

Report of the National Chairperson General Meeting November 1992



At the back of this report, you will find a day-by day account of my activities since the last general meeting. In order to avoid repetition with the Report of the National Executive, I will not detail here as well all the political work I have been undertaking, or the directives I am responsible for. If there are specific projects people are interested in finding out about, please ask me about them.

What I would like to do in the textual part of this report is outline some of the areas we will need to take action on during this general meeting. While I will outline these further in my remarks during Opening Plenary, I would like to put something in writing for your perusal.

We are now the guardians of the longest-running, most successful, most influential, and most developed student movement in our nation's history. In order to pass our accomplishments on to future generations of students we must respond to certain challenges. We must re-establish a sense of ownership of the Federation among students, we must define responsibilities, we must refocus our energies, and we must recover the financial freedom to make our political priorities into realities.

Some of the ideas I put forward will be attitudinal, others will be more concrete. Please take the time to talk about them; with me, with others. Improve them or change them, but above all else, let's try something.

1. We must democratize the Federation in order to create a sense among students that the Federation truly does represent them. This will lead to stronger local support for our policies. Some ways to do this would be to create a formal role for local councils in setting political policy outside of general meetings, and for occasional cases, to implement in our by-laws provisions for a national referendum (one use for this tool might be to show a massive rejection of the CSLP changes). Other areas worthy of discussion would be to discuss means to make local councillors aware of their role to shape the organization and to make it happen on campuses (perhaps expanding current documents to include democratic structure and programmes). We should also look at expanding our Declaration of Student Rights to encompass the rights of students within student organization. After all, if we don't listen to students, who will ?

2. It is important for us each to define and live up to our responsibilities within the Federation. Please take time to look at how many directives in the executive report led to local action on your part. See how many research directives are leading to some concrete action and lobbying. When moving motions at this meeting, please bear in mind that a national structure works best when it provides focus to strong local work, not as a receptacle for work locals don't wish to do.

3. We can also redefine realistic expectations for the national structure, bearing in mind its effectiveness at co-ordination, national lobbying, and skills development, and ineffectiveness at doing local work. Development of campaigns which depend on clearly-defined local work (like an anti-CSLP changes referendum) can aid in this goal. Structures like the National Graduate Council and the Constituency Group Commission could, with a guaranteed budget and a chance to meet outside of general meetings, discuss ways to take on issues of specific concern.

If we set a few issues for the national executive to take on, and develop a system of local leadership on other initiatives, we can continue to meet the political will of the membership without overworking to the point of ineffectiveness our national structures.

4. Let's get to work on reforming general meetings. If we were to take a few months to solicit ideas from all parties within the Federation, and revived the old General Meeting Development Committee in May, we could try to gain consensus on a new structure which highlights consensus over conflict, and ideas over committee appointment battles.

I think it is also time to look at cutting back to one general meeting each year. Frankly, with all the essential lobby work to be done, I see little point in continuing to tie up the national office four months out of every year preparing for internal work. If we developed a proposal for skills-building conferences, then we could accomplish the same networking with less demand on precious resources.

5. Please allow me to say a few words about our financial situation. We cannot waste one more minute with the old way of having an entire committee fight over how much money actually exists -- and spending less time actually allocating money. Real democracy comes from reflecting political priorities well, not performing technical tasks badly. Let's trust our professionals to do their job, and let's all leave aside our political baggage and agendas and get down to tackling the issue of future financial security.

Also, we have now developed fee increase referenda materials should locals need them. The sooner we get the fee increase in, the quicker we can get our financial problems behind us.

6. There are two areas which demand our complete attention in the months ahead -- the proposed CSLP changes and the federal election. In fact, the two are somewhat connected.

The fact is, the CSLP changes may not be the end of student loans, but I can see it from here if they go through. We must leave this meeting with a clear strategy to hold a sustained campaign to reignite public alarm at these changes, focusing on one or two changes with the most immediate impact. If we can't stop the government, we may be able to delay them until we get a shot at them in an election.

We must make the defeat of the Tory government our #1 priority -- does anyone really doubt their intentions now? To do this we must open up a second front of attack on the Tory record. We've got our traditional turf of fairness, now let's take them on on theirs; economics. Let's use this chance to develop policy on tax reform, on infrastructure investment, on a resource strategy, and attack wasteful Tory expenditures to rob them of that old "deficit" argument.

And, please, make this happen locally. Get those election committees ready locally and let us know when you do. Please join the two locals who have donated to our Election Fund -- what good are ads if we don't run them? And let's discuss ways of ensuring we have a consistent, co-ordinated message this campaign -- we will have limited time and many voices competing to be heard.

If we tackle these new challenges with the courage to experiment and a determination to leave old battles behind, we can find renewal where past organizations have found failure. The difference is ours to make.

