

## Bonds of Empire: The Formation of the National Federation of Canadian University Students, 1922–1929

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### ABSTRACT

The origins of the National Federation of Canadian University Students (NFCUS), Canada's first secular, student council-based national student organization, are explored. The NFCUS originated in the internationalizing context of the *Confédération internationale des étudiants* and British concern for redefining and strengthening Dominion relations. The following events are examined: the 1924 Imperial Conference of Students, held in England; the 1926 imperial debating tour that promoted national student organizing; the 1926 Conference of Representatives; and the First Annual NFCUS Conference, held in 1927. The formative influences on the NFCUS of the Student Christian Movement and pro-British Canadian university authorities are also examined. The NFCUS leaders held a narrow conception of the student interest and, moreover, were united by a pervasive and paradoxical imperial ideology that stressed both loyalty to the British Empire and a desire for Canadian national independence and identity. As such, the NFCUS was a highly political organization aligned with the university authorities, themselves associates of the British-Canadian elite.

### RÉSUMÉ

Cet article explore les origines de la Fédération nationale des étudiants universitaires canadiens (NFCUS), première organisation étudiante nationale et laïque au Canada. La NFCUS a vu le jour dans un contexte marqué par l'internationalisation de la *Confédération internationale des étudiants* et la volonté de la Grande-Bretagne de redéfinir et de renforcer les relations avec le Dominion. Parmi les événements ayant marqué la formation de la fédération, nous examinons : la conférence impériale des étudiants tenue en Angleterre en 1924; la tournée des débats impériaux de 1926 faisant la promotion de l'organisation nationale des étudiants; la *Conférence of Representatives* de 1926; ainsi que la première conférence annuelle de la NFCUS tenue en 1927. Nous explorons également de quelle manière le *Student Christian Movement* et les autorités universitaires britanniques canadiennes probritanniques ont influencé la formation NFCUS. Développant une conception étroite de l'intérêt des étudiants, les dirigeants de la NFCUS partageaient une idéologie impérialiste omniprésente et paradoxale qui insistait à la fois sur la loyauté envers l'Empire britannique et sur le sentiment d'indépendance et d'identité nationale canadienne. Ce faisant, la NFCUS était une organisation politique alignée sur les autorités universitaires, elles-mêmes associées à l'élite anglo-canadienne.

Over the Christmas break in 1926, a group of Canadian student council leaders came together in Montreal to form what would become in 1927 the National Federation of Canadian University Students (NFCUS) or *Fédération nationale des étudiants universitaires du Canada* (FNEUC). The idea to form a national, student council-based student organization in Canada can be traced back to the first Imperial Conference of Students (ICS), held in England in 1924. There, student delegates from throughout the British Isles and the British Dominions, including Canada, envisioned and planned a system of Dominion student organizations that would help maintain and strengthen the bonds of empire. However, the NFCUS's roots can ultimately be traced to the internationalism of the *Confédération internationale des étudiants* (CIE) formed in Strasbourg, France, in 1919. The formation of the CIE spurred the formation of the National Union of Students of England and Wales (NUS) in 1922, whereupon its leaders acted quickly to encourage the formation of national student organizations throughout the British Dominions. The NFCUS was mainly the accomplishment of a small group of British-Canadian student activists, encouraged by the NUS and the internationalist ideals of the CIE. The student leaders who created the NFCUS were entwined in a British imperialist and ideological campaign to re-define dominionhood by encouraging nationhood and national identity while maintaining imperial unity. Hence, this exploration of the origins of the NFCUS reveals the ties and conscious acts of co-operation among political elites, university administrators, and students on both sides of the Atlantic. The creation of the NFCUS was a conscious exercise in imperialist ideology and colonial politics and was an intrinsic part of Canadian nation-building.

The NFCUS was essentially a federation of student council representatives, funded on a per capita basis, with money collected by university administrations. The money collected was just enough to cover basic expenses, mainly the national conferences and the salary of a secretary-treasurer. The main decision-making authority of the officially bilingual NFCUS was the executive council, which comprised delegates from each student council and which met at annual meetings, usually over the Christmas break. Most day-to-day decisions were made by the secretary-treasurer, Percy Griffith Davies. He ran the NFCUS between 1926 and 1939 from his law office in Clyde, Alberta. There were approximately twenty participants at the 1926 Conference of Representatives that led to the formation of the NFCUS. The participants represented all Canadian universities except Ottawa, Laval, and the Maritime universities. The NFCUS's First Annual Conference in 1927 was attended by twenty-six delegates representing all Canadian universities except Ottawa and Laval and three officers of the executive council (who had been elected *pro tem* at the 1926 conference). Attendance numbers remained at about this level at the 1928 and 1929 conferences. After 1929 and throughout the 1930s, national conferences were held every other year. In October 1940, over a year into the Second World War, the NFCUS abruptly suspended operations.<sup>1</sup>

Until now, scholars have not examined the origins of Canada's student-council-based national student organization. The Student Christian Movement (SCM), Canada's first national student organization formed in 1921, has received more

attention, most likely because of its social change and Protestant religious orientation. That there is still no comprehensive history of the SCM may explain why the SCM's key relationship to the early NFCUS and its role in developing the plans that led to the formation of the NFCUS have so far been overlooked.<sup>2</sup> There are a handful of summaries of Canadian student life in the 1920s, sometimes included in university histories.<sup>3</sup> But these contribute little to our knowledge of the NFCUS. Thus, through an exploration of how the NFCUS came into being, this article fills a historiographical gap in our knowledge of Canadian student movements of the 1920s and the relationships among student, nationalist, and British imperialist social movements. Except for Paul Axelrod's pioneering investigations, the historiography of the pre-Second World War NFCUS is practically non-existent.<sup>4</sup> Hence, this paper relies on primary sources, particularly the digitized and searchable student newspapers and the few organization documents held in the archives at McMaster University, the University of Toronto, and the University of British Columbia.

Axelrod correctly observes that a British NUS-sponsored imperial debating tour that took place in the early months of 1926 inspired Canadian students to organize nationally and that the NFCUS promoted "postwar desires for international harmony and peace" and Canadian national unity.<sup>5</sup> However, there were several other vital influences, including the support the tour received from British and British-Canadian establishments. The British NUS, formed in 1922, was heavily reliant on private donations from the British establishment and would not have existed in the form it did without this patronage. On the Canadian side, the NFCUS most likely would not have come into existence without the facilitation of pro-British university administrators within Canada who provided moral, organizational, and financial support for the tour and, indirectly, the NFCUS's creation.<sup>6</sup> Without establishment supporters on both sides of the Atlantic and the British NUS leaders' desire to support the imperial project by encouraging the development of national unions of students in the Dominions, the NFCUS would never have formed, at least not in 1926–27.

While the extent of high-level, backroom influence may not be clear, one thing is: student leaders shared the cultural orientations and values of British and Canadian elites, in particular the vision of an autonomous and unified Canada within a strengthened British imperial order under which British racial superiority, patriarchy, and the social necessity of ruling elites were normative and understood as self-evident. The NFCUS was certainly not the result of elites controlling student leaders like puppets. Nor, conversely, was the NFCUS a politically autonomous student organization. The University of Toronto's SAC president in 1929–30, Allan H. Ferry, expressed it aptly: "It must be remembered that at present we have only a *measure* of student self-government..." (emphasis in original).<sup>7</sup>

### **The NFCUS and Imperial Culture**

During the 1920s, the British establishment was concerned with maintaining, developing, and defending its imperial interests and "common civilization" in the wake of the Great War's social disruption, increasing nationalistic tendencies throughout the

Empire, and in Canada specifically, American economic and cultural encroachment. Both British and British-Canadian elites sought ways to influence public opinion and promote British interests internationally. A Canadian national student organization with British ties, one that could represent all Canadian students, would be well-positioned to serve the British colonizers' interests and the imperial project. Moreover, when the NFCUS emerged in the mid-1920s, its leaders either identified with the elite or, less likely, had social origins within it. This was also a period when Canadian university students tended overall to be both politically conservative and uninterested in politics, compared to the period of the mid-to-late 1930s.<sup>8</sup>

Canadian youth was immersed in an imperialist culture well before they got to university, through schools, churches, youth organizations (such as Boy Scouts and Girl Guides), and popular culture. Students could support, at least passively, the NFCUS's involvement in the imperial project of nation-building and promotion of the bonds of empire. Oppositional student cultures and identities did emerge in the 1920s, such as those associated with communism, non-British immigrants, women students, and the socialist orientations of some within the SCM. But on campus, any counter-hegemonic youth cultures were weak, marginal, and regulated in part through university authority selection of the NFCUS.<sup>9</sup> British and British-Canadian elites did not create representative national student organizations; they simply let students get on with it, largely unhindered. And as long as the NFCUS's student leaders did not collectively challenge the establishment interests, culture, and values, they would be left alone and even encouraged.

Carl Berger's understanding of Canadian imperialism stressed the importance of culture and ideas in the exercise of power, including late nineteenth-century notions about the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race and civilization—often driven by a misappropriation of Darwin—and the British imperial mission for “uplifting” non-northern European or non-Christian humanity.<sup>10</sup> A sense of power, as expressed in cultural and racial superiority and godly duty to maintain the Empire, was pervasive in the daily life of the NFCUS participants and among British-Canadians in general. The NFCUS leaders' focus on national and imperial unity appears to be linked to a dominating imperialist ethos that included the idea that Canada would progress and eventually emerge as a major player within the Empire.

