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Canadian Union of Students

SOCIAL UNIONISM AND UNIONS

John Cleveland

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Resolution EA-5 called upon the president of CUS to establish working relations with various unions in order to gain support for universal accessibility. Little or nothing was done at the local, provincial or national levels about it.

Why? Students, coming mostly from business and middle-class backgrounds find it difficult to communicate with working people and understand the demands of labour unions. After all, they are made up of adults just like the administration and are separated by the "generation gap". Self-styled "progressives" see unions as reactionary because they are concerned with such unidealistic things as the salaries and general social working conditions of mainly blue-collar and non-professional (except teachers and professors) white-collar workers, i.e. non-university graduates. This does not prevent us from applying a double standard to our own analogous programs - universal accessibility, quality of educational (intellectual working) environment, democratisation of decision-making (worker's control).

UGEQ has rejected this naive view of social change and has opted to co-operate as fully as possible with labour unions in all sectors of the economy - including teachers, professors and secondary school students.

The reason is obvious. CUS exists - like any other union - because most institutions in Canadian society are not operated democratically. It was formed with the purpose of transforming the undemocratic nature of our educational institutions and more broadly of society in the long range; in the short range, we, as a union, have sought to gain more freedom for students (intellectual workers) from the arbitrary control of the administration and department heads (management) and to improve both by unilateral direct action (student council and club initiated activities, demonstrations and pressure for change in "management" policy), the environment students live and work in.

If universities and other schools are internally democratised as a result of student and teacher union activities (currently uncoordinated in any significant way), the chances are the experience of a liberating cooperative atmosphere of intellectual work will rub off on the other institutions in society, which after all will be populated by graduates from these schools. Similarly, democratisation of industrial factories and offices will facilitate the attainment of an electorate sympathetic toward our demands. At a bare minimum, it is in our self interest as an organization to ally ourselves with the democratising forces in society, i.e. the unions.

More basic than this is the concept of the students' social responsibility as an intellectual worker. He must apply the logic of his own analysis of the educational system to the rest of society (and vice-versa). He cannot pretend that the school is an isolated ivory tower unconditioned by the economic, social and moral realities of the surrounding community. One of the main vehicles for joint action on social issues outside the school is obviously other organizations like ourselves containing people who face problems we are attacking directly, from the receiving end.

This can be seen clearly in the absence of universal accessibility. The competitive materialistic ethic of North American society militates against anything but survival of the fittest (those best prepared to function according to the prevailing social values due to family background and connections). The kind of cooperative dialogue which CUS idealizes as the goal of education is impossible to achieve in a society in which the values assimilated by the parents and the student alike are generally antithetical to open dialogue and cooperation. The unequal distribution of income - which would be combatted if corporations were run more democratically - combines with the tuition fee (justified by the same privatistic and individualistic puritan ethic ideology generated in Canadian society) to keep academically qualified people out of school.

The cycle of poverty - material and psychological - which is a social reality in Canada cannot be combatted by unilateral action of 130,000 students. We must cooperate with other voluntary organizations, particularly unions, which seek to attack the same problems. If we or they are not relevant or radical enough it is our duty to radicalise one another by inter-acting critically and continuously.

Further, if we think the intellectual work of student lawyers, doctors, teachers, technicians and scientists can best be carried out in a liberating democratic environment, then what UGEQ calls "socialization des professions", the attainment of a similar practical working environment after school must equally be our goal. Hence CUS must develop programs calling for similar changes in the structure of society; perhaps one practical way of evolving such recommendations for change would be to hold a series of seminars and other programs for student engineers, etc. connected with their future work life. This would oblige them to analyse what their education was preparing them for and how.

It would be hypocritical for us to petition the university administrations to transfer more of the decision-making responsibility in the classroom and board rooms to members of our unions - teachers and students - and to deny workers in our own office the right to unionize and make the same demands on us. Thus we must encourage the formation of unions within student and teacher organizations and the school administration itself.

