

Nov. 3, 1983

Dear Linda,

We appreciate your concerns, and we realize that in addressing them to the 'union' you are not addressing them simply to us, the full-time AUCE officers, but to the executive as a whole, and to the membership at large. Nevertheless, given the low rate of participation in this union — and we mean no disrespect to those members who are active — much of the decision-making burden does fall on our shoulders, and so we feel a certain responsibility for responding to your concerns.

Needless to say, we share your support for the union, and your appreciation for its achievements. However, though we sympathize, we cannot agree with much else of what you have said. To begin with, our membership voted on much more than a simple endorsement of Operation Solidarity. Notice of motion was given in the August newsletter of an 8-point motion in support of the Solidarity movement (the motion had already been read at the July meeting). This motion included a resolution that we would 'give full support to any person or group who is discriminated against as a result of this legislation', and another that we would 'recognize any picket line set up by any other union, laid off workers, or community group which opposes any of the budget legislation as a bona fide picket line'. This motion was passed at the September meeting. In addition, our endorsement of Operation Solidarity, which was passed at the July 28 membership meeting, included approval of their ten-point program. This 'Program of Action' was printed with the notice of motion well in advance of the meeting, and it included the following point: 'The Provincial Trade Union Solidarity Committee will work out all the major policy decisions on the fight-back campaign as far as BC labour is concerned. Its chief spokesperson will be the President of the BC Federation of Labour.' All of these decisions were made at membership meetings, with notice of motion having been given well in advance. We also made every attempt to keep our members informed of all actions taken by Operation Solidarity and the Solidarity Coalition (also endorsed by us) as they developed. There has been no shortage of information, both on Solidarity, and on the nature of this legislation — legislation which has thrown the trade union movement, not the mention hundreds of other so called 'special interest groups' (special interests being things like education, tenant's rights, etc.), into an absolute panic. So, in answer to your first point: a) the decision to support Solidarity did commit us to respect decisions made by that body concerning future actions, and b) you were fully informed and had every opportunity to participate in these decisions.

The motions that were proposed by the executive for the special meeting on Oct. 31 were simply intended as a reaffirmation of our position regarding the job actions which are now being taken. We wanted AUCE to take a public, and what we felt to be an ethically correct stand concerning the government's treatment of its employees — and that includes us, since the combination of unprecedented cuts in education, and unprecedented labour legislation leaves us open to treatment that we can't countenance, at least if we want to continue to call ourselves a trade union. Unfortunately, we realized, after they had been published that the motions were out of order, since they would allow the membership to vote on issues that had already been duly decided (see above). This was a blunder, for which we apologize. Technically, it would have been possible, but difficult, for someone at Monday's meeting to have had the previous decisions rescinded. But we are very glad that such a decision was not taken. To back down from confrontation at this point, after having committed ourselves and participated in Operation Solidarity from the beginning, would be perceived as hypocritical and cowardly by the majority of our fellow union members in the province.

We do not agree with the description you have given of the way in which our union meetings are conducted. We have never seen the kind of harrassment you describe, and 'emotional harangues' by individual members, rank and file or executive, are obviously not something that can be controlled, unless they go beyond the bounds of order and decency.

In answer to the five procedures that you propose, we would answer as follows:

1. Agreed. With the exception explained above, this has always been the case.
2. At any membership meeting the membership can decide by a majority vote to use a secret ballot. Obviously, this procedure should be restricted to votes on major issues, otherwise no meeting could proceed at a reasonable pace.
3. Our meetings are conducted according to Bourinot's Rules of Order, which is the definitive authority on Parliamentary procedure in Canada.
4. Agreed. This is how our meetings are conducted. However, nothing should prevent any member, executive or not, from stating their personal view on any issue. Executive members are within their rights to present a minority position on any executive decision. As for 'emotionalism', how can a ruling against emotion be rationally included in the rules of order for a meeting? If a speaker is seen to be out of order, she can be so ruled by the chair either on her own instigation or that of the membership.

5. Certain major issues, according to our bylaws, and the labour code, do have to go to referendum ballot. For those issues not so stipulated, we feel it would be impossible for the executive to decide in advance which issues are 'major' enough to go to referendum. Referendum is expensive and very time consuming. Besides, a membership meeting can decide, at its will, to send any issue to referendum. As for members not being able to attend meetings, all meetings are scheduled during the lunch hour, and a majority of meetings are held during a two-hour period provided for in our contract. No one can deny you your right to attend those meetings. If you are unable to attend, your concerns can always be raised by someone else, or by the executive if you approach them in advance. In addition, we do not agree that votes at present are taken under 'hysterical and undemocratic pressures'. We resent that accusation.

We would like to conclude by saying, in reference to your last paragraph, that the procedures under which this union operate could not be more democratic. But a democratic process is something that must be used in order to be effective. We are very frustrated by members who leave all the decisions of this organization to others, and then appear when there is a crisis — namely when they stand to lose something by decisions which were made democratically and by legal majority, with ample notice and information — with the complaint that they have not been given the opportunity to participate. If you leave everything to others you deserve no more than you get.

Ted Byrne
Fairleigh Wettig
Pat House
(this letter represents
our personal views as
members of this union —
it was not written on
AUCE office time)