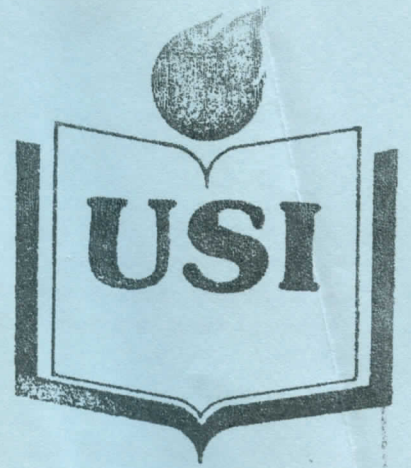


Aontas na Mac léinn  
in Éirinn

CONGRESS 1987



TUAIRISC  
Ó NA  
hOIFIGIGH

CARD  
VOTING



23rd - 26th April  
Northern Counties Hotel  
Portrush

Union of Students in Ireland

16 North Great Georges Street · Dublin 1  
Telephone 786366 · Telex 25289

## INTRODUCTION

This report does not aim to give a detailed list of all that has taken place since last Congress. It aims to look at the major developments of the past year, pinpointing our strengths and our weaknesses, to analyse the years work making recommendations for future development.

### A greater unity

The consensus reached on this year's Programme of Work and Plan of Action showed a unanimous endorsement of USI's belief that in order to defend and promote the rights of students we must actively campaign on the main issues affecting us. Our plans prioritised the campaign for increased investment in further and higher education and are discussed in greater detail in Section 2 of this report. This year there was also a much greater consensus on the campaigning strategy which USI must use in order to further our demands. It is clear therefore that a greater unity of purpose has been reached within USI.

### The Political Context

Our education campaign, and the strategy used in that campaign must always be seen in context, not in isolation from the political and economic situation in Ireland today. The last year has seen the British government continue with their all-sided attack on the education system cutting college budgets and student financial support; the Irish government refuse to make the necessary increased investment in higher education despite our growing young population, college budgets are cut and fees rise once again. Educational opportunities are denied to young people and others leaving only the options of unemployment or emigration for all too many. The British government continue to cut back on public expenditure while introducing tax cuts and continuing to spend on defence. The Irish government cut health, social welfare and education choosing not to bring about the necessary reforms in taxation - the burden on the PAYE sector increases while many of those in the wealthier sections of our community continue to escape the tax net.

The British and Irish governments are intent on making the weakest sections of our community pay for the economic crisis while protecting the interests of big, private business. They are prepared to stand by as large profits of multinationals continue to leave the country.

The Fianna Fail Manifesto - with its emphasis on growth - gave hope to many but their recent budget served only to expose their election rhetoric.

Women continue to be underpaid and continue to be forced into part-time work as well as facing increasing attacks on the right to fertility control.

### The Development of our Campaigning Strategy

It is in this context that we have organised our education campaign this year. We have put our demands for increased investment in education alongside demands for an end to unemployment, emigration, public sector cuts, and for taxation reform. We have broadened our base of support outside of the student movement. We have increased awareness on the need for an adequately funded education system and have put

forceful arguments to the public through better use of the media. We have organised students in defence of those arguments by using a wide range of tactics.

### The Development of our Programme of Work

While the education campaign is and must always be the priority for USI we have continued to develop in other areas of work. The defence of women students has a central role in our work and welfare issues have become an integral part of our POW. We have established the need, and indeed set the guidelines, for greater development of our work on academic affairs, ensuring that class reps play a role. We have been involved in a range of national issues and must continue to promote discussion on the national question.

We have tackled areas of SU work which are relatively new to Head Office such as Entertainment and Sport and have developed our work on student services.

We have further developed our training programme and must continue to do so, ensuring that class reps in particular are given the necessary training to carry out their role. The development of class reps, particularly in larger colleges, must continue to be seen as a priority in terms of union organisation and women students must be encouraged to run for class rep.

Finally, this year's Programme of Work was also based firmly on the mandates from last Congress which the officers acted fully upon almost without exception.

### Local Development

This year has again seen the strengthening of many local COs as evidenced by their increased ability to defend their members from local attacks. Many more COs drew up Programme of Work and participation at USI Training Events was largely good but requires improvement. Many COs did not organise Class Rep. Seminars and this must be prioritised next year. The leadership must be broadened in the interests of democracy and efficiency. Participation at National Council, conferences and other meetings should extend beyond Presidents or Executive members and class reps in particular should be brought into mainstream USI activity.

### Our Strengthened Position

This year has seen us achieve a greater unity, considerably increase our membership and further develop our campaigning strategy. Once again, more students than before have taken part in our campaigns. Education has been debated all round the country and our message is getting across stronger and clearer.

### The year ahead

Our campaigning strategy must continue to develop and every CO must draw up a Programme of Work on local and national issues. We must develop our organisation and our work to mount a serious challenge to the education policies of both the Irish and British governments. We must remember that the tactic of mass mobilisation, which proved so successful this year, is an essential one. Through development of the class rep. system more and more students must be involved in deciding upon carrying out our campaigns. The women's rights campaign must continue to develop as an integral part of our work and welfare issues must be taken up on a more local and action-oriented basis.

Most importantly of all, we must be honest with students when putting forward the Programme of Work and campaign strategy - while we must use a wide range of tactics it is only through the organisation of mass, broadly supported actions that we can really change government policy.

## 1. UNION ORGANISATION AND DEVELOPMENT

### 1.1 The Programme of Work

This year's USI Programme of Work set out clearly and concisely the direction that our union had to take in our main areas of work and roughly outlined the campaigning strategy for the Finance for Education Campaign. The programme was adopted unanimously by October National Council and the officers feel that this indicates two things - firstly, that within the student movement we have reached a much greater level of consensus not just on the general direction that our work must take but also on the specific steps we must take to follow that direction; and secondly, that discussion with COs on the Draft P.O.W., which was most productive this year, must continue on an annual basis in order to ensure that the Programme meets the needs of our membership. USI officers welcomed the opportunity which many COs gave to debate the P.O.W. at U.G.M. level but feel that this debate must take place in all colleges, not just a few, and that the programme should not just be debated at the beginning of the year but at later stages also.

The officers feel that this Report should deal openly with the progress of the P.O.W. throughout the year and therefore each section of this report will deal separately with the relevant parts of the Programme (e.g. Finance for Education Campaign and Academic Affairs under Section 2 Education etc.,).

### 1.2 Membership/Participation

Continuing improvement in the number of students participating in USI structures and work can be related to two things in particular:

- The broadening of the work of USI to take up a wider range of the issues affecting students, and
- The increased level of participation at local SU level through the development of effective class rep. systems.

In order for participation to further increase the colleges who have serious problems with student involvement must develop their class rep. systems and USI will continue to provide the necessary class rep. training.

Women's participation in student unions at both local and national level still appears to be on the increase; this is clearly a direct result of the development of our work on women's issues. However, much room for improvement still exists and can be aided by bringing women's rights into the mainstream of union activity.

Participation in terms of USI membership has also increased throughout the year. However, a letter was received from St. Catherine's College of Home Economics SU in December informing us that students had voted at a U.G.M. to disaffiliate from USI. The officers condemn the manner in which this decision was taken - no notice was given of the meeting thus denying students the right to an open and honest debate on USI membership.



A disaffiliation attempt initiated by sabbatical officers in UCG SU was defeated in November. A group of UCG students organised to inform students fully on USI thus creating a high level of debate and ensuring that UCG SU remained in USI. The pro-USI students were able to expose deliberate misrepresentation of USI and to distribute information about USI which had not previously been given to UCG students. The victory therefore, was not simply a national one for USI but a victory for the local students union and for student democracy.

Continuing on a positive note another further education SU was accepted into membership this year and we welcome the affiliation of students from Newtownabbey Tech. Students from the recently established CoACT SU (1,600 students) in Limerick voted 3 to 1 to apply for USI membership in March. This month St. Patricks College Maynooth SU voted 2 to 1 to re-affiliate to USI in a referendum. The campaign to re-affiliate was led by a group of students who organised a number of open discussions and debates on the issue. The result was a clear sign that when students are given the opportunity to hear the full facts about USI and are provided with a forum for discussion about the national union they will choose to join. Students and SU officers at Maynooth clearly expressed dissatisfaction at the blatant misrepresentation of USI before last year's referendum when the union disaffiliated. We congratulate those who worked so successfully for re-affiliation this year and give Maynooth's 2,100 students a warm welcome back to USI.

The officers wish to express their satisfaction with the increase in membership and feel that it is not only a re-affirmation of USI's aim to defend and promote the rights of students by actively campaigning on the main issues which affect us i.e. lack of finance for education; it is also an endorsement of the work which has been done this year and the subsequent strengthening of USI's position.

### 1.3 Training/Conferences

Over the last few years USI has rapidly developed its training programme for SU officers, class reps and activists. this year we held the Union Organisation Seminar, Welfare Conference, 2 Women's Issues Training Conferences (one open, one closed), Education Conference, F.E. Regional Training Event and many class rep. seminars. Accounts of some of the above events are included under the relevant sections of this report, but a few points must be made here about the main training events.

**Union Organisation Seminar:** Held at the beginning of the year, the seminar was fairly successful and feed-back seemed positive on the whole. Many of the workshops were on a sector basis which worked well and must be done next year also. The event covered all the main areas of USI's work, direct information on education structures and using the media and a full day was spent on campaigning strategy. However, attendance could have been a lot better - many colleges were completely unrepresented. Also, the officers feel that the event can be further developed to meet the more specialised needs of different SU officers and sectors through workshops. Also, we recommend that the Semir is held in July, for full-time officers and others who are around in the summer, and again in September/October for part-time officers and others.

**F.E. Regional Training Event:** This took place in the first part of this term and was run jointly by the NI Regional Officer, the National Union of Students U.K. and U.S.I. It was felt to be useful and informative but must take place earlier next year.

**Class Rep Seminars:** this year saw a vast improvement in the amount of COs holding Training Seminars for Class Reps. this year 12 colleges hosted a Seminar yet this still only represents 25% approximately of all COs. Practically, some colleges had all the preparation work done when the officers arrived but others had not done any groundwork. Furthermore it is not enough just to have a training event for class reps and leaving it at that: the follow-up work is most important in order to attain a high standard of democracy at all levels of the local CO structure.

#### 1.4 Local S.U. Development

USI has a clear role in aiding the development of local student unions. In the main this is done through running class rep. seminars, other training events, information, officers giving direct help or support in colleges, sector work and the giving of general advice. Last Congress passed a motion on organisation and development in the University Sector which pin-pointed a number of things to surmount organisational problems in large colleges, and others; class rep. manuals and seminars; incoming/outgoing officers conferences (including info. on college committees); increases in capitation; increase in number of sabbatical officers/establishment of a sabbatical post; direct SU employment of staff; and, the gaining of fuller control over SU funds.

A number of SUs clearly acted on these recommendations this year but many more did not and the officers feel that these recommendations should be implemented as a matter of priority, to aid development. Class rep. seminars should be a must and class rep. elections should be held as early as possible in the year; class rep structures should be reviewed where necessary; executives should draw up a Programme of Work at the beginning of the year and specific responsibilities shared out to executive members; class reps should be actively involved in implementing the Programme of Work; and Cuts Action Groups should be set up to carry out work on the finance for education campaign;

Towards the end of this year it became clear that many SUs were facing attacks on their funding and autonomy; the worst examples of these were the direct attacks on funds and control in QUB SU and the DIT Trading Dispute. Many SUs faced severe problems due to delays in necessary capitation money. The officers and National Council decided that we must formulate a clear strategy for dealing with such attacks and, to help this, it was agreed to hold a seminar on SU funding and autonomy next month. Subsequent discussion at a University Sector meeting agreed that this seminar should look at the development of SU services and that the formulation of Union Development Plans should form part of our strategy. Questionnaires on services and autonomy will be circulated before the seminar and it is hoped that there will be wide attendance at the event.

