

Report on FNBFA Activities at CAUT Council  
24-28 November, 2010

Lobby day Meetings Nov. 25, 2010

I wish to enter this report on the activities of the Federation at the recent CAUT Council. This report centres on two activities in particular: A) our lobbying activities with federal MPs, and B) the “Big Four” meeting of provincial federations.

**A. Lobby Day**

Meeting 1: Lobbying Breakfast with New Brunswick Liberal Caucus

Present: Brian Murphy, Jean-Claude D’Amours, Dennis Desroches, Richard Hudson, Roger Ouellette, Robin Vose, Gilles Allain

Good discussion was had about the “hollowing out” of universities that is occurring. We asked specifically to see some kind of support from politicians that reflect faculty concerns. Of course, everyone wants to see PSE to be more accessible. But what will this accessibility be *to* if operations funding does not improve? With the continued underfunding of universities and government intervention in collective bargaining, it is becoming clear that governments want universities to be a reflection of themselves. We made a very strong case for the fact that governments should not desire this kind of relationship to universities, because it stifles and kills the sort of creativity that society requires if it is going to face effectively the challenges with which it is confronted. There was agreement from the two New Brunswick Liberal Caucus members that universities need to have their autonomy respected, that university education needs to be supported, and that this means more than simply providing funding for accessibility. Further discussion took place around the following topics: the decline in the post-secondary age group in the province and Maritimes, underfunding of core operations and research while capital projects abound, and the reduction in programmes that is starting to occur. This is particularly problematic at Moncton, since reducing programs there reduces access to New Brunswick’s only French-language institution, and forces students to leave the province. We also discussed the desirability, for the purposes of sustaining and raising enrolment, of a federally-run student mobility programme that could also foster Canadian unity, a notion that did get the MPs’s interest. The problem of accessibility to the Université de Moncton for Quebec students was also raised, as these students are not eligible for Quebec loan-bursary programs if they study outside Quebec in a field that is offered at a Quebec university.

Concrete steps are to be taken. There will be structured communication between the FNBFA and Federal MPs on issues of mutual concern, with the idea that it may be possible to circulate joint press releases. We will then develop further actions. It will be important for the FNBFA to sustain this relationship. There is strong willingness here to

work with the FNBFA on PSE issues, but time commitments make it necessary that the FNBFA at the very least meet the MPs halfway in establishing a more productive relationship.

Meeting 2. Yvon Godin, NDP MP

Also Present: Dennis Desroches, Gilles Allain

This was also a very energetic and productive meeting. The MP was very sympathetic to our concerns about PSE, and was very interested to hear the effects of conciliation boards on the collective bargaining process, given his own background in labour relations as a union negotiator. He immediately understood the seasonal nature of university labour, and recognized the degree to which conciliation boards could negate any leverage for fair collective bargaining that faculty associations have. He encouraged us to keep his office in the loop when issues of PSE arise. He also generously offered to help facilitate a meeting with the NDP's education critic.

Conclusion

We believe there is the possibility for positive action arising out of these meetings with federal MPs. The FNBFA should continue to foster relations at the federal level, and work there, as it does at the provincial level, to effect positive change to the province's PSE system.

### **B) The "Big Four" Meeting, 25 November 2010**

This somewhat portentous designation refers to the four provincial federations that are able to resource and sustain functioning offices and executive personnel. The members include the Confederation of University Faculty Associations, British Columbia (CUFA, BC), the Confederation of Alberta Faculty Associations (CAFA), the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA), and the Federation of New Brunswick Faculty Associations (FNBFA).

This was, indeed, something of an historic meeting for all of these (con)federations. It represented a new level of coordination and communication across the country on issues that tend to surface at the provincial level. What from my perspective unifies the four provincial bodies is a concern to think through the question of what a university is, and to mobilize action based not only on the defense of salaries and working conditions, which has, after all, been the traditional purview of CAUT and local associations, but also on the need to rethink what a university is in the contemporary social, political, economic, and technological environment. These broader ideological and even philosophical issues cannot be divorced from consideration of how we defend universities today, and the manner in which they are being attacked and hollowed out by various social and political agendas.

It was decided that the four provincial bodies will look to formalize their relations through the routine exchange of information, and possible collaboration on conferences. OCUFA, for example, will be hosting a conference called *The Race to Globalize Higher Education* on January 21-22, 2011, which I will be attending. Similar kinds of conferences will be developed, and the FNBFA, which has been discussing the development of a Symposium on PSE, will look to partner with the other provincial bodies.

Along with increased communication among the “Big Four” will also come the increased presence of these bodies at others’ board meetings. OCUFA would have been present at our Nov. 6 board meeting had not the weather intervened, and I attended the OCUFA board meeting in October. Had not concern over our finances intervened, we would also have been present at CAFA’s meeting in November. On this particular issue, it was agreed in principle that the bigger organizations would try to provide financial assistance to the FNBFA to attend meetings. This is very welcome news, and reflects the commitment of the three other provincial bodies not to permit our smaller resources to keep us from participating in the crucial conversation that is beginning to develop.

The FNBFA is now on a path toward greater solidarity with its provincial counterparts, and is working to make itself a part of the larger conversations that are happening around the question of PSE. The excitement at forging a new and deeper relationship among the four provincial bodies was palpable at our meeting, and I believe reflects something of the necessity for greater information exchange, greater presence, and indeed greater understanding among them.

I conclude by adding that the Federation hosted lunch for the New Brunswick member associations. Members from Mount Allison, Université de Moncton, and St. Thomas University were in attendance. Unfortunately, the lunch conflicted with the Women’s Lunch which was attended by both UNB delegates. This is a conflict that we will have resolved for the next Council in May.