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"A STEP TO THE RIGHT"

THE RESTRUCTURING OF THE
NEW ZEALAND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ASSOCIATION
IN 1986

Grant Robertson

A research essay submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Political Studies at the
University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand
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ABSTRACT

A 12 000 word study, based on primary research, of the restructuring of the New Zealand University Students Association (NZUSA) in 1986. NZUSA dramatically changed its focus and structure from being a multi issue pressure group with strong sectional interests and a large national office, to being a single issue organisation dealing with students education and welfare issues, with only a handful of staff at a national level. This restructuring represented a shift away from the left wing causes with which NZUSA had been associated since the 1960s.

The essay is divided into five chapters. The first looks at what NZUSA is by analysing its organisation, role and structure up until 1985. The second chapter discusses the development of the multi issue approach, and some justification for it. The third chapter discusses opposition to this multi issue approach and particularly how it developed in the 1980s. The fourth chapter follows the process of restructuring during 1985 and 1986 which was precipitated by the threatened withdrawal of the largest campus, Auckland. An independent working party was set up and its recommendations were accepted. Chapter Five analyses the reasons for the restructuring taking place, and shows them to be representative of a shift to the right in the political orientation of NZUSA.

The chief reasons for the restructuring occurring are seen to be the structural inadequacies of NZUSA, including the lack of organisational history and political experience of student politicians at a campus level, and a lack of trust in the work of the national officers. The relative experience of those who wished to shift the Association away from its left wing perspective was also significant in the restructuring occurring. The restructuring process shows the vulnerability of the organisation to those with an agenda for change.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I think that it is only appropriate that I acknowledge how I came to be in a position to write this research essay. Since my arrival at the University of Otago in 1990 I have been involved in one way or another with the Otago University Students Association (OUSA). In 1992 I was a member of the Executive of OUSA, as Information and Publicity Officer. In 1993 I was the President of OUSA, and a member of the Federation Executive of NZUSA. My interest in student politics will continue next year when I will be the Vice-President of NZUSA.

This background in student politics has enabled me to gain access to a large amount of primary source material, and to be able to contact a number of people who were involved in NZUSA. I have tried to detach myself from the events, and this was part of my reasoning in not trying to look closely at recent events in NZUSA.

I would like to acknowledge the support, gentle persuasion and helpful comments of my supervisor Assoc. Prof Antony Wood. My deep gratitude is also due to the staff of the Otago and New Zealand University Students Associations, and the Hocken Library Archives for their patience and assistance, to Alistair Shaw for help in arranging interviews, and to the interview subjects Lyn Holland, Quentin Jukes, Malcolm McLean, Steven Ferguson and Bidge Smith. It is unfortunate that the latter two interviews were unable to be used due to technical problems.

A heartfelt thanks to the Political Studies fourth year class of 1994, may you all remain as mad as ever. Special thanks also to, Too Many Daves, the future of rock n' roll, you're all right boys, Jason, Nick (all the way from Christchurch), Phil, Mark, John, Rebecca, Nicole, Mum, Dad, the residents of the reference section, Central Library, and all friends who helped extend the coffee breaks.

This research essay is dedicated to the memory of John Houstoun, President of the Waikato Students Union, 1993, tragically killed in a car accident, July 1993. Rest in Peace, John.
"A STEP TO THE RIGHT" - THE RESTRUCTURING OF THE NEW
ZEALAND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ASSOCIATION IN 1986

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INTRODUCTION

To study student politics one needs to be trained as a social psychologist, a cultural anthropologist, a political scientist, an institutional economist, a historian and from time to time a philosopher.

E. Wright Bakke, “Roots and Soil of Student Activism”, Comparative Education Review June 1966

Since the early 1960s the New Zealand University Students Association (NZUSA) has had as its first priority, goals on issues directly related to the education and welfare of its members. This in practice means bursaries/allowances for students, student employment, accommodation, and related welfare activities. In the late 1980’s and 90’s this has meant opposition to the imposition of a User Pays regime in tertiary education in New Zealand. It also has followed the line that as members of their society students should have concern with issues of social importance. In New Zealand this has seen an association with left wing, or progressive political causes.

In 1986 the New Zealand University Students Association (NZUSA) dramatically refocussed its policy and restructured its organisation. The change saw the association move from being a multi issue pressure group with a broad range of international and national issue concerns to a single issue group focused only on the educational and welfare concerns of university students. This change is seen as the move from being a “student movement” to a “student union”.

The Association heavily reduced the subsidies from constituent student associations (from $9.22 per student to $4.47 per student). It also restructured the national office of the organisation reducing the staffing from a total of thirteen to the equivalent of five and a half, comprising two elected national officers and two appointed national officers, with the equivalent of one and a half clerical support staff.

1 View expressed by Bruce Palmer, Auckland University Students Association Treasurer, 1985, in submission on structure of NZUSA, 1985, NZUSA files
In 1986 the changes made were a dramatic purging of the organisation’s policy and structure. In student politics the terms “left” and “right” are relative to the rest of society, and to the time in which particular student politicians were operating. The changes that were implemented in 1986 were moved NZUSA away from the progressive forces it had been linked to since the 1960’s. Although a political focus was retained in educational issues, the changes can still be regarded as a “step to the right.”

This research essay examines this change of direction, and provides the reasons for the restructuring taking place. Chapter One gives the background to NZUSA, firstly in terms of its history and role, and secondly its structure and governance up until 1985.

In Chapter Two the development of NZUSA as a multi issue pressure group is traced. Although sporting and educational issues had been the main focus of NZUSA’s activity and policy, other social issues began to play an important part in the policy of NZUSA from 1959 onwards. NZUSA took an interest in a wide range of social issues ranging from marijuana law reform to apartheid in South Africa. Through the 1960s and 70s, NZUSA developed a comprehensive range of policies and structures to facilitate these policies. Chapter Two will analyse how these structures and policies saw NZUSA become a multi issue student movement firmly placed on the ‘left’ of the political spectrum.

Chapter Three is an analysis of the arguments against NZUSA’s role as a “student movement”. These had been articulated for a number of years but gained momentum during the 1980’s, as the national office expanded and the levies on constituent associations grew. Opposition to the broad focus gathered under the complaint that as a compulsory union for students NZUSA should concentrate on issues that are of direct benefit to its members. Other political issues were not thought to be relevant to the concerns of a student “union” such as NZUSA should be. The development and power of sectional interests within NZUSA were also the target for those who opposed the focus of the organisation.

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Chapter Four follows the process of restructuring that took place in 1985 and 1986 within NZUSA. The arguments analysed in Chapter Two and Three clashed, with the national officers defending their position, and those opposed to the direction of NZUSA led by Graham Watson, the President of the largest students association in New Zealand, The Auckland University Students Association. Watson successfully passed a motion at a Student General meeting in Auckland in 1986 to withdraw from NZUSA. An independent working party was set up by NZUSA in 1986 to look at changes for the organisation in order to keep Auckland from withdrawing and taking its 25% share of the budget with them. The recommendations of this working party were adopted and the changes outlined were made for the following year.

Chapter Five analyses the reasons for the change in policy and structure. The shift was a move across the political spectrum as NZUSA removed its support from a number of traditionally left wing political causes to concentrate on issues of students education. The will of Watson and others who wanted to make this change was significant in it being achieved. Moreover the structural weakness of NZUSA contributed to its downfall. The lack of continuity caused by the high turnover of representatives, a lifetime in student politics is said to be 2-3 years, and the lack of trust in the national officers were significant factors in the organisation undergoing such dramatic change.

In a postscript more recent moves within NZUSA are briefly covered. Firstly looking at how the organisation developed in the late 80's following the changes. Further developments in the 1990's have showed the cyclic nature of student politics that stem from the lack of continuity highlighted in Chapter Five. Some members of NZUSA have since 1992, made an attempt to broaden its focus to reposition it back to where it was before 1986, and to enlarge its staff.