REPORT ON ACTIVITIES

- June 15 Spoke to Canadian Council for the Advancement of Education in Toronto
- June 16 Worked in Toronto office getting updates on programmes, interview with Globe and Mail on Ontario's Crown Agencies legislation.
- June 18 Met with Dawn Mitchell, new President of Canadian University Press.
- June 19 Participated in a press conference sponsored by the York Federation of Students opposing the foundation of the International Space University at York. Visited McMaster campus to find areas of high grad traffic for campaign.
- June 20 In Toronto office working on materials for McMaster GSA campaign.
- June 21 Poster run on McMaster campus
- June 23 Campaigning at McMaster GSA referendum (for the handful of grads still on campus). Met with Eme Onuoha and Simon Blackstone from McMaster SU.
- June 26 Travel CUTS Board Meeting
- June 27, 28 At summer council meeting of St. Thomas SU in search of early fee hike implementation. Thanks to Pat McDermott and Graeme Gibbs, trip was a success.
- June 29 Attended meeting of the new Coalition for Post-Secondary Education in Ottawa, planning preliminary coalition activities.
- June 30 Participated in press conference for launch of new coalition, launch received coverage across Canada.
- July 2 Met with Don Savage from Canadian Association of University Teachers and Claude Lajeunesse from Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada on joint efforts to maintain federal role in post-secondary education.
- July 3 Attended CFS-Saskatchewan meeting in Saskatoon; met with Wayne Ingjaldson and Tracey Sletto from the University of Saskatchewan SU, met with NGC Link Mike Loncke and new component chair Jason Yea.

July 9 Met with Chantal Gingras and Yannick Spierkel of University of Ottawa Federation of Students, did interview with "The New Magazine" on the Federation's role in constitutional talks.

July 23-26 In Charlottetown for CFS Atlantic conference; led workshops on Canada Student Loan changes, Election Readiness, Federation Awareness, Fee Increase, and played evil Tory MP in Blair's brilliant role-playing workshop.

July 27 Kicked off Nova Scotia membership development tour in Sydney, met with Mark Frison and Sulanji Siwale of the University College of Cape Breton SU.

July 28 In Antigonish, met with executive of St. Francis Xavier University SU.

July 29 In Halifax, met with Craig Fearon and Tracey Vibert of St. Mary's University SA; visited SUNS office.

August 1-4 In Toronto office preparing for National Executive meeting

August 5 Met with legal counsel on Harassment Committee issue.

August 6-9 National Executive meeting in Toronto.

August 10,11 Worked in Toronto office; met with representatives from Lawline legal aid service about adding legal advice options to Federation health plans.

August 13 Attended meeting of the Native Council of Canada's Constitutional Monitoring Committee, a collection of prominent grassroots organizations, to get briefed on First Ministers' talks and to prepare joint action.

August 17 Met with working group of NCC Monitoring Committee to prepare a press release

August 18 Attended 'First Ministers' Conference. Met with Rock Matte, Aboriginal NE Representative.

August 19 Attended First Ministers' Conference. Called media about release of "Compromising Access". Spent evening preparing for press conference. Mail-out to politicians and media.

August 20 Press conference on "Compromising Access". Media coverage was phenomenal.

August 24 Met with Prosperity Secretariat officials on the next step for consultation.

August 27 Met with Mac Harb, MP for Ottawa Centre on CSLP changes, summer unemployment, and Liberal policy on PSE funding.

August 28 In Saskatoon met with U of Saskatchewan GSA and SU executives, and component chair. Did media work with Cape Breton Post and Toronto Star.

Sept. 1 Met with Rob Allin of University of Regina SU. Met with new NE rep Joe Stroeder to discuss ways to put off referendum at the U of R.

Sept. 3 Met with Kim Newton and Sean Rapley of Carleton SA.

Sept. 4 Open-line radio shows with CIUT-McGill and CJOB-Winnipeg

Sept. 7-11 Quasi-break in New Brunswick, although I did meet one day with FEECUM executive and spent a day handing out Studentsaver cards

Sept 14-16 In Ottawa office preparing for National Executive meeting.

Sept. 17 Travel CUTS Board meeting.

Sept 18-21 National Executive meeting in Ottawa.

Oct. 2-4 In Charlottetown to attend Action Canada Network national assembly; spoke about Federation election plans. Spoke to UPEI SU council and met with PEI NE Rep.

Oct. 8 Toured GM site in Rockland with NEADS representatives to assess accessibility

Oct. 12 In Toronto office

Oct. 13 Morning in Toronto office, afternoon met with John O'Leary of Frontier College on literacy programs, evening in London campaigning in Western's OFS referendum.

Oct. 14 Spoke to Western SOGS executive, returned to Ottawa.

Oct. 18, 19 In Halifax. Spoke at a forum organized by the Dalhousie SU, participated in a Federation Awareness Day at King's.

Oct. 22-26 In St. John's. Spoke to Memorial CSU Council, attended and gave workshop at NLFS meeting, went to reception at Marine Institute, gave interview on CSLP to the Memorial "Muse", met with new provincial chair Craig Adams.

Oct. 28 Attended release of Prosperity Initiative Final Report at Press Gallery in Ottawa.

Nov. 6 Working in Toronto office

Nov. 10 Met with Maurizio Bevilacqua, Liberal Critic for youth employment

Nov. 11 Met with OFS reps re working agreement

Nov. 13-15 Attended Coalition for Post-Secondary Education meeting; facilitated political panel

Nov. 15-16 Attended national Francophone Student Meeting in Ottawa.

