


Nelson, B. C.

Tuesday night
11 Feb 75

Dear Sandy,

Sorry to be so late with my reply. I've been busy at home, and my typewriter at work happens to be under the eyes of the registrar and vice president, my boss, who might feel compelled to fire me if he caught me at union business "on company time." Perhaps you know how it is. Anyway . . .

I've enclosed our salary scale, together with the numbers of people in the particular categories. Lee Karvonen, by the way, is in category GX, being, as it were, in a class by himself. I'm, as you see, in category F.

No one really knows how management has worked out its pay scale. Unhappily we were forced, this time, to accept an across-the-board increase, which resulted in nice raises for all but which also perpetuated--and deepened--the existing inequities. Our contract calls for a complete reclassification of jobs here, as you know, before the next contract, and will close, we hope, the present gap between so-called "women's work" and men's. In the meantime, we face some difficulties.

Among so few workers, all of whom know one another, many of whom have worked for NDU for years, there is bound to be bad feeling when some may have to "mark time," when the next contract is signed, so that others may catch up. This particular sore spot we haven't really touched yet. Management may even use it to try to squelch reclassification, or what we hope will be a fair and true reclassification.

Anyhow, what seems to be the case is that staff (and, until it organized, faculty) fell somewhere near the bottom of the university's scheme of things. It almost seems as though the personnel in this outfit are, or were, deemed expendable, the idea being that one worked here for "other considerations" (the beauty of the place, its smallness, intimacy, etc.), and in any event one could always quit, as it was pointed out to us, if one didn't like it. My own salary, for example, in 1972, should have started at \$365 a month, with a raise to \$395 after three months. I actually started at \$405, due to my "experience," and got no raise at all after three months. So you see their peculiar budgeting. When a new employee was hired, evidently, the business manager and the president got together and decided what they could pay that person. The typical arrangement was a "private" deal, and the employee was encouraged to keep quiet about it. Of course the joke was on us when, after unionizing, our cherished "secret" salaries proved to be uniformly lousy. ~~xxxxxx~~ Management can't pull those particular strings anymore.

But as I say, I don't know exactly how management arrived at its scale. Right now, with our contract, we're somewhere around the middle in the wage setup in Nelson. Our people make more, just barely, than bank employees; they make considerably less than hospital or government employees. It's only the poor labor market hereabouts that allows NDU to pay its maintenance staff the lowly wages it does. A skilled tradesman has to be desperate to work here.

(more)

As for clerical jobs, well, there's a pretty good turnover at the supervisory level: a woman with clerical skills and experience will accept a job temporarily (again, due to the poor labor market), then move on when the chance presents itself. There are jobs here that call for skill and experience; others can be handled by kids just out of high school with minimum typing and no shorthand necessary. Likewise there are pick and shovel jobs, unskilled jobs, and jobs that require an electrician's or carpenter's skills. We feel these jobs should be graded fairly, and a fair wage attached to them. The yardstick we would use is their worth to the university. Thus an office supervisor, or a skilled secretary, or a skilled library clerk, should be weighed for his or her real worth--and most often, it's her worth to be considered. In the past, getting back to how the university arrived at its scale or individual placement, a man with dependents, for example (and it was assumed that the man would be the sole provider in a family, not always the case these days), was always paid more, regardless. As for the private dealing that went on, we had the case of the typist in the steno pool making more than her supervisor. Why accept the hassle of supervising? For the glory?

Well, you see some of the problems. This is why we pushed for reclassification in our first contract, and why we retreated in the face of the complications. But a straightforward classification, together with a clear set of job descriptions, will have to be devised. Nobody, or almost nobody, does exactly what he or she was hired for. The whole system, if you can call it that, is outmoded, perhaps was never adequate.

We've made a start, I think, by making management post all jobs, ~~xxxxxxx~~ report all wages, etc., including those of new employees. No more deals. We expect some discomfort at the outset of a new classification, but I think most of us realize its importance. Our chief trouble, within the union, is the separate divisions: maintenance, kitchen, library, academic offices, and, if they ever come to their senses, the business office. We're all scattered (you wouldn't think this, comparing UBC's campus with NDU's, but it's true), scattered because of the diverse nature of some of our work. The clerical jobs, apart from the business office people, are no problem. But ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ maintenance definitely has another environment, and so does the kitchen. However . . .

It's getting late and I have to soak my infected foot before going to bed. I'm afraid I haven't given you much, just general rap, but we'll talk about it when I see you the 22nd and 23rd. I think you know why we're dissatisfied. How to remedy the situation, though, that's the rub. Basically, and very generally, I feel that clearly defined job descriptions, and a ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ very carefully and fairly worked out salary scale, will go a long way toward correcting our situation. Management "agrees" with this ~~xxxxxxxx~~ ambition. But the actual working out is going to be tough--tough on us, tough on them.

And so good night. We've had a lot of snow here, some five feet at our level, compacted to a good three feet outside our cabin door. Life in the Kootenays! It's snowing right now.

Sorry I failed to make that last meeting. Let's hope the weather will allow us to fly out of Castlegar, surely one of the worst of all places at which to build an airport.

Cheers,

Row

POSTSCRIPT: 12 Feb.

I've just read over my letter. It was late last night, and it shows. I will try to be more specific, less windy, next time. I'm up to my ears right now for some reason.

Your letter to Shirley poses some questions for us, which we shall try to answer before we see you next weekend. This Friday we hold a general meeting at which a questionnaire will be handed out, based on your letter, and which should elicit~~x~~ some feedback.

I hope to learn something about job evaluations at our meeting; time's a wasting and the whole question, we feel, is crucial to our next contract.

One other thing. Dr. Hardwick from UBC was here recently and, among a lot of things, warned us that "technically, everybody's going to be out of a job" when the government takes over next year. We aren't terribly worried; staff will probably be laid off one day, hired back~~xxx~~ the next, but "there is no guarantee," Hardwick says, that everyone will be rehired. Faculty is on the shakiest ground. I might be on shaky ground if the new governing body decides to hire a real assistant registrar, with accompanying qualifications. Lee may be out of a job. (Not that either of us is sweating it.) ~~Butxxxxxxxwillxx~~ From the union standpoint, this may be no problem, and then again it may be. It's something to think about. (Who knows, some of us may be asked to "transfer" to UBC or Simon Fraser. I rather doubt that, though, on the support staff level.)

See you in a week.

Row

P.P.S. Actually, after studying the contract, it appears that management may still arrange private deals, since it need not tell us exactly where a new employee is placed. Is this management's prerogative? At present vacancies, new jobs, etc., are posted, and the union is notified when an employee is hired, fired, promoted, transferred, or laid off. After checking with Lee, I discover that we aren't told how much a new employee makes. Again, is this none of our business? If it should be, we'll have to see about it in the next contract.