### 1.5 The Organisation of Officers Work

Most of the summer was spent in preparatory work on the Programme of Work, the Union Organisation Seminar and other conferences and the drawing up of a wide range of information. Throughout the year officers time was divided between college visits, area, sector and USI Committee meetings, conferences and a range of office work. Because we had to make the most of the General Election year the Education Campaign rightly took up the vast bulk of officers time, thus leaving less time for other work. The officers feel that greater participation by local SU officers in committee work could significantly increase the amount of work carried out by USI. Conor Lawlor of Bolton St., SU, who was the extremely hard-working chairperson of the Tech. Sector, showed that such work can be done to help local unions and the national union. Many SU officers do not seem to realise that USI cannot increase the amount of information in Head Office or develop our work to further assist local unions if we do not all co-operate and work together. While many SU officers did excellent work on USI committees others failed to meet commitments given thus stunting the developments of many sector committees and their work and increasing the workload on USI officers.

Officers visits to colleges have been regular in the vast majority of colleges with very few requests for a visit left unfulfilled.

### 1.6 Officer Board

Officer Board again failed to operate fully this year. Despite formal notice no meeting was fully attended by all the Area Convenors, and indeed, Dublin North failed to elect a convenor all year - no area conference was organised by its past convenor. The convenors have a clear role in working out the details of campaigns on a local basis as well as providing feedback and while many convenors carried out this work others failed to do so and failed to attend board meetings so that such work could be co-ordinated. The holding of Area Conferences in June/July must be undertaken by outgoing convenors and attendance at officer board must be taken seriously in the coming year.

### 1.7 Areas

Area work was not carried out evenly throughout the year though improvement took place in some areas.

**Dublin South Area:** The area has been reasonably active this year but is definitely not without its problems. The area met reasonably often but up until December, attendance was a major problem. Two or three colleges can take credit for almost full attendance throughout the year but many of the smaller colleges in particular had a very poor attendance record.

During the initial part of the year, the area successfully organised the Ballot Box Campaign with almost every college being involved. It also was involved in organising a number of meetings with politicians in the run-up to the election.

On a campaigning level, the attendance at the first National demonstration in December was poor from the Dublin South colleges and as a result, the area decided to combine with the Dublin North area for a Dublin Area Demonstration in January. This was an overwhelming success pointing to the need for a re-examination of the division of the two areas. It seems obvious to the officers responsible both for Dublin north and Dublin South this year that organising on an overall Dublin area basis is tactically and practically better.

Participation from some of the major colleges has gladly improved and the setting up Cuts Action Groups in many colleges in the area



was directly responsible for this.

Looking at the future of the area, it is clear that the lack of an area conference thus far has been detrimental and it is to be hoped that this will be organised before the end of this year.

The area will have to define for itself a clear programme of work at the beginning of the year and participation in actions will have to be stepped up.

It is also to be hoped that the area should begin to build links with outside organisations with a view to keying in particularly to work on the Welfare area.

**The Western Area:** In retrospect the year in the Western Area could have been a lot more productive but under the circumstances prevailing, a lot of work was done and many victories were recorded. The first meeting of the area was convened in late August and was attended by only two colleges. Considering that the 1986 Western Area Conference endorsed "A Campaigning Future" it was saddening to see most of that Campaigning being directed against the officers and USI as an organisation. Three colleges attempted disaffiliation motions but all were unsuccessful, mainly due to the efforts and some excellent work by groups of students in these same colleges. The people purporting to represent students were responsible for these attacks and it is important that situations such as these do not arise again. The UDO (who is responsible for the W/A), would like to stress that a lot of important work could have been done if these elements desisted from attacking USI and vented their anger towards those who are attacking the student movement at Government level. All in all, the potential of the W/A was not lived up to and it cannot be blamed solely on the officers. Indeed there were many people who were ready and willing to lend their support at times of crisis. Others unfortunately did their utmost to discredit USI and its work, these people created bad feeling and division. The answer to these problems is simple, if one believes in the concept of unity, they must surely believe in National Unity and if they wish to change USI they should go through the many channels and fora available to them within the organisation, to do so.

Moving on to the more positive aspects of the areas work our first victory was won in a case in Sligo RTC where students who were attending college for 1½ days per week were being charged full fees. A short, united campaign won over the Sligo RTC management and the students are now paying two fifths of their fees. This victory could not have been brought about but for the efforts of the officers in Athlone and Galway RTC's.

The Ballot Box Campaign gained a lot of media coverage, specifically in the Galway constituencies. Many successful public debates on the lead up to the General Election were held with many politicians being prompted, by student unrest, to place education high on their priority lists in their manifestos.

The December Day of Action was very well supported by RTCs in Sligo, Athlone and an unprecedented high percentage of Letterkenny RTC students. The pre-budget area demonstration in Athlone could be looked at from differing points of view. The objective, a Department of Education occupation, fell through due to a large Garda presence but an impromptu march through Athlone was very successful and we received a high media profile from the action which resulted in four arrests. Co-operation throughout the area seemed to be good during the year and constant contact between the convenor and member colleges should remain a priority for next year.

Recommendations: The Western Area Conference should look realistically at the successes and failures of the year and look optimistically at furthering the specific demands of the area as an integral part of USI. Given that the problems of the area will not be relived next year, we can be satisfied that all colleges will participate at all levels of the organisation, from National Council to all its sub-committees.

**South-East Area Committee:** The South East Area suffers from the problem that there is only three colleges in the area. also the fact that geographically there is no focal point for the area as in other areas.

Both Waterford and Carlow RTC suffered critically this year financially with both Students Union beginning this year with large deficits and a phenomenal amount of creditors. This unhealthy financial position severely inhibited the Union's development and campaigning ability in both colleges. Carlow RTC's financial difficulties are compounded by a low capitation level and Waterford's are compounded by the fact that the Union does not have any capitation and are reliant on block grants from the college which is quite low. While WRTC have negotiated capitation for next year, there seems to be a move on behalf of the college to curtail the union's financial autonomy which needs to be resisted. The Union has succeeded in clearing a great deal of its debt. In Carlow the story is quite different where the Union is still immersed in a great deal of financial difficulty and while it looks that capitation will be increased the college administration is very slow about handing the money over to the Union.

Difficulties with payment of ESF grants in CRTCC caused a great deal of difficulty in the first term. This issue was solved by Head Office putting a great deal of pressure on the college authorities through the Department of Education. Work has developed at a consistent pace in the college on student services and the college have recently provided a nurse and doctor (part-time) in the college. Plans are well under way in the provision of a student centre (this project is being funded by the Students Union). A visit to the college by the former Taoiseach was used by the students union to highlight the hardship that the 2/4 honours rule is causing; the lack of student services; graduate unemployment and lack of representation for students on college boards. The Union took part in the pre-election campaign and organised a debate for students. The Union needs to be mindful next year of the weakness of itself financially and must guard against any attempts by the college to play on its fiscal weakness.

Waterford RTC Students Union had a reasonably active and successful year. The Union successfully won a special students union area with a spacious common room and games room and a new office in addition to the office and shop. The union worked closely with Head Office on a campaign to gain student observer representation on its board of management and a quite successful lobby of local politicians and VEC members has been completed. The Union played an active part in the pre-election and pre-budget campaign. A highly successful debate with election candidates was organised. The Union also organised a successful 'Library Cram In' which gained good local media attention highlighting the inadequacy of a 115 seat library for almost 2000 students. An occupation of the VECs and a march was organised in which almost a thousand students participated in have gained some results in that it has again highlighted the dire conditions that pertain in the college and certainly helped strengthen the unions position in college. The organisational gains in WRTC this year were

attributed to a good executive and a dedicated group on the Union's Cuts Action Committee. The union has made great strides in one year and their recent elections recorded the highest percentage turnout in years in the college.

Both WRTC and CRTC have womens groups which in Carlow's case is well established and working and WRTC's case has just been formed this year, in both colleges there is tremendous scope for development in this area which is aided by a positive attitude to womens issues by the union leaderships.

In both colleges intensive executive training events were organised.

With regard to St. Pats. Kiltegan the Students Union is quite small having 17 members, however, representatives from the college have regularly attended USI National Council this year. The students lobbied the Department of Education on the issue of theology grants. The SU has also involved itself with international issues such as Apartheid in South Africa and the conflict in Central and Latin America.

In general, while the area lacks the ingredients for proper functioning adhesion, the colleges in the area are quite active with good Students Unions it is advisable that it organises its annual conference in conjunction with the Cork Area.

**Cork Area Committee:** Like the South East Area Committee the Cork Area suffers from its size as only two out of the three colleges in the area are members of the national union, despite this the area attempted to function as a unit and several area campaigns were successfully executed during the year.

Both Cork RTC and CCAD Students Union are well established in terms of funding and autonomy and both have representation on the structures that currently exist in the colleges. Both unions participated in the USI pre-election and pre-budget campaigns, and extensive work was carried out on the Ballot Box Campaign by Cork RTC in particular. With regard to the Ballot Box Campaign, CCAD and Cork RTC joined forces with UCC in mass registering students in the city's two constituencies. This was followed up by intensive lobbying of local politicians and a letter-writing campaign by CCAD during the general election, the RTC organised two open forums on education. Currently the Students Union in the RTC and the University are challenging the decision of the City Registrar with regard to student registration. In the run up to the budget the area held a Press Conference and students in the RTC engaged in an individual letter-writing campaign. Both colleges engaged in a number of facilities campaigns CCAD successfully campaigned for improvements in college services and work is currently in progress in upgrading their canteen and library facilities. Cork RTC SU began their year with the opening of the Atrium (canteen extension) and currently are in dispute with the college board with regard to the lack of facilities in their college, this has followed continuous attempts by the SU to raise these issues at college board level who consistently ignored attempts by the Union to highlight these problems which has resulted in the college board having a motion of no confidence passed in it by students at a UGM, this issue has received considerable attention in the media and hopefully the spin-off from it will be an upgrading of the college services.

Both SUs have particularly good media profiles in the local press which has assisted the unions in their campaigns this year.

With regard to Union Development a Class Reps Training Event was held in Cork RTC early in the first term, Crawford SU got off to a slow start due to an old rule that the President would be elected in the new academic year, the present executive have plans to change that this year. The Area has been invited to participate in the Cork Voluntary Youth Services Board.

Relations with UCC Students Union were cordial this year.

It would be advisable that the area hold its annual conference in conjunction with the South East Area this year, in general for both the affiliated colleges the Students Unions are reasonably well established and the RTC in particular is continuing to make great strides organisationally thus making it responsive to the needs of the membership.

#### **Dublin North:**

Dublin North is an area which still does not function properly as an area of USI. The area this year failed to send more than three people to any area meeting and as a result no convenor was elected. However, at a couple of meetings of the whole Dublin Area there was a high level of participation and this possibly leads to an indication that it would be advisable to amalgamate Dublin North and Dublin South into one area which would become a lot more active than these areas have been in recent years. There were three Dublin North meetings in the first term all of which were very badly attended. The area did organize a public debate on education which unfortunately had to be cancelled. Public debates were also organized by Dundalk RTC, COMAD and St. Pats. The Ballot Box Campaign was also organized effectively by several colleges in the area. On the 3rd November students in Bolton St., gave Dr. Fitzgerald a warm reception when he spoke to the students. Students made it clear to the Taoiseach that they did not agree with his policies in relation to students and young people.

There were massive problems in COMAD at the start of the year when the college moved to their new premises in Mountjoy Square. The students union were allocated unsuitable premises. The SU then occupied the principals office for three and a half hours after which they were offered suitable accommodation. A successful boycott of the canteen was also organized. The campaign gained excellent media coverage.

Colleges in the Dublin North Area also participated actively in the fees/grants campaign taking part in the occupations, pickets and marches that were organized in the Dublin Area.

There were problems in a number of the DIT colleges regarding the late payment of ESF Grants. Letters were sent to the media from the colleges and Head Office in protest at this unnecessary hardship inflicted on students.

There were also problems in the Dublin VEC in October when the VEC was asked by the Department of Social Welfare for lists of their students as part of their campaign against welfare fraud. Folton St., Students Union opposed it as a breach of students confidentiality. The VEC later refused to forward these lists.

## Northern Region

**NUS/USI Joint Programme of Work:** Representatives of both national unions met at the start of the year to draft a programme of work for the region. The programme of work set out priorities for the year and a campaigning strategy to be presented to the Regional Committee. The campaign priorities were the Student Financial Support campaign, Work for the Future campaign and the Claim it campaign.

Student : Financial support - the main demands for the SFS campaign were for £35 per week (non-means-tested for all students) and a campaign against the proposed introduction of student loans.

Work for the future - this campaign was mainly directed towards FEs. Work for the future is an umbrella campaign for the whole area of union development. The campaign included canteen facilities, Sabbatical officers, Common Room facilities, library standards, increased funding and free time to organize general meetings.