It is clear that the struggle of student groups in places such as South Korea or China are intertwined with their society as a whole, and thus studies have taken place in his area. However the position of student groups in "first world", or less repressive regimes is somewhat unclear. What

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3 see W. Dong, "University Students in South Korean Politics", *Journal of International Affairs*, vol 40, 2, Winter/Spring, 1987, pp 233-255,
limited material there is points to the fact that the role of student groups is an issue elsewhere. One Indian political scientist wrote in 1980,

It is felt that student unions should play an important part in decision making in Universities. At present they are taking part in matters which are not their interest. Influences of politics and trade union activities are dominant today and unless members of such (student) organisations stand aloof from such influences it will not be possible to expect useful work from them. 4

This is the dilemma that NZUSA faces, and the cause of the restructuring in 1986. As a student organisation serious questions were raised as to what their role should be and what structures were appropriate for that role. The restructuring of NZUSA in 1986 has shaped student politics in New Zealand, and was a classic battle between two very different views of student representation, and of the place of students in a political world.

Note: In the course of this study extensive use has been made of the files of both the New Zealand and Otago University Students Associations. Whilst the author is most grateful for this, the accuracy of the filing is somewhat questionable. Files are often wrongly dated, misplaced, incomplete or simply absent. Every effort has been made to be specific of when and how events occurred, and who wrote particular papers, however it has not always been possible to avoid a certain amount of surmising.

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT IS NZUSA?

1.0 ORGANISATION

The New Zealand University Students Association was formed in 1929 as a result of discussions between student association representatives at the annual Easter sports tournament that had been run between the colleges of the University of New Zealand since 1902. At its inception the organisation was called the New Zealand National Union of Students, after the British model on which it was based.¹

The original members of the organisation were the Auckland University College Students Association, Victoria University College Students Association, Canterbury University College Students Association, and the Otago University Students Association. These were added to in 1935 when Massey Agricultural College Students Association joined, in 1939, when Lincoln College Students Association, and in 1965 when the Waikato University Students Association joined.²

Any association must give twelve months notice if it wishes to withdraw from NZUSA. Threats of withdrawal were made by Auckland in 1966 over budgetary matters, and Otago in 1970 over the distribution of capping magazines. These were isolated incidents, but in 1978 three campuses, Lincoln, Massey and Canterbury gave notice of withdrawal. This is discussed in later chapters but it did lead to a thorough reappraisal of the organisation, as the threatened Auckland withdrawal did in 1986.

Membership of Student Associations has been part of enrolling at tertiary institutions since the dissolution of the University of New Zealand in

¹ The name of the organisation was changed to the New Zealand University Students Association in 1934. This was done to formally distance the New Zealand body from the British National Union of Students, and because the New Zealanders were keen for each individual campus to retain its identity under the national body.

² Critic, Vol. 55. 10, p.2. In 1977 the Waikato University Students Association joined with the Waikato Teachers College Students Association to form the Waikato Students Union. All student associations with College in their title removed these upon the dissolution of the University of New Zealand in 1961, or in Lincoln's case upon the college being granted university status in 1986.
1961. The various acts that constituted the individual Universities following this gave University Councils' the power to impose or collect fees on behalf of an association of students, and pay those fees to the association accordingly. The Education Amendment Act in 1990 confirmed this, and added that the Council was obliged to give affect to the level of association fees as decided by a General Meeting of students. This has provided students associations with a steady source of income, and enabled them to be involved in a number of activities. From the funds of each association a levy is paid to NZUSA. This levy has always been based on a per head calculation, for each student association. It has varied considerably over time, from around the equivalent of 50 cents per 50 students in 1933 to $15.00 in 1985. (1992 dollars) Thus, although the constitutional members of NZUSA are the seven constituent student associations, all students are indirectly members of NZUSA by virtue of being members of their campus student association.

The levy for the organisation is set at NZUSA August Conference. NZUSA holds two conferences at May and August, as well as a training workshop for Student Association executive members in February. These conferences double as general meetings of the organisation and the August one is designated to elect officers and set the budget (and the resultant levy) for the next year. Votes within the organisation are proportional to the number of enrolled students at each campus who are members of association, with a limited number of 49 votes being shared amongst the associations. In between times the National Executive of the organisation, which includes the seven Presidents of the various student Associations, and (before the restructuring in 1986) the full time national

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3 eg. University of Otago Act(1964) s35 (2). The provisions in this act were taken from the Auckland University College Amendment Act(1954) which is the first time Student Associations were given statutory recognition.

4 Education Amendment Act (1990) s229 (3). Subsection two of this clause provides for exemption from membership on the basis of hardship or conscientious objection.


6 These meetings were called Councils up to until the restructuring of 1986. The change of name was decided to more accurately reflect the fact that they were as much about information sharing as they were about the administration of the organisation.
officers, would make decisions regarding action and day to day management of the organisation.

The policy process that developed within NZUSA by the 1970s would begin by students making policy at Student General Meetings on campus. Delegates from each campus, normally from the Student Association executive would be selected to attend the May and August Councils and represent the policy of students from their campus. This was a structure that student associations defended as being "highly open and democratic." It was clear however that this policy process was breaking down in a number of ways, with a limited input from students, and delegates who were prepared to formulate policy whilst attending councils. (see below for more information on structure)

1.1 ROLE

NZUSA behaves much in the way of the traditional definition of a pressure or interest group. It is "an organisation whose members act together to influence public policy to promote their common interest." It does have roles outside of influencing public policy, in terms of providing services to its members, but for the most part this takes place within the activities of local student associations. As a national federation, NZUSA's main purpose is as a representative of student opinion to government.

The role of NZUSA was clearly less political in 1929. The organisation set up four standing committees to look at:

- sport
- debating and the purchase of books
- travel, publicity and foreign affairs
- internal affairs

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7 Critic, Vol 61, 3, 1985, p.12

8 A. Paul Pross, "Pressure Groups- Talking Chameleons", M. Whittington, and G. Williams(eds), Canadian Politics in the 1990's, Scarborough, 1990, p.293. Pross and a number of other writers use the terms pressure and interest groups in an interchangeable way. If there is any difference it is that the main focus of pressure groups is government policy whereas interest groups may have a focus on informing the public or simply promoting their activity.
Prior to the second world war the focus was on sporting activities and to a lesser degree travel. Maurice Joel the President of NZUSA in 1934/5 said:

Our thinking in those days was to look after students as we could, things that were legitimately within our sphere.....But we weren't interested for instance in anything political."\(^9\)

After the second world war, the focus of the organisation changed. As the organisation began to get more involved in political affairs, those who were more interested in sporting matters arrested back some independence with the formation of the autonomous New Zealand University Sports Union in 1957.\(^{10}\) The members of the Union were still the individual campus student associations but levies were apportioned separately from NZUSA, and representatives were able to devote themselves entirely to sport.

NZUSA had entered into various travel arrangements for students since 1929. These included charters and exchanges with overseas student groups, and discounts within New Zealand. In the 1960s the role of the travel committee as extended upon NZUSA obtaining the International Student Identity Card franchise. In 1975 the travel sub-committee became the Student Travel Bureau Ltd. This folded in the 1980s, and is now operated without student association involvement by independent operators.

Through the 1950s NZUSA was still a loose federation of student associations. It did not indulge in any campaigns on a national level and even refused to help the Institute for the blind in 1951 for this reason.\(^{11}\) At the end of that decade NZUSA was being more forthright in its views on both educational and international matters, and had become a political pressure group. The development of NZUSA into a pressure group is best described by 1966 Education Vice-President Edna Tait, when she said "we are a pressure group, and pressurise is what we do."\(^{12}\)


\(^{10}\) Critic, vol 55, 10, p. 2. The Debating sub-committee also joined with the NZUSU.

\(^{11}\) Ibid. p.2
A motion at the August conference of 1968, decreed that the Association first and foremost priority lay in the field of education. In practice this has meant a concentration on bursaries and allowances for students, student accommodation and welfare services, holiday and part-time work for students and in the late 1980s and 90s opposition to the imposition of User Pays into tertiary education in New Zealand. In NZUSA's history written in 1971, Research Officer Lindsay Wright said,

in its policy and research NZUSA will function as pressure group in areas that concern student welfare and the quality of University teaching and learning and as a mouthpiece for progressive attitudes to Education.”

Individual student groups had an interest in international affairs from very early in the history of university education in New Zealand. As an official student body NZUSA had reflected this in its involvement in the International Union of Students from 1946 to 1950. NZUSA left the organisation because of its Communist orientation, but continued its international focus with the non-aligned International Student Conference (1950-1969) and the Asian Students Association (ASA) (1969-1987). International policy this developed from the late 1950s onwards with the Association having policy opposing the 1960 tour to South Africa by the New Zealand rugby team and calling for nuclear disarmament. As student interest in international and social issues increased so did the amount of NZUSA policy and action that went into these areas.

