

**Canadian Federation of Students(-Services)
National General Meeting
May 1992**

REPORT

NATIONAL CHAIRPERSON



**" Got to kick at the darkness 'till it bleeds daylight"
- Bruce Cockburn**

As I wrap up my first year as Chair of the Federation, it is mostly with an eye towards the next year and the challenges that await us. There has never been a time when students have been more in need of a national student voice. The gradual dismantling of our education system and our country through nearly eight years of the Mulroney government call upon us now to show the leadership to provide true alternatives to both students and Canadian voters, and to make a renewed commitment to work co-operatively to make quality and accessible post-secondary education a priority once again.

This year we have been active on a number of fronts which have allowed us to put forth an alternative message to that of the government. I'd like to go into a brief review of these events, as well as what they mean. More details on all of this is found in the National Executive report. I should, however, put all of this in context. One must remember that education funding cuts, or changes to the Student Loans Program, are linked intrinsically to the Prosperity Initiative and to the North American Free Trade Agreement. We cannot deal with these issues simply in isolation -- combatting them will mean putting out a vision that includes education as a major component of our country's future. I will also comment on what that vision can be and how we can go about publicizing it.

THE PROSPERITY INITIATIVE

Nowhere has the clash of visions been more apparent than with the Prosperity Initiative. The government has attempted to put a veneer of public consultation on the economic agenda they wish to pursue anyway. The "Community Talks" which were meant to get the opinions of Canadians were, in fact, mostly left to Chambers of Commerce to organize with no promotions budget whatsoever. Partly because of the organized labour boycott of the talks, meetings were mostly business types backing up the Tory agenda -- continue social spending cuts, farm work out to the private sector, let business guide the economy. In education, this is bad news for students, because in this scenario funding cuts remain the same, tuition fees go up, and business does its own training -- often simply to meet its short-term employment needs.

I am pleased to say that our participation this year has led to us being one of the strongest opposition voices within the process -- and along the way coming up with enough victories that we can legitimately call the government on it if they put out a report that glosses over their record of funding cuts and students being turned away. In meetings like Charlottetown, Fredericton, and Calgary, we have won group recommendations and media coverage calling for a reversal of funding cuts, better student aid, and reductions in tuition fees. At the Saskatoon and Moncton Regional Talks, Federation representatives were able to get group recommendations calling for the imposition of a 3% corporate surtax to go towards education and training, as well as calls for restoration of federal funding, a tuition freeze, and the creation of a part-time student loans program. I even got to report back from my group at the Moncton meeting and blast the government's record

in education with Ministers Wilson and Valcourt right there ! (Hee! Hee!)

Some of the reports mailed back to Federation participants would indicate an effort to gloss over these speed bumps in the government's way of true "crony consultation". As well, some sessions have been decidedly slanted, like the Kingston session I walked out of where the moderator refused to entertain any suggestions that called for government spending or regulation.

However, I think we have enough to go public with a response after the government releases theirs, something like a "People's Initiative For Prosperity", which outlines an alternative economic model -- something like, alternative means of debt financing, revamp the tax system, develop trade alternatives to the North American free trade pact, and begin investing in an infrastructure that will allow us to utilize our resources here at home, including investments in better transportation, tax breaks for developing industries, improved research money and employment opportunities for graduate students, and the opening up of our post-secondary system through the implementation of "Strategy For Change". This will develop an alternative, education-based economic model that we can use effectively in an election, which I will cover later.

CANADA STUDENT LOANS PROGRAM

The theme throughout the Prosperity Initiative is that the government sees education in terms of hustling the fortunate through rigid courses as quickly as possible. This is highly apparent as well in their proposed changes to the Canada Student Loans Program, which show that the government has little vision of the aims of education beyond speedy program completion. This explains so-called "reforms" designed to get students through school faster and weed out what the government deems to be "non-productive" educational pursuits. When combined with the other changes in the program, including a draconian crackdown on "defaulters", reduction of service to part-time students and students with disabilities, and the new demands on students to possibly get parental letters of guarantee before getting a loan, the government is destroying the program's ability to create accessibility to the system. I believe the need is pressing enough to warrant a major campaign on student assistance as soon as possible.