The Claim it campaign linked to the campaign on student financial support included a claim it while you can campaign to inform students what they were entitled to and how to claim it as well as supporting the Action for Benefits campaign.

Other areas of work discussed for the programme of work include women's issues, South Africa, Nicaragua and National Affairs. The programme of work was adopted by the Regional Committee. This was the first time that the two national unions had jointly prioritized a programme of work for the Region in an attempt to provide a clearer direction in regional campaign strategies for the year. Both national unions are finally coming to grips with the fact that neither can give the region that direction by working in isolation. There is now an understanding that USI and NUSUK must meet more regularly than in previous years if we are to fully understand each other, to fully co-operate with each other and to plan jointly to meet the needs of students in the northern region.

**Student Union Development:** A discussion paper on union development in the Region was presented at the start of the year. The paper looked at the position of the Region now, fixing priorities and clarifying a development strategy. The paper dealt to a large extent with F.E. development i.e. monitoring the implementation of the Model Scheme of Management and pressing for adequate student union funding and sabbatical arrangements. In Higher Education academic affairs, lecturer training and student union autonomy were prioritized and a campaigning strategy to be discussed at the Regional Committee. A lot of the ideas put forward in this paper were pursued in the courses of the year by the Regional Office, various colleges on specific issues and by the Regional Committee.

**Union Funding and Autonomy:** A number of colleges in the Region encountered problems early in the first term regarding funding for their unions namely Rupert Stanley and Belfast College of Technology. These problems were later resolved. The two universities also suffered drastic cuts in funding for their unions. On the more positive side Newcastle Tech had their funds released to them and St. Mary's after a year long campaign had their block grant increased from £11,000 to £30,000 both of these were major advances for both unions and can be cited as examples by other colleges in their campaign for adequate levels of funding. The campaign for increased funding for FE colleges is a long term one in which initial steps were taken this year.

Students unions all over Britain and in the North of Ireland, especially the universities are facing major attacks on their autonomy. Similar attacks on autonomy are happening to a greater or lesser extent all over Ireland. QUB SU are facing the brunt of these attacks which are being made by the authorities in a very blatant and heavy-handed manner. These moves include the removal of the enrolment fund office to the university campus, getting rid of the enrolment fund account, all cheques to be signed by the bursar. There have also been rows about ultra vires payments, room cleaning in the students union and the academic standing of election candidates. All these moves are being vigorously opposed by the students union in Queens and the national unions. Other colleges should be aware of what is happening in Queens and be on their guard against any such proposals coming from their own college authorities.

**N.I. Welfare Committee (See Welfare Section)**

**N.I. Regional Women's Committee:** This committee has only met a couple of times this year for a variety of reasons. Several issues were taken up by colleges in the Region i.e. Abortion, Strip-Searching, Sex Education, Creche Facilities etc. A number of colleges took part in USI's National Women's Week which were very successful. The Region is also planning a Women's Conference for the third term details of which have yet to be finalized. There was strong representation from the North on WRAC with four of its members being from Northern colleges. There was also active involvement from Northern colleges at the women's training events, the women's conference and other activities on women's issues. Women from the Region also have representation on NUS Women's Committee and have been involved in the NUS women's campaign.

There is a need next year to ensure that the Regional Women's Committee becomes active as early as possible in the year with a clearly defined programme of work and close links with the Regional Committee.

**Regional Anti-Apartheid Committee:** This is a recently set up committee within the regional structure and had its first meeting in March. The committee has already looked at the possibility of organizing a day of action and an A.N.C. speaking tour in the third term. They are also investigating the possibility of the production of a Northern Ireland Anti-Racism and Anti-Apartheid Campaign packs. The establishment of such a committee reflects the need from colleges to actively campaign against the Apartheid Regime in South Africa. It is a very positive initiative which should be taken on board by other areas of U.S.I.



## 1.8 SECTORS

### Technological Sector Committee

Without doubt the Technological Sector Committee was the most effective of the USI Sectors this year, the sector worked on action oriented campaigns this year following the establishment of a Programme of Work for itself at an initial meeting in August 1986. Athlone was picked as the venue for the Sectors 3rd Annual Conference where considerable ground work was carried out in the areas of Student Services; Exam Appeals and Representation. The Sector produced a Student Services Report which has been circulated to all relevant bodies and will be used as a campaign tool for the sector on student services in the coming year. The sector also discussed academic affairs and content and control of education in relation to industrial based courses. The Sector felt the best strategy to adopt with regard to Exam Appeals was to ensure that local Students Unions had adequate Academic representation before campaigning for a system of academic appeals. Some of the colleges within the sector have begun the internal committee work to gain an exam appeals system. The issue of ESF funding for the forthcoming year is causing concern for many C.O.'s within the sector, however no definite details regarding the future of ESF have yet been released by the Department of Education. The sector made a considerable input into the Annual Conference of the Association of Vocational Education Colleges this year. The D.I.T. Trading Dispute was monitored closely by the sector which feared that the establishment of precedent in Dublin could affect SU trading in other VEC operated colleges, in the end however the D.I.T. Unions successfully won the right to trade.

The sector noted with interest the announcement made by the Coalition Minister for Education Mr. Patrick Cooney with regard to the future governing structure of the RTC's, the sector views this issue with concern for the coming year and believes that the developments with regard to the Coalition's Green Paper "Partners in Education" under the present government will have to be placed high on the Sectors P.O.W. for the coming year.

The issue of Library facilities and the control of the library service in the VEC Colleges came to a head this year in Athlone RTC where the County Council relinquished control of the college library to the V.E.C., this precedent will hopefully be expanded in the years to come. U.S.I. has made representations to the Department of Education about this issue. With regard to the Library service in general, the National Secretary of the Council of RTC Librarians addressed the Sectors annual conference and the Sector is considering proposals for a proper and planned expansion of the Library Service within the V.E.C. colleges.

#### Dublin Institute of Technology.

The DIT faced a major problem this year. The problem came in the form of the college authorities plans to curtail Students' Union Trading. This was identified by the Students Unions as a deliberate attempt to reduce the effectiveness of the Unions by attacking the financial base. The trading outlets had a combined turnover of over a quarter of a million pounds a year and was yielding a profit level sufficient to subsidise staff salaries, low cost course related materials and indirectly Students Unions Club and Societies. The Students' Unions reacted in a well organised and concentrated manner. They combined the tactics of lobbying and demonstration in a efficient manner. These were several rallies, marches, demonstrations and a strike, organised to coincide with the progress of the lobbying process. This combination of effort proved its worth when the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee agreed a solution favourable to the D.I.T. Students' Unions.

#### Art and Design Sector Committee.

With the Art and Design Sector certain common problems were identified. These problems could be grouped under the general area heading of:

1. Material provision
2. Facility provision
3. Course requirements
4. Emphasis on Art in colleges

The first meeting of the Art and Design Sector discussed generalised problems and were useful in giving an overall impression of the situation in the Art and Design Sector. They did not, however, help to quantify the extent to which the perceived cut-backs were deliberate policy on behalf of the Department of Education. It was agreed that if a national campaign on Art and Design was to be initiated then the back up information must be got. To this end the sector agreed on a number of areas where they would attempt to find information from their colleges. This decision was then formulated into a written request from head office to the colleges stating the exact information sought and the sources of that information. The request for information was largely ignored. Once this information is returned the possibility for a strong educational campaign in the sector will become possible. With regard to the N.C.E.A.s' approach to Art and Design a policy document was adopted, despite opposition from USI to sections of it, which sets out their targets for the coming year. We believe that his policy area could be the focus for a strong campaign on behalf of the Art and Design Sector.

**Teacher Education Sector:** USI's Teacher Education Sector has been largely inactive this year. It seems that the impetus and involvement built up last year during the Carysfort campaign has largely died down. The sector has found it hard to find one specific issue to key into and does not seem to be operating efficiently.

Although six sector meetings were called, only one was attended by a reasonable number of colleges.

It was decided early in the year that the sector would take the issue of Teaching Practice Evaluation and Assessment as well as the general issues surrounding Teaching Practice as its major campaign for the year. The Deputy President has laid out practical suggestions as to how this area of work can be properly taken up next year in a motion to Congress.

Meanwhile the T.P. Survey for all colleges has been produced and it is hoped that all colleges will distribute them while Teaching Practice is fresh in people's minds.

The only college to seriously take up the issue was CICE and they secured considerable improvements in the marking system in their college. Other than that, most colleges seem to have been very quiet on the campaigning front.

A serious look must be taken at the sector, overall, given the poor attendance at sector meetings and also the failure of the sector to find a satisfactory date for a sector conference.

The conference will have to take place by the end of October next year to avoid a lack of direction in the sector and the colleges will have to begin looking at their own work and making a better attempt to draw up definite programmes of work at the beginning of the year to give their own work direction.

Given that T. Ed. fee rises in the South were largely decided in June over the last number of years as a deliberate attempt to quell student opposition.

Petitions against fee rises, letters and motions to college boards and principals in all colleges must be done immediately and all colleges should consider direct action on the fees issue over the next month to guard against the massive fee increases of the last few years.

The announcement of the Public Service Jobs Embargo in Budget '87 is of fundamental importance to Teacher Education graduates as the number of jobs available will be drastically cut. The Sector will have to undertake a major campaign on this issue, preferably in conjunction with graduates and the Teacher Unions and we would suggest that this work would begin at the next sector meeting involving a meeting between all the CO President and USI and representatives from all the teacher unions to plan a co-ordinated campaign.

On the campaign for SU autonomy and improved funding St. Marys Belfast won a substantial gain in their financial situation when their block grant of £15000 last year was increased to £33,000 this year following a two-year campaign. The same campaign resulted in the college building a new welfare office for students which was a considerable improvement.

For next year, then, the priorities will have to be as follows:

- 1) Organisation of Sector Conference in October.
- 2) Planning of detailed campaigns from this conference.
- 3) Regular, well-attended sector meetings to co-ordinate these campaigns

### AnCO Sector

AnCO trainees were faced with a severe cutback during the summer months of last year when the Council of AnCO decided that trainees under the age of 18 would receive a flat rate of allowance of £20 per week as opposed to £32.75 for those trainees over 18.

This proved to be a serious attack on those trainees and an extensive campaign was begun to reverse the decision. Many Inner City Community and Development Groups lobbied members of the Council, and USI and local SUs concentrated on the Trade Union/ICTU representatives on the AnCO Council. At their September meeting, the original decision was reversed and no counter-proposal regarding alternative cutbacks were discussed. This result although satisfactory must be given a guarded welcome as we must be aware that the AnCO Council may attempt this again. A practical suggestion for next year would possibly be to produce a leaflet for all block release and AnCO apprentice student as we have clear policy on giving these often ignored sectors a well deserved voice at local level. Carlow RTC has introduced a specific post for apprentices on their union executive and many other colleges should take this example.

In the last term we hope to organise and participate fully in a Public Meeting on the need to organize Ireland's 53,000 Government Scheme Trainees. USI demands clearly a proper working wage and full trade union rights while working.

### C.E.R.T.

The CERT Sector, although inactive for the best part of the year did succeed to win many concessions from CERT authorities. Of the three meetings called, only one was attended (by 2 colleges). At a meeting held in CERT head office on February 18th agreement was reached on many issues.

- 1) CERT and USI should meet formally twice yearly.
- 2) There would be no cutback in the Schools Training Division budget for 1987/88 and CERT would maintain their subvention to Students Unions and USI alike.
- 3) CERT will recognise the rights of their trainees to stand for election to SU posts and also to attend meetings at General and Executive level without being reprimanded by their supervisors.
- 4) All trainees will benefit from more specialised "pre-placement talks" with a special emphasis being placed on welfare issues.

### **Recommendations:**

The holding of a CERT sector conference to be attended by all colleges in the first term to outline priority areas of work in the sector and to give each CO a clearer understanding of the problems faced in each particular college.

### University Sector

At the start of the year there were problems in the university sector with the forming of Universities United. However, this problem soon dissolved itself. The attendance at University Sector meetings fluctuated. At the first meeting of the sector there was some discussion of the organization and development of the sector in line with USI policy. There was general agreement on the organization of the fees/grants campaign, academic affairs and student union funding. A fees boycott was organized by TCD and by night students in Galway. All the universities had developed programmes of work which prioritized fees/grants, exam appeals, funding, health facilities etc. most of the universities organized class rep. training seminars as agreed by the sector meeting. By the second term most universities had submitted fees motions to their college boards with various responses.