The British-Canadian establishment (including university presidents) aimed to strengthen cultural and economic ties with Britain while, paradoxically, fostering Canadian independence.<sup>11</sup> The model of empire in which Britain and its predominantly white Dominions would form a federation was passé by the mid-1920s. An alternative model had evolved instead, one in which the Dominions would be both independent from *and* loyal to Britain. This position was first articulated by the ideologues of Canada's elite Round Table Movement and later, during the 1920s, by elites associated with the successor to the Round Table Movement, the Canadian League of Nations Society (CLNS).<sup>12</sup> These elites included Sir Robert Falconer, Henry Marshall Tory, and Sir Arthur Currie, presidents of the universities of Toronto, Alberta, and McGill respectively, all of whom were pro-Canada and pro-Empire.<sup>13</sup> While it is impossible to measure the effects of these organizations and individuals on the popular

imagination and on student organizations and their leaders, the NFCUS leaders appeared to share many of the values and the cultural orientation of Canadian elites, including university authorities; student leaders and their organizations were aligned with capitalist and imperialist hegemony. Evidence of this is extensive, most notably in the form and practices of the NFCUS and its constitutional objectives. While the pervasive elite culture was not monolithic, it tended to unite around several key myths, including the natural superiority of the white race (over colonized and racialized peoples) and men (over women); the civilizing nature of British culture and the British Empire; the legitimacy of army and navy power necessary to uphold Pax Britannica; and a sense of moral superiority and a belief that it would be protected by the (largely Protestant) Christian god.

### **Post-war Growth of International and National Student Organizations**

The formation of the Brussels-based *Confédération internationale des étudiants* (CIE) in 1919 unleashed a predominantly European, international student movement.<sup>14</sup> The Palais Mondial in Brussels was chosen in 1920 as the organization's headquarters as a result of Belgian attempts to become a global centre of "scholarly exchange, international law and institution-building."<sup>15</sup> Propelled by a direct experience of the Great War, the protagonists of the CIE realized that students and future leaders of nations should contribute to building international communication and peace.<sup>16</sup> CIE protagonists also maintained "links to the political and academic authorities of their country [and]... sought to consolidate, rather than transform, the international order." Key League of Nations supporters shared the CIE's commitment to internationalism, and for this reason, they often worked together.<sup>17</sup>

CIE policy required that the basis of membership was a single politically autonomous and representative national student organization. In 1922, as a result of this requirement, the National Union of Students of England and Wales was formed, along with several other European national student organizations that emerged around this time.<sup>18</sup> Once formed, the British NUS soon moved to unify and build communications with students of the Dominions. They quickly discovered that the Dominions were without representative national unions and proceeded to help form these so that Dominion students could join and have a vote in the CIE.<sup>19</sup> The NUS's advocacy for Dominion NUSes was also driven by the NUS leaders' sense of their imperial duty to help consolidate the Empire. Increased Dominion membership in the CIE would also increase British clout, especially over the "excessive influence of the French" in the CIE.<sup>20</sup> This was similar to the way in which British power increased five-fold in the League of Nations when the Dominions were recognized as independent nations.

Approximately one month after the National Union of Students of England and Wales (NUS) was formed in 1922, its founding president, Ivison Macadam, initiated contact with the University of Alberta Students' Union (UASU).<sup>21</sup> In his letter, Macadam expressed hope that international ties could be built, especially among students of the British Empire, and he invited students at the University of Alberta to become members of the NUS. The UASU president, R. L. Lamb, responded favourably

and agreed to exchange information and student newspapers with Macadam.

President Macadam's correspondence with the UASU is the first documentation of official NUS contact with a Canadian student council. Three months later, a similar letter arrived on the desk of the University of Toronto's Students' Administrative Council (SAC).<sup>22</sup> Again, the NUS expressed its "wish of maintaining close fellowship with all students throughout the Empire."<sup>23</sup> (Macadam presumably contacted other Canadian student councils at this time, but no evidence of this was found.) The NUS letters to student councils at the universities of Alberta and Toronto in the fall/winter sessions of 1922–23 suggest that the NUS campaign for separate national unions in the Dominions had not yet arrived, only the desire for greater communication and the ill-conceived and apparently short-lived notion that the colonials might want to join the NUS. By February 1924, there were further signs of the NUS campaign in the Dominions. The UASU received another letter from the NUS that invited the UASU to send a delegate to the Imperial Conference of Students "this summer at the time of the British Empire Exhibition."<sup>24</sup> Since ten Canadian delegates attended the first Imperial Conference of Students, we can assume that by the winter term of 1924, NUS contact with Canadian students was widespread.<sup>25</sup> The second letter that the UASU and others received was likely also the work of NUS President Macadam, an "establishment figure" who worked hard to raise the prestige of the NUS and the CIE and who used his establishment connections in early NUS fundraisers. He was also involved in the CIE from its early development and remained a top NUS staff member throughout the 1930s. Macadam also had close links to the British Foreign Office and his involvement in the CIE "was of great interest to [it]... he might well have been seen as a safe pair of hands to guide the development of the fledgling organisation [the CIE]." It was "inconceivable [that the Foreign Office] did not watch the development of the English student organisation with equal interest."<sup>26</sup>

### **The Imperial Conference of Students (ICS)**

In 1924, just two years after it formed, the NUS would organize the first Imperial Conference of Students (ICS). NUS leaders and their establishment supporters wanted to encourage the creation of NUSes throughout the Dominions in part to strengthen imperial relations and unity; the Imperial Conference of Students was seen as one means to further this goal. The Canadian delegation, under the informal leadership of Norman MacKenzie, appeared to be a major proponent of imperial unity, but only if increased dominion independence could also be attained.

There were ninety-nine student delegates in total. In addition to the relatively strong showing of ten Canadians, there were five Australians, three Indians, six South Africans, three Irish (representing the NUS of Ireland), six New Zealanders, and a Trinidadian. There were also sixty-four delegates representing the home universities—nineteen men and forty-five women. (The Canadian, South African, and New Zealand delegations each included one woman.) In addition, there were two visitors representing the International Universities League of Nations Federation and the Colonial Club respectively. In the commission reports, a representative from Hong

Kong was recorded but was not included in the delegate list.<sup>27</sup> Delegates from other British colonies were not present, even though students from the colonies were studying in England. Such was the case with black students from the British African colonies, who, together with students from the West Indies, formed the England-based Union of Students of African Descent (USAD) in 1924.<sup>28</sup> But any relation it may have had to the ICS and the British NUS is not documented.

Viscount Chelwood, honorary president of the NUS, provided “a word of welcome” to the delegates. He believed the conference would “be of the greatest value in promoting a closer fellowship between the Students of your Universities and those of the Mother Country.” He saw how “the future will impose [on students of the Empire] a large share of responsibility in the maintenance of our common civilisation and of our imperial unity.” He expressed hope that the conference would unite the “youth of the Empire” and “establish conditions that shall bring peace and prosperity to mankind.”<sup>29</sup> In spite of Chelwood’s emphasis on imperial unity, conference delegates decided it was “inadvisable to form an Imperial Union of Students,” which would have created two competing international student organizations. Instead, delegates endorsed a single international student organization—the CIE—and moved to establish “an Imperial Students Committee of the National Union of Students” to be comprised of representatives from each Dominion.<sup>30</sup>

Dozens of prominent members of the British and Dominion establishments attended the conference, including three former British prime ministers and the then-current prime minister, Ramsey MacDonald (the first-ever prime minister from the Labour Party), and five prominent Canadians: P. C. Larkin, High Commissioner of Canada, and several provincial agent generals.<sup>31</sup> One could safely assume that the establishment figures listed on the reception and hospitality committees included many of those who were or would be providing financial patronage to the NUS.<sup>32</sup> While top-ranking Canadian diplomats are listed, it is unclear what role they played at the conference or in the efforts to organize what would eventually become known as the NFCUS.

The work of the conference was organized into five commissions: I) Practical Co-operation between Students of the Empire; II) General Imperial Questions; III) University Questions; IV) Scholarships; and V) International Co-operation. There was ample time for recreation of various forms, including a service at Westminster Abbey, polo matches, theatre performances, and lavish dinners and luncheons in private clubs and manor houses, often followed by addresses by top British politicians.