The same argument applies to the way in which we get involved in international educational and social questions. We must act through a multilateral democratic international union so as to be able to draw on the expanse of other student unions and engage in cooperative efforts to change conditions in all countries of the world.

The best way of developing a productive working relationship which would at the same time not compromise our independent policy aims would be to set up informal inter-union councils - composed of representatives from trade, professorial, teacher and high school student unions - at both the local and national levels. Monthly meetings could be held to exchange information and ideas and plan direct strategy on issues of particular common concern. At the Université de Montréal, the CNTU, QFL, OCC and UGEQ currently pressured the Union nationale government for changes in the board of governors and senate membership - to include representatives from student, faculty and employees. This followed support of key industrial strikes engaged in by the CNTU and QFL members at La Grenade, Dominion-Ayers, etc. by UGEQ.

There are other programs that are educational as well as direct action in nature which could be facilitated by the existence of inter-union councils. These would include:

- a. possibilities of joint study of academic freedom as it applies to
 - (1) students
 - (2) faculty
 - (3) teaching and research assistants
 - (4) post-secondary institutions as a whole -with CAUT.

A draft document which specifies certain legal rights of professors with regard to tenure and disciplining processes has already been drawn up by the CAUT and sent to CUS for commentary. No. (4) is probably covered by the study with the AUCC mentioned in a separate working paper by Doug Ward. The whole question of the legal rights of students with respect to educational institutions and what student unions can do to guarantee due process, etc. (should we set up our own disciplinary courts or push for formal mechanisms for the whole institution according to certain principles, etc.) has not been investigated.

- b. an exploration of the relevance and efficacy of teacher education programs in conjunction with the Canada Teacher's Federation. Such a program might be connected with on-campus activities involving teachers in training enabling them to analyse their own education and discuss with the union its drawbacks as a preparation for actual teaching conditions. Other questions which might be explored with the CTF would be the possible results of the development of teaching machines and programmed learning or the application of the concept of learning by discovery on the role of the teacher in the classroom, the lack of democracy in the classroom and in the decision-making structures of the public schools, the ways in which teachers can prepare students for post-secondary learning, etc.
- c. Organize high school students into unions with at least the same degree of autonomy and freedom as post-secondary student unions seek for themselves, i.e. uncensored newspapers, complete control of budgeting, the right to make any legislation on any subject, the right to take direct action including student strikes without penalty, freedom to form any association and to meet openly, the right to participate in the decision-making within the classroom and in the school as a whole, etc. The alternate way of working with high school students is to invite them to join CUS and our provincial associations; however, this is probably not practical as, if successful, the majority of our membership would be high school students, something which might be difficult to make our own students accept. At any rate, something must be done in the interim period. (See implementation chart for resolution EA-4 on universal accessibility)
- d. Push with labor unions for increased public retraining facilities with adequate salary during the training period. Joint studies and action programs could be set up towards the goal of democratisation of places of work, - school, office and factory.

Summary of Recommendations and Resolutions

1. An inter-union council.

Whereas the close cooperation between CNTU, QFL (CLC) and UGEQ in confronting the Quebec government on the Université de Montréal democratising bill demonstrates concretely the real value of close contact with and joint action by student and labor unions,
Whereas this solidarity was made possible by previously combined programs between labor and student unions outside the academic community,
Whereas the injustices faced by the workers, La Grenade Shoe Factory and Dominion-Ayer were exposed by the combined action of UGEQ and Quebec's labor unions resulting in an amelioration of their working conditions,
Whereas universal accessibility will never be a reality until changes in the whole society accompany reforms of the educational system itself,

Be it therefore resolved:

