

SECESSION AND AFFILIATION (merger) ... Our only real option.

AUCE has outlived its usefulness. This is a difficult statement to make for someone with nearly ten years of involvement - involvement that has stretched from the organizing drives of the early 1970's to the end of my term as Secretary-Treasurer in 1981. AUCE has moved from the active volunteerism of its early days to the formation of a union "bureaucracy" in its latter stages, from the contract successes of the mid '70's to the threat of erosion of our benefits in the early '80's. We have evolved from intense membership participation to a time when most of our elected positions are unfilled.

Our history, although short-lived, has been compressed and eventful. In fact, our development has probably mirrored that of the established trade unions in their early years. We seized the opportunity and organized a union and negotiated a series of good contracts, due to fortuitous historical circumstances and membership participation. But we have been buffeted by successive recessions, periods of high inflation, the AIB, the limitations of an organization whose locomotive has been volunteerism. Little by little our position has been eroded. We have our own union "bureaucracy" as do other established unions, but we are isolated and suffering from a real malaise. We are members of a union that has run its day-to-day affairs competently thanks to dedicated members and office staff, but for years it has been our function - or fate - to react to events and issues, not to try to shape them.

I began years ago as a keen volunteerist, deeply suspicious of the existing trade union movement. I was wedded to the belief that AUCE's future was assured because so many had a personal stake in its growth and survival. But AUCE has evolved and for real historical reasons membership involvement has dwindled. We are members of a Provincial no longer provincial in scope, and, we are members of a union that has prided itself for too long on the fact that it was special, different because it was organized by women for women. We have witnessed the decline and the fall of the Provincial. Local #2 at SFU is in apparent disarray - it has been limping along with minimal membership involvement and without a contract for over a year. For me, the issue is the necessity of merging with an existing union. I equate independence with a staff association. Affiliation is not a viable option and it never was.

Merging will not be a panacea for our ills, for our problems - what it does do is hold out the promise of members getting the services they deserve and pay for and it presents us with a philosophical outlet. Survival as a union and continuity are the issues. If we are genuinely concerned about pushing for women's issues and for dealing with technological change, we should do it within the mainstream of the union movement, not by operating within a vacuum. We need to strengthen our bargaining position with the University, to ensure our survival as a union, and to break out of our debilitating, splendid isolation. For those who hold merger as AUCE's salvation there will only come disappointment. If we do decide to merge then new problems and issues will be there to hound us. A host of problems is preferable within the framework of an existing union to a staff association, masquerading as a trade union.

Since February of this year, when the merger issue moved from the back burner there has been an evident lack of response, emotional or otherwise, to remaining independent as AUCE. For those members who believe that we can make a go of it as a one local union, or even revitalize a moribund Provincial, now is the time to speak up and to present real and honest options for the future; to persuade members that such a course is possible. We can no longer afford to wrap ourselves in the emotional flag of the past.

There are several merger options. But, whatever the possibilities, we have to investigate the mechanics involved and debate whether or not the costs of merging, both in financial and practical day-to-day contractual terms, are worth actively pursuing. I no longer believe that AUCE has an assured future - I am convinced that we are approaching the end of AUCE as a useful and progressive union. A decision has to be made, one way or the other. We have a lot to be proud of, and, to preserve and build upon that legacy I believe that merging with an existing union is on the only real option.

Ray Galbraith

## SECESSION AND INDEPENDENCE ... Our guarantee of continued democracy & financial control.

Having read Ray's statement on the viability of AUCE I have decided that I cannot remain quiet anymore. Over the last ten years I have always respected the ability that Ray has exhibited in gaging and articulating the membership's position. If the preceding statement does indeed reflect the general consensus I would be unforgivably remiss not to respond.

Ray is ready to throw in the towel! I am not! I too have witnessed and actively participated in AUCE's evolution; its truly dynamic accomplishments of the past as well as its failures and mistakes. I like many people who were on campus before the birth of AUCE know from whence we came and why we organized in the first place. For those of you who subsequently arrived it is sufficient to say that working conditions for clerical workers on this campus have improved one hell of a lot since those days and it has not been by divine intervention.

