

The Agitator

A Bulletin for the Student Left

December 13 2008 ★ no.21

University of Ottawa undergrads say

YES TO CFS

On November 20, some 30,000 undergrads at the University of Ottawa joined the Canadian Federation of Students. After a week-long campaign, the result was narrow but decisive - 52 to 48 percent in favour of federating. The "Yes" side was able to overcome a range of misinformation and slander from the "No" side. It also countered those who argued that SFUO, the student union, was functioning quite successfully in defending student interests without being CFS members.

This argument is based on the success of the UOttawa student movement in recent years. On February 7 2007 and on November 5 2008, SFUO brought thousands of students on to the streets to oppose Premier McGuinty's policy of tuition fee

increases. Last spring, UOttawa students carried out a magnificent 500-strong, two-hour occupation of the administration building, an action that proved critical in defeating a draconian "Student Code of Conduct" introduced by the administration.

It would seem, from this point of view, that SFUO doesn't need CFS. But the truth is, Feb.7 and Nov.5 were CFS-led campaigns and SFUO cooperated closely with Carleton's CFS-affiliated unions, and UOttawa's CFS-affiliated grad students. More importantly, the SFUO student leaders and activists who made these campaigns a success, are the very students who have pushed for CFS membership. This is not a coincidence. Students who recognize the need to build large campaigns

around basic issues like tuition fees and student rights will find an ally in the CFS and its members unions who recognize the importance of grassroots organizing.

And not only will CFS membership benefit UOttawa undergrads, but their inclusion in CFS will bring new experience and ideas that will benefit CFS as a whole. This is precisely why we need a united student movement.

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Stop Canada's war in Afghanistan
Fight racism and Islamophobia
Resist military recruitment on campus

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FEBRUARY 1, 2009

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YORK STRIKE IN SECOND MONTH

The strike at York is entering its second month. CUPE 3903, representing TAs and contract faculty, is fighting for better wages, job security and a two-year contract.

The outcome of the strike will have an important affect on current and future struggles in the student movement, as well as unions on the campuses.

For example, Carleton TAs are being pushed towards a strike situation because the university wants to back “Tuition Increase Protection”, part of the contract which effectively freezes tuition to prevent pay cuts. Only Carleton and York TAs have this in their contracts, which highlights the importance of the two disputes.

Given the long-term underfunding of education and now an economic crisis, more pressures will compel already unfriendly university administrations to be more aggressive in union negotiations and with tuition fee increases. This is the key argument that student activists need to be carrying - that student and worker struggles in the same

struggle, that students have a direct interest in the outcome of such a dispute.

To facilitate this, The Agitator has launched a CUPE 3903 solidarity petition. You can download copies as well as the Agitator’s York strike bulletin at socialist.ca/agitator. Use the petition as an opportunity to raise the issues and make the arguments. Fax the signed petitions to CUPE 3903 to show your support, even if you’re too far away to walk the picket lines. Send messages of solidarity to: 3903hq@gmail.com

DEFEND WOMEN’S RIGHTS

Across Canada, anti-choice groups have been pushing for student union funding in order to sustain their campaigns. Recently at UVic, such a club was denied club funding by the UVSS Clubs Council. The group in question, “Youth Protecting Youth”, like other anti-choice groups have been trying to frame this debate around freedom of speech. What they want to avoid is a debate about their desire to rollback women’s rights. A similar case at UBC-Okanagan went to court. The BC Supreme Court ruled this past fall that student union had the right to deny an anti-choice group funding. But the court campaign still cost the student union \$45,000.

At the University of Calgary, another anti-choice group used pictures in a disgusting attempt to compare abortion to the Holocaust. The administration told the group that the pictures had to face inward but the group, “Campus Pro-Life” is now claiming this is an attack on “freedom of speech”. UBC, Carleton, Lakehead, York and many other universities have been facing the same anti-choice tactics. Where student unions have stood up for the rights of women, there has been a backlash, particularly in the mainstream press. The press frames the issue as a denial of rights instead of what it’s really about: the rights of women and the rights of student unions to exercise democracy.

The Conservative Party convention in November demonstrated that they still want to push Bill C-484. C-484 was ditched by Harper shortly before the election because of public opposition. The bill was a crass attempt at overturning abortion rights by describing “unborn victims of crime” as people. The struggles on the campuses are a key battleground in this broader struggle to defend women’s rights. We should never take for granted the rights we have in our society. We have to continue to defend these rights and make them a reality - and we also have to expand and deepen these rights.



For a moment, it looked as though we were about to rid ourselves of the hated Stephen Harper. A special Socialist Worker bulletin on the political crisis, the coalition and what’s next for the movement to dump Harper is available at: socialist.ca



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