Three key proposals arising from Commission I would have a bearing on the eventual creation of the NFCUS. The first was to appoint “liaison officers” for each Dominion. One would be “a resident in the Dominion, the other in England—to act as links between the English National Union of Students and the student bodies in that country. Through such [liaison] officers alone is it possible to translate into practice many of the adopted proposals for cooperation.”<sup>33</sup> The second proposal was to request the NUS executive to consider the feasibility of sending a “representative debating team to the Dominions in the near future... with a view to putting forward the aims and ideas of a NUS and thus assisting in the formation of such a union in

the Dominion concerned.” The third proposal was to develop international student tourism and exchange.<sup>34</sup> Having organized small student tours across the English Channel in 1922 a few months after it had formed, the NUS leaders quickly understood that student travel was not just a means of promoting international peace and understanding, but had the potential of being a major source of income. In the same year as the ICS, 1924, the NUS would assume responsibility for the CIE’s Travel Commission and begin to form its own professionally-staffed travel office.<sup>35</sup> Lord Chelwood recognized how student travel and exchange would serve the “future welfare of British industry... [by making] a significant contribution to technical education.” Some years later, Chelwood used this rationale to garner donations for the NUS from British elites.<sup>36</sup>

The proceedings of Commission II were conducted under the chairmanship of N. A. MacKenzie, the Canadian delegate from Dalhousie. During a roundtable discussion, the Canadian delegation reported that they rejected “Imperial... federation” and believed that “self-governing [autonomous] members of the Empire, co-operating in an Imperial Alliance could work for the peace of the world.”<sup>37</sup> Given MacKenzie’s prior student leadership role and interest in international law, he almost certainly was the main contributor, if not the author, of the Canadian delegation’s reports.<sup>38</sup> It seems highly probable that MacKenzie first met Ivison Macadam at the ICS, whereupon they became friends.<sup>39</sup>

Commission II delegates expressed a diverse range of opinion on “imperial problems.” Most delegates, including the English, supported the Canadian position. The English suggested how “separate representation of the Dominions in the League of Nations and their achievement of complete nationhood [w]as the surest means to secure their harmonious co-operation.”<sup>40</sup> Australia and New Zealand preferred a more dependent relationship with Britain, citing fear of Japanese invasion among their reasons.<sup>41</sup> On the second day of the conference, over dinner at Ranelagh, the historical seat of Lord and Lady Sandwich, delegates were addressed by Lord Balfour. Balfour had been a signatory on an appeal to “wealthy Britons” for donations that “gave NUS a start.”<sup>42</sup> Balfour focussed on how to “maintain, preserve [and] strengthen... loyalty... that sense of the common interest, the common duties, the common privileges belonging to one great empire...” It would be the duty of Dominion students to “to keep alive the sense of a common origin and identical civilization... which existed not merely for... glory or power, but as an instrument of peace, civilization, and good will for the whole of the world.”<sup>43</sup>

No doubt Balfour and his establishment associates were delighted by the way in which most students of the Dominions imagined their future organization together: separate nations within a unified Empire. Canada’s (and Ireland’s) position on Commission II was, in fact, surprisingly like the one adopted in the Balfour Declaration made four years later at the 1926 Imperial Conference (of mainly Dominion prime ministers) in London.<sup>44</sup> The conference delegates, like Balfour, would accept the need for the perpetuation of “that sense of the common interest, the common duties, the common privileges” and the inevitability of the Dominions as “separate nations.” The focus on imperialism as an instrument for promoting “peace,



civilization and good will,” echoed in Chelwood’s pleasing and rosy view of Empire expressed the night before, ignored the violent and darker aspects of imperialism. His views would appeal widely to peace-oriented post-Great War youth and thus expressed an essential feature of British imperial ideology.

Commission III, University Questions, worked closely with Commission IV and together they made a joint report.<sup>45</sup> Many of the recommendations made by Commissions III and IV promoted national development and strengthening the bonds of empire. The joint report made recommendations on imperial education, which was deemed adequate in the Dominions. However, recommendations were made for curriculum changes in the “home country,” especially in Dominion history and geography. The report proposed a system of teacher exchange that, in part, would encourage emigration. The NUS would also oversee a program to help Dominion students learn more about university programs in Britain and throughout the Empire.

Commission IV was mainly attended by Rhodes Scholar delegates on scholarships. The commission released its own report.<sup>46</sup> The commission discussed how the Rhodes Scholarship program could be improved by removing redundant examinations in certain basic subjects. While they did not recommend opening the Rhodes Scholarships to women, they did recommend that any new “travelling scholarships” be open to either sex. The commission also stressed the need for more scholarship programs, such as the British Empire Exhibition Scholarships, which would “be an excellent opportunity of remedying an admitted defect in empire development.”<sup>47</sup> Participants of Commission IV also considered whether student loans were desirable, and concluded that they weren’t, since paid student work during vacations was easily obtained. However, this issue was referred back to the executive of the NUS.

Commission V, International Co-operation, had a lengthy agenda that covered the CIE, the World Student Christian Federation, the International Universities League of Nations, and six other international, student-related organizations. But the first item on the agenda, and probably the most important, was the “Formation of National Unions.”<sup>48</sup> This lengthy section of the commission’s report discussed every aspect of what national unions would look like and how they could co-operate among themselves and be united with the mother country. In the Dominions, they could provide a central office, “represent students from a national and international point of view,” “take a more active part in the public and social affairs of their country, and to voice student opinion,” and represent students at the CIE to promote “a spirit of friendship.” An extensive twenty-three point list followed, covering in detail what services such an office (or headquarters) should provide. Point one was “to represent the students before the Government and the University Authorities of the country.” Subsequent points covered a full range of activities from facilitating student “study in another country” to providing employment services, “travelling scholarships”, arranging for “Union reciprocity” within the nation and Empire, and assisting “University Settlement.” Other points included calls for intervarsity athletic and debating coordination, including “help in the organization of Empire Debating Teams;” the organization of “Loan Schemes and Student Relief;” information-sharing; reduced student rates on travel, accommodations, and consumer

items; and helping arrange student tours and exchanges. Most points in this blueprint for national student organizations were eventually enacted by what became the NFCUS. However, point eight, co-operation with other student organizations, and point sixteen, establishing “investigation groups to discuss from a student point of view urgent questions of topical importance, thus co-ordinating student thought” were notably absent or poorly implemented in the NFCUS program. Points eight and sixteen suggest the subtle influence at the ICS of socialists and/or Labour Party supporters, or the SCM and League of Nations supporters. Point eight may have been shorthand for suggesting the need to coordinate with various League of Nations societies and national SCM groups, among other “student organizations.” Point sixteen would certainly have aligned with the SCM of Canada position, which would have wanted a politically-engaged student organization.

Delegates to Commission V stated that they were “heartily convinced of the great good to be derived from the formation of National Unions of Students, both from a National and an International point of view” and resolved that “Student Organizations in their respective Dominions [were] to consider the practicability of the formation there of National Unions.”<sup>49</sup> In the roundtable discussions that followed this resolution, the Canadian delegates reported that “the formation of... [a Canadian NUS] is well within the bounds of possibility” but realized that there was a “present lack of interest among the student body,” and they did not have much hope for the “immediate formation of a National Union.” The Canadian delegates presciently recognized their limitations when they stated that most of the Canadian delegates “will not be returning direct to their own Universities” and therefore any “agitation for the formation of such a Union must largely depend at first upon correspondence between the individual Delegates and their respective Universities.”<sup>50</sup> Given the inattention in the Canadian student press to the Imperial Conference of Students and the apparent absence of any organizing until the efforts of Col. Bovey at McGill, such limitations were real.

Eric Beecroft of Victoria College, University of Toronto, a delegate at the conference, was to be the national contact person for Canada; student councils would be urged to contact him and he was going to keep track of “the progress of movement.”<sup>51</sup> It is unclear whether or to what extent Beecroft fulfilled his organizational responsibilities, because no evidence of this emerged. As a student leader in various capacities at the University of Toronto, beginning in 1923 and culminating in his presidency of the SAC (1925–26), he would have been well positioned to be the national contact person. He was a contemporary and associate of Glennie Bannerman, who, as we shall see, was a major influence on the SAC and the NFCUS and an activist within the Canadian League of Nations Society. As predicted by the Canadian representatives, action on forming NUSes in the Dominions would be slow. Over a year would pass before plans for the imperial debating tour were announced in the fall of 1925. Many of the Dominion ICS delegates likely happened to be in England at the right time and appear to have been recruited by NUS organizers to represent their respective countries. There is little evidence of delegates being sent over despite there being evidence of invitation (to the UASU, for example). The expense would have

been prohibitive. Most of the delegates were presumably either on scholarships or independently funded. At least two were Rhodes Scholars and one was on a Carnegie Scholarship (MacKenzie). In other words, it stands to reason that they were not chosen for their organizing abilities, although some, like MacKenzie, were proficient organizers, but rather, were chosen expediently. The way delegates were chosen proved to be a weak link in the organizing chain. MacKenzie himself did not return to Canada until 1926 when the University of Toronto's president, Sir Falconer, offered him a job.<sup>52</sup> He could not have appeared on the scene at a better time to assist in the December 1926 Conference of Representatives that led to the NFCUS's creation.

The Canadian delegates to Commission V also concerned themselves with how an organizational meeting to establish a Canadian NUS would be convened.<sup>53</sup> That meeting did eventually materialize—the Conference of Representatives—but only after the organizational campaign of the imperial debating tour of 1926. While it appears that little, if any, action and mobilization occurred in the year or so directly after the ICS, it is certain that the seed for a Canadian NUS had been planted as early as 1924, over a year before the imperial debating tour arrived.