Disputes did arise over how much time should be spent on issues outside of education, and the May and August Councils of the 1970s were battlegrounds for this debate. By 1985, the multi issue focus of NZUSA was


13 Ibid., p. 43

14 (see) J. C. Beaglehole, *Victoria University College*, Wellington, 1949


16 *Critic*, vol. 55, 10, p.2
confirmed with the vast policy book of NZUSA containing 849 motions covering topics of educational, national and international interest. NZUSA was a political pressure group, far removed from the sporting focus that had been the root of the organisation.

2.0 STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE OF NZUSA IN 1985

The restructuring of NZUSA in 1986, saw not only the focus of the organisation change, but also a radical restructuring of the decision making and administration process of the organisation. The structure that was in place in 1985 was the combination of various incremental developments and occasional restructuring exercises.

Initially NZUSA was staffed entirely by volunteers and part-time staff. It developed its internal structure to having a part time President and four part-time Vice Presidents by 1962. The organisation was overseen by the National Executive that was constituted of Wellington based representatives of the Presidents of the campuses. This was changed in 1965, so that each campus was directly represented.

The Vice Presidents were in charge of a range of research commissions whose job it was to look into issues in the areas of travel, internal affairs, administration, and external affairs. These commissions were based on the campus of the Vice President concerned.

Student enrolments nearly doubled in the period between 1960 and 1966, from 15 000 to 30 000 and as a result the amount of work for NZUSA grew dramatically.\textsuperscript{17} In 1966 under President Alistair Taylor the organisation recognised the need for a full time Presidency, which became a reality with Ross Mountain being elected as President in 1967. In 1968 a full time Research Officer was added to the other part-time staff.

Through the 1970s the organisation developed its full-time elected positions, with the Education Vice-President and International Vice-President positions becoming full-time in 1970. Three part-time General Vice-President remained, but in 1974 this was changed to be one general

\textsuperscript{17} J. Baker(ed), \textit{Out of the Past-Higher Education Our Vision}, Wellington, 1994, p.17
In 1978 the organisation launched a restructuring exercise in response to the threat of withdrawal from the Massey, Canterbury and Lincoln campuses. A working party was set up and it recommended that the association focus more closely on the education and welfare of students. The result was that the International and General Vice-President positions were combined into the position of General Vice-President who was to deal with international and national issues. A second research officer was employed specifically to look at educational issues.

In the 1970’s NZUSA also began to recognise the special needs of sectional groups within its organisation. This saw two more part-time positions develop, a Women’s Rights Action Commission Co-ordinator (1978) and a National Co-ordinator for Overseas Students (1980). In 1984, a full time Women’s Vice-President was appointed to replace the part-time co-ordinator. In 1984 the position of Maori Vice-President was created, and in 1985 this was expanded to a two person collective, the Tumaki Maori Collective. This was added to in the form of a full time National Co-ordinator for Overseas Students in the same year.

Thus by the end of 1985 the national office numbered thirteen people including clerical staff. The per student levy that was being charged was $9.22. By 1985 there were eight policy commissions, still linked to the positions of Vice President. Some of them were similar to those that had been in the organisation since its early days, others were new and reflected the growing role of sectional interests in NZUSA. The eight commissions were

- International
- National
- Education
- Welfare
- Overseas Student
- Maori
- Finance and Administration
- Women's

In 1982 it was decided that the Women’s Rights Action Commission (WRAC) no longer had to have its budget approved at the Finance and Administration Commission, as all other Commissions were required to
do. The Budget and priorities for WRAC were debated and approved at a Women's Caucus, a meeting of all women delegates at Council. This was a recognition of the need for women to autonomously choose priorities for the commission.

The delegates of each campus students association would attend the various commissions and debate policy and action. In theory this policy would be enacted by the action collectives co-ordinated by the officers at national office, and through the work of local student associations. For the purpose of this five action committees met throughout the year, each with a full time national officer attached:

Public Affairs Action Committee (PAAC) - General Vice President
National Education and Welfare Committee (NEWAC) - Education and Welfare Vice President
National Overseas Student Action Collective (NOSAC) - Overseas Students Vice President
Nga Toki O Aotearoa - Tumaki Maori Collective

This structure had appeared incrementally. As each part-time position was created it necessarily found work for itself. The association was then put in the position of making that position full time in order for the person to fulfil the task of representing student concerns in this area. It had become a costly business and the challenges to NZUSA grew in response to the expansion of the organisation and the perception that its multi issue policy orientation had to be changed.

18 see next page for a diagramatic explanation of the structure outlined above.
POLICY
Women's Commission

ACTION
WAC

POLICY COMMISSIONS
- International
- National Education
- Welfare
- Overseas Student
- Maori
- F+A.

ACTION COMMITTEES/ COLLECTIVES
- PAAC
- NEWAC
- NOSAC
- Nga Toki

NATIONAL OFFICERS

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

WOMENS CAUCUS

NZUSA GENERAL MEETINGS/COUNCILS

LOCAL STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS

STUDENTS

CHAPTER TWO

THE MULTI ISSUE APPROACH- A STUDENT MOVEMENT

In 1985 NZUSA was clearly identifiable as a multi issue pressure group. The Constitution of NZUSA spelt out the objectives of the organisation:

(a) To represent both nationally and internationally the views of New Zealand students on any and every matter whether it be of peculiar concern to students or of concern to students as members of society in general.

(b) To function as a major informed and principled pressure group including education (as first priority) student welfare and social reform (including international matters) among its areas of concern but being in no way limited to those or to any other areas of concern.”

These objectives were obvious in the structure of NZUSA as outlined in the previous chapter and also in the policy and action of the organisation. Other than education which was the priority of the organisation there were three other areas in which the multi issue nature of NZUSA can be seen. These were in international matters, matters of national social concern, and matters raised by sectional groups within NZUSA. When the policy and action of these areas was drawn together it made NZUSA part of a student movement. This movement placed NZUSA firmly to the “left” of the political spectrum. Its organisation was dominated by various left wing ideologies, which mixed with the idealism of youth placed NZUSA at the head of the so-called progressive movement.¹

This multi issue approach was regarded as a desirable course for NZUSA to follow as policies and action grew out of the concerns of students. As members of society students had views that they wished to express, and the expression of these views helped gain support from other sections of society for student causes. The policy and action of sectional groups was

¹ C. Trotter, ‘The Re-birth of Campus Radicalism?’, Political Review, February/March 1994, p. 20. By this Trotter means issues of self determination, anti racism, nuclear free and civil rights issues, such as the behaviour of the SIS.
important to safeguard minority or disadvantaged groups who might otherwise not have a voice in a majoritarian system.

The multi issue focus had its origins early in the history of NZUSA. A significant event in the political development of NZUSA occurred in January 1949 with the first student congress being held at Curious Cove in the Marlborough Sounds. The Congress was regarded as an opportunity to get students together to discuss issues of the day. The range of speakers at the first congress included both National and Labour MP's, and the Chancellor of the University of New Zealand. Initially motions forthcoming from the Congress were rejected by the NZUSA Executive, which was somewhat more conservative in nature than the students who attended the Congresses.

The international focus of NZUSA was evident in the contact had with international student groups following the Second World War. A large number of returned servicemen who were retraining became involved in student politics, and brought with them an international focus.

The officers of NZUSA insisted that education and welfare was the priority of the organisation. From 1953 onwards NZUSA was active in negotiations for increased bursary payments and improvements in student welfare services. However, NZUSA by the late sixties was a multi issue pressure group representing the views of its members on a number of issues. NZUSA from 1959 had policy in areas such as nuclear disarmament and sporting contacts with South Africa. This kind of stance was common to other groups, notably trade unions.

