

A.U.C.E. VS "MERGER": WHAT ARE THE FACTS?

The various people who advocate the dissolution of AUCE and its absorption by either CUPE, OPEIU (OTEU) or BCGEU argue that a larger union, having more resources, would be more successful in negotiations and job action, and consequently would win us better contracts and higher salaries. Unfortunately, this argument is based on vague rhetoric -- but little hard fact. Perusing recent issues of the Labour Research Bulletin, published by the B.C. Ministry of Labour, one finds the following:

I. OVERALL, SALARY LEVELS IN AUCE LOCALS ARE BETTER THAN THOSE IN THE THREE BIG UNIONS.

- - An AUCE clerk typist level 1 receives a minimum salary of \$6.45/hr in Local 4 at Capilano College (Capilano) \$6.53/hr in Local 5, at College of New Caledonia in Prince George (CNC), \$6.79/hr. in Local 1 (at UBC) and \$7.16/hr in Local 2, (at SFU). The same employee would get a minimum of \$6.01/hr if working at the University of Victoria (CUPE), \$5.80/hr at Camosun College (CUPE), \$6.67/hr at Malaspina College (CUPE), \$6.23/hr at British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT) (BCGEU), and \$6.80/hr at Douglas College (BCGEU).
- - While an AUCE clerk typist level 1 starts at \$1032/month in Local 1, (UBC), she would receive a starting salary of only \$1012/month in Okanagan College (BCGEU). Salaries for the same classification in OPEIU (OTEU) locals are \$844/month (Crown Life), \$860/month (Van City), and \$886/month (CU & C).
- - An AUCE clerk typist level 2 receives a minimum salary of \$7.08/hr in Local 4, (Capilano), and \$7.03/hr in Local 2 (SFU) but would get a minimum salary of \$6.22/hr at University of Victoria (CUPE) and \$6.98/hr at Douglas College (BCGEU).
- - An AUCE Secretary level 1 is paid at least \$7.18/hr in Local 5, (CNC) \$7.58/hr in Local 1, (UBC) \$7.88/hr in Local 2 (SFU) and \$8.18/hr in Local 4, (Capilano). Pay rates for the equivalent classification are \$7.02/hr at UBC (CUPE), \$7.19/hr at University of Victoria (CUPE), \$7.20/hr at Camosun College (CUPE), and \$8.22/hr at Douglas College (BCGEU).
- - An AUCE Secretary level 2 starts at \$1174/month in Local 1 (UBC). The same secretary would start at \$1016/month at Crown Life (OPEIU/OTEU).

II. AUCE WAGE INCREASES HAVE BEEN COMPARABLE -- -- IF NOT BETTER -- -- THAN THOSE OBTAINED BY THE THREE BIG UNIONS.

- - While most AUCE workers could count on at least a 9% pay increase in 1979 and 1980, most employees in CUPE, BCGEU and OPEIU (OTEU) received less.
- - AUCE's recent settlements have involved wage increases of 8% (Local 4), 10% and 9%(Local 1), 9.5% and 9%(Local 2), and 22%(average) and 9% (Local 6).

- - The CUPE settlement for clerical staff at Cariboo College was 7% in July 1979 and 9% in July 1980. The CUPE settlement for the staff at the University of Victoria was 7% in 1980. At UBC, CUPE settled for a 10% increase in the middle of AUCE Local 1's strike, a move which undermined our Local's demand for a 15% wage increase. In various school districts (e.g. Nelson, Kamloops, New Westminster, Howe Sound, Alberni, and Queen Charlottes), CUPE settled for pay increases ranging from 7% to 11% per year. In the District of Mission, pay increases ranged from 7.3% to 11% per year depending on the job categories (1979 and 1980), and in the Corporation of Delta, increases ranged from 7.5% to 9% for 1979 and 1980.
- - BCGEU settlements are overall inferior to those of AUCE: 7% for Selkirk College Board (1979); 8% for Pacific Vocational Institute (1979 and 1980, Selkirk College Board (1980), Northern Lights College teaching and clerical staff (1979, 1980 and 1981); 8.5% for Okanagan College clerical and maintenance staff (1979 and 1980); and 9% for Camosun College (1980).
- - OPEIU got the CU & C Health Services employees a 7.5% wage increase in October 1979; 5% to 10% for Van City clerks and tellers in July, 1979; and 9% in October 1980 and 5% in April 1981 for Crown Life employees.

III - A LARGE "POWERFUL" UNION DOES NOT OFFER PROTECTION AGAINST LONG, LOSING STRIKES.

Recent labour history in Vancouver should be sufficient to demonstrate this.

- - At Crown Life Insurance, OPEIU (OTEU) was on strike from July 9, 1980 to October 26, 1980 (3 and one half months). All the international resources of the union and the powers of the CLC (numerous CLC affiliates have pension plans administered by Crown Life, during the duration of the strike, they were serviced by 'scab labour' in other Crown Life offices) had little effect to force settlement. The OTEU settlement involved one-time bonuses (AUCE members have found those insulting in the past), a non-retroactive 9% pay increase in October 1980, and a further 5% increase in April 1981.
- - The Brewery Workers "merged" in BCGEU thinking that this would help them in fighting their obnoxious employer (BELRA). In spite of this, the summer of 1980 saw yet another lock-out in BC's beer industry. It lasted two months. The large "powerful" BCGEU could do nothing to end the lock out. It was rather ineffective in its ally picketing, lost a labour relations case on that issue and did not show us how its 46,000 members could win this fight for the brewery workers. At the end of two dry months, BCGEU accepted a three year contract, with pay increases of 10% in 1980, 9.5% in 1981 and 8.5% in 1982.
- - CUPE had a 23 week strike in 1978 (City of Trail), two 11 week strikes in the Kootenays (East and West) in 1979, ended by provincial legislation; a two month strike at the municipality of Delta (1979) a 21 week strike at the City of Kelowna (1976).

As these facts show, union size simply cannot in all honesty be associated with bargaining strength and good contracts. Indeed, compared to the results obtained by AUCE Locals, the actual performance of the three big unions - in spite of their vastly 'superior' resources and their size - has not been particularly impressive. A large union will not provide us with a ready-made recipe for successful bargaining because the essential ingredient is in the membership, its cohesion and militancy. On the other hand a big union's central executive and paid staff (business agents) can be a sizeable barrier in the achievement of good contracts. One good reason for this is that paid union staff in CUPE, BCGEU or OTEU have no relationship whatsoever with the membership working conditions and wages. They will only go so far for us.

To be effective in the future, AUCE membership should work on organising itself, devising new ways to deal with our respective employers, and organising more university and college employees to improve conditions in that area. Becoming part of a bigger union gives us no guarantee for the future, because it all depends on us. One cannot buy a good contract, one must fight for it.

TO KEEP OUR GOOD CONTRACTS AND TO BUILD UP FROM HERE, VOTE TO LOBBY.

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December 1980

As these facts show, union size simply cannot in all honesty be associated with bargaining strength and good contracts. Indeed, compared to the results obtained by AUCF locals, the actual performance of the three big unions - in spite of their vastly superior resources and their size - has not been particularly impressive. A large union will not provide us with a ready-made recipe for successful bargaining because the essential ingredient is in the membership, its cohesion and militancy. On the other hand a big union's central executive and paid staff (business agents) can be a sizeable barrier to the achievement of good contracts. One good reason for this is that paid union staff in CUPF, SCGEU or OTEU have no relationship whatsoever with the membership working conditions and wages. They will only go so far for us.

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~~Sharon Feyer
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