



by Angela Hamilton and Perce Groves

A union for SFU support staff? But there's all that award-winning architecture to look at, free lunch-hour concerts, a pub where interesting people meet — what more could anyone want? And, after all, the registrar's office is a long way from the green chain, pushing a book-cart isn't like driving a truck, operating a typewriter isn't like running a chain-saw. What would make a clerical worker decide s/he needed a union?

Maybe it was the day I learned that the Personnel Office was searching for someone with a flair for organization who could type over 50 words per minute, take shorthand in French or English at over 100 words per minute, and speak French and English. Salary for this superstar secretary's job is listed \$268.16 bi-weekly to start, which is \$3.84 per hour. It seemed odd to me that some of the *lowest paid* unionized workers were worth \$5.10 each hour they worked for the University giving out gym equipment, sorting and delivering mail, or clerking in Central Stores, and that what they needed to qualify was Grade 10 graduation, good health and a union card.

Or perhaps it was the day an ex-colleague of mine was promoted to a supervisory position in my old office. He didn't quite meet the academic requirements posted by personnel, but he had worked in the office for a few months. I wondered about those capable, not-quite-academically-

AUCE Round One.

qualified women who had worked there for several years. Of course, maybe none of them had applied for the position, but why? Could it be that they had no reason to believe that being a good clerk or secretary could be excellent training for a job supervising clerks and secretaries.

Or maybe it was the day University News Service personnel told me that *SFU Week*, a flyer listing campus events, couldn't publish names of speakers or organizations represented at an upcoming information session on unions. They "didn't want anyone to think that the administration approved of such things". *Marat/Sade* was publicized that week; so was Fellini's *Roma*. Draw your own conclusions.

Or maybe it was reading all those letters that started "Dear Sir". Why was it that nobody ever assumed that a woman could have the authority to answer a letter? And even more puzzling, why was it that some of my co-workers could compose and type letters, but only a man could sign them?

Or perhaps it was the day that two of the women in my office received several hundred dollars in retroactive pay because their jobs had been reclassified, reclassification being what happens when someone notices that the demands of a job have become substantially greater than they were when the job description was written. It seemed curious that our supervisor's original application for this procedure to



begin was dated over fifteen months before the process was completed.

Maybe I just realized that no binding contract existed to ensure that all the staff benefits — subsidized dental plan and medical plan, generous sick leave policy, partial rebate of tuition fees — were mine for as long as I worked at the University.

At any rate, early this year I began looking for a union with local autonomy which would have special concern for the needs of female workers in the University, and soon found AUCE.

At its first Annual Provincial Convention on September 28th and 29th, the Association of University & College Employees will be looking back on just over a year of existence. The membership was small at the time of the founding convention in August of 1973; current members number some 1000 people, all of them members of staff at British Columbia institutions of higher learning, and spread through three locals: Local No. 1 at the University of British Columbia, No. 2 here at SFU and Local No. 3 at Notre Dame University in Nelson. The locals at Point Grey and Nelson are both certified unions and, at the time of writing, both are negotiating first contracts with their employers, while the AUCE members at Simon Fraser are awaiting an imminent decision from the B.C. Labour Relations Board on the nature of the SFU bargaining unit.

Leaving the psychological, sociological and political reasons aside, the fact is that the predominantly female, secretarial-clerical sector of the work force has remained largely outside the union movement. Those who are union members often find themselves part of a large "catch-all" unit, which is faced with trying to represent the diverse and even conflicting interests of all members. The people involved in the beginning of AUCE — themselves clerical and secretarial workers — were searching for an organization to represent workers with similar problems and interests, but in a very particular setting: the universities and colleges of B.C. The concept evolved further: large national and international unions seemed to us far removed from the day-to-day needs of our working lives, so a small, provincial union seemed to be the answer, but there was none. The only solution was to start one: a democratic, British Columbia union (one which could never, by definition, become over large, unmanageable and impersonal), one supported and operated by the members, one dedicated specifically and solely to representing support staff in universities and colleges in this province. The result was the Association of University and College Employees (AUCE as in saucy; or AUCE as in mousy, depending upon personal preference).

We are new, we are small, but we believe we have a democratic and workable constitution which provides the maximum of autonomy for individual locals while ensuring province-wide support from other locals (nothing is perfect; the experiences of this first year will bring forward several Convention resolutions for constitutional changes and refinements.) With goodwill and a lot of hard work we believe it is possible to represent university and college support staff effect-

ively and fairly from the *inside*, with the minimum of professional help. Who, for instance, understands the staff role or the unique difficulties of catering to the needs of an academic conference better than the people who actually perform the work? Can an outside, professional negotiator, despite the high price tag, really understand what it is like to work at a university?

For many of us the years of "paternalism" (Premier Barrett's characterization) have taken their toll; we are looking for self-determination and the dignity of the bargaining table.

