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CUPE - CUE

REPORT

BY TED BYRNE

(The attached report was written by former CUE Union Representative Ted Byrne. The Report was published in the CUE Newsletter and is reproduced here for your information. Ted left CUE in December of last year and wrote this report to the membership after one year of the CUPE Service Contract with CUE.)

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For those of you who are new to the bargaining unit, it should be explained that the membership of CUE (formerly AUCE Local One) decided about a year ago to affiliate to the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). We have a two year service contract with CUPE which gives us all of the rights of a Cupe local, including membership in the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC). After two years, our members will have to decide whether or not to become a chartered Cupe local.

Affiliation with Cupe also allows us membership in the BC Federation of Labour (BC Fed), the Cupe BC Division, the Cupe Metro Council, and the District Labour Council. Membership in any of these groups would involve per capita payments (this does not necessarily mean a dues increase). Members of the executive have attended BC Fed and Cupe Division conventions, and meetings of the Metro Council, and feel that full participation in these bodies is important to us as a trade union. However, the membership will ultimately have to decide whether or not we take that step, and such a decision should probably not be made until after we have decided on the question of joining Cupe.

The Executive will present a full report on our experience with Cupe over the period of the service contract before a vote is taken in January 1987. In the meantime, I would like to say a few words about our experience so far. I will try to cover the various points that were made by the Merger Committee in its final report of December, 1984.

Local autonomy.

Our greatest fear regarding affiliation was that we would lose our independence. Right no I would say that our relationship with Cupe doesn't seem to threaten this at all. Our internal structure has remained the same, except for those changes necessitated by a reduction in staff. Cupe seems to be more of a resource we draw on than a higher body from which we receive direction. Our main connection to the organization is our staff rep. The staff rep influences the operation of the local, but it is an influence based on experience and access to information, rather than on anykind of structured authority. We are free to accept or reject the advice of the rep, and the only 'power' that the rep has which is actually built into the structure is her or his ability to influence the local's access to the defense fund and other resources. So far, for us, this has been a positive influence. I think we are fortunate to have Joe Denofreo as our staff rep. He has been very available to us, and we've developed a good deal of respect for his opinions. Through him we've also had reasonably good access to expert advice on legal matters, education, contract costing, research, etc. At present, Joe is the staff rep for Cue, Cupe 116 and the TAU, but he is also assigned to several other locals off campus. One of the things that we will try to negotiate with Cupe is the assignment of one staff rep exclusively to the campus locals.

Another thing I've noticed, as regards local autonomy, is the absence of enforced 'caucus discipline'. I've heard representatives of other trade unions criticize Cupe for its lack of 'caucus discipline', but the acceptance of dissention seems like a healthy sign to me. Just to give you an example, Cupe BC was instrumental at the Annual Convention in pushing through the change to a percentage per capita payment to the Cupe National. The BC caucus was very tough, and united on this issue, but there were a couple of locals that voted against it - obviously because the average wage in these locals was high, and a percentage calculation would work to their disadvantage. There was also some division over the election of the National Secretary Treasurer, which was clearly an old guard/new guard type of election. I also remember hearing someone criticize Cupe for being divided over the BC Fed elections in 1984.

Services.

Research: Aside from a multitude of small questions that have been answered, the best examples of our use of Cupe's research services are in the areas of contract costing, and the Ritchie and Associates campaign. As for the contract, the groundwork for costing in our current negotiations was very thoroughly set by Don Cott in the Regional Office, with the help of the National Office and their computer facilities. The Regional Office also help us with some salary surveys. With Ritchie and Associates, the help came from the National Office, and especially from John Calvert and Larry Katz. It was also the National that hired, and paid, Donald Gutstein, the researcher who wrote the Ritchie and Associates report. The National also help to pay for some of the other costs incurred by this campaign - buttons, printing costs, pr, and so on. It should also be mentioned that we received some helpful assistance from the National Office with the setting up of our office computer.

Education: Since we've been associated with Cupe, members of our executive have attended several courses and conventions put on by Cupe or the BC Fed - conventions on coordinated bargaining and health and safety, and courses on contract negotiations, women and unions, and health and safety. Cupe also provided us with two very successful shop stewards courses, which we hope will become an annual event. We still encourage our members to attend the Cap College Labour Studies courses, and the annual Continuing Legal Education seminars, but it looks like Cupe will be able to provide much of our education needs.