This multi issue focus was a reflection of the movement that students in the Western world were part of in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Student

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3 Ibid., pp 12-13

4 Dave Morgan the President of the Seafarers Union is quoted in North and South in August 1994 as saying, "The Seaman's Union was not just an instrument of industrial clout. Its a social tool as well. Our union was the first to strike in protest against New Zealand's participation in the Vietnam War."
groups were at the forefront of social change, challenging not merely the academic world that they were part of, but society as a whole. It was perhaps most obvious in places like the United States and Germany where students sensed that "the liberty of the University does depend on the liberty of society as a whole." The level of radicalism that characterised the student uprisings in Europe and the United States was not as evident in New Zealand. However in 1966 NZUSA stated in an introductory pamphlet,

A well educated student should (therefore) be the social conscience of the community, and take a full part in all affairs in which he(sic) can offer knowledge, experience and effort.....It is no longer sufficient for an organisation representing students to concern itself solely with the narrow common interests of money and better working conditions. While these are important NZUSA is now acting in the belief that a national body with resources and knowledge and experience should speak usefully through its councils and Executive on issues of national importance to New Zealanders.

An analysis of the press statements made by NZUSA throughout the 1970s and early 1980s shows that a broad range of issues was covered. Although the majority were still on subjects related to tertiary education, such a student unemployment, or bursaries, a large number of other topics were raised. These included sporting contacts with South Africa, Homosexual Law Reform, nuclear issues, Poland, immigration, tax reform, domestic violence, Waitangi Day and marijuana law reform. The various Vice Presidents produced a great deal of work in these areas. There was some opposition to this with delegates voicing the complaint that many of the issues being discussed and moved were irrelevant to NZUSA, for instance marijuana law reform. This led some to believe that education and welfare was disappearing as a priority. The reports of the Research Officers


7 NZUSA Executive Minutes, 16/11/69. The delegate was Mr Anderson of Massey Agricultural College.
show that the vast amount of their time was dedicated to education related issues.\textsuperscript{8}

This multi issue approach was evident in policy terms. Both policy and action reflected an interest in international issues and domestic ones. With a large national office and the commission and committee structure NZUSA covered a large number of areas in its work. Although action was impossible on every aspect of policy, NZUSA put effort into almost all of these areas.

In 1978 some attempt had been made to restrict international policy to those countries that contribute significant numbers of students to New Zealand Universities, or are major economic, cultural or sporting partners of New Zealand.\textsuperscript{9} In the 1984 policy book however there were 166 agreed policy motions on international matters many of a general nature, for example:

\textit{12/84 " that NZUSA supports self determination, national independence, peace and a just world economic order."}

Action on international policy was necessarily limited by resources, but the International Vice-President and after 1978, the General Vice-President did publicise and produce resources on a number of issues. An example of this was the sponsoring of speaking tours by representatives of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation and African National Congress.

National policy related to a huge range of issues. Opposition to New Zealand's involvement in the Vietnam War had been a precursor for student policy and action on almost every aspect of New Zealand life. NZUSA officials made submissions on issues such as immigration and tax policy, and organised marches on issues such as anti apartheid and nuclear ship visits. This work was dealt with by the General Vice-President and the Education and Welfare Vice-President.

In 1985 there were three commissions dealing with sectional groups, the Nga Toki, the National Overseas Students Action Commission (NOSAC)

\textsuperscript{8} also interview with Lyn Holland, NZUSA Research officer, 1985-86 (14/5/94)

\textsuperscript{9} \textit{Critic}, Vol. 54, 7, p. 12
and the Women’s Rights Action Commission. Although much of the policy and work undertaken in these areas related to these groups as students, such as creche facilities on campus and grievance procedures, much work was in other areas. For instance the Tumaki Maori Collective was heavily involved in work on Te Reo, and issues of domestic racism.

The view of NZUSA as a multi issue organisation being part of a student movement was the traditional picture of student politics that had developed in NZUSA over the preceding twenty years before 1985. Those representing this view had dominated both the elected positions and the policy of NZUSA. They favoured NZUSA’s role as a multi issue pressure group. The 1985 NZUSA President Jessica Wilson, summed it up in a column published in student newspapers in 1985,

Although our priority is education and welfare work, these issues do not exist in a vacuum. Students are part of the wider community and have always taken a keen interest in issues which effect us as people as well as students.”

As a multi issue organisation NZUSA still had education as a priority. In the early part of 1985 the National Officers were able to point to the Bursary Review as both a sign of where NZUSA’s priorities lay, and further how effective the organisation was. The review laid out a series of recommendations to Cabinet on what kind of support should be available to students and trainees. Education and Welfare Vice President Malcolm McLean said that NZUSA was the cause of the bursary review, and that its papers were the blueprint for the support system that was adopted.

we kicked up such a stink that with support from other student/trainee groups mainly, we were able to drag Marshall (Minister of Education) out of a cabinet meeting and succeeded in getting the review as it was. We dominated the review and were the most efficient and organised people there. We got what we wanted into the report.”

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10 Critic, Vol. 61, 8, p.5

11 Malcolm McLean’s final report to National Executive, 15/11/86, NZUSA files. Russell Marshall was the Minister of Education in the first term of the Fourth Labour government. In the end not all of the recommendations of the Review were accepted, but it did result in
McLean also pointed to increased accommodation grants and improvements in the availability of the Emergency Unemployment Benefit as being direct achievements of NZUSA. He felt these were in fact only possible because of the multi issue approach of NZUSA.

these achievements were possible because the leadership and especially national office were organised and focused on the problems facing our membership. We had a good knowledge of wider social policy developments and were able to relate those to the tertiary education sector.\textsuperscript{12}

Malcolm McLean saw the position of General Vice President as an insurance policy linking NZUSA to other groups who could provide important information and support.\textsuperscript{13} NZUSA through its policy process developed these links. In 1979 NZUSA endorsed the aims and objects of thirty four organisations ranging from Amnesty International to the National Gay Rights Association.

Another justification for the multi issue approach is that it is impossible to detach the concerns of students from those of other sectors. This is particularly so in issues such as unemployment, housing and health. Student unemployment, be it in terms of holiday work or as graduates, is inseparable from unemployment as a community issue. Thus it was important for NZUSA to have links with groups who specialised in these areas.

Student endorsement of the multi issue approach was said to be ensured by the democratic structure of NZUSA’s policy making (as described in Chapter One) and this was sufficient to ensure that it was representative of students views. Students tended to be more interested in taking action issues outside of education such as the Springbok tour of 1981.\textsuperscript{14} This was taken to be a show of support from students in NZUSA’s stance as a multi

the establishment of a more comprehensive and increased package of bursaries being available to students.

\textsuperscript{12} Malcolm McLean’s final report to National Executive, (15/11/86), NZUSA Files

\textsuperscript{13} Interview with Malcolm Mclean 15/5/94.

\textsuperscript{14} “Another AUSA submission on NZUSA structure 1985”, NZUSA files
issue organisation. It was said that NZUSA would be seen as a narrow and self serving interest group disinterested in what was happening in society as a whole if it did not look at issues outside of tertiary education. NZUSA needed to be an organisation working for social change in general and the betterment of its own members in particular.\(^{15}\)

This multi issue approach was necessarily left wing. Colin Patterson, 1985 Welfare Officer at AUSA said, as young lowly paid people it was clear that students would be on the ‘left’ of the political spectrum. This would involve co-operation with housing groups, unemployed groups, trade unions and other issue groups such as HART.

As an association we should try to challenge and change the consciousness of our members and assist them to understand how tertiary education fits into the framework of our capitalist society rather than merely reflecting the elitist background and ideology that all too many members have and do experience.\(^{16}\)

The growth of sectional groups simply reflected the growth of student involvement within NZUSA and in the appreciation of the diversity of the student movement. Further, the nature of majority rule is that it can fail to take account of the minority, and thus be oppressive. As a result the development of sectional groups was necessary to keep this in check. The role of the Tumaki Maori Collective reflected another reason why the multi issue approach had developed;

It is important to remember that Maori students are not separate from the rest of Maori people. The struggle of the Maori people to combat the oppressive structures of the country are the struggles of Maori students. Thus any national Maori student body takes on board not only the problems and issues of their own constituents, but issues and problems before Maori people as a whole.\(^{17}\)

\(^{15}\) Ibid.

\(^{16}\) "Another AUSA submission on NZUSA structure 1985", NZUSA files.

\(^{17}\) "Submission in favour of the establishment of full time Maori Vice-President," 1984, NZUSA files.
The multi issue approach was supplemented by contact with overseas student groups particularly the Asian Students Association (ASA). As the New Zealand delegate to the 1985 ASA Conference commented:

"It was noted time and time again that students are an integral part of the societies they live in, that students in the past have taken their place alongside other social sectors in demanding progressive social change, and that they have a responsibility to do so."