- a. that local student unions explore ways and means of setting up joint and complementary education action programs with local labor unions.
- b. that inter-union councils be set up at local and national levels including representatives from high school, teacher, professorial, and labor unions as has been done nationally by UGEQ. Specifically, the national president should contact officials in the CLC, CNTU, CAUT, CTF and the National Farmers' Union and make definite proposals for an inter-union council. Inasmuch as there is no national high school organization, any contacts with high school student unions will probably have to be confined to the local level.
- c. that local student unions, provincial associations and the national councils judge each situation on its merits and be prepared to express their solidarity with the just demands of labor unions in words and sympathetic actions (lobbying, sympathy demonstrations, fact-finding public debates or seminars, etc.).
- d. that special efforts be made to involve young workers, especially recent drop-outs, in programs conducted by CUS and local student unions (e.g. drop-out seminars, community action projects, etc.)
- e. that specific effort be made to develop the following minimum program through the inter-union councils:
 - (i) a joint study of academic freedom as applies to
 - students
 - faculty
 - teaching assistants and research assistants
 - post-secondary institutions as a wholewith the CAUT.
 - (ii) exploration of the relevance and efficacy of teacher education with the CTF.
 - (iii) organize high school students into unions with at least the same degree of autonomy and freedom as post-secondary student unions seek.
 - (iv) push with labor unions for increased public retraining facilities with adequate salary during the training period and for democratisation of places of work - school, office and factory.
- f. that a major and joint seminar on the different approaches to organizing for social change and institutional reform in our respective sectors be organized nationally this spring with other members of an inter-union council.

g. that the national council make a report to the next CUS Congress on the implementation of this resolution and make recommendations on how cooperation with labor unions can best be integrated with our programs and strategy.

2. Whereas CUS believes in the right of workers - intellectual or manual - ~~to form~~ association to represent their interests and act on their behalf as students have already done,
Whereas the Canadian Union of Students firmly believes in democratising all aspects of the academic community,
Whereas CUS feels unionization of post-secondary institutions and student union employees would be an important step in this direction,

Be it therefore resolved:

- a. that all local student unions be asked to express their willingness to voluntarily recognize the formation of a union local should their employees wish to affiliate.
- b. that all local student unions be asked to help to organize the employees working in other parts of the academic community and be prepared to demonstrate solidarity with their reasonable demands at contract time and back them up throughout the year.
- c. that the principal of the union shop be one of the goals of any contract which student unions press for.
- d. that student unions endeavour to purchase union made goods and services as much as possible, displaying the union label.

3. Whereas CUS recognizes the value of workers,- intellectual or manual - forming unions to represent them,
Whereas CUS feels that it would be hypocritical to fight for the aims of its members as a union and deny the same right of representation and democratic participation and self-government to its own staff,

Be it therefore resolved:

- a. this Congress approves the recognition by CUS of the union formed by the support staff in the Ottawa Secretariat.
- b. that this Congress recommends that the national council voluntarily recognize the formation of a union by the Associate Secretaries to protect their rights and represent them.
- c. that this Congress establishes the principle that it be one of our goals that all CUS staff be unionized if they so desire.

4. Whereas the working environment of the student in Canada is conditioned by international realities,
Whereas we have a social responsibility to push for the same aims internationally that we see within Canada,
Whereas participation in multi-lateral international student organizations will strengthen our activities within Canada by exposing us to new ideas, information and experiences of other unions in other countries,
Whereas bilateral programs with specific countries are both prejudicial and a poor substitute for multi-lateral action although the two are not mutually exclusive,

Be it therefore resolved:

- a. that CUS continue to seek associate status within the International Student Conference and the International Union of Students.

- b. that CUS work to bring more cooperation between the individual members of the two Unions toward the end of eventual world student unity.
- c. that CUS demand that the International Student Conference completely break its connections with the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States and open up their books for inspection.
- d. that CUS continue to push for the establishment of education departments in the IUS and ISC in addition to those already established servicing broader student union activities.
- e. that CUS carry on active local international programs engaging in bilateral arrangements when necessary, e.g. contact with the All-China Students' Federation (if it still exists), scholarships for Zimbabwe students, spokesmen from Vietnam to speak on local campuses, etc.