We did it! We succeeded, in negotiating a couple of outstanding (and precedent setting) contracts in the beginning as well as in influencing the labour movement as it pertained to women. We were the first Union in Canada to firstly, negotiate a substantial maternity benefit and then to defend it and win in the courts. Subsequently, sister Unions were able to successfully negotiate like benefits. It is well worth noting that those were the impoverished days when we could not afford legal research and were obliged to do not only the initial leg work (as we do now) but the follow up as well.

Another success of which we can be proud was the way in which we challenged the Anti-inflation Board in 1976. During a period when the legislation dictated that any excessive increases would be rolled back to an 8% ceiling ... AUCE had to defend a 19% increase. The thought of facing an 11% roll back was more than most of us could face considering we had had to strike to win the contract initially. By the efforts, the research and the presentation of a well documented brief to Ottawa, AUCE was permitted a 15% increase (almost twice the ceiling of 8%) and was subsequently the object of considerable media attention as we were among the first to challenge the federal legislation and make a case for sexual discrimination.

These are only two dynamic examples of the successes that this Union can be credited with. Both were accomplished through non-professional cooperation and dedication. We had no high paid business reps or expensive legal counsel. We had each other and we had goals.

At this point I do not want what I am trying to say to be lost in gushy rhetoric. It is true that if this Union did not have some very dedicated volunteers nothing would have ever been accomplished but I would disagree that the level of involvement of yester year far exceeds that which we have today. It has always been our main problem; securing and maintaining a core of volunteers. That will never change. What we have to decide in our judgement of our ongoing effectiveness is whether a volunteer structure is the way to maintain our business.

Ray speaks of our Union's "bureaucracy" and then in the next breath talks about merging with an existing union within the mainstream of the union movement. The ideologic contradictions there have me confused. What could be more bureaucratic than an organization such as CUPE with its national headquarters in the east, its high paid execs and its very expensive per capita tariffs. For those who are not aware, a merger with CUPE would see that 45% of every dollar paid in Union dues would go to some nebulous "national" organization. Frankly, I would far rather keep the money on campus myself and see it used for our own legal research and maintenance. Further, in order to maintain the services this Union currently provides to its members AND pay that kind of whopping per capita tax can you envision the kind of dues increase we would have to agree upon.

I most strongly disagree with the statement that "AUCE has outlived usefulness." When compared to other Union's and Labour organization, our Union office provides individualized services far exceeding those provided elsewhere. The issues we have always battled for and will continue to strive to gain and maintain are those that we have labeled "women's issues". As I stated earlier, AUCE of a few years ago was a trend setter in this regard & as such, was often viewed with suspicion and disdain by the "established unions". We took very principled stands and were not always supported by other unions who could not identify with our concerns. Union's like ours are a dying breed. The democracy that has been our lifeblood and our mentor is almost unheard of within the "big union" structure. You pay higher dues and in effect authorize them to make your judgements for you. If that is what this Union wants then so be it.

AUCE can make it on our own. We will create problems for ourselves if we simply allow ourselves to be enveloped by an existing union. Not the least of which is serious financial liability as well as the possible loss of our principled continuity and growth. We face tough times ahead, most particularly with respect to TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE. Do we seriously feel confident that an organization such as CUPE would put lots of research dollars into loss of jobs due to computerization and the upgrading of word processors? I seriously doubt that we will get little more than semi annual visits from a high paid business rep and rather specific ground rules for negotiations if, that is, they permit us to carry on our own contract talks.

I don't hesitate to admit that I can afford to wrap myself in the "emotional flag of the past." Ray seems to think that such an indulgence is beyond our means as a Union. I maintain that a good dose of emotion has been missing from our diet for much too long. Emotion, correctly channelled is perhaps our most effective tool. Sure we are frustrated and certainly we get angry. The prevailing economic climate spawns little else. Let us not be reduced to unquestioning complacency or even worse, to a group that prepares to place blame where no blame honestly exists. WE ARE THE UNION! Each time we call AUCE into question it is simply an exercise in self flagellation. No matter what we decide on this issue or (heaven forbid) who we merge with ... the fact remains no matter what we call ourselves... CUPE... OTEU... or EST ... we are still the same group of people.. What we are truly deciding here is not what to support but how much we need and wish to be supported.