The Sector agreed to prepare a submission to the Department of Education on third level admissions procedures, administration of grants and the abolition of the 2/4 honours rule. There should be some discussion on this issue in universities in the coming weeks to enable a joint submission to be prepared before June 20th.

Queens University prioritized work against the Butler Report (see NI Region report for details) for the year. It was agreed by the sector committee that a joint USI/NUS submission should be drawn up.

The sector also discussed the application from Queens and U.U. for recognition from the CAO and the implications it would have for Irish universities. A formal response to this is being planned by the sector and the Irish Times will be approached regarding the possibility of a survey on the issue.

One of the major problems for all universities this year was that of student union autonomy. There have been attacks of varying degrees on the autonomy of students unions by universities authorities. The sector emphasized the need for a one day seminar on autonomy and finance which will be organized early in the third term. The sector will also be drawing up development plans for the control of unions, finance and clubs and societies. The development plans will also include looking at the division between services and political activity, control of premises and services etc. Towards the end of the second term the university sector began to become more active towards the end of the second term because common areas of work had arisen. Hopefully this will continue into the third term and help build the basis for an active sector next year.

Further Education Sector

The FE Sector was quite successful this year, especially the FE Roadshow in September which, for the first time, visited all but four of the 26 colleges in the sector. The outcome from the roadshow was very heartening with many Colleges actually setting up Students Unions for the first time and participating in National Union structures through the N.I. Regional Ctee. Much of the follow up work could have been dealt with if it were not for the lack of resources in our Belfast office. Much support must be given, as promised, by the H.E. sector, and this will lead to the region becoming a strong, active and campaigning part of U.S.I. Many victories have been recorded in F.E. colleges throughout the year. Bangor C.F.E. is a testament to the potential of a representative Students Union who enjoy a popular support base and utilise their actions extremely well. More work is needed on the ground in many colleges, yet the confidence is there that this will develop in time. Furthermore, the stability of many Unions falter during the Summer months and the next two years should be spent in an active campaign for the introduction of Sabbatical officers in the larger F.E.'s.

In an unprecedented move, the NUS/USI Regional Office succeeded in convincing the Youth Committee of N.I.C.T.U. to hold a pilot scheme in Belfast C.O.T. for YTP students with specific reference to joint Student/Trade Union membership. This should prove to be a large step forward in the defence of the rights of an otherwise underdeveloped sector of our membership. Rupert Stanley C.F.E. have been to the forefront of the Disability Awareness Movement, especially since their membership includes a high percentage of disabled students.

Other areas of work which have developed in this sector have been Apartheid in Southern Africa and the Nicaragua Must Survive Campaign.



### 1.9 National Council

The major problem with National Council was the disgraceful lack of attendance by many Cos and the persistent lateness of many other leaving a situation where a quorum was not reached until the afternoon in many cases, or not at all as in September and November.

It must be stressed that we cannot hope to seriously tackle the issues facing students if student representatives do not make the necessary effort to plan campaigning work at a national level.

When attendance was good the discussion was lively and productive and there was often large attendances from particular COs who brought along class reps and other SU officers.

### 1.10 USI Committees

A number of the USI Committees will be dealt with under the relevant sections of this report, but in general committees can only be of use to USI if members participate actively in the work as USI officers cannot be expected to do all the work as is frequently the case.

A number of new committees were set up this year to deal with specific areas of SU work.

Entertainments Committee: This year saw a grave need for the introduction of a USI Ents. Committee to share the many experiences, most of them bad ones, of Ents. Officers throughout the country. In hoping that the motion to Congress will be carried, there are many other areas of work which can be taken up. Sponsorship by banks or breweries is something which Northern COs have enjoyed for many years and it is hoped to formalise this on a countrywide basis; the area of charity fund raising is another, which can easily be organized if the efforts of Ents. Officers and executives can be relied upon. The week after this Congress, the first of these fund-raisers will be held to benefit the National Campaign for the Homeless but unfortunately due to the lack of co-operation of many COs, the full potential of this will not be reached. Meetings were very poorly attended throughout the year mainly due to the fact that officers were not giving their mailings to the appropriate officers or their executives. Many people would contend that Ents Officers do not play an important role in the political element of any union's work, this will remain so if letters are not given out or are taken for granted solely as services officers.

Next year should see the formalising of the Ents. Committee as a working sub-unit of USI.

Sports Committee: The USI Sports Committee was reactivated this year, the Committee is aimed at SU Sports Officers and Clubs Chairpersons. The Committee provides a regular focal point for persons involved in Sports Organisations in colleges. The committee set itself three tasks for the year. They were a) Organisation of a conference of student sports; b) The development of a USI Sports Stars Awards and c) to begin a USI backed campaign for proper sports and recreation facilities in colleges. The committee will hold the first USI Students in Sport Conference in Athlone RTC on May 1,2,3, '87.

Societies Committee: UCG Students Union have recently requested that USI establish a co-ordinating committee for societies officers in colleges. It is anticipated that a meeting will be called after Easter.

### 1.11 Communications

Head Office experienced great difficulty in getting information from local unions the worst example of this being the extremely low return of the Student Services Survey. If local unions do not provide Head Office with information on their local set-up it is impossible to provide a good information service to our members or external organisations, whether that information is requested by USI committees, surveys or National Council.

Also, once again many local unions are not distributing information (mailings etc.) to students which Head Office sends out. In a few cases the officers feel that there have been deliberate intentions not to provide such information but in the main it is presumably due to lack of effort. This has meant that many SU officers have not received information directly intended for them and students have not been informed about USI conferences and other events.

However, problems with communication clearly lay with with Head Office also:

#### U.S.I. News

U.S.I. News is a very important implement in our union's work. It is the only extended mass method of information dispersal available to us. It is an intensive user of both finance and time and we believe that this input has not been reflected in the benefits accruing to USI. The quality of USI News declined as the year progressed with erratic publication dates and often outdated content.

After the publication of the first edition of USI News the officers met to discuss the future of the newspaper. At the meeting the then editor of the newspaper (the Education Officer) asked for clarification of the role of editor. He felt that the editor should have the traditional role given to editors : that of overall control of content and layout within specified guidelines. This he felt would give the paper a more responsive content and style and open the way for development.

However, it was decided that there should be collective officer control and individual role allocation for the newspaper (i.e. one person for the editorial, another for advertising etc.).

This system was adopted and did not work. Copy dates were set, reset and passed again. We feel the reason was that the individual input from officers was considered secondary to their official constitutional defined areas of work.

We believe that USI News will develop better and meet the high expectations of local colleges if a single officer is allocated the position of editor. The content of the paper could be decided at officer meetings and copy dates set. If these copy dates are passed the editor should have the authority to get the material from elsewhere. All the normal functions of editor should also be allocated to this person.

We believe that once these steps are taken we can have a vibrant and relevant student newspaper. (A full report will be presented to May National Council).

#### Seal

Initiated only last year, Seal appeared briefly but was not produced regularly due to the workload on the officer responsible. All efforts must be made to ensure that it is produced regularly next year.

On a more positive note there were considerable improvements in some areas:

#### In the News

This year it was decided that news articles featuring USI or articles of general interest to student unions should be collated, reproduced and mailed to colleges. COs have been asked to send press cuttings from their local papers for inclusion and many have already done so.

The Officers feel that 'In the News' is a useful way of showing the amount of coverage that we receive - though there was not always enough room for all the press cuttings!

#### Media

There was a welcome heightening of USI's media profile throughout the year with considerable improvement in the amount of newspaper coverage received. The improved coverage on the education campaign can be put down to a number of things: better production and distribution of press statements from Head Office; the linking of education to issues such as unemployment and emigration; the use of press conferences to launch the Programme of Work, the pre-budget and pre-election campaigns; and the use of a wide range of tactics. However, there is room for improvement (particularly with regard to RTE Television News) and to this end the officers feel that a Media Training Event should be run at the beginning of the next academic year.

## 2. EDUCATION

### A. Finance for Education

This section of the Programme of Work prioritised the fees/grants campaign and pinpointed a number of other demands: the provision of realistic course funding, the abolition of the 2/4 honours rule, the provision of grants for mature students and an increase in college places.

#### 2.1 Fees/Grants Campaign

The Plan of Action (which was unanimously agreed) for the first term laid out the following:

- The drawing up, in Head Office, of submissions on fees and grants.
- The drafting and submission of motions to college boards calling for a fees freeze and a grant increase.
- The organisation of public debates on education, at local college level.
- The drafting of letters to politicians on fees and grants and intensive lobbying.
- The obtaining and distribution of electoral registration forms.
- The use of petitions for both students and the public, demanding a fees freeze and a grant increase.
- The organisation of a Mass Lobby of Dail Eireann.
- Local actions on late grants and fees or on local issues targetted at local authorities and college boards.
- Regular issuing of statements to local and national media at all stages.
- Three days of action in December, including a National Demonstration, with the necessary build-up of action in local COs.
- The sending of a questionnaire to political parties.

The strategy thus entailed formulating our demands clearly in submission form, identifying targets (politicians, college and education authorities) using submissions, debate, lobbying and registration of students to vote to increase pressure on politicians, using direct action for the same purpose and to publicly highlight our demands, and using the media to put our demands, and using the media to put our message across, thus further increasing support for our demands.

A summary of the Programme and Plan was put in USI News and USI officers visited colleges and addressed meetings on the USI Roadshow.

Submissions on fees and grants were drawn up and sent to the Minister for Education, the Taoiseach, other TDs and to all COs. USI Head Office got meetings with the Minister for Education and a number of political parties. Over 100 TDs and Senators were lobbied in Dail Eireann on November 5th by delegates from Cork, Carlow, Athlone, Galway, Dublin, Letterkenny, Limerick and Belfast. They went armed with USI Submissions and were briefed beforehand. The Taoiseach was given a 'warm' reception at October meetings in TCD, Carlow and Bolton St., by students and USI officers. However, very little lobbying appeared to have been done at a local level.

Thousands of students registered to vote and many COs organised success-mass registrations often in conjunction with other colleges in their area, despite problems in getting registration forms. However, many COs did not participate in the Ballot Box Campaign at all and a number of those who tried to organise mass registration had not done the necessary build-up organisational work.

Very few COs organised public debates in the first term or submitted motions to college boards though Letterkenny's board passed a 'fees freeze' motion. Local actions including pickets, marches and occupations in many COs (Sligo, Cork, Galway, Dublin...) throughout the first term but particularly during the three days of action in December when thousands of students were mobilised.

On Thursday, December 4th about 3000 students marched in a National Demonstration to Leinster House.

The officers wish to make a number of comments on the work of the first term:

Despite the fact that the Programme of Work and Plan of Action were agreed upon unanimously at October National Council many COs did not raise these for discussion at U.G.M. level. Thus in many cases there was no attempt to inform students on the issues or to involve students in making decisions as to how our campaigns should be carried out. Many SU officers did not actively take up the lobbying work which they had voted for or, for the reasons stated above, organise students in direct action on the education campaign. The necessary build-up work for the National Demo. in December was not carried out by many COs particularly the larger ones thus the numbers on the march were clearly disappointing.

However, those COs who consistently worked to implement the Programme of Work and Plan of Action mobilised large numbers of student in successful local actions and for the December march.

In the north, the campaign for a decent level of student financial support was the priority for the region in the first term. The campaign was faced with difficulties from the start because of the fact that most local politicians could not logically be seen as targets as they were not assuming their role in Westminster. Nonetheless as part of the regional programme of work the region organised a day of action on November 12th to focus attention on the lack of student financial support in the FE sector and the threat posed by the introduction of student loans.

The build-up of work in the FEs and St. Marys clearly paid off with a good turnout from them on the march to and rally of City Hall. The turnout from the universities was relatively poorer, however, Queens SU had been very actively involved in a militant campaign against University Grants Committee (UGC) cutbacks. There was a post-rally meeting in QUBSU to plan future tactics. Media coverage of the day was excellent.

