



AFFILIATION COMMITTEE REPORT ON THE OFFICE AND PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES INTERNATIONAL UNION -- Also known as OFFICE AND TECHNICAL EMPLOYEES UNION

The OFFICE AND PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES INTERNATIONAL UNION is known as the OPEIU in all locals except Locals 15 and 378 in British Columbia - these two locals were certified when it was illegal in B.C. to organize 'professionals' and they have not yet changed their name to OPEIU even though the law has now been modified.

OPEIU is an International Union with its headquarters in both Washington, D.C. and New York, N.Y. There is an International Convention held each three years - a convention is called for June 1980 in New York City.

Last year the first Canadian Convention was held - a Consulting Committee was formed which reports directly to the Canadian Director, Romeo Corbeil, in Montreal, Que. The Canadian sector of the OPEIU has complete autonomy and the Canadian Director is elected at the International Convention by the Canadian delegates only.

The total membership of the International is over 150,000 approximately and membership in Canada is 21,000 in 60 locals. Membership in B.C. is approximately 9000 in two locals.

The OPEIU is a 'white collar' union of office and technical employees including various professional categories. Officers of the Union do not feel that they have overlapping jurisdictional problems in the B.C. Federation of Labour as the other two unions, which organize office/technical workers, organize mainly in the government or municipal jurisdiction.

The OPEIU is directly affiliated with the Canadian Labour Congress. The International pays a per capita tax of 25¢ directly to the C.L.C. - this is the one area in which the International would have control over the Canadian sector. The British Columbia locals are affiliated to the B.C. Federation of Labour and each local pays a per capita tax of 25¢ to this Provincial Labour Organization. The OPEIU is also affiliated to the Vancouver & District Labour Council to which the locals pay a per capita tax of 12¢.

There are three Canadian Vice-Presidents in the International. B.C. and Alberta come under the jurisdiction of Fred Trotter who is an International Vice-President and is also President of Local #378. It is hoped that a Western Council can be set up in the near future, similar to one that is operating effectively in Ontario.

Delegates to the International Convention are elected by the general membership. Each B.C. local holds five General Membership meetings per year.

There are only two paid executives in the International office, one in Washington, D.C. and one in New York - the other paid staff are office workers and organizers. Local #15 in B.C. has, in addition to other staff, one full-time organizer who is paid directly by the International. Staff people are hired by the Executive Board and they are covered by the Master Trade Union Agreement, not by a signed contract.

The International per capita tax is calculated on a declining scale. For 2,300 to 2,500 members the per capita tax would be approximately \$1.64 per month. All International per capita tax paid by Canadian members is banked in Canada. These Canadian funds are used to organize and to negotiate contracts in the Canadian sector.

Per capita tax paid by members would be \$1.64 from which the International pays 25¢ to the C.L.C. - the locals would also pay 37¢ per capita to the B.C. Fed. and to the Vancouver & District Labour Council. Per capita tax, per member, would therefore be \$2.01.

In B.C., Local #15 is comprised of members in 164 bargaining units or workplaces, and Local #378 services 12 contracts. A few of the larger bargaining units are B.C. Hydro, ICBC, CU&C and Burrard Shipyards. The percentage ratio of female/male in B.C. is 80/20.

Local #15 employs three business agents and has the services of the one International Organizer. Business agents are from the Local; they are elected and go before the Executive Board (Table Officers) to be interviewed, a selection is made and the person is put, first, on a 3-month probationary period and then she/he goes before the General Membership for final approval.

The steward system is the foundation on which this entire union is built. Stewards are elected by the members of their own bargaining unit. Steward training is provided; scholarships are awarded for further steward training and a Stewards Manual is presently being developed.

There are six committees at the Local level whose members are elected by the membership - Political Education Committee, Women's Committee, Constitutional By-Laws Committee, Social Committee, Office Stewards Committee and Newsletter Committee. It is felt that the most active and most important committee is the Office Stewards Committee.

Negotiating teams are elected by members of each bargaining unit and they are always accompanied, during contract negotiations, by a member of the Negotiating Committee. This committee is comprised of Staff and Executive persons who are particularly experienced and knowledgeable in the complexities of the bargaining process.

The OPEIU (International) has a strike fund which pays \$20.00 per week strike pay after the third week. Locals match the \$20.00 - so strike pay is approximately \$160.00 per month. Local #15 has a Defence Fund of \$10,000. and they pay Health and Benefit plans while people are on strike if the employer does not continue to do so. In the case of a strike at one bargaining unit, other members are asked for voluntary contributions for a strike fund. No strike pay is given to a unit that is respecting another's picket line. When one unit goes on strike it is not mandatory that other units strike in support unless they so choose.