### **The Imperial Debating Tour and Support for the Organization Meeting**

A year and a half after the first Imperial Conference of Students put forward the idea of a debating tour to promote national student organizations in the Dominions, the imperial debating team left Liverpool en route to Saint John, New Brunswick, on board the *Montcalm*. Between January and March 1926, the team, consisting of Ralph Nunn May, T. P. MacDonald, A. H. Molson, and Paul Reed, toured across Canada under the auspices of the NUS.<sup>54</sup> At each stop along the way, they debated with teams from local Canadian universities, met with student leaders privately, and addressed various public meetings. Nunn May, an experienced organizer, “worked imaginatively to keep the movement alive.”<sup>55</sup> He was the team member most active in promoting a national Canadian student organization.<sup>56</sup> As the third NUS president (1923–24), he convened the Imperial Conference of Students and led the hundred-member British contingent to the 1924 Warsaw CIE Congress.<sup>57</sup> At the time of the tour, he was the general secretary of the NUS, a position he held from 1925 until 1939.<sup>58</sup> MacDonald, who represented the University of Edinburgh, was at the time of the tour the treasurer of the Confédération internationale des étudiants (CIE) and active in both the university branch of the League of Nations Union and the Liberal Party. Molson was an Oxonian and active in the Conservative Party. Reed, involved with the NUS since its formation, attended many international conferences and also helped organize the 1924 Imperial Conference of Students.<sup>59</sup> He was a Labour Party supporter and editor of the *Vincula* at the University of London and the *ICS Handbook*.<sup>60</sup> Most, if not all, of these debaters were associates of Macadam, who was at the time of the tour the organizing secretary at the NUS headquarters in London.<sup>61</sup>

The imperial debating tour might not have happened when it did without the pragmatic planning work of Col. Wilfrid Bovey of McGill, at the time, director of Extramural Relations and Extension. While there were other factors in play, it is

doubtful that without this support and the promotion of a Canadian NUS that accompanied the tour, the NFCUS would not have emerged, at least not in 1926–27. Whether or not Bovey was the liaison person recommended at the Imperial Conference of Students is unknown, but he certainly acted as if he were: “[O]n behalf of the National Union of Students, London, England, [Bovey] made the arrangements with the Canadian universities during the summer months [of 1925].” Each university (likely the president’s office) pledged between \$250 and \$150 to fund the travelling costs of the tour; a total of \$2500 was pledged, with McGill and Toronto pledging \$250 each.<sup>62</sup> The universities would further support the tour by hosting the debaters.

The biggest financial supporter of the imperial debating tour was the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), which would be “handling the transportation end of the trip.” The CPR office in London issued tickets from Liverpool to New Zealand. From Vancouver, the imperial debaters sailed to New Zealand and Australia on board the *Aorangie*.<sup>63</sup> Col. Bovey did not need to search far to get CPR support for the imperial tour as the chancellor of McGill University, E. W. Beatty, just happened to be the president of the CPR, a company that owned and operated railways across Canada and steamships in the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Presumably, Beatty and other Canadian elites, especially those on university boards, were motivated to support such a tour because they understood, as did their British counterparts, that the major goal of the tour, the promotion of national student organizations with an international and imperialist outlook, was congruent with their interests.

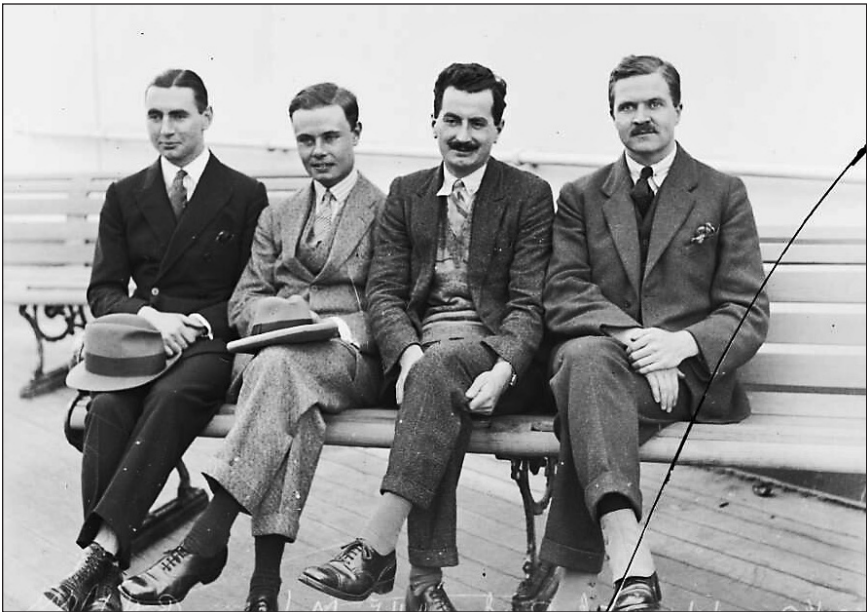


Figure 1. The imperial debating team during the Australian segment of their tour. New South Wales, April 1926. From left to right: R. May, H. Molson, P. Reed, and P. McDonald. Courtesy of Fairfax Corporation, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-162579967>.

How topics were chosen for the imperial debate, and by whom, is unclear.<sup>64</sup> But it is clear that the debaters often dealt with international political topics of concern to the British Empire. At McGill, it was “resolved that this House supports the establishment of a Naval Base at Singapore.” Similarly at Manitoba and Saskatchewan, they debated the resolution “that the Geneva Protocol [to ban gas and bacterial weapons] is worthy of the support of Great Britain and her Dominions.” At the universities of Toronto, Alberta, and British Columbia, it was “resolved that Western Civilization is becoming a degenerating influence on mankind.”<sup>65</sup> A second farcical and wit-filled debate held in the University of Toronto’s Hart House (where women were not invited) resolved that “women had more than come into their own.”<sup>66</sup> The debates at the University of Toronto revealed deep-seated sexism, racism, and orientalism that exposed the ideological or cultural dimensions of imperialism. While in Toronto, the debaters also made a presentation to the Empire Club in which they made emotive arguments for maintaining the British Empire.<sup>67</sup> The transcript of this presentation provides evidence of their oratorical skills, propagandistic intentions, and sophisticated knowledge of the political and legal dimensions of Empire; these were no ordinary students. Their address included the legal dimensions of British-Dominion relations in light of, for example, Canada’s independent nation status in the League of Nations and that dominion foreign policy was determined by the British Foreign Office (a situation they supported). There is no doubt that they made a strong impression on Canadian students and Canada’s establishmentarians.

During the tour, the message to organize a Canadian NUS was well publicized at every stop. The CIE and the League of Nations received less attention in the student newspapers, in spite of NUS leaders’ enthusiasm for these organizations.<sup>68</sup> The imperial debaters appeared to be tactfully staying “on message” that Canadian students needed to organize nationally. Other rationales for encouraging a Canadian NUS, like working to promote the League of Nations, mediating with the French and Americans, expanding student tourism, and advocating for German students’ admission into the CIE, would occur after Canadian students had organized, starting, for example, at the First Annual NFCUS Congress. League politics were broached during the tour but only in the context of debates.

There were other harbingers of a Canadian national student organization that may have led, in time, to some secular, student council-based national organization—likely with closer ties to the League of Nations. These groups were the various Canadian League of Nations campus associations and the Student Christian Movement of Canada (SCM). However, the NFCUS would not have formed when it did without British initiatives, especially the imperial debating tour. At the University of British Columbia (UBC), the CIE and national organizing were discussed before the imperial debaters arrived, almost certainly a result of Professor F. H. Soward’s activism in the Canadian League of Nations Society (CLNS).<sup>69</sup> The UBC “Literary Association” (more likely the Men’s Literacy Society) wrote to the University of Alberta’s student union president, Percy Davies, “regarding the forming of a National Federation of Students” that would “send delegates to

the International Students' Federation [CIE].” Davies would speak to the imperial debaters about these matters on their arrival.<sup>70</sup> At least on the west coast, Professor Soward and the under-resourced CLNS were promoting the idea of a nationwide student organization with international focus before the imperial debating tour arrived.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, the *McGill Daily* reported on the efforts of a certain Lewis Thomas, a student from Aberystwyth College of the University of Wales. Thomas was at McGill promoting the establishment of a “local” (national) unit of the International Universities League of Nations Federation. This organization was discussed at the first ICS and was not directly affiliated with the CLNS. So far, Thomas had visited the universities of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Toronto, and Queen’s, and Brandon College and had plans to visit other campuses.<sup>72</sup> The SCM, or at least those associated with it, was certainly involved in promoting a representative national student organization in Canada. The motivation for SCM members to support the formation of the NFCUS are unclear. However, it was the case that under CIE rules, the SCM would not be eligible for CIE membership. And thus, it is possible that the SCM rallied behind the formation of a Canadian NUS with the expectation that the SCM would work together with the NFCUS to support the CIE and league endeavours, and that the NFCUS would be politically involved in the pressing social issues of the day, as was the SCM. Points eight and sixteen, as outlined in the 1924 Commission V report, suggest an SCM-like vision for the NUSes in the Dominions that did not materialize, at least not during the 1920s and 1930s.

Indications of the SCM’s link to NFCUS formation were seen most obviously in MacKenzie’s role as chairman of Commission II at the 1924 Imperial Conference of Students and then as an official guest at the 1926 Conference of Representatives. MacKenzie’s involvement and influence at these two conferences was the basis of the SCM’s supporting role in the formation of the NFCUS. The second and even more compelling indication of SCM involvement was found in a letter MacKenzie wrote to the NUS organizing secretary, Ivison Macadam, soon after arriving back in Canada.<sup>73</sup> In this letter, MacKenzie states that at that year’s SCM conference at Macdonald College, Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, near Montreal, “it is proposed to bring together a group of representative students from all over Canada... This group would not take part in the [SCM meeting] but would act as a committee [to] work out the details of a National Union of Students.” The meetings did go ahead simultaneously with the SCM meeting at Macdonald College and the other, so-called Conference of Representatives, about forty kilometres away, at McGill University. That both conferences were in the vicinity of Montreal was not coincidental. The SCM was clearly playing a broadly supportive role here. Oddly, MacKenzie counselled Macadam to skip the SCM conference (and what would become the Conference of Representatives) and instead attend a conference of the American SCM in Milwaukee. MacKenzie also urged Macadam to visit some maritime universities on his way back to England via Halifax, where he could discuss “the national organization [and the] CIE.” MacKenzie also urged Macadam not to forget to remind student leaders that he would be “pleased to be of any service.”