December National Council called for a stepping up of action and the officers thus put the following proposals to January National Council:

- the calling of Emergency General Meetings for action between January 12th - 16th
- setting up of Cuts Action Groups
- a national occupation in Dublin on January 19th
- a press conference to be held as soon as the occupation starts
- occupation on area/local basis around the country
- public debates on education should be organised inviting local

election candidates

- pickets/lobbies of college boards in support of fees/grants motions should take place
- local politicians clinics should be lobbied or picketed
- meetings should take place with political parties and other organisations

The months of January and February saw our most intensive campaigning work, as actions all round the country were stepped up. They are too numerous to mention here but briefly, occupations of Fine Gael and Fianna Fail offices took place in Dublin and political parties, individual politicians and local authorities were targeted in a series of actions in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Athlone and elsewhere. A number of arrests were made and USI Education Officer, Peter Graves was arrested outside an occupation in the Department of Education, Marlborough Street (he was later charged and bound over to keep the peace). The arrests made under S.30 of the Offences Against the State Act gave just cause for concern showing how repressive "emergency" legislation can be used to prevent peaceful protests. Press coverage over this period was very good although T.V. coverage was noticeably poor.

Overall there was a distinct improvement in union organisation - mainly due to the setting up of Cuts Action Groups which particularly helped massive increases in participation in Dublin. Area organisation also distinctly improved over this period. Good publicity, including the USI News Election Special and the Pre-Election Leaflet also helped considerably.

The Student Financial Support Campaign continued in the North with a Regional Day of Action on February 11th. A blockade of the Department of Education N.I. was attended by over 300 students from QUB, U.U., COBS, Belfast Tech, and Rupert Stanley and petitions were handed in. Delegates from the region also attended an NUS demo. in London on February 21st.

February National Council decided on the following proposals for action:

- a pre-budget mass demonstration and one-day strike on Thursday March 12th
- from 17th February to 12th March, pressure should be put on college boards and VECs to issue press statements in support of a fees freeze and a grant increase. Such actions to include lobbying and direct action tactics (e.g. silent pickets, canteen boycotts etc.).

It was decided that a press conference should take place to launch the pre-budget campaign inviting trade unions unemployed groups, community Groups and other organisations and individuals to attend.

The Press Conference received the best quality of newspaper coverage of the year with a fair amount of detail on the arguments for greater investment in third level. Copies of our pre-Budget Submission were given out at the Press Conference and sent to the Ministers for Finance and Education and the Taoiseach. The Cork area also held a press conference on the same day gaining excellent local coverage.



Regarding the National Demonstration on March 12th the officers regretfully decided to call for a picket instead of a march due to the fact that numbers expected from the Dublin colleges were very low. Because of early elections, holidays, lack of follow-up and a DIT Trading demonstration it quickly became clear that numbers from outside Dublin would have exceeded those from Dublin thus creating a lot of bad feeling, as occurred in December.

A picket of the Dail staffed by between 150 and 200 students took place, therefore, between 2.00 and 4.00 on the 12th and gained good media coverage.

Colleges in Letterkenny, Cork, Waterford and Limerick organised intensive letter-writing to TDs and pickets of college boards. Otherwise, the officers feel that the pre-budget campaign was run mainly from Head Office, with very few COs putting proposals to UGMs and involving students in action to further our demands.

Furthermore, whatever the reasons for inactivity - These should have been clearly stated when proposals for action were being agreed at National Council.

## 2.2 Course/College Funding

The main attacks on course fundings were suffered in the northern region by Queens and the University of Ulster. Both universities suffered from the latest cuts announced by the university grants committee and took up these issues in a very militant campaign. In QUB as a result of the Butler Report the Business Studies Department was threatened with closure and others were to have their course content restricted and a number of academic staff to lose their jobs in an attempt to cut back £5.2 million by 1990. The students unions at QUB opposed this plan for 'rationalization' vigorously with a massive lobbying campaign, letter-writing, pickets at board and committee meetings, one-day strikes and public meetings. All of these actions were well organized and well supported by students. Support was also gained by trade unions, community groups etc. The Architecture Department students at Queens organized a very active campaign against the closure of their Department. In U.U. the same kind of campaign went on but to a somewhat lesser extent. A very successful day of action was organised when the UGC were actually visiting the university. A delegation from both the universities and the national unions met with the UGC and put forward the case against the committees proposed cutbacks and indeed attacks which have taken place since 1979 and the effect that these cuts would have on the North of Ireland as an already deprived area. The campaign was also based on the lack of discussion on the report in the Region and the fact that some of the recommendations of the interim report were already being implemented before the final report was discussed.

The officers recommended at February National Council that the SUs at Queens and UU should meet to draw up a joint response to the Butler Report. It is only when this is done - when both unions clarify their views on the report - that the national unions can plan a regional strategy.

## 2.3 Places/Overcrowding

The debate and campaign on UGC cuts and the Butler Report in the north obviously raised the question of places in relation to demand. However, throughout the year, and during the Pre-Election and Pre-Budget campaigns we consistently raised the issue of college places. During the summer, as Leaving Cert. results came out and places were allocated in the

'points race'. Head Office issued statements on the lack of educational opportunities for young people due to a shortage of places in third level. We made repeated calls for the past government to announce starting dates for the proposed five new RTCs : when the Taoiseach visited colleges, at public debates, in submissions as stated above, in press statements and at meetings with the Minister and the Department of Education. The issue of overcrowding was raised repeatedly by many COs, not least by COMAD SU in their controversial move to new buildings.

Despite increased pressure and promises by both the last government and Fianna Fail there appears to be no provision in the budget for the new buildings to go ahead. It is, therefore, of vital importance that we continue to expose the hypocrisy of past and present governments as they continue to do nothing about the shortage of places on the Irish third level system while talking about 'utilising skills'.

While many will choose to avail of courses in British colleges in the coming year - due to the fact that they will not have to pay fees for the majority of courses - the shortfall in places still remains drastic. This shortfall must be addressed.

#### 2.4 An Overview

The main problem affecting our campaigning work this year was the readiness which COs appeared to have when it came to agreeing on plans for action - but the failure of many of those COs to implement agreed plans. In many cases, this made it impossible to co-ordinate activity effectively and it certainly led to situations where there was no build-up to activity and no follow-up either. The officers feel that this made our campaigns disjointed and was extremely frustrating for those who actually worked to fully implement our plans. The level of organisation was extremely uneven and many COs did not organise class rep seminars in conjunction with head office to improve organisation. The main weakness in the work was the lack of follow-up to the intensive campaigning in January and February - a failure to take the next logical step and engage in disruptive action aimed at college authorities to stop the implementation of fee rises.

While there is an obvious need to continue to develop our campaigning strategy there seems little point if COs fail to implement and if COs fail to put these plans to students.

We feel that next year the USI Programme of Work and Plan of Action must be put to UGMs around the country for discussion. It is only in this way that students will see the context of individual actions or tactics and will support our campaign in mass numbers. Furthermore, unless this discussion takes place students will not have been given the opportunity to be involved in making decisions about campaign or to be actively involved in the campaigning work itself. The role of the class rep. in all of this cannot be emphasised enough.

Having said that, it is clear that we have strengthened our position throughout the year. the victory on grants for theology students, - a campaign which USI has been co-ordinating for some 18 months only - was considerable encouragement. Our heightened media profile, our increased support outside of the student movement, our increased membership and our greater unity of purpose must be used effectively not only over the coming year but over the coming months in an effort to prevent the implementation of excessive fee rises. Cuts in college budgets - despite increases in student numbers must be opposed. All efforts must be made to prevent the British government implementing student loans. We must work towards an equitable system of student

financial support and an increase in college places. We cannot do so unless we are honest with students about the steps which we must take in order to achieve our aims - there is no easy way to win. We must work towards the mass support necessary to show the politicians and the media that we cannot be dismissed.

## 2.5 EDUCATION : FOR A CHANGE.

As the year progressed it became increasingly obvious that the links between the finance for education campaign and the education for a change one, were real as well as apparent. The starvation of funding for 3rd., level is having a stifling effect on the educational debate. Those involved in academic decision making are increasingly reluctant to discuss issues for which for which they feel change can only be effected once finance is made available. This year the USI officers have recognised this problem and have attempted to raise academic issues in conjunction with the financial issues, when making representations to funding bodies. Issues such as representation and womens studies were included in our pre-budget submission to the Oireachtas Members. This was also done with our contacts with other funding and organising bodies such as the HEA, various VECs' and with the AVEC and the IVEA.

## 2.6 Representation

At the begining of the year the question of representation was identified as pivotal in our education for a change campaign. It was agreed to both push for an increase in our level of representation and to make greater use of our existing representation.

A vacancy arose on the V.E.C. of Westmeath. In line with our policy to attempt to increase representation, an intensive campaign was launched to secure the seat for a student. The Minister for Education Ms. O'Rourke was met with and the members of the County Council were lobbied. Student involvement was high and the issue of representation was well discussed. Letters of support were sent by many colleges around the country. The Campaign has ended for the time being with Athlone R.T.C. securing observer status on the V.E.C. However, the Campaign will have strengthened their further possibility for full membership.

In its first term the D.I.T. won the right to representation on their Academic Council. However the use of that representation is limited by the size of the Council in comparison to the student representation. The precedent will be of great use for the D.I.T. Unions in the coming year as they attempt to increase their representation.

Waterford R.T.C. have had a Campaign to gain representation on their College Board. Again the campaign was well supported by the students and the discussion was healthy. The Campaign is ongoing.

In increasing the use of our representation the role of the class rep., training seminar was very important (covered under Union Development). The seminars considered the process of taking up academic issues at class level. Blueprints on exam., appeals, assesment methods and representation were made available and discussed at various internal levels in order to prepare representatives in the preparation of submissions. In the attempt to improve the quality of our existing representation it was recognised that our approaches must differentiate between sectors. The Tech sector was the one that took up academic issues best. The process of information swapping was useful to the

colle  
time  
on ar  
the o  
use o  
recogn  
with  
future  
to st  
sessio  
and t  
a wid  
attend  
the at

2.7

The  
basis  
The wo  
tation  
approa  
been u  
for th  
produc  
study

asked  
would  
overco

outlin

a posi

necess

can ha

first

They h

the De

23rd m

N.C.E.A

with r

and fro

U.S.I.

force i

and gra

Council

prepare

2.8 EF

The ro

year.

of loc

the at

Officer

-ical o

in help

Recomm

That th

That i

will g

practic

That e

meeting

Local E

colleges involved and was facilitated by regular meetings. At the time of printing it seemed that Cork R.T.C. would achieve agreement on an exam appeals system. This should now serve as a precedent for the other colleges and improve progress considerably. In making greater use of our representation the programme of work and the plan of action recognised the need to stimulate an informed debate in the Colleges with regard to the educational issues. The open Conference on the future of Irish Third Level Education 29th/30th Nov 1986 was an attempt to stimulate such a debate. The Conference, which took place in four sessions, basically undertook to evaluate the system as it operates and to suggest change within the structures. The Conference attracted a wide range of speakers and was felt to be useful by all those who attended. However, despite much advance notification and discussion the attendance from member colleges was poor.

## 2.7 N.C.E.A.

The National Council for Educational Awards meets on a twice monthly basis and has not been a source of educational change for students. The work of the Council has often been solely concerned with the implementation of existing rules and procedures rather than considering new approaches. However the representation of U.S.I. on the Council has been useful for the access to information and for the avenue it affords for the solving of individual student problems. The major study documents produced by the Council were contributed to by U.S.I.. The international study group to examine the case for a new technological University asked for a submission from the N.C.E.A. Any difficulty that U.S.I. would have had, considering our policy is vague on this issue, was overcome by the fact that the N.C.E.A. agreed to submit a document outlining all the various options. The N.C.E.A. have not as yet taken a position on which of the options they favour. This will not be necessary until July at least so once our policy is clarified we can have an input into the choice. The N.C.E.A. have agreed for the first time to accept a submission from U.S.I. on fee and grant levels. They have also agreed to consider making public representations to the Dept of Education. This submission will be presented to the June 3rd meeting of the N.C.E.A. The officers feel that the use of the N.C.E.A. could be considerably increased only if pressure for change with regard to academic issues comes from local colleges in general and from academic staff in particular.

U.S.I. met with a Dept of Education Task Force in February. This Task Force is looking at the problems of the Third Level Admission procedure and grant administration. This issue has been discussed at National Council and Sector level and 2 separate written submissions are being prepared.

