

WHY WE CANNOT AFFORD CUPE

Our union has had a trial affiliation with CUPE for the past two years and now is the time to decide whether or not to permanently affiliate. The decision should be based on an evaluation of what CUPE has done for us in the past two years and on whether we can afford to affiliate without financially crippling our local union structure or raising union dues to cover the levy imposed by CUPE.

Joining CUPE will necessitate either a drop in service to our members because of a shortage of funds or a rise in the dues that each member must pay. The budget projection for 1987 indicates that we will be sending a minimum of \$159,600.00 a year to the CUPE National Office in Ottawa. This amount is collected from our union dues. Whatever is left over remains to finance our local operation. We must therefore look hard at what we actually obtain for the large amount that we send away and whether the amount left over is sufficient to operate our union office here at U.B.C.

It is the local that protects its members and affiliation with CUPE does not change this fact. Affiliation would not alter our need to maintain a union office on campus, administer our contract, or provide service to our members. CUPE's brochure, "The CUPE Story" states that "once the agreement is signed, it is the function of the local to see that it is not violated by management." This function takes money over and above what we pay out to CUPE National. We need sufficient full-time union staff in our U.B.C. office to administer the contract and to provide full protection and service for our members. The CUPE staff representative is not a substitute for our own full-time staff representatives as he must service several union locals and is therefore not as accessible as if he had to service only our own local.

Although we could look to CUPE for some help, we would still be expected to operate as an autonomous unit. For example, when the university violates the collective agreement and the resulting grievance is not settled, we must pay one-half of the arbitrator's fees (the university pays the other half) out of our local's funds. While it is true that the CUPE staff representative assigned to us will represent us in arbitrations, if we decide that the case is complex enough to require a lawyer, we will have to pay the legal fees out of our local's funds. The CUPE Defense Fund will only pay legal fees (or provide lawyers) for cases that the CUPE National Office in Ottawa considers to be precedent setting. Many of our cases, however, may not be considered to be precedent setting by the CUPE head office but may still arise out of severe violations of the contract by the university. In other words, they may be precedent setting for our collective agreement but the CUPE head office may not consider them to be precedent setting for Canada and therefore will not fund them.

Affiliation with CUPE would give us access to research material, education facilities, etc. We must consider whether it is \$159,600.00's worth per year and we must also review what CUPE has done for us in this area in the past two years during our trial affiliation. There were expectations that CUPE would provide frequent steward training and organize the division structure. This has not been the case in the past two years and there is no reason to believe that

it will change once we permanently affiliate. Although CUPE did provide us with one stewards' training session, that was no more than we previously had when we were on our own. The division structure is no more organized than it was two years ago.

The CUPE conferences and outside courses that we were eligible to attend during our trial affiliation were not free. We still had to finance expenses (out-of-town travel, room and board, etc.) out of the local's funds and this will continue to be the case after affiliation. CUPE does provide access to contract research such as cost-of-living comparisons, costing of contracts, etc., but affiliation is an expensive way to obtain this information. Prior to the trial affiliation we contracted this type of research out to the Trade Union Research Bureau for a reasonable amount when it was required.

The executive statement that affiliation with CUPE would lead to a surplus is based on the assumption that there will be very low legal expenses, low office expenses and the continuation of the \$3,000 per month salary grant from CUPE. As far as I am aware, CUPE has made no commitment to continue the salary grant beyond 1987. Even with affiliation we will have heavy legal and office expenses which will have to be financed with whatever is left to the local after \$159,600.00 is sent annually to the CUPE office in Ottawa. I do not believe that joining CUPE on the terms presently proposed is in the best interest of the membership of this local because the services that CUPE will provide to us are not worth the \$159,600.00 annual cost of admission.

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