### **The 1926 Conference of Representatives and the Formation of the National Federation of Canadian University Students (NFCUS)**

Over Christmas break, 1926, a Conference of Representatives was held.<sup>74</sup> This was the organizational meeting first envisioned at the Imperial Conference of Students in 1924. Student council delegates from twelve Canadian universities met and agreed on a process to establish what would be called the National Federation of Canadian University Students (NFCUS). This meeting laid out and set in motion the basic character and political orientation of the NFCUS up to the Second World War. Most students, however, were indifferent to the NFCUS's formation. As stated in the meeting's report, "No one University Student Council appeared overly enthusiastic about the formation of such an organization, none appeared to be opposed."<sup>75</sup>

At the conference, delegates agreed that before the NFCUS could officially exist, at least ten university student councils had to affirm the draft constitution proposed at the conference.<sup>76</sup> Delegates at the well-organized conference discussed the purpose of a federation, the various programs and services it would offer, and elected three pro tem officers of the federation: President L. I. Greene of Bishop's College, Vice-President J. Lesage of l'Université de Montréal, and Secretary-Treasurer Davis of the University of Alberta. Consensus was reached at the conference that a national student organization would work to promote Canadian unity while developing international ties, most notably with the British NUS and through the Confédération internationale des étudiants (CIE). Hence nationalism and internationalism became expressed in the two core objectives of NFCUS as stated in the draft constitution:

To promote in every way possible a better understanding among all Students; a greater degree of co-operation between all Canadian Universities for the promotion of national interest and to provide a means for developing international relations with student groups in other countries.<sup>77</sup>

The broad notion of promoting the national interest while developing international relations could be described as hegemonic in the sense that the NFCUS's constitutional objectives received widespread support for its pacifist and unifying orientation while concealing other top-down interests. These involved a fundamental British imperialist project for redefining nation and dominionhood and joining the CIE, an organization, as Laqua put it, that tended to consolidate rather than transform the international order. The NFCUS objectives would support and legitimate future NFCUS–NUS relations and would provide the mandate to gear all the NFCUS services and programs towards unifying Canada, or, more accurately, unifying a white-settler society in which the fate and existence of Indigenous peoples was not acknowledged. The NFCUS objectives articulated the desires of Canadian youth for peace and international understanding with establishment interests where national and imperial affinities could marginalize subaltern classes and internationalist working-class identities and consciousness. Thus, the NFCUS's objectives and future programs and

practices can also be viewed in part as the more generalized ideological products of British and British-Canadian elites, operating through each individual student delegate. The collective will of Canadian student leaders as expressed in the NFCUS constitution was clearly an extension of the imperial project and is consistent with Carl Berger's understanding of imperialism during this period.

The NFCUS's constitutional objectives appear to have arisen largely from the leadership work of a handful of dedicated and then-former Canadian student leaders, including Norman MacKenzie, Percy Davies of Alberta, and Glenn Bannerman, Toronto's Students' Administrative Council's secretary-treasurer.<sup>78</sup> These people, in varying degrees, were in contact with a small elite group of NUS leaders, including Ralph Nunn May and Ivison Macadam. While they no doubt had their differences, what united them was their shared allegiance to the British Empire and concern for forging international ties and Canadian unity. Such unity of opinion is suggested for example in the consensus achieved at the Conference of Representatives for the NFCUS's constitutional objectives.

SCM member Bannerman was an unofficial guest, supposedly because he was one of the major organizers and had drafted the proposed agenda. Bannerman, who was appointed to the SAC by the University of Toronto's president, Sir Falconer, was also the most outspoken participant at the conference. Together with MacKenzie, formally representing the CIE, Bannerman had a major influence on the conference's constitutional objectives and general outcome. Bannerman was particularly active on the Scope of the Federation Committee, whose ten-point program was a practical blueprint for its future programs and services.<sup>79</sup> The NFCUS's 1926 ten-point program resembled many of the "Formation of National Unions" proposals of the 1924 Imperial Conference of Students (ICS) in England.

Given the support of university authorities for the imperial debating tour and more generally for building nationalism within the imperial order, and given the authority they had as moral guardians within a culture of *in loco parentis*, it is inconceivable that they would take a hands-off approach to NFCUS formation and development. There was certainly an indirect influence. In fact, the imperial and ideological culture of leading university administrators was found in every aspect of the NFCUS's social form and practice. Moreover, an organization that steadfastly refused to engage in any other kind of political engagement while claiming to represent the interests of Canadian students would well serve the interests of Canada's establishment. Any possibility of the NFCUS adopting point sixteen suggested at the ICS that called for so-called investigation groups to discuss "urgent questions of topical importance" and to formulate a students' point of view was, in effect, rejected by the majority. Clearly, most delegates at the conference identified with university administrators and saw themselves as unwilling or incapable of expressing independent thought. McGill's Errol Calvin Amaron was possibly one of the few exceptions.

Amaron expressed strong opposition to the conservative political direction of the yet-to-be-formed NFCUS. His thoughts were remarkable, given the overall absence of critical-oppositional thought, as suggested in the conference minutes. Amaron opined:



Would the Union see problems everywhere in the world [racialism in South Africa and India, for example] and ignore the problem at home, as evidenced by the French culture in Quebec, the Jewish problem and the Japanese problem? Would the Union ignore these matters, declaring them to be outside the province of a student organization or would it endeavour to do something worth while? Would the Union create a consciousness and come to grips with vital things or would it concern itself entirely with cheap text-books and cheap tours which should be mere by-products?<sup>80</sup>

Amaron had been president of McGill's student council (1925–26) and president of the McGill Student Christian Association, a combined SCM and Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) campus club.<sup>81</sup> He was an SCM member but, like MacKenzie, was no ordinary member. Both had helped found the SCM in 1921.<sup>82</sup> Unsettled by the proposed services-focus and disregard for "vital things," Amaron prophetically warned delegates that the NFCUS would have "no very lasting benefits or motives."

At the end of September 1926, MacKenzie arrived at the University of Toronto to start his new faculty position in which he felt that he could "be of more service... to the things that [he] consider[ed] most important."<sup>83</sup> One of those things was almost certainly fulfilling the mandate of the 1924 Imperial Conference of Students: the formation of a Canadian NUS. On arrival back in Canada, he wasted little time in rallying his old SCM friends and future delegates and organizers of the 1926 Conference of Representatives and updating Macadam on the new development. MacKenzie travelled to Montreal to meet with fellow SCM member, E. C. Amaron, and Miss M. MacSporran.<sup>84</sup> MacSporran had apparently met and befriended Macadam while attending the Prague CIE Congress in 1921, the year before Macadam became the NUS president. At the University of Toronto, MacKenzie was in contact with the SAC president and SCM supporter, Joseph McCulley (who "you can count on"), and, most importantly, the main conference organizer, Glenn Bannerman. McCulley, Amaron, and MacSporran would also attend the Conference of Representatives. It is not known whether MacKenzie corresponded or met with any other delegates prior to the conference. But given his connections, especially within the SCM, and his openness to meet with student leaders, there was a high probability he did.

While MacKenzie did not participate in discussions in the conference's commissions, he undoubtedly influenced conference outcomes on international relations through his opening presentation. The notetaker for MacKenzie's presentation, probably the SAC's Mel Kenney, stated this was where "the real work of the conference was introduced." MacKenzie spoke extensively about the NUS, the work of the CIE, the national and international responsibilities of student organizations, and the League of Nations. He stated that if "Canada is to realize itself fully" it needed to overcome "racial, geographical and economic barriers" and should consider having a travelling secretary that could work with the Canadian League of Nations Society in Ottawa.<sup>85</sup> While SCM member MacKenzie succeeded in encouraging relations with the NUS

and support for the CIE, the Conference of Representatives marks the beginning of the end of an SCM-like NFCUS, even before it officially existed.

### **The First Annual NFCUS Conference, December 1927**

What is most remarkable about the First Annual NFCUS Conference at the University of Toronto was the extent to which various services and programs proposed at the 1926 Conference of Representatives were already well developed. This can be attributable to the organizing work of Percy Davies and other officers of the executive council, the support of the British NUS—including the student tourism infrastructure it had developed with the National Student Federation of America, and the ongoing work of Glenn Bannerman.<sup>86</sup> The delegates to the NFCUS conference discussed a) interregional and international debating tours; b) an all-Canadian intercollegiate athletic union; c) an all-Canadian intercollegiate press association; d) reduced rates on rail travel and consumer goods; d) the exchange of undergraduates scheme; e) harvest tours for students; and f) securing admission into the CIE and arranging to send delegates to the upcoming Paris meeting.<sup>87</sup> It should be stressed that the above programs and activities were all consciously framed within the nation-unifying and international objectives as stated in the NFCUS constitution, as well as within a particular conception of the student interest. The student interest was served by providing the NFCUS members with services and programs and not through representing student opinion to governments or university authorities. Most of the NFCUS's early program initiatives did not fulfill expectations since most of these, like the interregional exchange program, relied heavily on obtaining reduced railway rates—which did not materialize, at least not in any substantial way.