Strike policy is worked out according to the B.C. Federation of Labour strike policy - affiliates meet and discuss the situation before a strike is authorized by the Canadian Director of the OPEIU. In an authorized strike situation the B.C. Federation of Labour affiliates can give a great deal of support to the strikers.

Local #378 retains the services of two law firms and these legal support services can be used by any sister unit.

It is felt that the most progressive contract gain achieved recently by the OPEIU Local #15 was the Binding Arbitration contract negotiated for the workers in the office of the B.C. Registered Nurses Association. The arbitration clarified the fact that the nurses are indeed a Union and an employer. Their office workers are now covered by the Master Trade Union Agreement. These workers received retroactive pay back to April 1, 1978.

Local #378 was one of the first unions to fight an equal pay case for women members - they won this case and equal pay was awarded to draftswomen working with draftsmen when the Equal Pay Act was enacted in 1953.

The Master Trade Union Agreement covers all workers who are employed by unions. In fact the OPEIU was founded by workers in Trade Union offices and they are considered to be their 'elite' workers. They are highly paid and their rates set the standard for other bargaining committees to work toward.

One of the goals of the OPEIU has been to negotiate shorter work weeks - from 32½ to 37½ hour weeks down from a maximum of 40 hours per week. They also negotiate the 4-day week and the 9-day fortnight.

Temporary and part-time workers receive top wages under the Master Trade Union Agreement to offset the fact that they receive no other benefits.

Instead of paid Maternity Leave the OPEIU carry a Wage Indemnity Plan with the CU&C Health Services Society whereby workers off work for any legitimate reason receive 75% of their wages. However, through letters of understanding with employers, workers deposit this 75% with the employer and then receive 100% of wages for a 16 week period. Workers therefore receive full compensation for lost wages if they miss work for reason of pregnancy or a broken leg - the key consideration is that wages are lost.

The OPEIU is currently negotiating with the B.C. Federation of Labour for 'family responsibility' leave for its workers. Local #15 follows closely the aims and directives of the B.C. Federation of Labour Women's Program, and puts emphasis on contract clauses that specifically relate to the problems of working women.

During a lengthy interview, the Canadian Director of the OPEIU stated that the single, most important strategy for public sector employees to pursue, at this time, is political union education. Local #378 employs a full-time political education officer. They send delegates to all Union Education Schools and seminars led by the B.C. Federation of Labour and to labour seminars offered by the Vancouver & District Labour Council. Members are also eligible to attend Labour College in Montreal.

The OFFICE AND PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES INTERNATIONAL UNION has given to AUCE a generous and friendly invitation to join them. They recommended that it would be beneficial to join as one local rather than as five separate locals. Were AUCE to affiliate with the OPEIU, we would become one Local with a central

office and office staff who would service our four (and, hopefully, five) contracts in five bargaining units. As one Local, AUCE would have the financial resources and energy to carry on its business more efficiently and could direct itself to organizing new members.

OPEIU has offered financial assistance and the use of all of Local #378's office facilities and staff. A submission would be made to the International Convention in June for a charter for a new OPEIU Local. AUCE would have to draw up its own Constitution which would be presented to the Convention. The dues structure and the 'new member' initiation fees would be at the discretion of AUCE with the per capita tax as established by the declining scale. New member initiation fees are from \$5.00 to \$50.00 - Local #378 charges \$25.00. AUCE Local #4 charges \$1.00 and this is considered to be too low. Both B.C. OPEIU Locals set dues at 1 1/8%; 1% of this goes into operating expenditures and 1/8% goes into Defence Funds.

By affiliating with the OPEIU, AUCE would have the entrée into the B.C. Federation of Labour and the Canadian Labour Congress that it believes would be to its advantage. AUCE members would remain together in one unit - AUCE would retain its special characteristics as Post-Secondary Education Support Staff and would retain much of the autonomy that it now has.

When the two AUCE Provincial Representatives from Local #4 met with Opal Skilling, President of OPEIU Local #15 and their International Organizer and again, later, when the Affiliation Committee met with Fred Trotter, President of OPEIU Local #378, we felt that they had prepared very carefully for the meetings. They made available to us their Constitution, details of their financial situation and a great deal of other literature. All of our questions were answered very openly and fully. They offered us the use of their office and research facilities without any indication from us that we would join them. We must, therefore, ask ourselves if the B.C. Federation of Labour has encouraged or perhaps directed the OPEIU to make this positive offer to AUCE. Are we being encouraged by the B.C. Federation to join the OPEIU? Does the Federation leadership believe that affiliation with the OPEIU is the best possible action for AUCE to take? We cannot answer those questions but we can list what appear to be the advantages and disadvantages of such an affiliation.