The multi issue approach developed from roots in the post world war two generation of students. From the 1960s through to the mid 80s those dominant in NZUSA were of the mind that as an organisation they should be active in a number of areas. Although the first priority was education, other issues were important to students as members of society as citizens of the world, and as member of traditionally disadvantaged groups. This in essence was the multi issue approach. It was justified by the belief that the contacts made would benefit the chief focus of education and welfare, that students had a duty as members of society to be involved and that the work being done by sectionalised groups was important in recognising the diversity of students and the need to support minority groups within the system.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE ARGUMENT AGAINST A MULTI ISSUE APPROACH

"As it has been noted in the past prior to 1986, NZUSA was a troubled organisation, there was no accountability to students in fact the organisation at times acted in spite of students. The national office tended to be bloated and overstaffed, and the organisation was typified by internal dissension."

Dan Ormond, President NZUSA 1992
(NZUSA Annual Report 1992)

Arguments over the correct focus for NZUSA had been common in the organisation. In 1972 several hours was spent at May Council debating over the direction of policy. A member of the Otago delegation said that NZUSA should not be a vehicle for the revolution, and that most policy NZUSA had was not in accordance with the views of students.1

As roles had grown at University it appeared that local student associations were struggling to be representative of their members. This in turn was being reflected at a national level. The criticism went further when it was considered that NZUSA was isolated from local Student Associations. 1976 NZUSA Presidential candidate Sue Green said in her election statement;

NZUSA is not in close enough contact with the majority its members, most students have only a vague idea of what NZUSA does.... NZUSA does not adequately tap the opinions of its members so that sometimes the policies being carried out reflect only the views of the minority."

Discussions about the role and structure of NZUSA became more frequent in the 1980s. NZUSA’s role as a multi issue pressure group was coming under fire. A group of students were becoming involved in student association activities who had no time for work on issues of social importance. The forerunner of this view was Paul Gourlie, the President

1 Critic, vol. 48, 6, p. 3
of the Otago University Students Association in 1979-80. Gourlie entered student politics at a time when issues such as feminism and anti apartheid work dominated. He reflected some of the weariness that students had with such serious topics. As the Editor of Critic commented in 1978 Gourlie appealed to those students who were “more concerned with the soccer match between Selwyn and Studholme, than with apartheid.”

Gourlie went to Auckland a couple of years later and was to find a number of allies for his position. The election of Graham Watson, an associate of Paul Gourlie to the Presidency at Auckland in 1984 that further fuelled conflict over the role of NZUSA. Those who shared his views were not only at Auckland. On a number of campuses student politicians were beginning to question the wisdom of a multi issue pressure group from which they could perceive little benefit for their $9.22 per student.

Watson and others first brought pressure to bear on NZUSA in 1984, often through the pages of the fledgling student newspaper Campus News. Watson claimed to have the support of the majority of students in his opposition to the actions of NZUSA. A number of other campus Presidents began to join Watson in expressing their dissatisfaction with the increasing sectionalism within NZUSA.

Watson and his supporters were of the belief that NZUSA was an inefficient and unrepresentative organisation. They saw the National office as overstaffed and concentrating too much on issues of social or ethnic interest. Essentially they advocated a move back to being a single

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2 Critic, Vol. 54, 19, p.3. Selwyn and Studholme are Halls of Residence at the University Of Otago.

3 Gourlie went to Auckland and became President of the New Zealand Technical Institute Student Services Association. From this position he was highly critical of the political stance of NZUSA. (Interview with Malcolm McLean, Education and Welfare Vice President NZUSA, 1985/86, 15/5/94)

4 Campus News was set up in Auckland in 1984 in opposition to the official student association newspapers by an organisation called the Society of Independent Students. It was distributed freely at all campuses. Its editorial style was conspicuously anti student association, and particularly NZUSA. It featured a regular column by Graham Watson. Campus News ran from May 1984 to September 1987. I am unable to provide page numbers for Campus News as the only readily available source was photocopied selections from the NZUSA files, which do not have page numbers.
issue pressure group, concentrating solely on the education and welfare of students.

They were opposed to the political stance on a number of footings. Firstly they did not believe that all students could have the same political views so that it was better to steer clear of major political issues. It was these political views which were divorcing NZUSA from the greater student body. Even if a majority of students could be said to agree on these political stances it was not possible to justify spending on such issues which did not have any special reference to students. Watson felt that the student political consciousness had changed but that NZUSA had not,

We are being very conservative if we tie ourselves to a traditional image of the student being a protester/revolutionary. This relic from the past should be challenged while encouraging many students to participate in rational debate on many community issues. It is all too easy for student leaders like ourselves to offer individual students bandwagons to jump on by reciting fallacious justifications in order to selfishly claim support for our own political whims.\(^5\)

Watson felt that NZUSA was being tied to a particular political viewpoint which was not what students wanted. He saw the NZUSA line to be one of do not change our policies to reflect student opinion but change student opinion to reflect our policies. This was the crux of the argument of representation. Should NZUSA be representing students interests or being representative of students.

In his columns in the \textit{Campus News}, Watson was particularly critical of the profile of NZUSA on campus. He criticised the method of electing NZUSA officers saying that students should have a direct input into the process rather than just through their executives. He pointed to an over inflated bureaucracy that spent 63\% of its income on salaries. It was top heavy “with try hard politicians, which while quaint indeed is detrimental to the students value for money.”\(^6\)

\(^5\) “Official AUSA submission to NZUSA in 1985”, NZUSA files.

\(^6\) \textit{Campus News}, 17/3/86. Watson also pointed out in great indignation that $5000 a year was spent on biscuits and milo at National Office.
The views attracted right wing support. None more so than Philip Ross writing in the Campus News in 1984, he referred to NZUSA,

> It is time this body disappeared as it has gone from being a useful body promoting sporting links between Universities to a political anachronism belonging in the sixties when students were more involved in waiting for the revolution that thankfully never came.... an end to NZUSA might also help students in their public image which at present is abysmal as many members of the public automatically associate students with bludgers and whingers.7

Watson claimed that he was not right wing, but simply that he was not dogmatically left wing as those in control of NZUSA.8 No matter the challenge he was taking to NZUSA was explicitly attacking the traditional focus of NZUSA that was firmly rooted to the left wing. For NZUSA to only concentrate on education and welfare interests of its members made the body significantly more conservative, as it reduced the number of the groups with which it had common ground.

Much was made by those wanting to make change of the resignation of the 1985 General Vice President of NZUSA Graham Harvey. Harvey from Canterbury was part of the left of NZUSA. He resigned before the 1985 academic year began citing the contradictions between what he was working for and what a majority of NZUSA’s membership was working for.

why should we expect students to challenge a system which has given them access to University and denied it to others...to the people still active in the student movement I ask you where you will be in ten years time? Will you have a nice position of power within the system, are you going to have a position within society where you can really support radical change or will your personal ambitions lead you into a situation where you are defensive of the present system.9

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7 *Campus News*, 5/6/84
8 *Campus News*, 14/3/85
Even though Harvey was from the other side of the political spectrum, his words were used by those that wanted change because he advocated moving outside of NZUSA to be involved in social issues. He was essentially agreeing that NZUSA was not the place for social issues to be the subject of policy and action.

The sectionalism within the organisation was the subject of attack also. Simon Johnson, the VUWSA President in 1985 and 1986 was a fierce critic of the growth of "quasi-autonomous interest groups" within NZUSA. He argued that in many ways NZUSA was not actually a national organisation at all, but "an uneasy alliance of interest groups whose loyalties lie to different degrees to students but who stay together in order to take advantage of the compulsory levying of students." Johnson argued that NZUSA was in effect dysfunctional because it could not set realistic priorities, and devote resources to them. This was because of the power of the interest groups, and as a consequence of the "fixation" with every group having a Vice President and action collective. Johnson complained that sectional views were taking hold within the organisation, particularly in terms of the role of the semi autonomous Women's Action Commission.11

By the middle of the 1980s the schism within NZUSA was huge. Those who opposed the multi issue approach did so on the grounds that NZUSA was not representing the views of students, that it was inefficient, and that sectional groups had gained control of the organisation. The impasse between those who favoured a multi issue approach and those who opposed it was destined to come to a head in 1986.

