

# BRITISH COLUMBIA STUDENT FEDERATION

## A BRIEF HISTORY

August, /77

Post-secondary students in the province of British Columbia have tried, since the early sixties, to organize in support of student needs. Unfortunately, the life span of the associations was incredibly short and frustrating. There were a number of reasons for these failures. First of all, the union/associations generally viewed the student in society simply as someone pursuing an education. The student, under this traditional view, receives an education from educators who view the student as dependant and incapable of reasoned criticism of the educational process. Secondly, these associations viewed the student representative councils as strictly service oriented cliques, responsible for student entertainment, and often token student representation on institutional committees. Finally the commitment of individual student representatives was generally restricted to their institutions rather than the broader nature of student issues at the provincial and federal levels. Consequently, funding for a provincial union never progressed beyond the donation stage.

It has been argued that the objectives of these associations (B.C.U.S.; B.C.A.S.U.) which included exerting pressure in matters of student concern, were paid only lip-service attention simply because the associations were financially impotent to provide support to student issues after the committed individuals finished their studies.

The B.C.A.S.U. is a case in point. It was established to co-ordinate the interests and concerns of post-secondary students and press for change. At semi-annual meetings, delegates exchanged information and discussed their problems. Implementation of policy motions and effective lobbying of government departments was never accomplished, however. This was because the association had no formal membership, no financing structure, no staff, and no central co-ordination of information.

Delegates to BCASU conferences confronted these structural limitations as early as September of 1974, and resolved at the March 1975 meeting to re-evaluate and re-structure the association. The delegates agreed to the necessity of organizing co-operatively into a federation (B.C.S.F.) which would press government agencies for changes as well as providing an information and research centre and workshops improving general student services at the institutional level. Delegates also agreed to consider the holding of referenda on their campuses (to join the B.C.S.F.) on the basis of a per student fee levy.

Implicit in this dialogue was the feeling that students the students' societies/unions were beginning to re-assess their commitment as active and critical members of the educational community. It was felt that the student and institutional needs required serious lobbying and organizing, co-ordinated by a vibrant provincial student federation.

The final stage of this decision took place at the Fall 1976 Annual General Meeting at Capilano College. It was at this meeting that membership in BCSF was restricted to those who had conducted some kind of vote within their student population and joined at the new membership fee. As a result of the fact that some institutions had begun to pay this fee in the previous year, and combining this with a variety of grants, the organization had managed to grow in just one year into a viable representative for students. It had begun the process of responding to and in some cases initiating, discussion on important educational issues. As well, delegates at a previous BCSF conference (Nelson, Spring 1976) had made changes to our operations which integrated our work with that of the rest of the

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student movement in Canada, thus strengthening our position through information and resource exchange and constant communication. They had voted to change the nature of the BCSF executive by electing the NUS Central Committee representative for B.C. as a member of that executive.

Thus, the organization was formalized, and with the passing of a new constitution at the Capilano conference, continued the work of organizing and representing students as a cohesive unit.

This is not to say that problems did not arise. At the very conference which finalized the new fee structure and constitution delegates had to deal with many internal problems already cropping up. Of particular importance at that time was the fact that with the building onslaught against education, the still minimal resources of BCSF were being stretched to the limit. (At that time delegates had to put together a projected budget for BCSF which called for a \$6,000.00 deficit). With a handful of executive members and two staff it was impossible to both deal with government policies and communications between student unions. To attempt to deal with these problems, the members discussed the actual capabilities of these few resources, and possible ways of expanding this base. It was hoped at the time that a committee structure would serve the dual purpose of getting the work done and involving more and more people in the day-to-day grappling with issues which is needed to develop a working understanding. As well delegates placed a strong emphasis on the need to recruit more institutions to the organization in order for it to survive.

This process of constant re-evaluation of methods of working will always be necessary and is continuing. Suggestions from student unions, discussions in the executive and at conferences, and participation by students will hopefully continue to help us to be a more effective organization.



# **British Columbia Students' Federation Fourth Annual General Meeting**

**Simon Fraser University** Oct. 14 - 16, 1977

## CONFERENCE STRUCTURE

This conference has three types of sessions scheduled:

A) Workshops    B) Caucuses    C) Plenaries

A) Workshops provide a forum where reports to the plenary or activity on various issues are developed. It is in the workshops that background papers and reports to the conference are first discussed. Workshops serve two basic functions; 1) to discuss and develop specific policies and strategies for the B.C.S.F. and/or local student associations, and to forward these recommendations to the plenary for consideration, and 2) to exchange information on differing matters so that those present at the workshop will be more aware of, and better able to deal with, these matters at the campus, provincial, and/or national level.

B) 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. A caucus may or may not prepare recommendations for the plenary.

C) Plenaries are the meetings of all delegates. It is only in plenary session that the conference can make decisions binding on B.C.S.F.. All reports, recommendations and motions that need BCSF action or policy should be brought to the plenary. Any registered delegate may speak at the plenary, but only BCSF member unions may vote. All plenaries are presided over by the conference Chairperson and Secretary.

The annual general meeting is also the organization's business meeting and these affairs are also part of the plenary sessions.

**"ORGANIZING for ACTION"**