

S.F.U. 18 Defense Committee

Dear Sisters and Brothers;

On 22 March, 1979, 18 persons were arrested on the picket line of the Association of University and College Employees, Local 2 (AUCE 2) at Simon Fraser University (SFU). The following provides some background to the arrests and information on the defense campaign of the SFU 18.

AUCE 2 is the bargaining unit for 650 clerical and technical workers at Simon Fraser University. The union, 80% of whose members are women, won important gains for its membership when it was certified in 1974, especially in the area of "equal pay for work of equal value". However, with the expiration of its third contract on March 31, 1978, AUCE 2 was consistently subjected to the hardline stance by an employer determined to reverse those gains. Initially the employer offered only one-time bonuses, and later offered percentage increases far below the rate of inflation.

After months of bargaining, AUCE 2 began a series of rotating strikes in December, 1978. In January 1979, the SFU Board of Governors stated that its final offer was 6% over a two year contract. When added onto the A.I.B.-limited increases of the previous two years, this offer amounts to a cut in real wages of over 20%! On March 8, 1979, AUCE 2 voted to go on a full-scale strike when the University escalated selective lockouts. A picket line was set up at the entrance to the university and remained in place until April 20. On March 29, the university succeeded in obtaining a severe court injunction against AUCE 2 and supporters which limited the number of picketers to 10. AUCE 2 then continued to press for a settlement by picketing allies of the University, leafleting, and publicity actions. An Industrial Inquiry Commission, whose decision will be binding, is being appointed by the Minister of Labour, and AUCE 2 has returned to work.

Throughout negotiations, the SFU administration showed bad faith and attempted to break AUCE 2. For example, the administration repeatedly made the offer of CONDITIONAL binding arbitration, a major condition being comparability with UNORGANIZED clerical workers in the private sector (selected by the employer); unfortunately, the latter are traditionally low paid, and comparison was really put forth for the purpose of reducing unionized wages. The fact that members of the SFU Board of Governors represent big business is important here. Board members such as [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], who are President and Vice-President of the anti-union Employers Council of B.C., clearly manipulated the dispute in the interests of employers, not those of the University community.

After the full-scale strike began on March 8, 1979 the administration took the view that the operation of the campus would be cut back in some areas but that all classes would continue. In some cases, scabs were hired to do the work of AUCE 2 members; in other cases, people volunteered. Scabbing against the food service workers, B.C. Hydro bus drivers, teaching assistants (AUCE Local 6), and others who respected the picket line was also common.

As well, students who respected the picket line were threatened with academic penalties; professors who held classes off campus were warned that these were considered "unauthorized". The administration thereby encouraged and coerced people to degrade themselves and break the strike by crossing the AUCE 2 picket line. The administration virtually ignored the plight of students who felt that the picket line must be respected, especially those who were also members of trade unions.

It is in this context that the events of March 22, 1979 should be viewed. On that date, a rally at the picket line led to approximately two hundred supporters joining to strengthen the line. The picketing was completely peaceful and legal; at no time did the R.C.M.P. tell the picketers that they were committing an offence or require them to disperse. However, after about three hours, the police, including members of the R.C.M.P. Security Service's "Ad Hoc Labour Liaison Committee", made a violent attack on the picket line and arrested 18 of the picketers.

Fourteen of those arrested are, or have been, members of trade unions, including the Construction and General Labourers Union; the Hospital Employees Union; the Service, Office, and Retail Workers Union of Canada; the International Steelworkers of America; the Association of University and College Employees; the Hotel, Restaurant, and Culinary Employees and Bartenders Union; the International Woodworkers of America; the B.C. Government Employees Union; the Canadian Paperworkers Union; the International Association of Bridge, Structural, and Ornamental Iron Workers; the Canadian Union of Public Employees; and the Carpenters and Joiners United Brotherhood of America. Twelve of those fourteen were also students at the time of the arrests.

Organization to defend the 18 persons arrested began immediately after the police attack. The SFU 18 Defense Committee, composed of those arrested and supporters, was set up shortly after and began to lobby for the dropping of the charges and the raising of defense funds. The charge laid at the time of the arrests was "obstruction of a peace officer in the execution of his duty". A month later a second charge, "blocking a highway", was added.

The Crown is proceeding with the charges against 17 of the 18 persons originally detained. Costly and time-consuming individual trials, rather than a more sensible group trial, have now been set, the first occurring at [REDACTED] (in courtroom #3, the Provincial Courthouse, 6263 Gilpin St., Burnaby). Two experienced trade union lawyers have been retained by those arrested.

The SFU 18 Defense Committee is currently continuing and expanding its campaign to raise money and to have the charges dropped: a petition is being circulated, "Drop the SFU 18 charges" buttons are being sold, representatives from the committee are speaking at meetings: and printed information regarding the arrests are being disseminated to unions and community organizations. The demand that the charges be dropped has been endorsed by the individuals and organizations on the attached sheet.

Because the legal defense will be expensive if the trials proceed, the Defense Committee is asking the labour movement for its financial support. Support for the committee must be strong to provide a good defense for the persons arrested, and generally to protect the sanctity of the picket line against police attacks. Let us not forget that strike-breaking by the R.C.M.P. is nothing new and must be vigilantly guarded against.

We would also appreciate any assistance in obtaining the support of others. The petition, calling for the charges to be dropped and "Drop the charges" buttons may be obtained at the convention. Correspondence to the SFU 18 Defense Committee can be sent c/o A.U.C.E. Provincial, Suite 901, 207 West Hastings, Vancouver, B.C., V6B 1J8

The Defense Committee would like to thank all those who have offered support to now.

The following persons can be contacted to speak for the committee.

The demand that the charges be dropped has been endorsed by:

AUCE Provincial

AUCE Local 2

AUCE Local 6

Vancouver & District Labour Council

Jack Munro, International Woodworkers of America

Canadian Union of Postal Workers, Vancouver Local

CUPW National Office

British Columbia Government Employees Union

John Fryer, General Secretary, BCGEU

Simon Fraser Student Society

The BC Federation of Women

The Service Office and Retail Workers Union of Canada

The Trade Union Research Bureau

Working Women Unite

Social Service Employees Union, Local 2

Margaret Mitchell, Federal Candidate for NDP in Vancouver East

Vancouver Status of Women

Art Gruntman, Regional Vice President, Canadian Paperworkers Union

British Columbia Provincial Council of Carpenters

Hotel, Restaurant and Culinary Employees & Bartenders Union, Local 40

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 213

Construction and General Labour Union, Local 1070

Victoria Labour Council

Gay Alliance Toward Equality

Syndicat des Charges de Cours de L'Universite du Quebec

Raj Chouhan, Farmworkers Organizing Committee

Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, Local 580

Canadian Association of Industrial, Mechanical, and Allied Workers

Peter Cameron, Regional Vice-President, CAIMAW