

## REPORT ON THE STRENGTHS AND SUCCESSES WHICH MAKE AUCE WORTH FIGHTING FOR

This report will discuss those things which make AUCE an exciting union: namely our history, objectives democratic constitution and the contract and legal battles we have won.

AUCE's history goes back to the Vancouver Women's Caucus, formed in 1968 by a group of feminist socialists at Simon Fraser University. They formed a Working Women's Association which met to discuss common problems of working women, and to attempt collective resolution of their problems. This led them to investigate trade unions and their potential for solving women's problems. Examples of the problems they faced are the fight for equal status and equal pay to male workers; improving salaries and working conditions.

After several unsuccessful organising campaigns at University of British Columbia, they were prepared to begin a strong organising drive, based on their own union. They wrote their own constitution, guaranteeing equal pay and equal status for women; local control and a democratic union structure - allowing members to be informed and to participate in decision-making in the union. AUCE was established as an independent union to represent the interests of the support staff at universities and colleges. Each AUCE local is an autonomous unit, determining its own structures, negotiating its own contracts and having complete control of its own finances. At the same time province-wide support can be obtained if needed from the other locals (although each local has the right to refuse that support, none ever have when their support was needed).

The objectives towards which AUCE was formed include the following:

- to bring about fair wage standards and to assure uniform job classification with equal pay for comparable work for all employees, regardless of sex, sexual orientation, age marital status, physical disability, previous and current psychiatric or psychotherapeutic treatment, colour, race, religious or political beliefs, national origin, whether or not she/he has children and/or dependents.

- to bring about improvements in the working conditions of members and to dedicate its efforts toward maximizing the opportunities for personal growth in the work situation of all members.

- to maintain at all times the principles of local autonomy and democracy within this Provincial Association and its Local Associations.

Less formally expressed, but very important is the fact the AUCE was formed by mainly by women, with the direct intention of organising unorganised women and men in clerical positions, very few of whom had ever had the benefits of a union contract.

AUCE's contract is democratic. The protection it affords union members falls into several areas.

- LOCALS HAVE THE RIGHT TO SECEDE. In Section 6 of the Provincial Constitution locals can vote to secede from the union if they are dissatisfied. There is no penalty for doing so, and all local union funds and property remain with the local. There is no reverter clause. This is in contrast with traditional constitutions, which allow a higher union body to overpower any local which is "operating against union policy".

- **DECISION MAKING STRUCTURE** AUCE's structure is organised to keep decision making power in the hands of the membership. To this end, each local sets up its own by-laws and structure, to be approved by the Provincial Executive - which ensures the democracy of all locals. Although final authority rests with the Convention - to whom the Provincial Executive is responsible - all decisions on important questions - such as dues increases and affiliation - are referred to referendum of the whole membership.

- **UNION OFFICERS** are all elected from the locals, by the membership. Locals may employ one or more full time paid Executive member, who takes a leave of absence from her/his job to work for the union. The Provincial Executive also has one full-time paid Executive member, elected by the membership of the whole Association, who also takes leave of absence from their work. The salary of paid officers may not exceed that of the highest in the union. This ensures that union business is done by union members whose interests are not separated from those of the members they serve, and eliminates the need for paid professionals. No Provincial Officer may serve more than two consecutive terms.

- **RECALL** The membership has direct power to recall any union officer at any time during their term through a referendum ballot following a meeting where the situation is discussed and the officer given a chance to speak.

- **PARTICIPATION IN COMMITTEES** Various functions (eg negotiations, communications, grievances) are carried out by Committees, whose members are elected from the membership. Participation is encouraged and contact facilitated by a steward system where shops are kept to a small size. The committee structure is particularly important with reference to the contract. Negotiators are elected from the membership; proposals are discussed with the membership before being presented in negotiations; ratification of the contract does not take place before it has been discussed in a membership meeting.

- **DISCIPLINE** Discipline proceedings can be started by any member. Guidelines are set down in the bylaws. The decision is made by the membership after a hearing, and an appeal can be made to convention.

AUCE has made substantial gains, particularly for clerical workers, during its existence, both within local contracts, and in legal fights. The following are some contract and legal gains:

- **MATERNITY LEAVE** Locals 1 & 2 have the fullest in B.C. The employer refunds the difference between UI payments received while on leave and the employee's usual salary upon employee's return to work. This provision was contested by UIC, and fought by AUCE all the way to the Federal Court of Canada, where it was won - creating an important precedent for all women workers in Canada.

- **SICK LEAVE** Locals 2 and 4 leave no gap between casual leave and long-term disability leave. There is no period where a person is not covered. Local 2 has no limit on the maximum sick leave which may be taken. Local 4's provision covers not only full-time employees, but part-time temps as well.

- **FLEXIBLE HOURS, MODIFIED WORK WEEK AND JOB SPLIT** These three clauses allow for some choice in hours worked - this is not commonly available to working women, and is important to those of us who have time consuming personal commitments.

**Flexible hours:** employees work a set number of hours, but have a range of time within which to work - i.e. they may come in early and leave early, or come in late and leave late.

**Modified work week:** employees work a set numbers of hours per week, but can spread the hours to allow one day off every two weeks.

**Job Split:** is sharing one position. This allows 2 or more people to create part-time work for themselves by sharing the work of one position.

- TEMPS AUCE has attempted to protect a generally abused group of workers - i.e. part-time temporaries. Many unions do not allow temporary workers to be in the union. AUCE's goal is fully to include these workers and to bargain the best agreements for them as well as for permanent employees. Local 2 is presently negotiating with an Industrial Inquiry Commission to get better pay, benefits and working conditions for student temporary workers. Local 1's contract allows part-time temporaries to accumulate seniority from the moment they begin work, with all time worked being counted, and they are placed on the recall list for their classification as soon as they are laid off. Seniority accumulates for 1 month after lay-off. After 3 months seniority have been accumulated, temporaries receive the status of permanent employees.

Local 4 has a contract that does not include a category of temporary or casual workers. All employees are permanent staff with the benefits accompanying that status.

- SEXUAL HARASSMENT. Local 6 has initialled a sexual harassment clause in their first contract, which is still under negotiation. It will be the first such clause in the province.

- EQUAL PAY FOR WORK OF EQUAL VALUE. Local 2 made significant gains towards this principle in their first contract, and are still fighting for it.

- HUMAN RIGHTS Local 1's human rights clause prevents discrimination on the grounds of physical or emotional disability.

- HEALTH AND SAFETY Local 1 has a clause allowing employees to leave their place of work immediatly if a majority of those working there (including management) believe there is a health hazard.

- LOCAL SIX is the first union in B.C. to represent teaching support staff.

- LRB VICTORY. Local 6 won a precedent-setting ruling from the Labour Relations Board - and won the appeal against the decision - when the Board ordered the university to pay a retroactive pay increase to the bargaining unit. The increase had been withheld during a freeze imposed on working conditions after the local had applied for certification, despite the fact that an annual increase was common practice, and expected by the bargaining unit. The Board's ruling was that a regular, annual increase across the board is part of the terms and conditions of employment.

If we, the members of AUCE, refuse to merge with another union, we have severable possible options. We can continue to operate as an independent union; we can continue to lobby the CLC to admit us as an independent union; we can affiliate to the CCU. With all those options we can still pursue our own objectives and goals, using our own methods - unrestricted by a union executive with objectives different from ours. AUCE has proved a valuable member of the labour movement during the past years, and can continue to do so, with the work of its members.