## 2.8 EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The role of the Education Committee did not develop very well this year. The major problem here was lack of participation on behalf of local colleges. For the Education Committee to work well it requires the attendance of a wide variety of people, especially the Education Officers. The Education Committee could be the key initiator of practical debate on educational issues within our union, and be of benefit in helping give clarity to the role of Local Education Officer.

### Recommendations:

That the Education Committee meets at least before each National Council.

That it gives a report from that meeting to National Council. This will give the Committee a practical aim and will help increase the practical profile of the education debate at National Council.

That every attempt be made to encourage wide attendance at committee meetings. A separate notification should be posted direct to the Local Education Officer.

## WELFARE

The work on Welfare issues this year has seen many major developments in colleges. The setting up of welfare services due to increased training and the active taking up of issues in colleges has been a welcome addition while successful information speaking tours on a number of issues have laid the groundwork for further campaigns in the future.

### **3.1 Student Services**

This area was highlighted by us at the beginning of the year. It was felt that detailed information was necessary and a national strategy would have to be worked out in order to have a successful National campaign on the issue.

We produced a Student Services Survey but it must be said that COs' were very slow in returning the completed survey as this survey only took place in the last number of months.

It must be said that the Technological Sector with USI did its own Student Services Survey which was extremely successful and in bringing this to the AVEC (Association of Vocational Education Colleges) Conference in March and ensuring it was supported, the sector has begun the lobbying necessary to convert the Report in to positive change.

We would propose that each sector prepare its own report between now and the end of the year and that the campaigns be taken up at sector level using individual colleges to set precedents.

On the national level, the Welfare Committee will have to organise a co-ordinated campaign in conjunction with the sectors on the issue although the chances of major improvements in the area have been made all the more difficult given the scale of cutbacks in colleges and particularly the new Public Services Jobs Embargo in the South.

One of the big elements in the campaign will be the drawing up of submissions and motions which will need to be put to every college board as soon as possible. These should again be drafted on a sector basis.

### **3.2 Social Welfare/Benefits Campaign**

The setting up of a National Campaign for Welfare Reform on a National level has been a very positive step and we have played a very important role in the organisation at a National level. Following the publication of the Report of the Commission on Social Welfare last August, a very broad based group including students, the unemployed, single parents, poverty groups, poverty organisations, the homeless etc., was set up to campaign for Welfare Reform.

On a National level, with both the President and Deputy President being involved, USI has gained a lot from the organisation, making links with many other organisations which increases our profile and also gains us outside support. This was converted into real benefit for us at our press conference to launch the pre-budget submissions

when a number of the groups involved expressed and publicly stated support for our campaign. This national involvement will become increasingly important next year with the virtual certainty of a major National campaign of resistance to this years budget among workers and the unemployed. Unfortunately, the benefits realised by involvement in the NCWR at a National level have not been taken up by local COs' and this will be important given that the campaign is trying to establish itself, particularly outside of Dublin. We would suggest a joint USI/NCWR speaking tour bringing the issues to students in colleges and inviting other groups in the community to participate. Local COs' should become involved in the setting up branches of the NCWR, improving their links and gaining support from the local community.

In the North, the campaign on the Social Security Review does't really seem to have taken off in any great degree. Action for Benefits seems to also have quietened down considerably. The Northern Ireland Welfare Committee were to investigate the possibility of getting a meeting with Richard Needham to discuss student access to benefits which has been hit considerably but as yet this has not materialised. The campaign will have to become a priority again in the Regional Welfare Committee work next year.

In the Programme of Work, the Social Welfare Appeals System was also prioritised by us but as this has become an integral part of the NCWK's work, not that much has been done on it as a specific campaign. The legislation on the issue is still lying dormant in the Oireachtas but with the re-election of Senator Brendan Ryan, we can be sure that the Bill will be pushed again.

### 3.3 Family Planning

This year has seen the revitalisation of this campaign and USI has been working closely with the IFPA. Following the Welfare Conference an extensive speaking tour was organised with the IFPA which led to number of colleges stocking contraceptives for the first time.

On the publicity level, a poster on the issue is currently being co-produced by USI and IFPA aiming at students holiday times and it is hoped that this poster, along with an accompanying leaflet will be relaunched at the beginning of next year.

A training day on family planning services was also organised but we will deal with this under the training section.

On the commercial level, discussions were held with two major companies, Frederick Trading Limited and I.F.P.A. to discuss the possibility of a better deal for Students' Unions in the buying of condoms. This is currently being investigated as is the possibility of vending machines being installed in colleges.



### 3.4. AIDS

The AIDS Campaign did not start the year as one of our priorities as the the year progressed it became very evident that U.S.I. would have to become involved in the campaign.

A start on this was made by the joining of AIDS Action Alliance, a broad based campaign group and we have been active in the group throughout the year. Along with Gay Health Action we organised an extremely comprehensive speaking tour covering half the colleges in membership and raising awareness.

An important development at the end of the year was the setting up of the AIDS Action Alliance Helpline in which we were involved. This service will be invaluable for the provision of information. It is hoped that students of the Dublin Colleges will actually get involved in working on the Helpline and it is also intended that other lines will be set up around the country. It would also be better if more members of the Welfare Committee attended AIDS Action Alliance meetings as this would give Welfare Officers a better idea of what was happening on a National level.

The production of information directly aimed at students has happened over the last month with the production of the Student AIDS Action leaflet in association with T.C.D. U.S.I. were involved from the time the idea emerged and the leaflets were distributed to most colleges in membership.

Next year we must organise further speaking tours using also a number of videos which U.S.I. is in the process of buying.

If financial considerations allow us we will have to produce our own posters and leaflets to back up information provided in our publications like the recent feature in U.S.I. News.

We will also have to organise direct action soon if the governments refusal to take constructive action.

### 3.5 HOUSING

This year saw two major developments in the setting up of the Housing Rights Committee in the North and the Campaign for Flatdwellers Rights (C.F.R.) in the South. The N.I. Welfare Committee are involved in the Northern Campaign and the Deputy President represented U.S.I. in the Southern Campaign.

The C.F.R. drew up a charter of Flatdwellers rights and used it in the run-up to the election, securing support from many parties. As with a number of the other campaigns it is hoped that this group, now at a formative stage, will become nationwide and it would be very advantageous for local C.O.s to get involved in a intensive campaign on the issue. Interestingly Sligo R.T.C. did a very good report on housing recently which came up with appalling statistics on lack of safety and basic fire prevention services in the private rented dwelling

3.6

3.7

and without doubt, this would be reflected in most colleges.

The whole issue of housing co-operatives is alive and kicking in the Northern region with SHAC continuing its programme of expansion but it seems to have died down in the South. However, the last meeting of USI Welfare Committee set up a sub-committee to look into the area and report back and hopefully, this will rekindle interest in the subject.

#### 6 Mature Students

At the meeting we had with former Minister Paddy Cooney in November, great interest was shown in the mature students issue and Welfare Committee decided to co-ordinate a campaign on the issue.

The plan was to distribute a survey to all mature students and to follow this up with meetings of mature students which would hopefully lead to a co-ordinated national group. Unfortunately, even though the survey went out in the mailing in January, only one reply has been received by Head Office, making a National Report on Mature Students an impossibility.

Given the victory USI won on Theology grants and the possible moves on the 2/4 honours rule, we must continue to push the mature students issue as it is clear that the possibility of success exists there.

A co-ordinated lobbying campaign can only take place, however, if all students unions take part and return the surveys immediately.

#### 7 Disabled Students

The Disabled Students Campaign has got quite a degree of National Press coverage yet it has not been taken up to any degree by the majority of COs. This issue was also discussed with the Minister but little headway was made.

The Disabled Students Conference in Roslyn Park in March was poorly attended but it laid out a clear programme of work for next year, including -

- The drawing up and campaigning on a charter of Disabled Students Rights
- The organisation of a speaking tour and information campaign
- The taking up of direct action colleges in the form of Disability Awareness Days to bring college and media attention to the issue

#### 3.8 Overseas Students

The main development in our work this year was the production of the Overseas Students Pack, which was done in conjunction with the Irish Council for Overseas Students (I.C.O.S.). The pack aims to provide local S.U.'s with the information that overseas students need and we hope that many C.O.'s will actively take up the issues outlined and will provide their own information for Overseas Students based on what is in the pack and on local details.

### 3.9 Welfare Training

This year has seen USI's emphasis on training of officers increasing and this is particularly true in the welfare area.

We had a very good session on Welfare at the Union Organisation Seminar in September which led to the setting up of a number of welfare offices and improvements in welfare information provided.

This was followed up in October with our National Welfare Conference which was more specialized in dealing with particular areas and all the people present seemed to find a lot of value in this.

It was following the Welfare Conference that many people requested specific 'issue' meetings and the speaking tours largely grew out of the conference.

Following the conference it was felt that there was a need for more specific training days and there was quite a demand for a specific day on Family Planning Services. This was organised by the Deputy President in conjunction with the IFPA. Unfortunately, it was extremely badly attended, even though it had been well publicised. This was mainly because it was organised after many incoming Welfare Officers had been elected, due to pressure of time and in future these kind of events will have to be organised in the first term.

The second term also saw the first sector training event with the NI Research and Development Officer and USI running a training event for FE Welfare Officers which again was very successful. It would seem that this approach would be a good one to take in the future as the event zoned in a lot more on the specific needs of the officers involved.

### 3.10 Information Provision

The major work on information provision this year was the overhaul of the USI Welfare manual, which the Deputy President did over last summer. A lot of the information given needed to be simplified and many sections added to or updated. This was achieved with the help of a number of people who re-wrote full sections and it is to be hoped that a further update this year will improve the situation.

It is also clear that northern colleges are falling between two stools as regard the welfare manual and this problem needs to be tackled this year in conjunction with the Northern Research and Development Officer.

this year also saw the publication of a specific Welfare Pack dealing with Overseas Students compiled jointly between USI and ICOS and more of these packs would help to make information accessible to Welfare Officers.

The other important part of the work was trying to bring the information directly to students and this was achieved with large welfare features in each of the issue of USI News. This is a practice which must be continued given that our budget at the moment makes the printing of specific leaflets very difficult.

## 4. WOMEN'S RIGHTS

### 4.1 Introduction

At the start of the year it was necessary to ascertain the situation as regards women's affairs in our colleges. A questionnaire was sent out to colleges with questions relating to WRO's, women's groups, number of women in college, number of women lecturers etc. Unfortunately only ten colleges returned this questionnaire so to date we still do not have a comprehensive overview of women in our colleges. As it is important that women are in a position to organize effectively and autonomously in our colleges a woman only training event was held in early October. This training event was attended by women from a wide number of colleges. Topics such as women in students unions, women's autonomy, sexism in education, violence against women, sexual harassment and creche facilities were discussed. A training pack was compiled to help women to organize within their colleges. As a result of a national council decision an open training event on women's issues was organized in February. This event was attended by representatives of two colleges thus underlining once more the lip-service paid to women's issues in our colleges and further emphasizing the need for women to organize and lead any campaign on women's issues.

### 4.2 The National Women's Conference

Organized in November was a great success, attended by almost 80 delegates from all over the country. During the weekend topics discussed included, the women's movement in Ireland, setting up women's groups, violence against women, fertility control, abortion, and women in the North. The Women's Rights Action Committee for 86/87 was elected at the Conference. On the Saturday afternoon the conference voted to adjourn for two hours so that women could attend the march against strip-searching organized by Dublin Council of Trade Unions.

### 4.3 W.R.A.C.

Over the past few years WRAC has been developing into a more effective committee and this development continued this year. It was decided that as well as the eight elected members, membership of WRAC should be open to any interested women to broaden its representation and to ensure that it became more active.

This committee met regularly throughout the year and was better attended than it had been in previous years. The two major achievements of WRAC this year was the setting up of the Dublin Area Women's Committee and the organization and promotion of National Women's Week (both will be elaborated on in the relevant sections). Attempts were made by WRAC to organize self defence classes and a course in assertiveness training for women students. Due to various factors these efforts did not come to fruition. Plans were also made for

a one-day conference on women in education but unfortunately this did not happen due to problems of timing. It is hoped that a similar conference could be held next year.

#### **4.4 Women's Rights Officers**

Most of our colleges now have Women's Rights Officers and we should continue to strive to ensure that all colleges have WRO's within the next two years. The post of WRO was added to the constitution of colleges such as Kevin Street. We should also continue to campaign to ensure that the post of Women's Rights Officers remain women only posts and that the trend towards anti-discrimination officers is tackled as soon as possible.

