

Report of the Student Support Sub-Committee

In the few weeks preceding the strike, when the preparations were, by necessity, undertaken at a fevered pitch, there was one question which was never debated to the extent that its self-evident importance required. That question, of course, was the role of UBC students in our struggle. After all, students (at least in theory) are the 'raison d'etre' of a university, and surely the student response to a strike would have been of considerable importance in determining the administration's response. Student solidarity with our demands and support of our strike would have meant an effectively closed university, an isolated administration, and would have created a precedent for the conduct of labour relations on this campus of the sort that McLean & Co. have nightmares about. On the other hand, widespread and organized student scabbing (such as that which occurred at the recent instructors' strike at Langara) would have seriously hampered us tactically.

There were essentially four reasons why students did not, initially, get much attention from us:

1. Most of our 'serious' negotiations for a contract and strike preparation took place over the summer, when UBC is virtually deserted by students.
2. UBC students have a reputation for being rather conservative. An air of extreme pessimism dampened most discussions of possible student strike support.
3. This pessimism, although understandable, led to some rather unclear thinking about what would have been necessary to win the strike. Despite the fact that the decision was to strike during registration week (one week before classes) there was, for some reason, a feeling of certainty that a strike would not go beyond that week, and therefore there was absolutely no consideration given to tactics which the union would have had to undertake in a tremendous push to win students to our side (i.e. some sort of boycott of classes, etc.)
4. There was no attempt to analyze the specific nature of a strike on a university campus - i.e. in the "service" sector, as opposed to industry where the strike weapon involves a halt to the manufacture of a certain product. Our situation is different in that withholding our labour involves "inconvenience" to people - students, the community, etc. Therefore, to build support from the people who we would have been inconveniencing is much more important to this kind of an institution than in industry.

In spite of these problems and the shortness of time, the elected strike committee formed a student support sub-committee approximately one week in advance of the projected strike date. Our tasks were:

1. To create a nucleus of a student group, willing to mobilize other students in support our struggle.
2. To contact the Alma Mater Society and The Ubessey, to try to gain their support and commitment.

2. (cont'd)

This task for the most part was a dead letter - the AMS did not have a quorum at the one meeting which we attended to seek their support of resolutions which we had drafted asking for both concrete and moral support and solidarity. The Ubessey was not going to publish until the first week of classes, after the first short strike was to have happened.

3. To try to reach approximately 150 students hired by the Administration to help with the registration process, to dissuade them from crossing our picket lines if a strike took place.

Quite fortuitously, the strike committee was able to obtain a list of the names, addresses, designated work areas of these student/workers, including details about planned sessions to orient them to their work. Thus, we quickly involved ourselves and about 15 students (some from the AMS Executive) who had enthusiastically volunteered for the task, in preparations to bring our message to these temporary workers. Plans included the writing and producing of a leaflet and the detailed organization of its distribution. (see attached leaflet - it was never distributed, obviously).

Other plans made by the original nucleus of students and AUCE members who formed the Student Support Committee included postering for a larger meeting at which other interested students would have discussed further plans to build student support.

For the next contract, two things must be kept in mind:

1. It is fairly important for AUCE to cultivate some type of an on-going relationship with students at UBC. Perhaps we could begin by working with them on issues of mutual concern - for example, the struggle of faculty and staff at Notre Dame University; also we could at least provide moral support (and perhaps concrete support) for certain student struggles and campaigns on campus, such as the severe housing shortage, and the issue of the applicability of the B.C. Landlord-Tenant Act to student residences.

2. There are many students and various groups on campus, who because of their political outlook, would be quite amenable to participating in support work for any future struggles in which AUCE Local #1 finds itself. And given that we are unlikely to be close to the crunch in contract negotiations during the summer approaching registration week, we are going to have to strategize much more seriously on how to win student support in the context of the on-going academic year. Although student social consciousness is clearly at an all-time low, we must be aware that active campaigns on the part of the union could easily spark a not-insignificant number of them out of their inertia.

- Jack Gegenberg and
Heather Prittie
- for the
Student Support Sub-Committee