

Wendy -

Yes Marcel, there really still is time for AUCE !!!



(A response to a letter written by Marcel Dionne, and published in the 1980 AUCE Convention docket, and reprinted in the August "Across Campus", in which he expresses, in a confused "bedrock of integrity", his lack of confidence in the leadership of the Contract Committee, and severe doubts as to his belief in the existence of AUCE as a strong, objective union.)



Dear Marcel:

It is sad to see your faith in the leadership of the Contract Committee shattered, which has led you to doubt whether there is any future existence for AUCE. We will attempt to put your mind at ease, and reassure you that AUCE is still a viable "believable option".

It is damaging to assume that the sole "raison d'etre" for the existence of AUCE lies in the issue of "equal pay for work of equal value"--it is only one principle of many on which AUCE was founded. We mustn't forget principles such as democracy, leadership, and particularly women's issues, which AUCE holds dear. And more important, AUCE is a union founded by its members, which works for its members, based on active member commitment and encouragement of member participation. And AUCE does have an excellent record for a very high level of member activity. And more, AUCE has been unbelievably successful in upholding its principles.

But further, for those members who are doubtful as to the possibility of affiliation, and adamant to accepting the likelihood of merging, there is much, much more at stake!! That is, the total loss of local autonomy in the collective bargaining process through the use of so-called "professionals". This would

destroy the local's right to determine their own contract demands and effectively communicate with the membership through-out the process through the democratic system. It is only through local autonomy that a union can adequately reflect the needs of the members it represents.

The Contract Committee never at all forgot that they are the elected representatives of the membership, and in fact wholeheartedly attempted to serve the membership in as democratic a way as possible. This was done by thoroughly arguing out issues, and then arriving in agreement to a solid stand which was felt to represent membership interests. There were not always easy times for the Committee, particularly in the reality that a successful strike can only be won by unions whose members are totally in accord with their contract demands, and extremely visibly active. Although the membership expressed their agreement with contract demands over and over again, an actively involved membership was sadly lacking throughout the strike, through no direct fault of the Contract Committee.

It is the responsibility of the membership to speak their peace and to provide the Contract Committee with direction on which to act. This the membership did to a great degree. The membership cer-

tainly spoke when they decided to conduct a study session, which threw the University for a loop. The membership wholly endorsed the objectives set by the Committee, and made it plain that the issues on the table were solid worthwhile objectives, of which the most important was, of course, WAGES. The membership went further and gave a very strong strike mandate, on which the Contract & Strike Committees jointly acted. Your belief that the elected representatives of the union did not accurately represent the AUCE membership, but only the majority of those in attendance at the Union meetings, is wholly unfounded. Every member of AUCE has the democratic right, responsibility and privilege of attending their union meetings, and every provision is made for people to do so. Members were continuously encouraged to attend by their Contract Committee. An unfortunate contrariness of the democratic system is that the individual also has the democratic right not to exercise his/her democratic right, or not to attend union meetings (how else do you think that this country could possibly be governed on a mandate of roughly 45%!). As such, the Contract Committee had no option but to take membership attendance as totally representative of the membership as a whole, and members who did attend were continuously asked for direction by the Committee.

What was probably more important than membership attendance is that the strike vote, legitimately conducted, was in fact representative of the membership, and expressed their agreement with contract demands, the vote being based on such.

Nor is it fair of you to say that the set of demands promoted by the Contract Committee led the membership of AUCE Local 1 into jeopardy, when such demands were endorsed and approved by the said membership. The membership was always given every opportunity to speak, and the Contract Committee went to considerable pain to provide prompt and complete communication. The membership was kept well informed, and no information was held back. No membership can ask for more!!!

As to your concern why over 900 members showed up at a meeting and accepted essentially the same package offered by the University prior to strike action, this occurred for various reasons. These people were frustrated, and not willing to finance a continued strike at a cost of about \$200/mo. per member, and they spoke their voice. Taking the strike vote as entirely representative, the membership at that point had undoubtedly changed their position and decided that continued strike action was not worth it. Don't be mistaken that the membership ratified the University's package because they liked it!! Had they liked it, they would have voted to accept it one month previously. The membership spoke quite strongly at that "pivotal" meeting that a one-year contract would have in fact been preferred!! A very begrudging acceptance of the package left a very foul taste in the mouths of many members. The end result is not in fact acceptable to all, and therefore, by your token, we have accomplished little, or nothing at all.