10 Column by Simon Johnson in "National Student Issue", Critic, July 1986, p.3
11 Ibid., p.3
CHAPTER FOUR

THE PROCESS OF RESTRUCTURING NZUSA IN 1985-86

Pressure had built up within NZUSA in 1984-85 for some changes to the organisation. Unsuccessful motions to withdraw from NZUSA were tabled at Massey and Victoria University in 1983 and 1984. Graham Watson had unsuccessfully sought to give twelve months notice of withdrawal from Auckland in 1985, but continually attacked NZUSA in the pages of Campus News. Although the personnel on some campuses changed, disenchantment with the sectionalism, and the broad focus of NZUSA was retained on campus Executives.

The pressures for change moved NZUSA National Office to ask for submissions at the beginning of 1985 on the future structure of the organisation. The submissions reflected the schism that was now evident in NZUSA. The two polarised views were characterised by one respondent as representing on one hand the view that NZUSA should be a student union, looking after the interests of, and securing direct and tangible benefits for, the members. It was argued if NZUSA was to be representative of students it had to take this line.

The other polarised view was that NZUSA should be part of a student movement working on behalf of members in areas where society may benefit. In this way they would be representing students interests. The perception of both groups at the outset was that they could not work together. 1

NZUSA national office was able to delay any decision on the future role of NZUSA past the August Council of 1985. In April 1986, in his third year as President at Auckland Watson successfully passed the motion to withdraw from NZUSA at a student general meeting. At that point in time NZUSA was a vulnerable organisation. The President in 1986, Alex Lee was struggling to come to terms with the job. He resigned as President at the start of May Council, saying that he felt he could no longer fulfil the requirements of the job. There was also considerable conflict over the lack

1 Paper by Bruce Palmer (AUSA Treasurer), June 1986, NZUSA files.
of activity of national officers.  This combined with the Auckland withdrawal for a tense May Council.

A "restructuring" plenary was planned for the Council. It was designed to answer the questions that had been raised the previous year over the structure and role of the organisation. The plenary became stuck on discussion on the number of elected officers that should be at national Office.

A National Executive meeting was held to try and find a solution to the problems. It lasted for sixteen hours without a break, as arguments over every aspect of NZUSA were covered. Surprisingly by the end of it there was a plan. The recommendation formulated by the Research Officers was that an independent working party be set up to take submissions and make recommendations on the future aims, role and structure of NZUSA. The National Executive accepted this solution with relief as they were unlikely to come to any agreement.

The problems of NZUSA were all to evident in the response to this plan. NOSAC and Nga Toki reacted by saying that the restructuring exercise was a pakeha problem. Manu’a Poloai, National Overseas Students Coordinator said on their behalf, "we’re not going to change for you- you people are fucking yourself round at our expense. Its your problem as pakeha people." A motion to not include NOSAC or Nga Toki in the restructuring was only lost when Graham Watson voted against the wishes of his delegation.

A portent of what was to come for the organisation came from Bidge Smith the Women’s Vice-President, who was elected President of NZUSA shortly after the conference. She sounded a note that changes to the


3 Ibid. p.7

4 Interview with Malcolm McLean (15/5/94)


6 The format for voting at the conference leaves the President and one other delegate from each campus to cast the votes after discussion has taken place within the delegation of each campus.
organisation had an air of inevitability about them. "Sacrifices must be made, everyone must compromise."\(^7\)

One of the chief reasons that things began to move was that the vast majority of delegates who had tacitly gone along with the focus of the organisation were beginning to react against it. There was a perception that NZUSA had not taken students with them. Donovan Wearing, former Canterbury President, and acting NZUSA President for the conference following Alex Lee's resignation said:

> breaking NZUSA into sectional parts puts stress on the organisation. It does not have to reflect (in its structure) the society it is aiming for, nor does it have to be a microcosm of the society it lives in either. Balance, Compromise, Effectiveness.\(^8\)

The Independent Working Party (IWP) was set up following the conference, and comprised Steven Ferguson, 1982 UCSA President, Paul Cochrane 1979 VUWSA President, and Lindsay Wright, former Research Officer of NZUSA (1968-71).\(^9\) The IWP terms of reference were:

1. to call and hear submissions from interested people and organisations
2. to discuss, evaluate and report upon them
3. to carry out investigations into the future role and structure of NZUSA and its present deficiencies.\(^10\)

The final report of the IWP was circulated shortly before the 1986 August Council of NZUSA. The report developed a number of principles for the operation of NZUSA, and from this listed a number of options for the future role and structure of the organisation. The working party stated which option that it favoured.

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\(^8\) Ibid., p.9

\(^9\) The working party also included Helen Aikman a former Vice President of NZUSA, but she withdrew due to lack of time.

\(^10\) IWP Report, p.4.
In its analysis the IWP came down firmly in favour of a single issue focus for NZUSA. It said the first and foremost aim for the organisation has to be the advancement of the welfare and educational interests of students, this meaning bursaries, jobs, assessment, access, welfare and accommodation. Work on other issues that members decide has to be secondary.

NZUSA is the only organisation specifically for the issues of university students, if that work is not done by NZUSA it will not be done. It must therefore remain the priority. Work on social issues can and often is best done by other organisations which are created for that purpose.\(^\text{11}\)

The IWP did not feel that as an organisation with effectively a compulsory membership levy that NZUSA could see itself as part of a political movement. They said that this did not mean that co-operation with other organisations was impossible. The IWP Report did stress that social issues should continue to be worked on at a campus level where students could be more directly involved with where resources were allocated.

The IWP was particularly critical of the sectionalism within the organisation. It asserted that the organisation could not survive if it sacrificed the principle of democracy by imposing the sectarian views of any interest group. In recognition of the need for self determination the IWP agreed with a proposal from Nga Toki that an independent Maori students association be established. The IWP report says

The creation of a separate and funded Maori student organisation recognises that there is a responsibility for work on Maori in university issues at least and probably on wider Maori issues. Equally it recognises that the alternative of continuing within the NZUSA structure means either that the federation forgoes democratic control of any sectional group or that section abandons self determination.\(^\text{12}\)

\(^{11}\) IWP Report, p.6.

\(^{12}\) IWP Report, p. 17. The independent Maori organisation Nga Toki was to be set up with funding for the first three years to come from NZUSA.
The structure favoured by the IWP saw the establishment of NZUSA as a federation working on education, welfare and women's issues of University students. The collectives and commissions of NZUSA were to be disestablished, with the exception of the Finance and Administration and the Women's Action Commission. The number of full time national officers was to be reduced from seven to two, a President and a Vice-President. The two research officers were to remain, as well as an Administrative Secretary and 1.5 clerical workers. The policy book was to be abolished in favour of policy statements covering broad topics within the aims of NZUSA.13

The recommendations of the IWP were put to the August conference. In order for the changes to be put through in time for the 1987 year, it was necessary for the motions to be passed unanimously. The mood of change that Bidge Smith had signalled at May was exemplified by the moving of the motion that only a 2/3 majority was required for changes to be constitutional. A constitutional quirk meant that this motion itself had to be passed unanimously. Initially the Massey delegation equivocated but following pressure being put on them the motion was passed. 14

After much discussion the recommendations of the IWP was approved. The Waikato, Massey and Otago delegations voted against the major proposal, but they only represented 17 of the 49 votes that were available, and they were not enough to stop it. The heat of the debate seemed to have been removed by the creation of an independent Nga Toki.15

NZUSA was no longer a multi issue group. The Council had effectively resolved the dilemma that Bruce Palmer had noted by deciding that NZUSA was a student union, albeit with a political focus in the area of education and welfare. Opinions on the result differed;

13 Adams, R., “Council of Change”, Salient, August 1986, p.4, also NZUSA minute books, August Conference 1986, NZUSA files. The Women’s Action Commission was to lose the right to determine its own policy, and financing, but was still to remain in existence but was now directly accountable to the finance commission for spending.

14 Adams, Ibid p.4. It was the Massey delegation alone who seemed to think that the kind of changes that were taking place needed to be taken back to be discussed on campus.

