

1982 PROVINCIAL CONVENTION
ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE PRESIDENT AND THE VICE-PRESIDENT

"I wouldn't joint a club that would have me as a member"
Marx (Groucho, that is)

This report is not intended to provide a blow-by-blow account to you of all of the activities of the Provincial Executive over the past year, but to reflect upon the more striking events, and, more importantly, to point out our failings and the changes the Executive feels are necessary as a result of our year's experience.

SECTION I: THE CRISIS IN AUCE

AUCE is in crisis and has been for several years. Our two smallest locals -- Locals 4 and 5 -- are in the midst of secession from AUCE, and Local 1, the largest, will likely consider secession upon conclusion of its current set of contract negotiations. AUCE Local 2 is split between its (majority) clerical and (minority) technical components, with the latter sabotaging efforts to restore financial and organizational solvency to that Local.

But these centrifugal tendencies in the Provincial Association are not the crisis. The crisis is the increasing inability of AUCE locals to respond to the economic, political and social changes that have taken place since AUCE was founded in the early 1970's. At that time the economy was (relatively) stable, the NDP was in power provincially, and the women's liberation movement was at its zenith. Today, the economy -- both world-wide and locally -- is in a shambles, a right-wing government is scapegoating both labour and the public sector, and a reaction against feminism is growing in strength and public acceptance.

Under these conditions, AUCE has not fared well -- most notably in that our wages have not kept up with increases in the cost of living, and our working conditions and job security have been eroded. To many AUCE members, the blame for this state of affairs can be laid upon the structure of our Union and its isolation from the trade-union mainstream. They see the size, financial and technical resources, and alleged clout of unions like CUPE and BCGEU as the solution to our problems. But the mainstream labour unions, in particular those just mentioned, have fared little better, in spite of (or perhaps because of) their supposed advantages.

In spite of the wishes of the vast majority of AUCE members, the leadership of Locals 1, 4, 5 and, until recently, of Local 2, have been opposed to AUCE joining the CLC intact as AUCE. In their attempts to persuade their members to abandon AUCE and join another union, the aforementioned leaderships have relied mainly on the tact of "Provincial bashing". Provincial, in particular the Provincial Executive, has been charged with becoming a rather gloomy bureaucracy, insensitive to the needs of the locals, absorbing vast amounts of per capita tax and returning nothing in the way of services or aid. [In fairness to ourselves, it should be said that these leaderships speak eloquently from both sides of their collective mouths -- coupled with the charge of creeping bureaucracy, is the demand that AUCE "centralize" so as to more efficiently provide the services demanded!]

Unfortunately, the charge of creeping bureaucracy is well founded. In the next section, the emerging bureaucratic nature of AUCE will be discussed.

SECTION II: THE EMERGING BUREAUCRACY IN THE PROVINCIAL ASSOCIATION

Bureaucracies are everywhere, they permeate our lives -- as university and college employees and students we have lots of hands-on experience with them. But it is hard to define them very precisely, and even harder to pinpoint exactly when, and for what reasons, an organization becomes a bureaucracy. Our characterization of the AUCE Provincial Association -- in particular the Provincial Executive -- as a bureaucracy is based upon the following facts:

1. Our budget has grown faster than that of any AUCE local.
2. There are more people being paid to do Provincial work all the time with no corresponding increase in the services provided.
3. Provincial Executive meets frequently with most discussion centering around internal matters.
4. Most people who serve on the Provincial Executive now have been doing so for years, or have come back after a break. Many of us are rather odd birds -- at odds with our local's policies or personnel, or dilettantes who can't or won't bring ourselves to do work in respective locals.*
5. Provincial Executive treats requests for aid from locals in a rather tight--assed way: we demand documentation, require that it be done "by the book", and, in the glorious tradition of welfare bureaucracies, extract promises that the aid is absolutely necessary and will be used only for its stated purpose.
6. We always cover our collective ass. Often we make decisions in order to take the heat off of us for past boo-boos, and try not to offend anyone -- thus offending everyone.