As Ray aptly and generously pointed out, AUCE has a lot to be proud of and to persevere. And to that end I would suggest that merger with another Union would truly represent a loss of our identity and the ideals we have worked enormously hard to win and to maintain. Certainly we lack the momentum of a decade ago ... the WORLD economy is feeling the pinch. This single element while important does not in itself prove that our Union is not working. I want people to seriously consider this issue ... in so few areas of our lives do we still have the degree of choice that AUCE offers. I personally have had my fill of people and institutions that claim to serve me or be at my disposal. High cost bureaucracy is rampant already ... do we want to let it in our front door?

Fairleigh Kettig  
Union Organizer

(My comments are exactly that ... "my comments". They are not made in relation to my position with the Union - that position is temporary - they are made with an eye to the future ... when I come back to the bargaining unit.)

## A Vote for Independence is a vote for a reasonable dues' structure!

In the last few years, AUCE has gone through periods of self-doubt and criticism. I do not see that as a sign that AUCE is no longer a useful and viable union. On the contrary, the very fact that its members are constantly reassessing and questioning its utility and philosophy is a healthy sign that AUCE is not calcifying. While it is true that the energy and participation level is not the same as it was during the early stages, I do not see this as a sign that AUCE is dying, but rather as a reflection of the eighties as opposed to the seventies.

Whatever problems exist, merging with another union would not cure them, in my opinion. There would be new problems. Our dues would be greater, since we would not only have to pay dues to support our own local structure, but we would also be required to pay money each month over and above our local dues to send to the national or head office of the union. For example, the CUPE "per capita tax" is \$9.30 a month for full-time employees (those who work over 85 hours per month). In the case of our local, this would mean sending about \$12,555.00 each month or \$150,666.00 a year to the head office in Ottawa. This amount is collected from the members over and above the local dues.

Some people believe that we would get more than our money's worth in services and help, but this is by no means certain. I have been told that financial aid for the legal costs in arbitration is available to CUPE locals only if the head office decides that the case is a very good one. Locals wishing to arbitrate cases not deemed worthy by the head office are left paying their own legal expenses. The fact that the funds are collected from all locals does not mean that the funds are available to a local specifically when it needs them. It is better to put that extra money to use within our own union and therefore have control over how it is spent. There have been numerous complaints against CUPE, but I am in no position to verify them. It is a matter of record, however, that the CUPE representatives on the President's Advisory Committee on Safety, Security and Fire Prevention did not support AUCE's recommendations on health and safety issues connected with the use of video display terminals.

Some members argue that joining the mainstream of the labour movement would give AUCE more strength. The strength of a union local comes from its members and not from affiliation with other locals. Changing our name will not magically increase the strength of our local.

Furthermore, women's issues are very important to our members and it is here that the mainstream of the labour movement has dragged its feet. Most of the leadership positions are held by men, even within unions with a high percentage of women members. The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) was criticized by its women members for failing to promote and deal with "women's" issues such as adequate child care, maternity leave, technological change, sexual harassment, equal pay for work of equal value, part-time employee benefits, and other concerns. The level of involvement of women within unions has been low. One reason for this, is that most of the union membership meetings are held after work hours, making it impossible for women with child care and other commitments to attend. Membership in the CLC has not given women the confidence to speak up in their own interests at the meetings of union locals, contrary to what some women had hoped. Belonging to a larger, mainstream union has not changed the reality of the situation for the women union members.

In my opinion, AUCE presently provides its members with better services than do the other unions on campus and is more responsive to its membership. In preparing for the last set of negotiations, I reviewed the contracts of many public sector unions. Our collective agreement competed well with others in many areas of concern to our membership. It is interesting to note that KEU and WREU, both of which are very effective unions, are also independent. In conclusion, I believe that AUCE has a future as well as a past. If AUCE members feel that AUCE is not functioning well, perhaps it is time to examine and make changes in its structure rather than to give up and merge with another union.

Shirley Irvine

(The above statement is a personal statement and does not necessarily reflect the views of the executive.)

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