Undoubtedly borrowing from the British NUS's model, delegates at the 1927 NFCUS conference considered possibilities for funding the nascent organization: student tourism and a \$50,000 endowment fund to be raised by soliciting private donations. The fact that the NUS ran the CIE's Travel Commission and its own travel business helps explain the NFCUS's early involvement in student tourism. Delegates at the First Annual Conference discussed plans for a Canadian student tour of Europe, the lobby for reduced fares on the railways, the need for a travel secretary to link up to the NUS travel office in New York, and how Canadian students could obtain the International Students' Identity Card (ISIC), a program the NUS had helped develop as chief organizer of the CIE's Travel Commission.<sup>88</sup> Attempts to set up the endowment fund dragged on for some years and, in the end, the initiative was laid to rest with the arrival of the economic collapse. The first plans for student tours to Europe also failed, but a NFCUS student travel bureau would develop over the next few years.

In the wake of the immense trauma of the Great War, student leaders of the era—especially war veterans like Macadam, MacKenzie, and Bannerman—understood the importance of internationalism and intellectual co-operation for promoting world peace; peace being the overarching reason for NFCUS membership in the CIE. At the conference, CIE membership was noted as being of “of particular importance because... Canada might well act as an interpreter between Gt. Britain and



**Figure 2.** *The First Annual NFCUS Conference, December 27–30, 1927, University of Toronto. Courtesy of the University of Manitoba Digital Collections. This image was originally published in the Manitoban, February 17, 1928, 3, [https://digitalcollections.lib.umanitoba.ca/islandora/object/uofnm.\\$3A1421551](https://digitalcollections.lib.umanitoba.ca/islandora/object/uofnm.$3A1421551).*

**Back row:** W. J. Riddiford (Toronto), F. Darvall (President, NUS of England and Wales), W. A. Donohue (Toronto), E. M. Culliton (Saskatchewan). **Fourth row:** H. L. Brown (British Columbia), A. Haddon (Students' Representative Councils of Scotland), C. L. Anderson (Mount Allison). **Third row:** J. Findlay (Queen's), D. J. W. Oke (Alberta), S. R. Howe (OAC), P. Boucher (Montreal), W. V. Foster (New Brunswick). **Second row:** J. E. Kenny (Toronto), W. A. Higgins (Toronto), V. R. Diamond (Western Ontario), J. P. Manion (McGill), J. G. Godsoe (Dalhousie), V. R. Dawson (MacDonald College), H. D. Bent\* (Acadia), F. Fidler (Manitoba). **First row:** "Miss" H. D. Rogers\* (OAC), J. LeSage (Vice-President, NFCUS), L. I. Greene (President, NFCUS), P. Davies (Secretary-Treasurer, NFCUS), "Miss" G. Sedgewick (OAC).

**Note:** *Missing from the photograph are G. F. Bannerman (SCM guest), "Miss" A. E. M. Parkes (Associate Secretary-Treasurer, Toronto), "Miss" N. Holden (Toronto), "Miss" N. Holden (Toronto), "Miss" R. Whitely (McGill Women's Society), W. Spence (Osgoode Hall), O. McConkey (OAC), and C. Howard (McMaster). Most of these people were probably non-voting delegates. For a more complete listing of the participants, see the Varsity, "National Federation of Canadian University Students Hold Meeting Here," January 6, 1928, 4, <https://archive.org/details/thevarsity47a/page/231>.*

\* *In other sources, H. D. Bent was also referred to as E. D. Bent and H. D. Rogers as J. D. Rogers. It is unknown which initials are correct.*

France, and also between Gt. Britain and the United States." The NFCUS planned to send five delegates to the upcoming CIE conference in Paris, including a French-Canadian, but in the end, only a single delegate was sent: Escott Reid. It was likely that the NUS leaders wanted at least one pro-Empire French-Canadian delegate who could interpret and help mediate disagreements between NUS and the l'Union nationale des étudiants de France (UNEF). Admittance of the Deutsche Studentenschaft was a major divisive issue in the CIE: the NUS (and the NFCUS) supported it, while UNEF was firmly opposed.<sup>89</sup> Reid was chosen to lead the NFCUS delegation to the upcoming CIE conference in Paris because of his previous year's attendance at the 1927 Rome CIE conference and his presence in England at the time.<sup>90</sup> The international plans and ongoing imperial ties of the NFCUS were almost certainly facilitated by MacKenzie's advice and the presence at the First Annual Conference

of Frank Darvall, the NUS president, and A. Haddon representing the Students' Representative Councils of Scotland.

Two other key NFCUS-defining decisions were made at the First Annual Conference. Unfortunately, neither the conference records nor the few newspaper reports provide details on the content of the debate.<sup>91</sup> The first decision was to amend the constitution to make the NFCUS officially secular. Why this was important to the NFCUS delegates and why this was not in the original draft constitution is unclear. Given the rift that would develop between the NFCUS and the SCM over the next few years, it is feasible to think that this amendment was an early gesture designed to emphasize a political separation from the religious piety of the politically-engaged SCM. The second key decision was to reject affiliation with the Canadian League of Nations Society (CLNS).

As indicated above, various League of Nations support organizations co-existed with the NUS and pre-existed the NFCUS. By the time of the 1927 conference, it seems likely that there were still some unfinished organization development issues to consider. Clearly, there was widespread encouragement for university student involvement in league associations, from leading opinion-makers such as the honorary NUS president, Viscount Chelwood, NUS's Macadam, and leading NFCUS proponent Mackenzie to several prominent Canadian university presidents, including Sir Falconer, H. M. Tory, and Sir Currie. W. A. Higgins, secretary-treasurer of the SAC in 1927, who stated that "if this move [affiliation of the NFCUS with the Canadian League of Nations Society] is made it will be, in the opinion of many, the most revolutionary step ever made by undergraduates of this Dominion."<sup>92</sup> The NFCUS would not be so revolutionary.

Two months after the First Annual Conference, MacKenzie wrote a letter to Macadam in which he expressed his disappointment over the non-affiliation decision. He would have liked to have seen the NFCUS link up with the "Geneva crowd" as "it would give our own National Federation something else in the International world to play with." In light of the decision, MacKenzie stressed to Macadam the importance of not "forming another international student organization in Canada." In this regard, MacKenzie urged Macadam to write to the NFCUS secretary-treasurer, Davies, and suggest to him that some kind of paper affiliation might still be possible.<sup>93</sup>

Bannerman, representing the SCM at the conference, was unsuccessful in convincing the NFCUS delegates to affiliate. Perhaps the outcome of the affiliation debate would have been affirmative if MacKenzie had been present to explain the importance of league affiliation and the opportunities this would provide for Canadian students.<sup>94</sup> The NFCUS delegates, unsure about their new national leadership responsibilities, may have simply lacked the confidence and/or a politicized self-identity to take such a political decision. Moreover, just one delegate opposing affiliation, and therefore threatening the NFCUS and national unity, was enough to cause a no vote. Unity, the central ethos of the NFCUS, was more important than league affiliation. Moreover, had any member threatened to withdraw over affiliation—and presumably this occurred—such a threat would have been enough to sway the vote because the NFCUS would have experienced an immediate financial crisis. The consensus

politics that seemed to prevail in the first year of the NFCUS's operation would have had a moderating effect on NFCUS politics.

The NFCUS delegates discussed hosting a second (and final) Imperial Conference of Students. This eventually went ahead at l'Université de Montréal in September 1929 under the aegis of the NFCUS and the AGEUM (L'Association générale des étudiants de l'Université de Montréal), a founding member of the NFCUS.<sup>95</sup>

## Conclusion

The NFCUS certainly did not come together in the 1920s as a result of a broad social movement of concerned students protesting the conditions of their education, authoritarian university administrators, or the policies of governments. Rather, it came together because a handful of student council leaders identifying strongly with Britain and imperialist ideology sought to actualize the political yearnings, cultural orientation, and values of British and pro-British-Canadian political elites. Moreover, the NFCUS provided university authorities with an ideal institution in terms of their governing obligations to control and socialize students and, as such, is a case study of how ruling groups ruled. It is no wonder that a decade after it formed, the NFCUS was deemed "reliable and approved" by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.<sup>96</sup>

Practically all the features of the NFCUS suggest the widespread influence of a dominating and hegemony-producing British-Canadian imperialist culture. This can be seen mainly in its nation-building programs and services that aimed to cultivate a Canadian identity, in part to counteract American integration and curb class-conscious identity formation, and its undeclared policy of avoiding pronouncements on the pressing social issues of the day. The operation of hegemonic-imperialist power is also evident in such things as the elite social alignments of its leaders and the location of the NFCUS headquarters in isolated rural Alberta, away from hostile political organizations associated with the larger metropolises. Power was also evident in the onerously small budget the NFCUS set for itself at the second Imperial Conference of Students of 1929, which would restrain political action as well.

From the start, the NFCUS was a highly political organization. It may be true that many in the NFCUS viewed their organization as "an apolitical service organization" that "stood on the sidelines, studiously avoiding taking positions on issues of the day."<sup>97</sup> But this view did not make the organization apolitical. Avoidance of political issues was not a simple extension of how students in general felt. Rather, avoidance was more a projection of establishment cultural orientation and values bearing down on student council leaders in various ways and working through them.

## Notes

- 1 NFCUS executive to NFCUS representatives, Information Service Bulletin, October 25, 1940, B19840053, box 019, file NFCUS 1943–44, University of Toronto Archive (hereafter UTA).