DEVELOPING ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVES

The problem with the current government's plans in education is that they are far too short-sighted. When we speak of merely getting people into the nearest private sector opening as the goal for education, we follow a path which will create a future workforce that lacks problem solving skills, and is very much at risk of losing out as the world changes. As well, by ignoring the accessibility question the government is denying this country the genius and diligence of thousands of qualified Canadians. Their simplistic plan of social spending cuts to eliminate the deficit ignores the simple mathematics of the situation (there's not enough there to cut and really change things) and ignores the fundamental need to create an economic future for Canada that gives us the educational and technological ability to do more than offer up our resources to the U.S. at fire sale prices. And all this being said, Canadians are fundamentally uneasy with the unfairness of the past eight years, which have moves us towards two strata of society and asked us to forget about the needs of anyone but ourselves.

THE FEDERAL ELECTION

I hope you'll excuse that brief interlude of criticisms, but they are necessary because I believe that those are the areas around which we build a strong, pro-education message to take to the people in an election campaign. This meeting will see our first opportunity to plan a strategy. This election, likely this fall, is vital to students. If we do not make education an issue, and if we accept four more years of the neglect we have seen from this government, then we will be letting down our constituents and Canadians. This is, to me, the most important issue before us. We have tremendous talent in this organization, and that talent is not limited to any one opinion or ideology. Let's come together to use it.

This campaign we can make education relevant to all Canadians, not just students. We must develop those themes of equality of opportunity for Canadians, securing an economic future, and guaranteeing skilled professionals for use in what I hope will be a major publicity campaign. Also, I hope people will contribute their creativity to develop activities to supplement an election campaign; by way of suggestion, a national kick-off press conference, a national day of rallies, following the Prime Minister's tour with demonstrators, local door-to-door canvassing, local MP accountability, and the release of a national "report card" on parties' policies.

BUILDING COALITIONS

Coalitions will also be valuable to us. Action Canada has been invaluable to us this year, whether it's been helping locally with the Prosperity Initiative, doing policy development on the Constitution, sharing resources on the free trade fight, or getting active around the Tory convention in Toronto. These are allies on our issues, and we are hardly so blessed with resources that we can turn those away. At labour conventions I have addressed, the pro-education message I have outlined above has been met with standing ovations and endorsements of our policies. These are but a few reasons why I am recommending to the National Executive that we double (to a mere \$500) our contribution to the Action Canada Network, and will encourage the forging of parallel provincial and local ties as the election approaches.

FEDERATION FEE INCREASE

This leads me to another issue I wish to address; that being the proposed fee increase from the National Executive. By now you no doubt are aware that fees have not increased (from \$4.00) since 1981, a situation which I doubt is the same for most of our member associations. Probably the most important question, however, is -- what would the new money go for?

An increased budget would put new, broad-based campaign ideas at our disposal. Our campaigns must reach more than just our constituents; an ability to run national ad campaigns would make us even harder for governments to ignore. In November, delegates overwhelmingly endorsed the idea of a national advertising fund -- now we need something to put in to it. I am examining proposals to create a foundation which will allow donations from Travel CUTS (and others) to these endeavours, but if members really want strong campaigns, additional resources from all of us will be necessary. The approaching election, for all the aforesaid reasons, reminds us of the need for proper funding of our movement.

CONSTITUENCY GROUP DEVELOPMENT

As well, I think the fact that our fees are too low has led to unnecessary division in our ranks. One area where I see this is with the resistance to what some call "the constituency group campaigns" this year. What I have outlined above is a focused, national message for education. But being focused does not mean being exclusionary -- our agenda must be big enough to address the issues on our campuses that affect us all. That means tackling racism, homophobia, date rape, sexual harassment, campus safety, AIDS and all those other issues-- they enhance rather than detract from the agenda. I grow especially disappointed when I see motions to audit only constituency group spending -- why should that be any more an area of concern than all Federation spending ?