The OPEIU appears to be a democratic union - it allows a fair amount of autonomy; the locals control their own finances and can set their own priorities in the use of member's dues. The per capita tax revenues remain in Canada and directors in the Canadian sector are elected, at Convention, by Canadian delegates only.

The OPEIU is not a Union that hits the headlines but neither is it often forced to carry on lengthy and debilitating strikes. They cooperate closely with the B.C. Federation of Labour which can put pressure on employers when a strike situation arises and mobilize support from other affiliates.

It was stressed to us that the OPEIU Stewards are given every possible support - they believe that the members' best interests are served by a good Steward system, and with this we agree.

According to the people from the OPEIU, AUCE is not a 'growing' union - we are not, at present, being as assertive or as effective as we might be because we are not coordinating and using our resources of money and person-power to our best advantage. Our Provincial Executive and facilities are completely overwhelmed by the volume of work. The type of structure offered by the OPEIU, they claim, would seem to be the one, within the C.L.C., most compatible to a union of our size and composition.

The Canadian membership can decide to leave and form their own independent union at any time, and the Canadian units have the right to establish their own autonomous Canadian national union.

For those who have negative feelings about International unions, it would seem that the OPEIU Convention has recognized and has made important provisions for a 'partnership' relationship with its Canadian sector. - But the final decision-making Board is in the United States - albeit there are three Canadian Vice-Presidents - - - the Washington, D.C. headquarters serves as a 'lobby' and this function is not particularly useful to Canadian workers.

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Excerpts from the OFFICE AND PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES INTERNATIONAL UNION  
CONSTITUTION

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I have extracted only those items which would seem to be particularly important or would be suitable items for discussion. (The language has been simplified and comments added).

Membership: No person shall be admitted to membership who belongs to an organization or movement whose aims are contrary to principles of the governments of Canada, United States and the Commonwealth or Puerto Rico.

Convention: Convention is the governing body and legitimate source of all authority - between conventions the Executive Board exercises all authority.

Conventions: Conventions are held once each three years in May, June or July. Special conventions can be called but the procedure is so complicated that it is doubtful that it could be achieved. Convention call is issued 90 days prior. Resolutions, petitions etc. must be submitted 21 days prior to convention - by Local Unions. Resolutions put from the Convention floor must have the consent of two thirds of delegates to be heard.

Representation at Convention: Each Local Union shall have 1 vote (1 delegate) for each 100 members or major fraction thereof to a maximum of 5 votes (5 delegates). Local Unions with less than 100 members shall have 1 vote (1 delegate). Delegates must be in good standing and be elected by vote at the Local. Officers of the International can vote at Convention only if they are duly elected delegates from Locals - except the President who shall be a delegate from the International.

Resolutions Committee at Convention: The President shall appoint the Resolutions Committee at Convention and endeavour to achieve regional representation on this committee.

Canadian Autonomy: Canadian unions have the right to establish their own autonomous national union.

Canadian Director: The Canadian Director is elected by the Canadian Convention delegates only. The Canadian Director may authorize strikes in Canada only.

Discipline: Locals in arrears in per capita tax three months shall be automatically suspended. Any discipline for any other infraction (violation of the constitution or action contrary or detrimental to the welfare of the International Union) shall be commenced by the Executive Board by serving written statement upon the party or parties in violation. A hearing shall take place; a hearing officer shall be appointed; the hearing officer shall preside and submit a report in writing. The accused shall have the opportunity to present evidence, witnesses, documents or statements. An appeal may be filed within 2 weeks with the Executive Board which shall make its decision at the next regular meeting - or the President may rule in matters of emergency. Any disciplinary action taken by the Executive Board may be subject to appeal to the next regular Convention which is the final authority in all matters of discipline. An appeals Committee may be set up by Convention and the aggrieved may appear - but only with the consent of the Convention.

Locals: There is a charter fee of \$50.00 per Local. Twenty-five persons may apply for charter (no less).

No Local union can be dissolved while there are 7 dues-paying members.

All Locals shall have as officers:- President, Vice-President, Secretary-Treasurer, Recording Secretary, three Trustees. Officers shall be elected by the majority.

Terms of office shall be not less than 1 year and not more than 3 years.

The Secretary-Treasurer shall be bonded, monthly statements must be submitted to the International Secretary-Treasurer. Trustees shall audit the books at the expiration of his/her term and quarterly during his/her term.

All new members must fill out application and authorization cards.

A Local may not do a 'special' assessment on members more than \$4.00 per year and this must be approved by majority vote by secret ballot.

Respectfully submitted: Anne Gilbert, AUCE Local #4  
Carol McQuarrie

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