Local No. 2 at Simon Fraser University was chartered in February this year, just in time to run into competition from the Office and Technical Employees Union and, later, from the SFU Staff Association, whose members had decided to work towards the Association's becoming a union. Among staff members with very little direct experience of unionism, many of whom held a very stereotyped view of unions as only relevant to "blue collar" workers, the picture rapidly became muddy. Several support staff were in the rather unusual position of belonging simultaneously to two unions as well as to the Staff Association. Organizers on the SFU campus were faced with a Labour Code which defines "employer's" time and premises, but which fails to specify the rights and wrongs of organizing activities on a university campus, which, after all, is really public property. AUCE Local No. 2 was most reluctant to become a test case by defying the ground rules laid down by Administrative Vice-President George Stuart: no tables or booths to be set up near cafeterias; no use of University duplicating facilities; no mention of organizers' office locations or internal telephone numbers in literature. University facilities of this sort are open to all kinds of public

interest groups, but not to us. The absence of the traditional sidewalk outside of the factory where we could buttonhole employees and hand them literature made our task difficult and slow. The SFU Staff Association, on the other hand, had the built-in advantage of a "core" membership which had been built up over the years since 1967 with the assistance and blessing of the University Administration. Their other built-in advantage was, very simply, that staff members who normally would not support a move towards unionization would bow to the inevitable if the Association should become a certified union. The Association's major problem lay in the fact that *all* non-teaching employees of the University were eligible for membership, and this clause remained in the very-little-changed constitution and by-laws submitted with their application for certification. Consequently, they could expect a large number of the membership to be excluded from any bargaining unit defined by the Labour Relations Board. It's really very simple: the members of a bargaining unit cannot bargain amongst themselves!

This Spring the OTEU made an unsuccessful application for certification of 12 staff members in the Physical Plant and Planning section at Simon Fraser. The Board ruled (and the SFU Administration concurred) that "fractionalization" was undesirable and that, although geographically some distance from the main campus buildings, the Physical Plant & Planning staff nevertheless shared common employment conditions with other SFU staff members.

Following a general meeting in June, attended by 80-odd members, the Staff Association's new, but basically unchanged, constitution and by-laws were submitted to the LRB with an application for certification of a unit to include

all non-teaching staff at the University. AUCE Local No. 2's long-planned July 5th application for certification followed a few days later. Our application defined a bargaining unit consisting of secretarial and clerical employees only. After having examined the situation and having talked with a number of technicians on campus, we had decided to exclude technical employees. The July 1, 1974 pay scales had provided for a separate scale for technical staff, a fact which we felt illustrated one of the very basic differences between the two groups of employees. And the lack of response to our campaign from technicians as a group indicated to us that it would be unethical to include them in our application, even though we could have met the Labour Board's requirement that 35% of the members must be signed up prior to an application for a Board-administered vote among employees.

The Labour Relations Board's response to the complicated situation at SFU was to schedule a hearing to determine who should represent SFU staff and the nature of the bargaining unit. The hearing extended over a total of four and a half days and was presided over by IWA President Jack Moore. Much of that time span was taken up by an application by the International Association of Theatre and Stage Employees (IATSE) on behalf of three SFU Theatre technicians, who argued that although small in number their specialized duties and working conditions warranted a separate certification. The University presented no evidence in opposition to the AUCE and Staff Association cases, except to state that it favoured a bargaining unit encompassing secretarial, clerical and technical employees; however, the University expressed opposition to the IATSE application on the same grounds on which they opposed the earlier

OTEU application.

AUCE Local No. 2's case was very ably put by our lawyer, Stuart Rush, who worked very closely with, rather than for, union members. We presented considerable argument on our definition of the bargaining unit, pointing out that the separate technical pay scale recognizes the special working conditions, training and duties of technical staff and, perhaps most important, the almost total lack of transferability between clerical and technical jobs. In presenting our case, we stressed our view that the Staff Association would be unsuited to representing employees' interests by virtue of its long-standing relationship with the University Administration — a relationship which has always been an amicable one and quite legitimately so when an organization has no legal rights. We also expressed some dismay that the Association had not thought it necessary to run an organizing campaign in the usual sense and had instead submitted a current membership list to the Labour Relations Board, a list which included the names of people who had not expressed a desire to be represented by the Association by signing an application to that effect, but rather were presumed to be in support of the application by virtue of the fact that they remained members. We buttressed our argument on this point by informing the Board that Association memberships have for some years been automatically renewed each January by payroll deduction of a year's dues; thus it was reasonable to assume that a number of employees had been taking far from an active part in recent Association business. We also questioned the sagacity of the Association's maintaining an office on University property, provided rent-free by the Administration, with furniture and a telephone, even after a decision had been made

to apply for certification of a union.

Our lawyer's closing remarks reiterated our position on the nature of the bargaining unit, but indicated our willingness to represent technical employees as well if the Board so ruled. We now await the Labour Relations Board's decision, which may well include a referendum vote among all eligible staff members to be conducted by the Board.

On August 24th, AUCE received the Labour Relations Board decision on its application for certification. The university's definition of an appropriate bargaining unit was accepted; clerical, secretarial and technical workers must be organized in the same unit. The applications of AUCE and IATSE were rejected because neither met this definition.

Jack Moore, Labour Relations Board spokesman, expressed concern that the Staff Association membership included 40 first-line supervisors, whose eligibility for membership in this bargaining unit is questionable, as well as 15 professionals and 14 high-ranking supervisory personnel who are definitely excluded by the Labour Code. The Staff Association was directed to go through the usual procedure of having its members sign forms applying for union membership within at least three months before making any future application. Because of the automatic dues deduction from pay cheques after initial membership in the Association, it seemed doubtful that all persons on the roster were in fact interested in belonging to a union.

AUCE's response is to reapply with a bargaining unit which includes technical staff. The membership drive has gained strength since support staff are now confident that certification is imminent. Work on contract items proceeds so that they will be prepared for a favourable decision after the next application.