The real issue is not as simplistic as "some issues are good to address, others bad". Rather, the question is one of context. This year I have noticed some problems in who's responsible for initiating these campaigns -- the commissioners or the national executive? I would propose a couple of improvements to better define these roles. Last November I recommended to the Executive that a commissioners' meeting be held -- I would suggest that these be entrenched and held before every general meeting. Secondly, I urge delegates to closely examine proposals for a Constituency Group Commission. This group would involve all the commissioners, would receive a preset level of funding to distribute each year, and would have the ability to respond publicly to issues that affect them, or, should they wish, to push for more inclusive actions and policies from the Federation as a whole. They would also be responsible for co-ordinating all campaigns paid for by their budget. This kind of increased autonomy and responsibility truly lends itself to better definition of roles.

OPENING UP THE PROCESS

Another thing we must look at is democratizing our Federation -- making students aware that they make the decisions, not some foreign body in Ottawa. It is always frustrating for me to go to a school contemplating withdrawal and learning that a major problem is a policy that same student union supported. If students are more aware of the process, I believe they will be more accepting of the inevitable policies they disagree with. If students don't feel a part of the process, we risk dying the death of a thousand paper cuts, with every student finding at least one policy they feel doesn't represent them. There are two ideas I would submit to deal with this -- first, that we develop a campaign to be sent to schools every year, not just telling students what CFS does for them, but also what they do for CFS -- their rights and responsibilities as members and how they can influence and affect change within their movement. This might mean little more effort than developing means to do this with materials that already exist. As well, I think it would be valuable to examine mechanisms to have member local councils ratify non-operational policies adopted at General Meetings. Many member locals already do this informally before general meetings. This moves the decision making process closer to the students, and by watching it in action they can understand the roles of their local representatives and not see every CFS policy as imposed upon them from elsewhere. It is also more democratic. I leave other ideas to the creativity of the Membership Development Committee.

IDEA SHARING

Continuing with local Federation profile for a moment, I also think it is worthwhile to examine ways in which we can enable and enhance the kind of idea-sharing between student associations that organizations like ours can facilitate. We are the largest forum in the country for bringing student leaders together, but the

necessary hectic pace of our general meetings often prevents us from learning from each other as much as we could, especially on issues of local jurisdiction. I know when I was President at a very small student union (St. Thomas), I found the ideas I got from other locals to be invaluable in setting up an Ombudsperson's Office, setting up an emergency student loan fund, media relations, putting together a policy manual, establishing an affirmative action plan, constituency group organizing ... the list goes on. A lot of stuff I was able to do never would have happened without the contacts I was able to make through Federation membership. We can also discuss the role of computer networking in this service.

It would be highly worthwhile for us too examine setting up a national idea bank for information sharing, with member locals each contributing their success stories on everything from constituency group organizing to running a pub to board of governors structures. Of course, brilliant campaigns and Federation profile raisers would be included as well. If we could put together an annually -updated resource book for student unions, we could greatly accentuate the idea-sharing aspect of the Federation.

PROGRAMMES

There are two other aspects of our programmes I should talk about, though Allison will provide you with most of the insight on these. Firstly, I am truly excited about the expansion of the Studentsaver programme into high schools across Canada. If given time to grow and expand, this area of growth can reinvigorate the programme and its service to members. As well, I think that we should begin to examine ways to forge political as well as service links with high schools who get on the programme -- after all, high school students are among the most direct beneficiaries of our work.

If Studentsaver is taking off, then CFS Net is running out of gas. Quite frankly, no one is using the programme. It may well be time for members to evaluate if they continue to want this service. If so, there is one way we may be able to rejuvenate interest. Reorganizing the programme into bulletin boards around particular interests or areas of activity might give people an incentive to use the programme more so than simply the promise of being able to "reach out and touch someone", for which most folks still seem to prefer the telephone. There are a couple of ideas for renewal already in place which will be circulated at this meeting. If the idea appears to hold some potential for members, it may be worth a look in Programmes Committee for some brainstorming.

ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT MODELS

As I write this report, we are in the midst of renegotiating the working agreement we have had for several years with the Ontario Federation of Students. At issue is whether or not the OFS will continue to provide fieldworking for us in that province at no cost. Members should be aware that both Ontario and British Columbia have, for a number of years, subsidized the rest of the country by paying for national fieldworking in their province. (B.C. even now is repaid less than they put in).

With the encouraging development of new components in Alberta and Manitoba, I think we can begin to discuss ways to ensure stronger provincial as well as national lobbies in these other provinces. If these provinces would develop plans to move to a substantial provincial levy in the next few years, we could look at Prairie and Atlantic regional offices to do provincial research and other work on a provincial level. Past Organisational Development committees have looked favourably upon this concept, and I think it's one we need to strive towards.

While small provinces like PEI and Saskatchewan will never be able to hire staff on their own, an Atlantic and Prairie office could allow them to pool resources with other provinces to see work done at their provincial level. This in no way binds the provinces together politically; rather, it takes steps towards strong, independent provincial lobbies. I believe this remains an idea worth examining.

GENERAL MEETING REFORM

The last issue I wish to address in this overview is general meetings, which continue to be a source of dread for many student types. There is no doubt that the number and gravity of issues to be addresses in one short week is partly responsible for that. However, I think it has also become true that our committee-based meeting structures foster clash rather than consensus and put the focus on political advantage rather than the issues. Members have expressed frustration after many a general meeting. In some committees, motions go in, are debated, sometimes divisively, then sent out with no changes, just a recommendation attached which plenary sometimes feels no need to heed. Calls for people to trust the committee simply leads to endless debates about structure.

I would suggest we look at a seven day general meeting with five days taken up by workshops. The first four would be working group sessions on, one per day, Campaigns, Membership Development, Policy Development, and Programme Development. People would participate collaboratively, bring forth ideas, developing consensus on ones to deal with, then breaking into small groups to develop implementation proposals for the plenary. Structural motions would go right to closing plenary; they practically do now anyway. Budget committee would continue in its present form, with representation from provinces, constituency groups, and the NGC, but would have more meeting time because it would run concurrently with the other sessions, thus alleviating the pressure of marathon sessions. The mornings and evenings would be open for constituency group meeting time and NGC meetings. The fifth day would be skills building workshops, and plenary would carry on as always on days six and seven.

These are some ideas to look at anyway. I believe they would put the emphasis on learning from, not competing with, each other. There have been other alternative models developed as well, including one called "Food For Thought", designed by staff members Sylvia Sioufi and Louise Carriere, which deserve consideration. Perhaps it is time to direct the National Executive to both solicit and develop alternatives for perusal by a revived general meeting development committee in November.

Those are the issues that are on my mind at term's end. Additional information about my activities can be found in the National Executive Report and at the end of this report.

Allow me to close with this thought. Now more than ever students need a national voice, and they count on us collectively and co-operatively to give that to them. Often this year I have seen people prepared to fragment that voice, to pull out, over issues that seem small compared to our overall goal -- to stop the assault on our educational system that robs thousands of our constituents each year of a future.

There is no speaking of the Federation in the third person; it is us, and so are all its successes and shortcomings. It is always a noble goal to rebuild and innovate, it is never noble to attempt to divide and fragment. We must not deny our students a national voice because student politicians couldn't

get it together. I ask of you to remember that at the end of the day we need each other to learn from, to work with, and to count on. It is far better to share power in a powerful organization than to each reign over our own impotent fiefdoms. Let us not forget this week that no issue eclipses the most important of all-- the survival of our collective voice.