- 2 For a literature review on the SCM, see Catherine Gidney, “Poisoning the Student Mind?: The Student Christian Movement at the University of Toronto, 1920–1965,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 8, no. 1 (1997): 148.
- 3 See, for example, A. B. McKillop, *Matters of Mind: The University in Ontario, 1791–1951* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), especially chap. 15, “Students Between Wars.”
- 4 Paul Axelrod, “The Student Movement of the 1930s,” in *Youth, University and Canadian Society: Essays in the Social History of Higher Education*, eds. Paul Axelrod and John G. Reid (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989).
- 5 Axelrod, “The Student Movement of the 1930s,” in Axelrod and Reid, *Youth, University and Canadian Society*, 216–7.
- 6 Pro-British Canadian university authorities played an essential role in supporting the imperial debating tour. Evidence of any direct manipulation and guidance of the NFCUS leaders proved challenging to assess and is beyond the scope of this paper. However, direct influence should not be ruled out. It is hard to imagine that someone like the University of Toronto president, Sir Falconer, for example, with his strong imperialist sympathies, ties to the Canadian and British establishment, and strategic geographical location at one of Canada’s largest universities, simply sat on the sidelines while the NFCUS was created. Unfortunately, Falconer had his personal correspondence destroyed upon his death; this makes any satisfactory assessment of his involvement difficult. See James Greenlee, *Sir Robert Falconer: A Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), xi. A future study of other university presidents may be useful here.
- 7 *Varsity*, “Allan H. Ferry, President of Students’ Council Issues Statement of Policy,” October 8, 1929, 1, <https://archive.org/details/thevarsity48/page/30>.
- 8 This was certainly the case in the United States. See Robert Cohen, *When the Old Left Was Young: Student Radicals and America’s First Mass Student Movement, 1929–1941* (New York: Oxford University Press), 4.
- 9 For a discussion of selection and selectivity of student organizations by the state after the Second World War, see Nigel R. Moses, “All that was Left: Student Struggle for Mass Student Aid and the Abolition of Tuition Fees in Ontario, 1946–75” (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 1995), 132–43. Selection refers to a strategic social-relational process whereby university administrators and/or government officials choose to cooperate with student organizations whose cultural orientation and values are closest to their own or deemed the least threatening. This selective action tends to subdue and delegitimize youth and student movements that are deemed politically hostile and usually anti-capitalist. Moreover, selectivity often enables elite influence without leaving obvious traces of influence.
- 10 Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867–1914*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013 [1970]). Edward Said also makes important points about the existence of racism in everyday life and literature in his books *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994) and *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993).
- 11 For the idea that the imperial relationship was a paradox, see Daniel Gorman, *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 23.
- 12 Greenlee, *Sir Robert Falconer*, 312.
- 13 Donald Page, “The Institute’s ‘Popular Arm’: The League of Nations Society in Canada,” *International Journal* 33, no. 1 (Winter 1977–78): 49, note 31.
- 14 The full story of the CIE cannot be told here. For recent contributions to the literature about it, see Daniel Laqua, “Activism in the ‘Students’ League of Nations’: International Student Politics and the Confédération internationale des étudiants, 1919–1939,”

- English Historical Review* 132, no. 556 (June 1, 2017): 605–37; and Betül Batır, “The Foundation of the Turkish National Student Union and the Attendance of the International Student Union at the Second Warsaw Congress,” *Paedagogica Historica* (February 3, 2017), doi/full/10.1080/00309230.2016.1248447.
- 15 Laqua, “Activism in the ‘Students’ League of Nations,” 621.
- 16 Mike Day, *Respected not Respectable—A History of the National Union of Students in the UK, 1922–1997* (unpublished manuscript, National Union of Students, UK), 8.
- 17 Laqua, “Activism in the ‘Students’ League of Nations,” 607, 620–21.
- 18 Day, *Respected not Respectable*, 10–11, 33.
- 19 Day, *Respected not Respectable*, 33. While national in scope, the Canadian SCM was not considered representative and was therefore not eligible for CIE membership.
- 20 See Eric Ashby and Mary Anderson, *The Rise of the Student Estate in Britain* (London: McMillan, 1970), 61–2, and Laqua, “Activism in the ‘Students’ League of Nations,” for discussions of British and French rivalries within the CIE.
- 21 *Gateway*, “Organization of Empire Students,” October 3, 1922, 6, <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GAT/1922/10/03/6/Ar00603.html>.
- 22 The SAC referred to herein is the men’s SAC or the combined men’s and women’s Joint Executives of the SACs, not the women’s SAC.
- 23 *Varsity*, “Date of Debate with Kingston Set by SAC,” January 26, 1923, 1, <https://archive.org/details/thevarsity42/page/168>.
- 24 *Gateway*, “To Paint a Portrait of Chancellor Stuart,” February 19, 1924, 1, <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GAT/1924/02/19/1/Ar00108.html>.
- 25 There were representatives from British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, both French- and English-speaking Quebec, and Nova Scotia.
- 26 Day, *Respected not Respectable*, 51–2.
- 27 Paul Reed, ed., “Delegates,” *Imperial Conference of Students* [hereafter *ICS*] *Handbook* (London: National Union of Students of the Universities and University Colleges of England and Wales, 1924), 27, Mackenzie General Correspondence, box 224, file 6, University of British Columbia Archives (hereafter UBCA).
- 28 See Daniel M. Stephen, “‘The White Man’s Grave’: British West Africa and the British Empire Exhibition of 1924–1925,” *Journal of British Studies* 48, no. 1 (January 2009): 115, 125.
- 29 Rt. Hon. Viscount Cecil of Chelwood, “Forward,” *ICS Handbook*, 3.
- 30 Imperial Conference of Students, *Report of Commission V*, July 1924, 12, MacKenzie General Correspondence, box 110, file 6, UBCA.
- 31 *ICS Handbook*, 4–6.
- 32 In 1924, only half of the £1000 it took to run the NUS office in London came from students. The rest came from “those who desire to further the cause of education and promote international fellowship,” *ICS Handbook*, 8. “NUS was clearly heavily reliant on donations at this time,” Day, *Respected not Respectable*, 20. While the exact origins of the donations cannot be documented, it is almost certain that most of them were from anonymous members of the British establishment, many of whom had vested interests in the NUS’s imperial activities. Establishment support for the NUS can be observed, for example, in the opening night of an appeal intended to raise £30,000, at which £6,186 was raised from among the 300 or so attendees, composed mainly of British university administrators, military personnel, and peers. The funds would be used mainly to purchase the NUS’s headquarters on Endsleigh Street, London, where a welcoming centre for international students was established. *Times* (London), “National Union of Students, Prince of Wales’s Appeal,” July 8, 1930, 16, *Times* digital archive. For a discussion of the NUS’s ties to establishment patrons, see also Ashby and Anderson, *Rise of the Student Estate*, 63–4.
- 33 *ICS, Report of Commission I*, 1.

- 34 ICS, *Report of Commission I*, 2–3.
- 35 Ashby and Anderson, *Rise of the Student Estate*, 63; Day, *Respected not Respectable*, 34–8.
- 36 *Times* (London), “National Union of Students,” July 8, 1930, 16.
- 37 ICS, *Report of Commission II*, 1.
- 38 MacKenzie was certainly the co-author of the Canadian statement in the appendix to the Commission II report, which provides more detail on Canada’s position on the future of imperial relations. MacKenzie identified constitutional law “which relates to the Dominion of Canada and the other Dominions and our relations with Great Britain” as an area in which he was “deeply interested.” Mackenzie to President Sir Robert Falconer, June 10, 1926, MacKenzie General Correspondence, box 2, file 3, UBCA. For further information on MacKenzie’s career as an SCM organizer to his work with the League of Nations and his appointment by Sir Falconer at the University of Toronto in 1926, see Peter Busby Waite, *Lord of Point Grey: Larry MacKenzie of UBC* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1987), 32–3, 40, 45–7, 54.
- 39 In letters between Mackenzie and Macadam, which constantly update each other on the student events, there is a clearly friendly and familiar tone. Their friendship was undoubtedly facilitated by their shared experience of war, Scottish heritage, and dedication to student movements. See, for example, MacKenzie to Macadam, November 10, 1926, MacKenzie General Correspondence, box 2, file 4, UBCA; and MacKenzie to Macadam, March 28, 1928, MacKenzie General Correspondence, box 4, file 4, UBCA.
- 40 ICS, *Report of Commission II*, 2.
- 41 ICS, Appendix, *Report of Commission II*, 2.
- 42 Ashby and Anderson, *Rise of the Student Estate*, 63.
- 43 *Times* (London), “Preserving the Empire, Lord Balfour’s Address to Students,” July 28, 1924, 15, *Times* digital archive.
- 44 The Balfour Declaration acknowledged the Dominions as “autonomous Communities within the British Empire... united by a common allegiance to the Crown...” The declaration was an important defining moment in British-Dominion relations and provides further discursive context for the imperial project into which British and Dominion students were drawn. Thus, it was not purely coincidental that the Balfour Declaration came in 1926, the same year of the imperial debating tour.
- 45 ICS, *Report of Commission III and IV*.
- 46 ICS, *Report of Commission IV*.
- 47 ICS, *Report of Commission IV*, 2.
- 48 ICS, *Report of Commission V*, 1, 5.
- 49 ICS, *Report of Commission V*, 8.
- 50 ICS, *Report of Commission V*, 8b.
- 51 ICS, *Report of Commission V*, 8b.
- 52 Waite, *Lord of Point Grey*, 45–7, 54.
- 53 ICS, *Report of Commission V*, 8b.
- 54 “Imperial Debating Team at Toronto,” *Torontonensis, the Year Book of the University of Toronto* (Toronto: Joint Executives of the SAC, 1926), 384–5, <https://archive.org/details/torontonensis26univ/page/384>; *McGill Daily*, “Imperial Team Meets McGill at Mt. Royal,” January 21, 1926, 1, <https://archive.org/details/McGillLibrary-mcgill-daily-v15-n082-january-21-1926-7302>.
- 55 Ashby and Anderson, *Rise of the Student Estate*, 64, 69.
- 56 This is verified throughout the student press. See, for example, *Sheaf*, “Varsity Asked to Send Delegates to Conference,” December 9, 1926, 1, <http://scaa.usask.ca/gallery/sheaf/browse.php>.
- 57 *Varsity*, “Imperial Debaters to Speak on Two Occasions,” February 2, 1926, 1, 4, <https://archive.org/details/thevarsity45/page/305>.