15 Adams, Ibid, p.4
there will be a shift in emphasis back to education and welfare issues which will encompass all students regardless of gender, class or ethnicity. It is my belief that these changes are a positive step towards a better, more representative, effective and democratic student body.\textsuperscript{16}

twenty years worth of radical policies and the institutional memory accumulated from some of New Zealand’s most talented leftists was wiped out overnight.\textsuperscript{17}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16} Ross Blanch (OUSA President in 1986-7 quoted in) \textit{Critic}, Vol 62, 20, p.5.
\item \textsuperscript{17} C. Trotter, ‘The Re-Birth of Campus Radicalism?’, \textit{Political Review}, February/March, 1994, p. 21.
\end{itemize}
CHAPTER FIVE
THE PRESSURES AND REASONS FOR RESTRUCTURING

For a pressure group, such as NZUSA to radically alter its shape and role there must be significant forces at work. The kind of changes that NZUSA inflicted on itself were born of a number of causes. On one level there were structural inadequacies of NZUSA. The political inexperience of many student politicians made for decision making that was not always in the best interests of the national organisation. The element of continuity that national officers may have been able to provide was undermined by the lack of respect that campus based student politicians had for them and the sectional interests that some of them represented. There was an absence of common purpose between those in national office, and members of campus executives.

The personal politics of those involved in making changes was also important. They did not like the multi issue, left wing approach of NZUSA and they were determined to change it. This determination was able to convince delegates who could not see any tangible benefits for the stance that NZUSA adopted. The student politicians of 1986 were a more conservative breed than those who had preceded them. This combination ensured that there would be acceptance of the proposals of the IWP, and that any changes made would be a "step to the right".

One of the chief characteristics that Paul Pross ascribes to a successful pressure group is continuity of membership and leadership. It is this that allows groups to develop contacts and institutional memory, and begin to have a thorough knowledge of their specialised area and thus increase the amount of influence they have. A stable leadership also engenders confidence in a group both from its members and those that it wishes to influence. Although there may be reasons beyond the control of pressure groups that limit their influence, a high degree of continuity is essential in every case.¹

¹ see A. Paul Pross, Pressure Groups in the Canadian Political System, Toronto, 1975, pp 8-9, and R. Mulgan, Politics in New Zealand, Auckland, 1994, pp 203-206
The structure of NZUSA works against continuity. Most students are only at University for 3-5 years, and of those are likely to spend only 2-3 involved in student politics. This means that knowledge developed is easily lost, and student politicians spend a great deal of time “re-inventing the wheel”. NZUSA had been through a thorough re-examination in 1978, but by 1986 was confronting similar issues again. Although these re-appraisals are important for organisations the lack of continuity placed NZUSA in a position that leant itself to dramatic change.

Lyn Holland NZUSA research officer in 1986 sees this as a generational problem for NZUSA.

There is no organisational history in NZUSA. Often they are just a group of young people developing their ideas. This leads to extremities, as people playing in left wing politics come to their political consciousness. 2

The lack of experience sees student politicians unable to view the long term consequences of their actions. The comparative experience of Graham Watson and those pressing for change enabled them to manipulate the situation. It was true that there was simply no way that NZUSA could survive in its current form without Auckland, and thus everything had to be done to keep them in. Auckland contributed 25% of the budget and it was thought that carrying on without them would either raise the levy to an unacceptable level, or see a fatal reduction in services. Little thought was given to what the changes would actually mean for the organisation’s reputation as a pressure group. Both Lyn Holland and Louise Mason the other Research Officer at the time of the restructuring warned against letting contacts and reputation slide.3

The only people with real institutional experience were those who were already in National Office. The Auckland withdrawal threat precipitated a reaction to the distance that developed in the mid eighties between the

2 Interview with Lyn Holland 14/5/94. Holland had worked for a number of years before joining NZUSA, and was consequently older than many of her employers.

3 In her report to the Federation Executive in November 1986, Mason was particularly scathing. “You’re making a big mistake if you think that NZUSA can start next year after you have got a new office new staff and new technology…. any lobbying organisation relies on information gathering, personal contacts and credibility….you have done a good job of fucking up so far.”
national officers and campus executives. Pross identifies confidence in the leadership as a crucial element in the successful operation of a pressure group. This confidence disappeared, even from those who worked most closely with the them, the constituent Presidents. Many of them were alienated by the strength of the sectionalism that the national officers held.

The officers elected to national office became very involved in their portfolios. They were no longer on campus, and thus the direct link they had with students was limited. In the case of the Tumaki Maori Collective and the General Vice-President their portfolios meant that they spent a large amount of time dealing with groups outside of the campus environment. The national office appeared to have a life of its own at times rather than operating in accordance with the issues that were being raised by students. The national office insisted otherwise but this was not accepted by those committed to change, or the Independent Working Party.

This situation became a problem because of poor communication. It seemed to campus Presidents such as Simon Johnson and Graham Watson that the work of the National Officers took place inspite of policy rather than because of it. Budgets were not kept to, and there was limited supervision of work done by national officers. In retrospect many of the national officers acknowledge that not enough had been done to make the structure open, clear and accountable. 4

It was difficult for the Presidents to keep a balance between their own campus interests and the priorities of the national organisation. This was understandable as Presidents are "a combination of mill owner, shop steward, and factory worker at the same time." 5 It was the Presidents who had to defend NZUSA on campus, and the pressure came on them to show tangible benefits from NZUSA. There did seem to be a confusion in the mind of some of the Presidents as to whether their role was to represent the policy of their campus, or supervise the operations of NZUSA’s policy. 6 One observer of the time felt that Graham Watson’s

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4 Bruce Palmer’s paper on restructuring, June 1986. Also interviews conducted with Malcolm Mclean, Lyn Holland and Quentin Jukes. Jukes was the General Vice-President of NZUSA during 1985.

motivation for change was that as the President of the largest campus he felt that he should be in control of NZUSA. This was a very serious misunderstanding of the role of NZUSA.

There was a great deal of dissatisfaction with the number of tangible results achieved by NZUSA Federation Office. By becoming a single issue group those who voted for change felt more results would come. It seemed that those who wanted change believed that if only the work was done more effectively, then the results would come. It seemed no amount of work would convince them that the structure of New Zealand politics was against NZUSA. In Malcolm McLean’s mind there was no sense of political struggle for the student politicians who sought change. They simply did not understand that NZUSA was a very small fish in a very big pond.7

The impossible position of NZUSA national office in relation to its members was summed up by Andrew Little the President in 1988 and 1989 as offering few options.

as a lobbying group NZUSA cannot guarantee success, it may not even be possible to attribute success past the point that NZUSA was involved in the debate.8

The national officers tended to believe that the constituent Presidents and executives did not understand the tactics involved in the campaigning and lobbying. Malcolm McLean says,

they did not see the six weekly meetings with the minister, the daily phone calls and meetings with departmental officials. They could not see the big picture, and in their naivety believed that reasoned debate would change it.... they had no idea how all the different techniques of campaigning fitted together, the lobbying, mass action, the working with other groups.9

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7 Interview with Malcolm McLean 15/5/94

8 Presidents report to May Conference, 1988., NZUSA Files

9 Interview with Malcolm McLean 15/5/94
The developing political consciousness of campus politicians combined with this confusion to fuel tension between the national office and constituents. Regardless of what the circumstances were the distance between national officers and constituents was capitalised on by those who wanted change.

It was Graham Watson who led the charge of those who wanted change, and he capitalised on the lack of experience of other student politicians and the structural difficulties of NZUSA. Although he could not have succeeded if not for the support of a majority of presidents, it was Watson who used the experience he had developed over his previous two years as President at Auckland to undermine NZUSA in 1986. Added to this was his close association with a number of other people who had been around student political circles for a long time. Chris Trotter calls this the “strange continuities of the right in student politics.”\textsuperscript{10} Paul Gourlie as President of the New Zealand Technical Institute Students Association in 1983, had removed the political element of their work. He saw them as a service organisation. He was a close associate of Watson, and was present throughout the debates in 1986.

