

VICE-PRESIDENT'S REPORT TO THE 1980 AUCE PROVINCIAL CONVENTION

As Vice-President of AUCE Provincial in 1979/80 my tasks and responsibilities were the Affiliation Committee, the library and working with other Table Officers on Provincial business. It took up more of my time than I expected and liked, and yet there are still most of the tasks I set myself left undone. Unless we have another full-time paid Provincial person or volunteers come flooding in I would not recommend this position to anyone who is unwilling to devote a great deal of time to it. If you are, then the Provincial is exciting to be involved in.

The potential of Provincial is enormous. It can co-ordinate information and manpower from 5 extremely diverse locals, and the labour movement in general and disseminate this support to locals. Collection of such support information is exciting work and has been done well by the Provincial considering people-power constraints.

The frustration of the job lies in disseminating this information. The first barrier is simply the amount of work. An educational seminar, for example, takes time to organize and since it is logically the second step after information is gathered, it often becomes one of the things we do not have time and energy to do. The second barrier that I see was far more formidable to me and that is the attitude of the locals. Firstly, locals do not see Provincial as having anything to offer and secondly, they prefer to do things internally. It is a terrible irony that our commitment to autonomy and democracy has made us slow to accept the potential of a central AUCE organization.

Chair of Affiliation Committee

Work on the Affiliation Committee was the most frustrating and time consuming of anything I participated in at Provincial. The Committee never managed to work coherently as a whole and the many meetings were full of frustrating discussions. There were several reasons for this, not the least of which was the nature of the work; most committee members were so strongly committed to either one affiliation position or the other that this sometimes interfered with our ability to work as a team. The Committee was too large. It made discussion difficult when everyone came to meetings, and planning work and reporting on work difficult when everyone did not. Another problem was the instability of the committee. Members of the committee attended for various parts of the year and only a small number were actually involved in the variety of tasks from beginning to end. This was not because of the lack of commitment of Affiliation Committee members, rather the opposite. Most of us were carrying too many union responsibilities either at Provincial or our locals to do the affiliation job as we would have liked.

Nevertheless, the Affiliation Committee compiled an amazing amount of information on the labour movement in B.C. The Special Convention docket contains some of this. Much more is in files on the labour organization in the AUCE Provincial office. Much of this is in its raw form from the organization themselves, but there are many interesting and informative reports and articles for anyone who is interested.

The Library project suffered as a result of the time that went into affiliation. AUCE Provincial has a good collection of periodicals, pamphlet files and books. The problem is it is inadequately catalogued. It needs to be properly catalogued and a complete list of the holdings available at each local. This will be expensive but it is necessary to make the resource available to everyone.

My year as Vice-President clarified my perspective on AUCE. I feel we are an active and important part of the labour movement. AUCE tends to depreciate its achievements, in many cases is unaware of them! AUCE is a leader in the labour movement in two main areas. The first is membership involvement. Our members turn out for meetings and make decisions. In general, they are much closer to the processes of labour relations than is the norm. This builds trade union solidarity in our members in a personal way. It works towards each individual worker gaining an understanding of the labour relations process, and who his/her supports and opponents are. Labour relations must be demystified for this to happen. It is in the interests of employers to have members intimidated by the process that determines their working conditions, not in the interest of union members.

The second is its achievements in the fight for rights and benefits for women workers. Other unions have followed our lead in the last several years. What is important is that AUCE does not have the double fight of a union bureaucracy opposed to making this fight a priority. This was and is the key to our success in this area.

My work on the Affiliation Committee convinced me that my feeling that other unions do not offer these two things that are most crucial for our members.

I also gained clearer perspective on AUCE's problems. I'd like to mention two. One is our dependence on volunteerism. It cripples our ability. I think Local One's solution to this problem is a good one. There are three full-time union officers on personal leave from their jobs. This does not deter in any way from our principle of member involvement and does provide us with more people power to provide the services we know how to provide.

The second problem I'd like to mention is less clear for me. I think that AUCE tends to repeat its mistakes. That the history of events does not get passed on from one group of leaders to the next. I think also that often we do not take risks in leadership. Sometimes we swing between attempting to manipulate members to a certain decision and attempting to represent them with absolute accuracy. Perhaps this is because our communication with our members is not what it should be given our constitution. I think our union officials should research and consider an issue first, give that information and opinion to the people s/he represents and then follow the membership decision. Often we try to formulate policy on membership input before we have given members any considered information on the issue.

In conclusion, I'd like to reiterate my commitment to AUCE's membership involvement and participation in the fight for improved working conditions for women. I believe that these principles are most important and that we should continue to fight for them. I hope that we do not waste any more valuable energy on repeated criticisms and compromises and instead applaud our many strengths and get on with the building of our union.

In Solidarity,
Hester Vair.