Provincial has become, and under the structure we have, will always be, an organ separate from the rest of the body, with interest distinct from, and often at odds with, the interests of the individual locals of AUCE. Provincial has become a classic bureaucracy, and is by its nature profoundly different from the locals in AUCE.

* In planning this report, Jack and I have found that it is people like Jack and I who make us quite ill because we are the very type that has helped cause the problem. We are involved in Provincial year after year often because we don't like what is happening in our own locals, or because we're too lazy to get involved in the local, but we have too inflated an image of ourselves to keep our fingers out of the pie altogether. We find at Provincial others who fit in with us, other feminists, soul-mates. Then we go to convention each year and get terribly puzzled and upset when the rest of the members kick the shit out of our "correct" ideas.

Some of us who have served on Provincial for a long period of time have begun to see our own interests as inexorably linked to the interests of Provincial and therefore to its survival as a bureaucracy. We will fight any change that threatens this set up. It has gone so far as to mean for some that the survival of "Provincial" is synonymous with the survival of AUCE.

So, we are left with the sad situation that locals see Provincial as a potentially threatening body OVER them; a body with its own interests which may well not coincide with the GETTING and protecting of good contracts, but which is more interested in keeping itself going at any cost. We doubt very much that this is what the founding mothers of AUCE had in mind when they drew up the original constitution.

It would be wonderful if the blame for this development could be laid squarely at the feet of those who have served on Provincial over the years, but this would be a dangerously simplistic view (and every bit as self-serving as the actions of Provincial may appear). In some ways, this role has been thrust upon the Provincial by the locals. It was the locals who thrust Provincial into the role of a policy-making body for all of AUCE. It was the locals who demanded an affiliation policy, it was the locals who wanted more "servicing". By the same token, it is the locals who resent the Provincial stepping in and trying to "service". [And who can blame a person working hard in their local resenting being asked to give up weekends to attend seminars at other locals, when the needs of their own local seem so great.] It is the locals who asked for a level of (available) services that necessitated dues increases, and necessitated a second full-time paid officer. It is the locals who now complain about the money which is "down the drain" in per capita tax.

Well, the fruits of our labour have been that two locals are leaving and the rest hate our guts (perhaps I should say "the Provincial's guts"). It is no longer good enough to moan that the locals are wrong, crazy, unprincipled or that we are taking the "correct political line". None of that matters worth a damn IF our precious little organization is going to simply fall down or be torn down around us. So the question arises, how do we best insure the survival of the only thing that matters in AUCE, its locals?

SECTION III: ONE STEP FORWARD AND TEN STEPS BACK? ... AGAIN?

What does Provincial Actually Do Now?

- It supports all sorts of outside organizations and causes.
- It hears local reports. These should be the most important role of the Provincial -- to facilitate the sharing of information about what is happening in and to other locals. In reality, this item is quite often carping about what is going on in one's local, while the rest of the Provincial Executive makes appropriate clucking noises.

- We talk a lot about our own financial situation (which, when the dues are in on time and when the books are kept up is not too bad).
- We plan convention.
- We spend hours and hours planning structures (of our next meeting -- when it will be, how it will be run, what will be discussed).
- We oversee the Strike Fund which is a joke in itself. With the size of our locals and with the cost of strikes, it is ludicrous to assume that the \$10,000 we have traditionally held would be of anything but symbolic use. So, for the most part, the strike fund is used as a slush fund for when locals don't pay their per capita tax, or don't pay on time.
- We spend most of our time dealing with whatever crisis has just arisen (usually these are complaints about Provincial, or locals not paying their per capita tax, although this year we had the Petitions for Secession).

What allows Provincial to be the slow, huge bureaucracy that it is, wasting time at meeting after meeting? Well, it has a lot of money to do it with, it doesn't really have a clear job -- regardless of the pages and pages of policy and procedure. What can we do?