And what's been accomplished in fact by this short strike??? Is it really appropriate for anyone to make a rash judgement on the success or non-success of our strike at this point? Certainly, any such judgement must be made in light of what we have won in the past (without striking!!!) and what we will win in the next set of negotiations, and the set after.

Sure, we won our strongest wording on the issue of leave of absence for union officers ; we won the right to take our 6 unit tuition waiver concurrently ; we fought the University's abhorrent leave of absence clause, their 3-yr. contract proposal, and we won ; and we won 19.5% over two years! (BCGEU won 8%/yr. for 3 yrs!). If nothing else, it leaves us paid \$150-\$200/mo. more than similar classifications in the private sector! What's more, the process left both parties frustrated and depleted, with many hard lessons learned, and still much more to think about. The impact, good or bad, will be seen in 1982, and in the

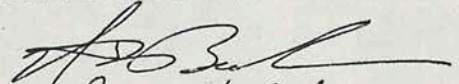
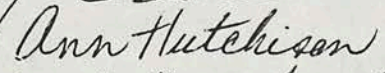
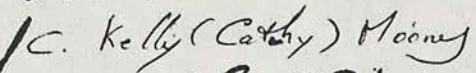
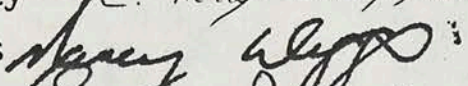
far future. At any rate, experience makes AUCE stronger!!

You are correct in that labour/management relations at the University are not simply a matter of dollars and cents. It is by this token that we were striking for other very important issues as well, which the University refused to address. However, it is presumptuous to assume that we can in fact negotiate for recognition and self respect. We can only negotiate with recognition and self respect, and such must come from both parties. Recognition and self respect, for our part, must come through the attitude and commitment of the membership, and if we have not "gained" any, then we must look to the membership to revive our belief in AUCE as a union, not to the University! Part of such self respect involves a continued pride in the value of our work, and in the model AUCE has provided for other unions, and in the amazingly good contract AUCE has won in only a surprisingly short 7 years--a contract which is often used as a standard for other unions. We must remember that the major purpose and ultimate goal of a continuing process of collective bargaining is to improve on the standard of the contract already won. This is a process which takes much time and many years. Although AUCE historically has been successful in negotiating a good contract in a relatively short time period, it has now become very difficult and even painful to negotiate considerable improvement to a contract, through no fault of the Contract Committee, or the AUCE membership. With due respect, the University has been considerably generous in previous years in showing respect and giving us recognition as a union in some of the excellent articles we have won without striking!! The fact that we have been given 2-hr. union meetings during lunch says that the University must in fact recognize us in some way as a union, and certainly as a predominantly women's union, with family commitments, and little time to spare for evening meetings! Need we say more regarding our historical maternity leave clause??

We have been under no illusions whatsoever that "to strike is the only possible answer to our demands". We went on strike at the time we did out of sheer necessity, not illusion. Were our membership to be under such illusions, we would be striking year after year, and we would surely have a membership entirely willing to do so.

Yes Marcel, there is indeed all the hope in the world for AUCE! The end result of this "traumatic strike" shows us that our answer to AUCE's integrity and existence lies not in passing the buck through merging, nor in unjust criticism of a committee which has done its utmost in representing membership wishes throughout a very difficult and frustrating set of negotiations, but only in reorganising of divisions, continued encouragement of active member participation and attendance at union meetings, and taking pride in what AUCE is and represents. AUCE became strong only through hard work, enthusiasm, and strong commitments from members. So you see Marcel, AUCE really does exist, and it exists because it is very special and unique. AUCE is our union--it works for us because we make it work. AUCE will continue to thrive and grow on principle, democracy, good leadership, and much, much PRIDE!! 

IN SOLIDARITY!,
Your Fellow Contract Committee Members,

- Neil Boucher 
- Ann Hutchison 
- Cathy Mooney 
- Nancy Wiggs 
- Suzan Zagar 