In this sense personal politics did have a role to play. Although Watson claimed not to be right wing, the changes that were brought were an attack on the traditional focus of student politics, a focus that was unmistakably left wing.\textsuperscript{11} David Blowers and Steven Cowan claim that the rise of Watson coincided with that of new right political thinking in New Zealand. He is described as “the first new right student president.”\textsuperscript{12} His contemporaries are not so sure, and even those who opposed him do not think this ideology was a conscious thing.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{10} C. Trotter, “The Re-birth of Campus Radicalism?”, Political Review, February/March, 1994, p.20

\textsuperscript{11} At least four members of the National Office in 1985-86 were members of the Workers Communist League. Those who favoured the changes would have been aware of this. (Source confidential)

\textsuperscript{12} D. Blowers, S. Cowan “Student Politicians Turn Right”, New Zealand Monthly Review, March 1989, pp 6-7

\textsuperscript{13} Interview with Quentin Jukes, 14/5/94.
Clearly Watson and others were uncomfortable with their name being associated with some left wing political activity, and this was a motivating factor in decisions made. They did seem to possess an anti-collective attitude, and according to Quentin Jukes were coming from a position of privilege where they did not understand the reasons behind the development of NZUSA’s ‘sectionalism’.14

Much was made by those who moved the restructuring that the political consciousness of students had changed, and that the structure of NZUSA had to move with this change in attitude of students. It is true that the demands of internal assessment and the changes in the employment market were beginning to effect the time that students had for political activities.15 However it is doubtful that either side would have had proof of what average students were thinking. Rachel Whitrock one of the Otago Women’s representatives to May Conference in 1986, summed the situation up:

> there have been a number of claims that the average student is not getting their money’s worth out of NZUSA, but I haven’t had much evidence to show that the average student knows what they want or what they don’t get, let alone who they are.16

It was the political consciousness of the student leaders that was fading. This was how Watson, Gourlie and others were able to make the changes they did. Student activists did not have a Vietnam to latch onto as the previous generation of activists had done, and after the Springbok tour in 1981 many were left wondering if they wanted to get involved in such a thing.17 They were unable to believe that what they were doing had any real relevance, and at least within education there were tangible things to protest about.

14 Interview with Quentin Jukes, 14/5/94.


16 Critic, vol. 62.12, p.4

17 Interview with Quentin Jukes, (14/5/94). Jukes feels that campus activists lost their way after the Springbok Tour, not sure whether they had won or lost, and uncertain of what method of protesting should be followed.
Their distaste for so-called sixties radicalism was an interesting testament to the children of the “baby boomers”. Cynical, and unwilling to challenge the world as the generation before them were, the student politicians who sought change were far more conservative than those who had dominated NZUSA since the late sixties. They were able to see that in their own self-interest it may be necessary to oppose cuts to tertiary education, but widening the debate may not be.

For NZUSA this becomes the dilemma of representing the interests of its members or being representative of them. This debate in 1986 decided on the side of the latter position and thus restricted the focus of NZUSA. Although no one sought to ask students, the NZUSA that was created after 1986 did reflect the seeming ambivalence of the members to these social issues. NZUSA had become a responsible education pressure group.

The pressures that led to the changes were as much created by NZUSA itself. The organisation has a structural weaknesses that will always make it vulnerable to dramatic change, and thus a weakening of its status as a pressure group. The AUSA withdrawal precipitated a reaction to a developing schism between the national officers who favoured the development of interests within NZUSA, and those tired of issues with which they had a difficulty identifying. There was an absence of common purpose in the organisation. As such it was only a matter of time until a dramatic change took place. Graham Watson was able to use the relative experience he had built up to refocus the organisation and shift NZUSA across the political spectrum.

NZUSA did not take the time to go back to its constituents and think the consequences of the changes through. As often in the life of NZUSA it did not behave like an organised long term pressure group, and left itself to the mercy of the political system.

The restructuring shifted NZUSA away from the allies on the left that it had developed since the early sixties. This does not mean that it moved to the right of the political spectrum, rather that it took a step to the right to concentrate on educational issues alone rather than societal issues including education. This left the organisation in a difficult position as its
remaining policy on education was in direct opposition to the direction of the government. This appeared to leave NZUSA isolated. There is not sufficient space to debate the result of the changes in this essay, but the validity of the following statement by David Blowers and Steven Cowan in 1989 is a question that is still debated within NZUSA, as it has been in the past and no doubt will be for a long time to come.

NZUSA has chosen to ignore the fact that if it doesn’t support the struggles of the wider community then the wider community will be extremely unlikely to support the struggles of students. The student politicians are in this respect acting against the interests of the student population.18

POSTSCRIPT

BEYOND 1986 - THE WHEEL TURNS

In the remaining months of 1986 there were problems for NZUSA, as most of the energy of the organisation during the year had gone into restructuring. The office effectively ground to a halt, as first four of the Vice-Presidents were asked to resign in order to save money, the legacy of overspending earlier in the year, and then the clerical staff were told that they would not be re-employed. A strike involving all the appointed staff as well as some elected staff caused major problems for the remainder of 1986.

The industrial dispute was a highly acrimonious affair. It was alleged by the clerical workers that they were losing their jobs because they did not fit the new image of the association. The workers, a Maori male, a Sri Lankan woman, and a Samoan woman, alleged there were racist overtones. For many who were opposed to the restructuring process the affair was the last straw, and ex-NZUSA workers were involved in a picket of the offices. The matter was ultimately solved by arbitration in which NZUSA was strongly criticised for the way that the National officers handled the dismissal of the clerical staff. NZUSA was forced to make a large severance payment.¹

The normal problems of continuity in NZUSA were compounded as both the research officers, Lyn Holland, and Louise Mason resigned at the beginning of 1987. By the end of that year the two people who had been appointed to replace them were made redundant. The Research Officers had long been the strength of the organisation and without them the only non-elected staff member in the office by the beginning of 1988 was the Administrative Secretary. Much of the respect and credibility of NZUSA focused around the work of the research officers. It was concluded that any research that was needed would be contracted out. At the May Conference in 1987 the Women's Action Commission ceased to exist, replaced by a "women's conference" to be held at each of the NZUSA conferences.

¹ One source believes the payment was in the order of $7,000, but no evidence is available to confirm this. All of the material relating to the dismissal of staff was discussed in committee in National Executive meetings. Thus it is difficult to know what happened.
A stability in the NZUSA leadership in the period from 1987 onwards enabled the association to settle into the new structure. Bidge Smith returned to be President in 1987, and she was followed by Andrew Little, from Victoria University who also served two years in 1988 and 1989. This stability was added to by the looming spectre of User Pays in tertiary education. Almost all of NZUSA’s energy and resources were devoted to opposing it after the idea was floated in the Hawke Report on Post Compulsory Education in 1987. From 1990 when student tuition fees increased 1000%, User Pays has served to sharply focus NZUSA on the issue of the education and welfare of students.

The cyclic nature of NZUSA has reared its head in the last two years. Just as NZUSA restructured itself in 1986, eight years after the restructuring of 1978, after another six years, in 1992 moves were made to broaden the focus of NZUSA. The particular debate arose as a result of an attempt to gain NZUSA support for the students of universities in the occupied territories of Lebanon who had been affected by the closure of universities by the Israeli government.

The idea of being able to have policy and take action on social issues was debated at length at the May Conference in 1992. Following some tense negotiations a motion was finally passed, allowing for policy and comment on social issues as long as “democratic consultation” took place on all campuses. This meant that each specific proposal for NZUSA to have a policy on an issue not directly related to the education or welfare of students had to be discussed at a general meeting on each campus.

This restriction has limited the amount of work that has been done, but in 1993, NZUSA was able to take a position in favour of the Mixed Member Proportional option during the electoral referendum. In 1994 it has also seen NZUSA come out in favour of instituting pay equity legislation.

In 1993 the size of Federation Office was increased with the return of the position of Research Officer, and the employment of a Women’s Coordinator. Significant moves have been made by the sharing of office space and administrative staff with the Aotearoa Polytechnic Students Union. In 1994, the organisation has facilitated the re-establishment of a properly
funded National Maori Students organisation, Te Mana Akonga.\(^2\) Also there is a proposal for NZUSA to be involved in the Next Step Democracy Movement which is seeking a referendum on a number of issues including the state provision of education, health, environmental policies and more. This is a way in which NZUSA can link with other groups but the question is again been asked as to whether this is the direction in which NZUSA wishes to move.\(^3\)

These recent moves not only show the cyclic nature of reappraisals of NZUSA, but represent a recognition that there perhaps is a middle ground for the organisation. Student politicians in the mid 1990’s who are developing their political consciousness seem set again to try to challenge their members to be part of a legacy that was diverted in 1986.

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\(^2\) The independent Nga Toki, that was set up following the restructuring of 1986 lasted until 1990, when internal difficulties caused to scale down its activities. It has operated on a part time basis since then.

\(^3\) At the time of writing NZUSA is yet to decide if it will support the move in 1995, the year in which the Next Step movement is gaining signatures for the referenda to be held.
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