#### **4.5 Women's Groups**

Women's groups, in colleges where they have been set up, were very active and organized regular meetings, ents. etc. A lot of these women's groups also organized events during women's week. There is still a lot of work to be done to ensure that the women's groups get adequate funding and practical support from students unions. Where women's groups are organized there has been an increase in the profile of women and women's issues in colleges and an earnest attempt to ensure students unions take women's issues seriously. New women's groups were also set up in Kevin St., COMAD and Waterford RTC which will ensure that women's issues are prioritized within these students unions in years to come.

#### **4.6 Area Committees**

There are now two women's area committees, the N.I. Regional Women's Committee and the Dublin Area Women's Committee which is an amalgamation of Dublin North and Dublin South areas. There are still a number of organizational problems with these women's committees but the fact that they have been established is a major step forward in building up a network of communication and a campaigning basis for women in our union. These area committees have already planned or are in the process of organizing on issues such as abortion, rape, sexism in the curriculum etc. The NI Regional Women's Committee is planning a conference for the second term.

#### **4.7 Women's Autonomy**

There were problems at the start of the year with the issue of women's autonomy especially at the women's training event. The whole principle of women's autonomy is one which needs to be discussed widely in students unions and which our unions should be strongly committed to. Despite agreement at the union organization seminar that women have the right to organize autonomously, objections were raised by various colleges throughout the year. It is a sad reflection on our union that this principle has still to be defended after many years of women's campaigning.

#### **4.8 National Women's Week (dedicated to Anne Devlin)**

As WRAC had designated the week of 3rd - 8th March as National Women's week many colleges made a serious effort to participate in the activities suggested for that week. There were problems of timing in that

it fell during Rag Week for some colleges but events were organized for the following week where possible. A blank poster was produced for use in colleges. A lot of events were organized with abortion and strip-searching being two of the most popular issues with colleges. Organizing a National Women's Week such as this went a long way to increasing the profile of women in college and is certainly something which should be organized every year.

#### 4.9 International Women's Day

This fell at the end of National Women's Week and the activities organized for this were attended and supported by women in USI. Defend the Clinics picket was held on Saturday in Dublin and a large number of women (especially from U.U.) attended the picket against strip-searching at Maghaberry Jail.

#### 4.10 Abortion

Circumstances dictated that abortion was a priority for our work on women's rights this year. Early in the year a couple of meetings were held with Ruth Riddick, the Director of Open Line Counselling to clarify how USI could help the clinics in the pending court case. Women from USI attended the court during the hearing and a press statement was released condemning Justice Hamilton's ruling in December. Since December National Council took the decision to supply women with information on abortion and contacts for clinics in London. This decision attracted much adverse media publicity. However, this media publicity led to a situation where women could contact USI to request information on abortion. In the weeks that followed Head Office answered on average two phone calls per day from women seeking information on abortion. The Defend the Clinics Campaign, which USI actively supports, produced information packs on abortion which have been sent out to all colleges and an updated pack has been sent to women's groups and women's officers. Telephone numbers and addresses of clinics have been published in USI News and we should continue to publish such information as long as Irish women need it. Early next year USI should organize an information day/ seminar on abortion for welfare officers and WRO's to ensure they can deal adequately with enquiries from women about abortion.

Given the situation with abortion this year many SUs, debating societies, womens groups etc. held meetings to discuss the issue. Both the President and WRO spoke at a large number of meetings on the issue of abortion and a woman's right of access to information on abortion. It was heartening to see that in colleges which debated the issue that the outcome was in favour of a woman's right to information.

The WRO also spoke at a meeting organized by the National Abortion Campaign at the NUS Conference in Blackpool on the issue of abortion in Ireland.

USI is also affiliated to NIALRA and supports their campaign to have the 1967 Abortion Act extended to the North of Ireland. This year is the 20th anniversary of the introduction of the Act and NIALRA is organizing an independent tribunal on abortion in the six counties. Colleges in the North have been actively supporting this campaign.

W.R.A.C. at the start of the second term wanted to draw up a list of colleges with policy on abortion and a mailing was sent to colleges requesting them to send copies of their policy. Unfortunately to date we have only received replies from four colleges.

#### 4.11 Strip-Searching

USI has been involved in the strip-searching campaign since 1983 and we continued to support it this year. Early in the year the three different groups; prisoners campaign, women against strip-searching and trade unions against strip-searching came together in an attempt to reactivate the campaign and to draw up plans for the year. The International petition has been circulated to all colleges, some of which have already been returned. Several pickets and a march against strip-searching have been supported by USI. A national working conference on strip-searching was held in USI Head Office on Saturday 4th April and was attended by over sixty people. The conference planned several activities which include petition signing, letter-writing, pickets, fund raising etc. all of which will be advertised in mailings to colleges and which as many unions as possible should attempt to support. A central co-ordinating committee was established, on which USI has a representative and we should use this position to ensure that students become more actively involved in this campaign. Speakers from the strip-search campaign have spoken at a number of conferences organized by USI and at meetings in colleges during women's weeks etc. A new video has been produced by the campaign and there should be an attempt to have this shown in as many colleges as possible in the third term.

USI also wrote letters to the press and Peter Barry on the issue.

#### 4.12 Rape

The issue of violence against women was discussed at the women's training event and the women's conference with guest speakers from the Rape Crisis Centre attending both conferences as well as speaking at meetings in colleges all over the country throughout the year. The main thrust of the campaign this year was a petition demanding the Repeal of the Criminal Law (Rape) Act 1981. Copies of the petition were sent to all colleges along with information leaflets. This campaign was particularly relevant this year given the increase in the number of rapes, sexual assaults etc. which have taken place on our campuses over the last few years. Several colleges, through their women's groups launched campaigns on safety on campus in line with USI policy. The campaigns were launched in such a way to raise awareness of the problems of safety for women students and to ascertain the steps which need to be taken to ensure their safety. Students unions should make it a priority to support such campaigns and to ensure that motions on safety on campus are forwarded to their college boards.

#### 4.13 W.E.S.I.B. Seminar

A WESIB Seminar on Women in Higher Education was held in London in November. The seminar was organized because national unions of students who had not given any priority to women's issues in their own work agreed that the issue was of such general importance to the student movement that WESIB should tackle it in a seminar. The seminar was attended by representatives from seventeen countries. The seminar discussed issues such as general trends in women's participation in higher education in Europe, women's changing role in the economy. The needs of women in higher education, sexual harassment/violence against women and women in students unions. The session

on women in students unions was presented by USI. The general feeling from USI of the seminar was that it was extremely frustrating dealing with NUS's which had never considered the issue of women's rights before. It also made us aware that we were among the most advanced unions as regards women's issues (believe it or not).

A policy document on women's issues was collated and sent to colleges as well as briefing packs for women's issues covering a number of issues which USI is and should be campaigning on.

#### **4.14 Creche Facilities**

Although USI had prioritized creche facilities as a campaign this year it was one which never took off with the exception of Magee College whose women's group organized an active campaign around the issue. Although many colleges agree that there is a need for creche facilities on all campuses it is a campaign which never becomes a priority in our union's work. There is a need next year to take a serious look at our approach to this campaign and to revitalize it.

#### **4.15 Rag Mags**

Although many colleges have taken a serious view of the content of their rag mags and have tried to ensure that jokes which are offensive to sections of our society are not included there are still problems. The most notable was in Athlone RTC this year which resulted in the resignation of the W.R.O. This continuing problem underlines the need for us to ensure that as a national union we continue to confront the sexist attitudes in our society. Students unions should also strive to ensure that the contents of rag mags are closely monitored and censored if need be.

From the work that developed on women's issues this year there are many ideas for the future organization of women in USI, these are dealt with to a large extent in the motion to this Congress on women in USI, a few more ideas have been included here.



## 5. NATIONAL AFFAIRS

### 5. 1. Introduction

At the Union Organisation Seminar the plans for National Affairs for the year were discussed. It was agreed that there was a need to raise discussion on repression/civil liberties and the National Question at both a local and national level. As in the previous two years it was agreed that colleges should try to raise discussion on civil liberties issues in colleges. Various issues were highlighted, as dictated by U.S.I. policy.

### 5. 2. Strip Searching

See section in 'Womens' Rights'.

### 5. 3. Plastic Bullets.

Speakers from the United Campaign against Bullets addressed several meetings and conferences organised by U.S.I. A representative of U.S.I. attended as many campaign meetings as possible in Belfast and through the Dublin campaign organised a fund-raiser for the campaign. When Nigel Hegarty the RUC reservist, who murdered John Downes was acquitted in September U.S.I. sent letters of protest to the media and to Peter Barry, Minister for Foreign Affairs. Plastic bullets leaflets were sent to all colleges and a price list of campaign literature, badges, posters etc. Pickets of Woodbourne R.U.C. station and John Downes commemoration rally were also attended by U.S.I. members, Queens students against repression group brought speakers from the Plastic Bullets Campaign and a speaker of the 'shoot to kill' policy to NUS Conference in Blackpool in December.

### 5. 4 Section 31

A letter of protest against the renewal of Section 31 was signed by National Council and sent to the media. U.S.I. officers also attended pickets of Leinster House and the Department of Communications to protest at the Irish Government's attack on free speech and the Irish peoples right to information.

### 5.5. Extradition

Telegrams were sent from U.S.I. Head Office and several colleges to the Minister for Justice in Holland urging her to rule against the extradition order on Gerry Kelly and Brendan McFarlane. Several colleges took part in a picket outside the Courthouse in Donegal

during Patrick McIntyres court appearance there.

#### 5. 6. Offences Against the State Act - Section 30

The increased use of repressive legislation in the 26 counties was highlighted when several students were arrested during the fees/grants campaign under Section 30 of the Offences Against the State Act.

In press statements and letters to the press U.S.I. condemned these arrests under this Act as an attack on peoples rights to voice dissent and protest against government policy on any issue.

#### 5. 7. Students Against Repression

While U.S.I. organised several meetings with speakers from civil liberties campaigns, it is necessary to build up a strong campaign against repression in Ireland North and South. While quite a few colleges have organised meetings on specific issues there is only one active Students against Repression Group in U.S.I. which is in Q.U.B. Other colleges should be looking at the possibility of organising Students against Repression groups to ensure that students are made aware of the relevant issues and that there are support groups in colleges. As part of NUS Campaign against Repression in Ireland the W.R.O. was invited to participate in a week long road show of colleges in Britain in November. The main issues dealt with on the speaking tour were strip-searching, plastic bullets, the P.T.A. and Students against Repression. Speakers from U.S.I. and Q.U.B. also spoke at a fringe meeting on Ireland at a NUS conference in March.

In Ireland it is necessary next year to organise a similiar roadshow to gain maximum publicity and to give repression/civil liberties issues a higher profile in our colleges. The strip-searching campaign is organising a speaking tour for September and as many colleges as possible should tie into that.

#### 5. 8. Belfast Exposed

The Belfast Exposed exhibition, after its showing at the National Question Conference, did a successful tour of a number of colleges including Sligo, Athlone, Carlow and University of Ulster. Again, this exhibition is one which all colleges or areas in U.S.I. should attempt to show in the third term if possible but certainly next year.

#### 5. 9. National Question Conference

The second ever National Question Conference organised by U.S.I. was held in Q.U.B. in January. Head Office attempted to give this conference as high a profile as possible with a number of prominent speakers. The topics the conference covered are all included in U.S.I. policy. Speakers in the morning included Bill Rolston, Lecturer from U.U.J. who spoke on political developments in the North since 1969, speakers from the Campaigns against Strip-Searching and plastic bullets and Brice Dickson a lecturer from Q.U.B. who outlined the

whole apparatus of repressive legislation. In the afternoon Mary Nelis, a community worker from Derry, spoke of her experiences as a woman in the North. Dougie Jameson from Rathcoole Self Help Group spoke about community politics, Mairtin O'Muilleoir and Ide Ni Chonnaithe spoke about the Irish language North and South. Speakers from political parties who spoke mainly about the Anglo-Irish Agreement included Jim Wells, D.U.P., Austin Currie S.D.L.P., Gerry Adams Sinn Fein, and John Cushnahan Alliance.