Legal Assistance: It looks like we've pretty well weaned ourselves from our lawyers, and most of our legal advice is coming from our Cupe rep, and/or the National's legal services section. Our staff rep has broad experience in arbitration, and we've relied heavily on his advice. Several times he's sent a file to Ottawa for an expert opinion, or put us directly in touch with a Cupe lawyer. So far, in our first year as a 'Cupe local', we haven't yet been to arbitration. This is quite a relief, after several very expensive years in which there were numerous arbitrations. We seem to be settling more grievances, but I'm not sure whether this has to do with the advice we're getting from Cupe, or the fact that the University realized they

were going to go bankrupt before we did! The 20m dollar defense fund has added a little to our self-confidence. If and when we do wind up in arbitration our staff rep will act as counsel, where in the past we would have hired a lawyer. The Cupe National will provide a lawyer if we can convince them of the necessity of it - this would depend on the importance of the case as a precedent. We still have the option of hiring our own lawyer if we feel it is necessary.

Public relations: We've had three press conferences in the past year: one on contract negotiations, and two on Ritchie and Associates. The arrangements in each case were handled by the Cupe BC public relations officer. I believe these conferences were more successful than they would have been had we had to arrange them ourselves. At two of these conferences we had the benefit of the Cupe National President's participation, which certainly increased our chances of press coverage. Even in our own ongoing public relations efforts we've had some useful assistance from the Cupe pr rep.

Publications: One thing we have in our office is a damn good library. Cupe's regular publications have been a welcome and useful addition. We've been sending some of these publications out to our stewards, so hopefully they get some circulation amongst the membership. Jeff Rose, the Cupe president, is a compulsive writer, and his frequent reports to his Executive have been an excellent source of information on Cupe across the country.

There are also regular reports, handbooks, etc. on particular issues that have been of use to us. The Cupe 'wish book' is a good example: model language on which to draw for contract negotiations.

Defense fund: As noted above, we have already had some benefit from the defense fund - the money for research on Ritchie and Associates came from this fund. Otherwise, it's just somewhat comforting to know it's there.

Women's issues: Since we don't belong to the BC Division of Cupe, we are not currently involved in the women's committee, or any other Cupe committees for that matter. Cupe has taken a strong position on women's issues, as evidenced by some of the reports and resolutions discussed at the Annual Convention last October. According to the report of the Equal Opportunities Office, women's committees have been set up in all of the regions, and in many of the union locals. The first annual Women's Conference was held in March 1984, and the first regional conference in May 1985. Courses have been developed in the area of women's issues, including the week-long 'Women in the Union' course at Naramata, to which we sent a member of our executive. A quarterly 'Equal Opportunities Bulletin' has been established. A 'Compendium on Women's Policies' has been published. The Cupe National Task Force on Women has been very active, as evidenced by their report to the Convention, and Cupe participates in the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, and the CLC's Women's Committee. The following activities have been planned: a second national women's conference, a second regional conference, a 'Bargaining for Equality' binder for use

by local negotiating committees in furthering Cupe's policies on equal pay and other issues, and other information packages for local union members around specific equality issues. There seems, then, to be a fair amount of activity in this area, and our task, obviously, is to tap into it. This may be one strong argument for joining the BC Division, since that's essentially where our representation is located. Currently, we have no women's committee, and our response to women's issues is on an ad hoc and somewhat sporadic basis. I'm ashamed to admit it's minimal, and this should be a serious concern.

The Convention passed positive resolutions on child-care, equality, technological change, sexual harassment, and abortion (the resolutions calling for a deletion of policy on this issue were defeated), and constitutional amendments on child-care at conventions and percentage per capita dues. Documentation regarding the above is available from the Union office.

Education Sector: Comparisons with other Cupe locals in the post-secondary education sector have been useful to us in relation to contract negotiations. Cupe also has a large number of locals representing library workers, both here and across the country. We had an opportunity to meet with these locals at the Convention, and will have another opportunity at an up-coming regional conference of library sector locals.

Affiliation: We sent a couple of our executive members to the Harrison Winter School this year, and several of us attended portions of the BC Fed Convention. Although we don't belong to the BC Division, we have been included in several conferences, including one on joint bargaining, and one on health and safety. We also attended the BC Division Convention last summer, and have attended the Metro Council. The whole question of extending our affiliation will come up once we've decided on our membership in Cupe, and there will be a full report on this aspect of our potential membership before a decision is made next year.

Cupe at UBC: I would say that our relationship with the other Cupe locals on campus has improved since our association with Cupe. We all have the same service rep, and so there is a constant line of communication open. We have cooperated with the other locals on specific issues - with the TAU on contract negotiations (joint press conference last Spring), and with the Cupe 116 on the Ritchie and Associates issue. Cupe 116 and CUE have recently both had representatives elected to the Staff Pension Board, and we look forward to a good working relationship there. We can only hope that the solidarity between the three locals continues to grow to the extent that it will have some real and positive effect on our relationship with the employer.

To sum up, we feel quite positive about the relationship at this point, and have every reason to expect that things will continue to go well in the second year of our service contract.

- Ted Byrne