We can stop the Provincial from being an organ with separate interests (whether real or only perceived) from the rest of AUCE (the locals). We can stop the Provincial from having a huge budget to do nothing with. We can stop the Provincial from having two salaried positions with ill-defined duties. We can stop the Provincial from performing vague services for locals who don't want them.

But enough of this philosophic drivel. To the point comrades: we should be facilitating the sharing of information. We ourselves (contrary to our past view) have no information to share.

Instead of having a Provincial Executive which consists mainly of Table Officers (who, although technically responsible to the membership are in fact responsible only to the rest of the Executive) we should eliminate those Table Officer positions and make the local representatives truly that -- people who are elected in their own locals (in other words, just have the Provincial Local Representatives). We should get rid of the Newsletter and instead put all of the local newsletters together every two months, have them reduced and printed, and ship them to each local to distribute to their memberships. We should stop the sham of bearing the responsibility of putting on cross-local seminars. Instead, when a local wants a seminar and would like people from other locals to participate, they could contact the appropriate local representative, who would be able to provide names and numbers of knowledgeable people in their local. If a budget is still in existence, financial assistance could be given at the discretion of the local representatives.

Now to the nitty-gritty -- do we in fact want a budget at all? Yes, we think that we must have one. But, not resembling anything like we have now. What do

we really need money for? Let us have a look. We think that we do need an office which is not located at any local (consider, please that every local now has an office on their campus -- what happens if there is a strike). So, the office (without full-time paid person, of course) would be located at no local, and would have a typewriter, photocopier and a gestetner. That way, there is a place for the local representatives to meet, equipment in the unlikely event that they should want to mail anything to anyone or for ballots, and an office outside the picketed area for locals to use when on strike. What else do we need money for? We need money in case the representatives ever want to loan money to any local for any reason, be it for organizing new locals, or for strikes. We need money in case the representatives want to lend their support to outside groups. (It seems that although our ordinary members resent this activity a lot, elected reps. cannot resist this and feel it is essential.). Do we need money to maintain the "library" of Provincial? Although we had some trouble with this question, we feel it is of more importance to rid ourselves of the superstructure, and it is simply impractical to assume that the local representatives can fulfill this function. At the same time, this duty would not go towards justifying a full-time paid person. So, this money should be used to help locals set up their own libraries. We no longer need much money for travelling expenses (we do not feel that the local representatives from Local #7 will cost that much). We no longer will need money for salaries (except perhaps before and immediately after convention).

We feel that we could reduce the per capital tax to \$2.50 per month per member (at least to this level), which represents around \$55,000 per year (assuming that Locals 4 and 5 are no longer with us). We expect that "production costs" will be around \$30,000 per year, leaving \$25,000 to go into a strike fund. We estimate that our cost figures are in fact quite high.

How do we stop the old problem of having so much money to play with and this leading to a self-serving bureaucracy? Simple, get rid of all of the useless duties that cause this.

Maybe in the future there will come a time when there is not always an internal crisis around every corner, when part of our membership stops dedicating itself to destroying the organization and calms down to fighting for the workers who are members. At that time, we can perhaps rebuild -- for now we must do our best to protect the thing from totally disintegrating.

We recognize that this is a radical job to say the least, and will not merely involve editing the existing Constitution, but will mean culling what we want to retain and totally re-writing the rest. Given this, it is unreasonable to assume that this can be accomplished at this Convention.

So, what can we realistically accomplish this year towards our goal? We can get rid of one paid position -- the Co-ordinator. We can eliminate as many Provin-

cial duties as possible. Our specific suggestions are: the newsletter, the Provincial responsibility for cross-local seminars and committees (which only the same old provincially active people attend -- a little like preaching to the converted; we all get together, tell each other things we already know, nod sagely and go home), the responsibility for maintaining a library or clipping file, limiting meetings to every other month, eliminating over-time.

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