### 5.10 Weekend to West Belfast

As a result of an invitation from Gerry Adams to students to visit West Belfast 19 students took part in a delegation to West Belfast on 11th/12th April. The students who stayed in houses all over West Belfast met representatives from Sinn Fein, S.D.L.P., Alliance Party, Campaign for Equal Citizenship. They also met with the Divis Residents Association and Rathcoole Self Help Group who took them on a tour of their areas and discussed housing problems in their areas. The students also met with representatives of Glór na nGael who spoke of the cultural revival in West Belfast and their campaign for a second Bunscoil in the area. Despite being dogged with organisational problems the weekend was a success in terms of what the students who took part in the delegation felt they had achieved from it.

A policy document on National Affairs and a Students Against Repression Pack was prepared for all colleges. The pack contained information on strip-searching, plastic bullets, shoot to kill, Birmingham 6, Show Trials etc. All of these contained contact addresses for campaigns and people to write to in protest at various aspects of repression.

### 5.11 Cursai Gaeilge

Ag an comhdhail seo an bhliain seo chaite, do phleamar run dearfach don ghaeilge agus do leagamar amach cupla rud le deanamh. Ag tus na bliana, bhunaigh an Leas-uachtaran Coiste Na Gaeilge don aontas ach ce gur chur seo tus le obair an aontais, bhí fadhbanna mor aige.

I rith na bliana, rinneamar iarracht cruinnithe rialta a eagra don choiste ach ní mor an meid baill a thainig chucu. S'ead an fhadhb is mo na nach bhfuil na huachtarain sna colaisti ag tabhairt an eolas faoi na cruinnithe go dtí na daoine a mbeadh suim acu. Tá se soileir duinn go mbeidh orainn an obair seo a dheanamh go direach lena Cumainn gaelach sna colaisti ce go dteann seo direach in aghaidh an polasai ata againn.

Bhí orainn fadhbanna Gaeilgeoiri sa tuaisceart a fhreagairt ag tus na bliana nuair a ghabh an R.U.C. ar min-bhus micléinn Ollscoil Na Banríonna agus iad ag dul abhaile o crinniu gaeilge i gco. Mí Euir an Aontas raiteas amach ag caineadh an RUC agus fuair se cuid mhaith cludaíocht sa phreas.

Rinneamar iarracht deireadh seachtain sa Ghaeltacht a eagra sa dara tearma ach arís ce gur thaispeain na daoine ag Comhairle Naisiunta do theip orainn arís go leor daoine a fhail agus bhí orainn an deireadh seachtain a chur ar cheall.

Don bhlian seo chugainn, mholfaimis go mbeadh crinniu no comhdhail gaeilge ag tus na bliana ina mbeadh na cumainn gaelach agus na hoifigh a bhfuil suim acu pairteach ann.

Leis an meid sin, bhi A.M.E. pairteach ar Lar-Choiste na hOg-eagraisi Gaeilge agus chuireamar ruin agus aitimh do Comhairle Naisiunta Na nOg ar an Gaeilge agus an oideachas agus cabhraiomar le cupla colaiste polasai agus ruin ar datheangachas a chur le cheile.

Ag an am cheanna, ni bheidh moran dul chun chinn gan cabhair o na colaisti agus leanfaidh polasai folamh agus comharmhar ar aghaidh.

At last year's Congress we debated and passed a positive motion and we laid ourselves out a number of aims. At the beginning of the year, we formed an Irish language committee for the Union following the Deputy President's suggestion but although this put a start to our work it met with major problems.

During the year, we attempted to organise regular meetings but the attendance was extremely poor. The major problem was that the Presidents in colleges were not passing on the information to the interested people. It is clear to us that if anything is to be done in this area we will have to work directly with the Cumann Gaelachs on this issue even though this clearly is not what was intended in our policy.

We had to address the problems of Irish speakers in the North during the year when a group of Queen's students were arrested and held by the RUC on their way home from an Irish language meeting in Co. Meath. USI issued a strong press release on the issue which got good coverage in the National Press.

We tried again to organise a weekend in the Gaeltacht in the second term but once again, though National Council gave the idea great support we had to cancel the weekend due to the lack of numbers.

For next year, we would recommend an Irish language conference early in the year involving Cumann Gaelachs and INTERESTED union officers.

As well as the above, USI were involved in the National Committee of Irish language Youth groups and we put a number of motions and submissions on Irish language to the NYCI who included it in their education policy document. We also helped a number of colleges to draft bilingual policy and motions to college board.

We also managed to get reasonable coverage from the Irish language media with the Deputy President being interviewed for RTE television, RTE Radio 1 Nuacht and Radio na Gaeltachta features. This must be continued next year.

On a final note, not much will be done next year without COs co-operation and an empty and tokenistic policy will continue at college level unless some real commitment is shown.

**5.12 National Youth Council of Ireland:** In accordance with the motion adopted at Annual Congress last year urging greater involvement in the NYCI, the officers have increased USI input into the NYCI. All our motions were adopted this year at the Annual Assembly. We had an article published in the NYCI magazine 'Output' on disability. USI has actively participated in the International Committee; Juvenile Justice Working Group. Our involvement on the other S.C.'s has been limited due to lack of personnel. NYCI featured sections on third level education during their pre-election campaign. On the more negative side NYCI still could be described as a very right-wing, reactionary organisation in many respects, the current position regarding the Youth Service is highly unsatisfactory in light of the severe attacks by the budget, despite this NYCI has failed to react to this publicly which in the officers opinion is indicative of the conservative nature of the NYCI leadership. However, USI will be calling on the NYCI to call a Consultative Council to debate the issue. More recently we were successful in having a discussion on AIDS at the Youth Affairs Standing Committee. The officers would recommend that more CO's would become involved in NYCI next year and would express their thanks to everybody who helped out in USI's work in NYCI this year.

**5.13 Trade Unions:** This year also saw a renewed attempt by Head Office to effect greater contact with the trade union movement, in particular with local trades' councils and local unions. The following trades councils have student observers: Galway, Letterkenny and Dublin. Marty Dwan, Letterkenny RTC SU, sat on the ICTU Youth Affairs Standing Committee.

## 6. INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

The level of priority given to international work this year wasn't as high as in previous years mainly due to the amount of time and resources being spent on our Fees/Grants Campaign.

### 6.1 Nicaragua Must Survive

The main concentration of USI's work did however go to the Nicaragua Must Survive Campaign where both the UDO and the Deputy President were active in the organisation of both fund-raising concerts and the selling of Nicaraguan coffee to Students' Unions. The NMS Campaign called for funds to aid the provision of essential materials such as medicines, paper, clothes and tools. Through a series of leaflets they attempted to counteract the US offensive which is destroying Nicaragua and also making a number of appearances at debates in colleges. Many support groups sprung up during the year throughout the country but as yet still has to get the full support from the student movement.

### 6.2 Miscellaneous International Work

During the year USI also supported but not as vehemently (due to lack of time) the Ireland - Chile Support Group, the Irish Anti-Apartheid Movement and the protests of our colleagues in France and Spain.

6.3 WESIB The President and WRO attended a WESIB Seminar on Women in Higher Education. They found that USI's work in the area of womens rights is good in comparison to other National Unions. Consequently the Seminar covered many areas in which USI is already involved. They however found the Seminar a useful forum for exchanges of views: meeting with other Unions and an opportunity to learn of other problems.

Partly on the invitation of USI, WESIB carried out a survey of Student Finances in Europe. This was duly completed by USI. However the findings were delayed by the slowness of some of the other Unions in replying. These are now, available however from Head Office.

USI and WESIB are currently discussing the holding of the next Seminar on Student Housing in Ireland before the end of this year.

### 6.4 South Africa

Regrettably our work on this area has been weak over the last twelve months. USI did however take part in an IAAM march last summer and a number of the officers attended some of the events commemorating the 75th Anniversary of the founding of the ANC. USI has now renewed its affiliation to the IAAM which had lapsed for the last couple of years.

It is hoped that a greater interest in the struggle for freedom in South Africa will occur next year and a larger programme of information and support activities will take place.

Still on South Africa, a speaking tour by Nimrod Sejake, a Trade Unionist who fled during the treason trials of 1959, was very successful. He spoke mainly of the history of the labour movement in South Africa and its opposition to apartheid. This tour covered Letterkenny, Carlow, and some of the DIT Colleges and was organised jointly by Labour Youth and USI.

The FE Sector in NI held a number of successful meetings on Southern Africa taking in Namibia which is also suffering from state repression. COBS in Belfast, in conjunction with NUS/USI hosted a week of events on these issues as did Queens University.

**6.5 Conclusion**

Hopefully next year will see a certain amount of time being spent on International issues and maybe some discussions at National Council on the above and possibly other cases of state repression.

With regard to the associates in membership this issue should be discussed at the May meeting of National Council.

## **7. ADMINISTRATION & FINANCE**

### **7.1 Local S.U. Finance**

As stated earlier many SUs have been facing attacks on their finances and autonomy and it is clear that this must be strongly fought against. Any strategy to combat such attacks must include the putting forward of union development plans. The need for adequately planned budgeting is often overlooked by many SUs who do not budget properly for major items of capital expenditure, thus creating major problems. USI must continue to improve the training on Admin. and Finance at the Union Organisation Seminar. All efforts must be made by local COs to secure a decent level of capitation and to keep a firm control on finances.

### **7.2 USI Administration and Finance**

Like local unions, USI must plan in order to develop. The officers feel that many changes in administration within Head Office can be made. While some small changes have taken place this year the officers recommend that full discussion takes place among USI staff and officers over the summer period so that more fundamental changes can take place and so that more planning is put into the office work. Such changes should take on board the specific roles of staff, officers and the needs of our members for regular information in an accessible form among other things. The officers also feel it is necessary to review the financial position of USI in relation to more long-term development plans.

While USI is financially stable many problems were created this year due to the extremely late payment of affiliation fees by the majority of our member unions. Most COs now recognise that unions need a sound financial base, based on a decent capitation level. However, this recognition has not extended to USI thus causing late payment of fees. If USI is to develop and to help local unions develop it needs resources and the payment of affiliation fees should be viewed in that context.

The financial accounts for 1985/86 have been circulated and will be discussed separately.

### **7.3 U.S.I.T.**

The year has been satisfactory for USIT with increased turnover and the opening of new offices. USIT is now represented in London, Oxford, Bristol, Manchester, Glasgow, New York, Paris, Nice, Brussels and Athens, as well as in Ireland.

The expansion of business has led to an examination of the under-capitalisation of the company. This has led to a number of moves in relation to shareholding and shareholders. The working capital of USIT was increased in October from 250,000 to 300,000 ordinary shares. The Bureau was allocated an extra 20,000 shares and USI purchased 5000.

The management in consultation with USI have also considered a number of options in relation to bringing in an additional shareholder. One option was to involve NUS(UK) in the British undertakings - this proposal was turned down by NUS. Continued negotiations have taken place throughout the years with Investment in Industry in Ireland (3i), a venture capital company.



The Board of USIT is currently discussing a proposal whereby the operations of USIT would be divided into USIT (Ireland) and an International Holding Company to cover all the other operations. The President and Specific Interest Director Claran McCann will continue negotiations with USIT Management over the summer, and firm proposals will be put to National Council in the Autumn.

At the specific request of COs and at great expense to USIT in terms of finance, time and expertise, USIT organised a training event for student union officers. The officers regretted that the turn-out for this event was extremely poor and have apologised to the USIT Management and Staff in relation to this event.

A further 4000 J1 Visas for the U.S. were allocated this year, demonstrating continued good work by USIT. In addition 100 Work Visas for Canada were allocated on an experimental basis.

At the request of National Council USIT have included an information section on AIDS in the Globeplotter and as part of the J1 orientation programme on arrival in the U.S.A.

The Board and Supervisory Board will be discussing the ISIC Card repayment deal in the near future with a view to negotiating the same deal for next year.

**Title:** Congress 1987: Tuairisc Ó Na hOifigigh  
**Organisation:** Union of Students in Ireland  
**Date:** 1987

Downloaded from the Irish Left Archive.  
Visit [www.leftarchive.ie](http://www.leftarchive.ie)

*The Irish Left Archive is provided as a non-commercial historical resource, open to all, and has reproduced this document as an accessible digital reference. Copyright remains with its original authors. If used on other sites, we would appreciate a link back and reference to the Irish Left Archive, in addition to the original creators. For re-publication, commercial, or other uses, please contact the original owners. If documents provided to the Irish Left Archive have been created for or added to other online archives, please inform us so sources can be credited.*