- 58 *Day, Respected not Respectable*, 18.
- 59 *Varsity*, "Imperial Debaters to Speak," 4.
- 60 *Torontonensis*, 1926, 384.
- 61 Sarah Hellowell, "Key Figures in the Early NUS," National Union of Students, United Kingdom, [www.nus.org.uk](http://www.nus.org.uk).
- 62 *McGill Daily*, "The Imperial Debating Team to Tour Canada," December 11, 1925, 1, <https://archive.org/stream/McGillLibrary-mcgill-daily-v15-n062-december-11-1925-7283>. At the University of Toronto there is no record of any money transactions found on the board ledgers. It appears that the pledged amounts were paid directly to the British debating team from debate entrance fees. Bovey wrote to the SAC to suggest ways that proceeds from the debates "over the guaranteed amount" should be divided. Minutes, executive of the SAC, October 7, 1925, Acc. A70-0012, box 2, UTA.
- 63 *McGill Daily*, "Imperial Team Meets McGill at Mt. Royal."
- 64 For the NFCUS's first sponsored tour of Maritime debaters in 1928, debate topics were solicited from E. W. Beatty and other prominent members of the Canadian elite. This suggests how topics may have been chosen for the imperial debaters in 1926. See *OAC Review* (Ontario Agricultural Review), "The NFCUC," (*sic*) October 1927, 40, v, <https://atrium.lib.uoguelph.ca/xmlui/handle/10214/13829>.
- 65 *Varsity*, "Varsity Debaters Victorious Western Civilization Is Not Degenerating Influence to Man," February 10, 1926, 1, <https://archive.org/details/thevarsity45/page/328>; *Gateway*, "Imperial Debaters Score Win on Subject, Decline of Civilization," March 4, 1926, 1, <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GAT/1926/03/04/1/Ar00101.html>; *Ubysey*, "National Union of Students Upheld by Debaters," March 9, 1926, 1, <https://open.library.ubc.ca/collections/ubcpublications/ubysseynews/items/1.0125238>.
- 66 *Varsity*, "Women Came Into Their Own... And then a Little Farther Decide Hart House Debaters," February 11, 1926, 1, 4, <https://archive.org/details/thevarsity45/page/333>. The four women participants at the First Annual NFCUS Conference were forbidden to enter the Great Hall (dining room) of Hart House and ate their meals separately. Percy Davis, "NFCUS First Annual Conference... Registration and Meetings," box 132, file 1st Annual NFCUS Congress—Reports of Officers, etc. 1927, William Ready Archives (hereafter WRA).
- 67 Nunn May, McDonald, Molson, and Reed, "Certain Phases of the Empire," The Empire Club of Canada Addresses (Toronto, Canada), February 11, 1926, 41–52, <http://speeches.empireclub.org/60338/data?n=1>.
- 68 See *Varsity*, "Editorial," February 9, 1926, 2, <https://archive.org/details/thevarsity45/page/326>. The mention of the CIE here was an exception, not the norm.
- 69 *Ubysey*, "Motion of Thanks Sent to Government," November 6, 1925, 1, <https://open.library.ubc.ca/collections/ubcpublications/ubysseynews/items/1.0125019>. Professor Soward, Norman MacKenzie, and many other university faculty and staff from across Canada were thanked for their support of the education program of the Canadian League of Nations Society. Donald Page, "The Institute's 'Popular Arm,'" 49, footnote 31.
- 70 *Gateway*, "Federation of Students Mooted," February 25, 1926, 1, <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GAT/1926/02/25/1/Ar00105.html>.
- 71 Such campus League of Nations clubs do not appear to have been widespread. McGill had one, formed in 1926. *McGill University Yearbook*, 1929, 224, [http://yearbooks.mcgill.ca/viewbook.php?campus=downtown&book\\_id=1929#page/246/mode/2up](http://yearbooks.mcgill.ca/viewbook.php?campus=downtown&book_id=1929#page/246/mode/2up).
- 72 *McGill Daily*, "New Federation Probes Problems," February 4, 1926, 1, 2, <https://archive.org/stream/McGillLibrary-mcgill-daily-v15-n094-february-04-1926-7314>.
- 73 MacKenzie to Macadam, October 5, 1926, MacKenzie General Correspondence, box 2, file 4, UBCA.

- 74 *Report of the Conference of Representatives from the Student Bodies of the Canadian Universities held in Montreal at McGill University, December [28–31] 1926 to Investigate the Formation of a* [NFCUS]. Released January 1927.
- 75 *Report of the Conference of Representatives*, 3. The *Varsity* also typified the national response to forming a national student organization when an editorial expressed shock towards the “silence of the grave” and widespread “Godlike indifference” of students towards its invitation to discuss the proposed NFCUS. See the *Varsity* editorial, “... And Responds Only by Slight Twitching When Poked with a Stick,” February 7, 1927, 2, <https://archive.org/details/thevarsity46/page/310>.
- 76 The collective affirmation of the draft constitution was announced in March. See D. A. Andrew, “The NFCUS,” *OAC Review*, April 1927, 2[3]62–364 (*sic*), and *OAC Review*, January 1928, 167, <https://atrium.lib.uoguelph.ca/xmlui/handle/10214/13823> and <https://atrium.lib.uoguelph.ca/xmlui/handle/10214/13832> respectively.
- 77 Draft Constitution, *Report of the Conference of Representatives*, 34.
- 78 See *Report of the Conference of Representatives*, 2–3, 6–8.
- 79 *Report of the Conference of Representatives*, 10, 16–19, 33, and *passim*.
- 80 *Report of the Conference of Representatives*, 9.
- 81 See *Old McGill* (Yearbook) 1923, 14, 180; 1924, 22–3, <http://yearbooks.mcgill.ca/browse.php?&campus=downtown&startyear=1921&endyear=1930>.
- 82 D. L. Kirkey, “Building the City of God, the Founding of the Student Christian Movement of Canada” (MA thesis, McMaster University, 1983), 124.
- 83 MacKenzie to President Sir Robert Falconer, June 10, 1926, 3–4, UBCA.
- 84 MacKenzie to Macadam, October 13, 1926, MacKenzie General Correspondence, box 2, file 4, UBCA.
- 85 *Report of the Conference of Representatives*, 6–7.
- 86 Six months before the first 1927 NFCUS conference, Bannerman presented the NFCUS proposal for interregional exchange scholarships to university presidents at the Canadian Universities Conference in London on June 2, 1927. See G. F. Bannerman, “Report of Presentation of Exchange of Students,” *OAC Review*, September 1927, 12–13, viii, <https://atrium.lib.uoguelph.ca/xmlui/handle/10214/13828>.
- 87 This section of the article draws mainly from the various uncompiled conference commission reports from box 132, file 1st Annual NFCUS Congress—Reports of Officers, etc., 1927, WRA.
- 88 Day, *Respected not Respectable*, 34–6.
- 89 Box 132, file 1st Annual NFCUS Congress ...1927, WRA. *Report of the Committee on International Relations*, 1, 2. For a detailed analysis of German student organizations and CIE membership, see Laqua, “Activism in the ‘Students’ League of Nations” (Part 2).
- 90 MacKenzie had recommended Reid to Macadam to represent Canada at the Rome CIE where, according to Macadam, he thought Reid “had been a great success.” Macadam also reports that Reid was continuing to perform well on the Imperial Committee of the NUS. Macadam to MacKenzie, April 20, 1928, MacKenzie General Correspondence, box 4, file 4, UBCA.
- 91 The first annual conference was covered widely in the student press. The most extensive coverage was found in the *Gateway*, “NFCUS Conference,” January 19, 1928, 5, 6, <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GAT/1928/01/19/5/>.
- 92 *Varsity*, “Canadian Students Link Activities of Universities,” December 13, 1927, 1, <https://archive.org/details/thevarsity47a/page/208>. It was almost certain that Higgins was a major contributor to this anonymous article.
- 93 MacKenzie to Macadem, February 28, 1928, MacKenzie General Correspondence, box 4, file 4, UBCA.

- 94 Contrary to his name appearing on the attendance list as the CLNS representative, Norman MacKenzie did not attend the 1927 NFCUS meeting.
- 95 Unlike the first Imperial Conference of Students, no official report was released, or, if there was one, it could not be found. For a review of this event, see *McGill Daily*, "Empire Student Conference Held by NFCUS," October 1, 1929, 1, <https://archive.org/details/McGillLibrary-mcgill-daily-v19-n002-october-01-1929-7754>. See also "Announcing the Second Imperial Conference of Students: University of Montreal, Montreal, Quebec, September 6th to 16th, 1929" (NFCUS Pamphlet, 1929), W. D. Jordan Special Collections, Queen's University.
- 96 Axelrod, "The Student Movement of the 1930s," 217, in which he quotes a 1939 Royal Canadian Mounted Police surveillance report.
- 97 Axelrod, "The Student Movement of the 1930s," 217.