In solidarity,

Kelly

OTHER ACTIVITIES TO REPORT

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Nov. 25 | Presented brief opposing Bill C-20 to Standing Committee on Finances |
| Nov. 26 | Participated in media event sponsored by Council of Ontario Universities |
| Nov 30-Dec 1 | Attended Action Canada Network Congress |
| Dec 3 | Addressed Canadian Labour Congress's Policy Alternatives Conference Presented brief to Beaudoin-Dobbie Committee on Constitutional Renewal |
| Dec 4, 5 | Campaigned at Mount Royal College |
| Dec 6 | Attended December 6th Day of Reflection service in Calgary |
| Jan 7,8 | Attended steering group meeting for Toronto constitutional conference on distinct society and the Charter of Rights |
| Jan 8 | Spoke to student council at UNB Fredericton |
| Jan 14 | Met with Carleton School of Social Work students on their attempts to get paid practica |
| Jan 16 | Attended Action Canada Steering Committee meeting |
| Jan 20 | Met with Martin Theriault from Canadian Centre Against Racism and Predjudice to discuss campus communication |
| Jan 22-24 | Attended Ontario Federation of Students General Meeting in Guelph |
| Jan 23 | Participated in forum on post-secondary education sponsored by McMaster S.U. in Hamilton |
| Jan 29 | Attended Prosperity Initiative Community Talk in Kingston, walked out in disgust Met with Doug Robertson, executive assistant to Robert deCotret |
| Jan 30-Feb 3 | National Executive Meeting in Ottawa |
| Feb 4 | Met with Ron Duhamel, Liberal Critic for Post-Secondary Education, about upcoming issues at the Liberal Policy Convention Attended ACN strategy session on upcoming constitutional conferences |
| Feb 5 | Travel CUTS Board of Directors meeting |
| Feb 6-9 | In Toronto for Constitutional Conference, addressed conference live on CBC Newsworld |

| | |
|-----------|---|
| Feb 12 | Spoke to University of Guelph CSA council |
| Feb 18 | Met with Thomas Hui, President of COPUS, on issues of concern to part-time students |
| Feb 19-21 | Attended Liberal Party Policy Convention in Hull |
| Feb 25 | In Ottawa for release of federal budget and media work that followed |
| Feb 27-29 | Attended National Graduate Council meeting in St. John's, Newfoundland |
| Feb 29 | Gave Federation workshop at Marine Institute's council retreat |
| Mar 2 | Met with Dan Sweeney in Montreal regarding formation of new council involving youth wings of five political parties |
| Mar 7,8 | Attended Action Canada Network strategy session on constitutional reform |
| Mar 6-11 | Campaigning at University of Toronto |
| Mar 14 | Attended New Brunswick Component meeting |
| Mar 31 | Went with ACN delegation meeting with Bob Rae on free trade, constitution, and national economy |
| Apr 2-4 | Attended Educated Opinions forum in Calgary |
| Apr 10 | Meeting with education lobby groups and senior bureaucrats from Sec.State, Prosperity Secretariat and Departments of Finance and External Affairs |
| | Put out first issue of "Tellexec", new executive biweekly newsletter |
| Apr 15 | Press conference on changes to administration of Canada Student Loans Program |
| Apr 22 | Met with OFS Chair and CFS-OFS Link to identify issues for working agreement renegotiation |
| Apr 23-25 | Attended Health Plan User Group meeting in Toronto |
| Apr 30 | Attended National Advisory Group on Student Assistance meeting |
| May 2 | Attended Prosperity Initiative "Regional Talks" in Moncton |
| May 4 | Travel CUTS Board Meeting |

| | |
|------------------|---|
| May 7 | Presentation to "Liberals In Motion" committee on Youth Issues in Ottawa, urging opposition to government's proposed CSLP changes. |
| May 8 | Addressed Prince Edward Island Federation of Labour convention in Charlottetown |
| May 12 | Media work around formation of Action Canada's constitutional monitoring committee |
| May 13 | OFS Working Agreement negotiations in Toronto |
| May 14 | Addressed McMaster GSA general meeting in Hamilton |
| May 20-31 | In Edmundston for CUTS Board, national executive, and Annual General meetings |