

X-Press hits Quebec

This humble X-Press staff member has just returned from one of the most interesting weeks of his short life. I attended the 55th annual National conference of the Canadian University Press (known everywhere simply as CUP). I met people of various backgrounds and lifestyles and I learned a ton about student newspapers and how they are "supported" to operate.

First of all, I should explain how a National CUP conference is set up and what it achieves. In the process of doing this I will also explain what CUP does. The national conference is held in a different location every year. Usually rotating through CUP's four regions Atlantic (ARCUP), Quebec (CUPBEC), Ontario (ORCUP), and the west (WRCUP). This year's conference was held at the Delta Hotel in downtown Valleyfield, Quebec. By the way, downtown Valleyfield resembles downtown Summerside in many ways except that it happens to be situated about 45 minutes away from Canada's second largest city, Montreal.

The conference itself is meant to fulfil two purposes: decision making and learning (these two things weren't always separate either). CUP is organized with a very direct form of decision making. At each national conference three large meetings, or planaria, are held where discussions, debates and votes take place involving each of CUP's 42 member papers. Committees formed earlier in the week to work on the budget, hiring, advertising, etc. give

presentations at these plenaries and direct member papers vote on which way CUP should be moving. Each member paper has only one vote, no matter how many delegates they send to the conference.

The learning component usually ends up taking a back seat to this decision making process because it is not deemed as important and because the decision making process just takes too damn long. There were however many informative seminars and guest speakers on such important issues as the rise of Nazism in Canada, the environment, and sexual discrimination. There were also several caucuses organized for several minority groups. The racial Equality caucus, the Women's caucus, and the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual caucus. Each of these three caucuses had their own resource rooms as well where delegates could drop by and get pamphlets and talk to members of these caucuses.

Being the only delegate from the X-Press at the conference I was kept quite busy all week, averaging about 20 hours of work a day. One of the issues which was brought up in my mind is the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual communities. Coming from a place as conservative as Prince Edward Island these groups aren't very vocal so we almost forget they exist. Being a straight, white male was something I never put a lot of thought into and then to go to a conference such as this where the three caucuses organized excluded me was surprising. My only hope is

that through experience I will be much more responsive to the special needs and troubles faced by members of these groups.

Beyond becoming more enlightened on several social issues I also learned things about the structure of other student newspapers across the country. Most other University newspapers have a very different relationship with their student unions and student bodies. Many of these papers have been forced to become autonomous from their student unions because the student unions tried to control what went in the paper. Here at U.P.E.I. the X-Press and the Student Union are hopelessly intertwined. The paper's paid staff is in fact entirely approved by the student union, including the editor (by the way, this violates CUP membership bylaws, but that's another story). The X-Press in many ways has simply become a newsletter sent out by the student union and not an independent body. This is in no way the fault of the editor, the writers, or student union, it is simply the way things have always been done. Hopefully with some small adjustments to the constitution of the X-Press these problems can be solved.

While not all student newspapers are members of CUP I can now see why it is beneficial for the X-Press to be a member of this organization. CUP provides us with a news exchange through which we receive articles from other papers across Canada, and we receive more national advertising due to Campus Plus, a company established by CUP, and we have a body to ensure our paper meets certain standards. Besides, any organization that has a conference where you can get free beer every night of the week has to be of some value. ●

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