

## 831 STUDY CONTRACT

831 staff members in attendance at Thursday's meeting in the SUB Ballroom; a secret ballot vote of 660-80 to remain for the afternoon to conduct a study session; \$224.74 in donations collected to pay for renting the Ballroom. All facts, but when they are taken in the context of UBC support staff history, they become important. Responsible, intelligent, aware, serious, sensitive, etc.--all are overworked, hackneyed, cliché-type adjectives, but no other words suffice to describe the response to the four-hour study session. The meeting and subsequent study session were definite morale-building experiences, part of a seemingly endless procession of vital events which AUCE has confronted; events which help in determining what kind of union we are building.

It has been one of our persistent beliefs that Mr. McLean was labouring under the misconception that the Contract Committee represented no one but themselves; that they were isolated.

Hopefully the study session has divested him of this erroneous assumption. For four hours there existed the spectacle of a Director of Personnel with no support staff personnel to direct. It is like a conductor without a symphony; he can only go through the motions. Mr. McLean's position has been depressingly consistent from the beginning of negotiations; that is, there has been an underlying unwillingness or inability to take us, the

overwhelming majority of whom are women, seriously. It was Mr. McLean who inflicted upon us a series of questionable counter-proposals, and it was Mr. McLean who wanted to play the game of percentages on the wage issue. But 11.4% of very little equals even less. It was Mr. McLean who drew the immediate interpretation that negotiations had broken down, and it was he who called upon the Labour Minister to appoint a mediator. Furthermore, it was Mr. McLean who labelled our extra-ordinary meeting an **illegal strike**, threat-ening pay docking and other actions. We want to negotiate our first contract as quickly as possible. In the light of Mr. McLean's apparent confrontational tactics, the Thursday meeting was an unqualified success, and it should be taken as a sign of our seriousness and intent to bargain in good faith.

To witness the Ballroom filling to capacity, and to experience the subsequent and almost simultaneous dissolution of much of our former feelings of isolation and powerlessness were gratifying. The overwhelming majority of AUCE's bargaining unit had voted initially with their feet and had registered their dissatisfaction with present Administration policies and contract counter-proposals. The level of discussion throughout the study session was of a uniformly high quality. Four hours of patient and sensitive listening and well-informed response and contributions is a tribute



to AUCE's reply to a crucial and difficult situation.

The study session was mainly geared to a point-by-point discussion of the contract, and the proceedings were interwoven with motions from the Contract Committee to reaffirm certain goals and with motions from the floor. The motion to reaffirm the across-the-board increase was passed unanimously. A motion to set up a Pension Plan committee was carried, as was a motion to establish a committee that would present a working paper on affiliation with a credit union. A motion to reaffirm our wage demand of \$250 per month was passed unanimously. Emerald Murphy, chairperson of the Contract Committee, moved that: "Be it resolved that the University's decision to call in a mediator was premature." This was carried and led to the introduction of another successful motion on a direct approach by letter to the Board of Governors outlining AUCE's position.

The study session was the best and most creative response to a difficult situation. The Contract Committee had presented the membership with a *fait accompli*, a suspension of negotiations. The Contract Committee thanks you for your splendid response, and for that masterful mixture of seriousness and spontaneity. And, in a way, we must "thank" Mr. McLean for laying much of the groundwork for the study session. But the main objective is yet to be achieved— **the signing of AUCE's first contract.**

***by Ray Galbraith***

## **IS OUR WAGE DEMAND A JOKE?**

Last week eight hundred and thirty-one UBC library and clerical workers attended a special study session to look at the contract and the university administration's 'proposals'. At that meeting a motion was passed UNANIMOUSLY reaffirming our wage demand of \$250 per month across the board. Yes, unanimous, Mr. McLean!

Why did we have such overwhelming support for that motion? Was it due to the excitement and enthusiasm of that meeting? Was it simply a protest vote against the incredibly unbelievable offer of the University? Or was AUCE playing negotiating games, bargaining high by throwing out this 'pie-in-the-sky' figure of \$250?

If the university administration is trying to console itself with any of these explanations of our vote, they should think again. Our wage proposal is a serious statement of what clerical and library workers at UBC believe they need and deserve.

Our proposed contract is a result of months of research and discussion by our membership. Right from the beginning, we decided that we would not vote on contract proposals on the basis of "padding our demands" with more than we expected to get in order to bargain down to what we really wanted. We don't consider negotiating the conditions of our work a game.

Initially when the \$250 across-the-board proposal was introduced for discussion, some people were quite taken aback. Compared to what we've been used to for so long, it seemed like quite a bit of money. Even though it is generally accepted fact that clerical jobs and 'female' jobs have been



underpaid for years, one starts to expect and accept it. After all, what can one do—walk individually into the boss's office and ask for a raise? Sure, it works here and there, especially if he's in a good mood that day. As a matter of fact, one of our members was telling us that just a few years ago, she walked into Mr. McLean's office and asked for a raise. She explained that she simply could not live on the wage she was receiving, especially since she had children to support. She asked him if he could live on her wages. He agreed that he couldn't and gave her a \$5/month increase!

The introduction of AUCE has challenged concretely the acceptance of the position of clerical and library workers. Now that we're collectively together, we have, for the first time, the power to have a say and to change our working conditions.

And so we seriously looked at the facts:  
Forty per cent of us were living under the federal poverty line of \$500/month for **single** people. None of our basic classifications even matched the average B.C. worker's wage which is approximately \$188/week or \$814/month. (This figure is an April 1974 figure which is based on 12 sectors of the economy.) The cost of living nationally had risen 10.4% in the period from December 1972 to December 1973. The cost of food in Vancouver had increased 20.9% during the year of 1973. Looking at contracts of other unionised clerical workers, we discovered, for example, that at VGH their lowest paid clerical workers were receiving \$621/month and at Empress Foods, \$687/month.

Then, we examined the situation at UBC. To our surprise, we discovered that even the university admits discriminating against women workers.

The President's Ad Hoc Committee to investigate the status of women at the university concluded among other things that 'female jobs' were being paid less than 'male jobs' and that this was not necessarily justified in terms of work performed. At UBC the classification of 'light labourer' with no specific skills or training required was being paid at a rate of \$782/month. Assistant mail clerks were receiving a starting wage of \$775/month. Of course both these positions are unionised!

Our files are filled with more documentation. Increasingly, as we discussed the matter, our membership found themselves not surprised at all with our figure of \$250. What we were shocked at was the fact that the University has been paying their staff such dismal wages. And that we accepted such a state of affairs!

So, Mr. McLean, that's why our wage demand of \$250 per month was reaffirmed unanimously by that meeting. We aren't playing games, and we're not being 'greedy'. No, we know that we're asking for a reasonable living wage that we both deserve and need. We know that the money is there, and that the provincial government is quite willing to give the university any supplementary money it requires for justifiable union contracts. The only thing that we feel badly about is the fact that we didn't ask for this increase years ago. We've thought about it a lot, Mr. McLean. Perhaps you and the administration could too.

***by Heather MacNeill***

**SO THAT WAS THEN.....**