into the organization at Halifax included significant Atlantic participation.

At Halifax and the next conference (Edmonton, October 1973) delegates specified areas of interest with which NUS should concern itself. They were:

- . financing of post-secondary education
- . housing
- . employment
- . status of women students
- . operation of student unions

Detailed policies on the financial concerns were developed, and a program to encourage the creation and existence of provincial/regional organizations was approved.

The membership fee provided an operating budget of approximately \$35,000. It permitted the establishment of a national office. Two full-time staff members were hired in September 1973 to co-ordinate the work done by volunteers across the country and improve the communications network within NUS, with other campuses and with outside groups. The staff began to make initial contact with various federal and provincial officials to prepare the way for NUS lobby programmes.

In 1973-74, a basic exchange of information had resumed and NUS began programmes of political research and action. Once more, students in a province or on a campus who acted on a common issue did so in co-ordination with students in the rest of the country. The federal government was asked to do research on student aid programmes and prepare a long-term policy on it. At the same time they were approached with some of NUS's short-term goals such as improved tax deductions for students. Ottawa did conduct a survey of the socio-economic characteristics of students for which NUS assisted in developing the questionnaire.

NUS faced a crisis in the fall of 1974. The development of a national union of students requires time to obtain experience and support needed to deal constructively with many issues facing students. Most student leaders knew NUS existed, but the lack of resources made on-going work so difficult that it had a do-nothing image. The October 1974 conference approved a fee increase to \$1.00 and launched an intense campaign on student aid reforms. Unsupportable efforts on other issues were suspended.

The concentration on student aid provided the first consolidated campaign and concrete demonstration since 1969 of the unique value of a national student organization. NUS became more capable of meeting its mandate. Many student governments which had doubted the viability of a national organization saw that NUS had the potential to be a strong, effective body.

The results of this new credibility were seen in 1975-76. As the national forum for student opinion NUS conferences dealt with a wide variety of matters and issues. It was clear that only a much larger organization than the three-employees NUS could do the national work which was desired. As a result of NUS debates and stimulus provincial/regional organizations were emerging outside of Ontario, and coping with the problems of early growth.

The most visible effect of new credibility was a remarkable number of referenda. Many members had been reluctant to hold a vote establishing the \$1.00 fee. Now they moved to do so. New members came forward in all regions where NUS had a presence. The result was that in 1975-76 more Canadian campuses voted in favour of national organization than ever before. Many aspects of university domination within NUS were finally eliminated.

The enthusiasm generated by the student aid work and referendum success was evident at the May 1976 conference in Winnipeg. The largest conference in NUS's history, it saw the National Student Day program develop out of delegates' conviction that students' had to positively seize hold of the

situation facing them, particularly decreased accessibility, and advance student interests.

One outcome of the rush of enthusiasm was an overly-ambitious list of objectives for NUS's work in 1976-77. However, among the accomplishments of the year are: on-going liaison with federal parties; full-time research capability; sustained fieldwork; regular Central Committee meetings; a steady increase in NUS's French-language operations; publication of a monthly newspaper; systematic collection of information; organic link with the provincial/regional organizations and further progress in the program to establish and strengthen them.

The circulation of ideas and exchange of information is increasing month-by-month, coherent student views and policy are articulated across Canada, student unions are able to develop services on a firm basis. Governments take into account the positions that students have developed, and this is increasingly reflected in the content and presentation of programs affecting students. Campuses are no longer on their own when a crunch comes.

New challenges face NUS — questions about priorities for the best use of the collective resources of students in Canada, about the future development of the organization and about the stance to be taken in the common work of students. This conference will be the first in eight years to deal with such questions, at the Canada-wide level, on a basis of visible and significant day-to-day activity by students' national organization.

Dan O'Connor (with acknowledgements
to the groundwork of Bob
Buckingham and Hilda Creswick
in drafting the 1975 orientation
paper)