

1976-77 STRIKE COMMITTEE
REPORT

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I. BRIEF SUMMARY OF OUR ACTIVITIES

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We functioned as an autonomous committee only dependent upon the union membership; had a rotating chair person who took care of the agendas and attended executive meetings; we prepared our own reports and motions for the general membership meetings, etc. Unfortunately, we always had to fight for time in the agendas of the general membership meetings and were most of the time reduced to 5 minutes in which to give a report and have motions approved.

At the time the Committee was formed the University was showing no intentions of settling the contract; the crucial registration period had yet to come (August and September). The involvement of union members in the different committees was very low, and although our noon general meetings had an average attendance of 300 to 400, there was no enthusiasm about going on strike.

Our activities as a Committee started with the approval of our motion to hold a strike vote some time in June, as well as a Plan of Action to prepare the strike vote* presented by our Committee, at the April 14th. 1977 noon-hour general membership meeting. We concentrated our work in the following areas:

- 1) Publicity work.
- 2) Establishment of links with other unions and organizations.
- 3) Permanent communication with all members of the union. Some organizational efforts.
- 4) Preparation of a possible strike.

* See the April 7/77 issue of Across Campus.

1) PUBLICITY WORK.

Our publicity campaign played a very important role in putting pressure on the University Administration to reach a settlement for our 76-77 contract. It aimed to attain the following major goals:

- let the public know of our situation and the attitude of the University Administration;
- seek support and explore the possibilities of joint actions with other unions; and
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The publicity campaign started as soon as the Committee was formed: We drafted a leaflet which we got approved by an all-committees meeting, as well as two posters* which denounced the gap between faculty and staff salaries and the cutbacks on education. As well, we sent questionnaires to everyone of our members to find out what areas (leafletting, postering, sale of buttons, etc.) they were willing to help in.

Once we received a considerable number of answers to our questionnaires (around 200 in total), we held a meeting with those who had positively answered the questionnaires to discuss the aims of our publicity work. About 25 of these members came and most of them signed up for coordination of the different areas of publicity.

We postered on several occasions and leafletted at the conventions which took place on campus. As things worked out, we did not have time to expand our publicity off campus. The conventions covered were:

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- The Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Conference which had an attendance of approx. 500 people.
- The Graduation ceremonies during which around 700 leaflets were distributed.
- The Estonian Convention attended by about 200 people.
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2) Establishment of links with other unions and organizations.

In early June we were able to hold a meeting with CUPE representatives, representatives of the Health Sciences Association and a representative of the Simon Fraser local. These meetings were arranged through letters we sent to all unions on campus. At these meetings, we exchanged information on contract negotiations and proposed sending delegates to speak at membership meetings, issuing joint press communiques or leaflets, and the possibility of them joining us in the organization of joint actions. The representatives said they would get back to us on the proposals after having discussed them with their executives and memberships. By the time we were ready to arrange a second meeting, we had settled our contract.

3) Permanent communication with all members of the union. Some organizational efforts.

Our organizational efforts consisted of a series of division meetings to encourage the election of representatives to the Committee and to call on our members' attendance to important membership meetings.

Through reports at every general membership meeting and through articles in the newsletter we kept our members informed on what the Committee was doing. Aside from that, two internal information sheets were sent to every union member. The first one compared our wage demand with what other unions were already earning, and the second one compared our benefit demands with what other unions already had. These sheets played an important role in developing our members' awareness of the importance of the issues we were fighting for. We also worked on a blurb for the back of a poster which stated the situation of UBC employees before the union and after it.

A couple of very important membership meetings were publicized to a maximum by the Committee. The April 14th meeting which approved the holding of the strike vote in June was one of them. We publicized it through posters and division meetings. The July 29th membership meeting which discussed the last university's proposal before the strike referendum was the other meeting publicized by the Committee, this time in conjunction with the Contract Committee.

(The strike vote was taken at the end of July and not in June as planned due to a sudden referendum held on whether the wage increase was to be an across the board or a percentage one, which delayed our strategy.)

At the July 29th meeting, the University's package was rejected, and our Committee put forward the following motions:

- A noon-hour mobilization on campus on Wednesday, August the 3rd., which would consist mainly on leafletting while marching towards a rallying point. (Defeated)
- The formation of a strike-support committee with the unions on campus and the Student Representative Assembly. (Passed)
- To continue with the publicity campaign and to expand it off campus. (Passed)
- To mail letters to the B.C. Federation of Labour, Vancouver District Labour Council, and other unions and women's groups, and arranging any possible joint actions with them. (Passed)
- Approval of all necessary printing expenses for the continuation of the Plan of Action up to a ceiling of \$2,000. (Passed)
- To subject the implementation of the benefit to the formation of a subcommittee at the meeting of July 29th itself. (Defeated)

After the meeting and while our members were answering the strike-vote ballots, the Strike Committee put up posters calling our members' attention on the need to defend our contract demands with a positive strike vote.

The strike vote results were 60% in favour and 40% against the motion of going on strike if necessary. This positive vote even though not very encouraging gave the Contract Committee enough bargaining position to settle most of the outstanding issues for at least what we had in the previous (75-76) contract, to reduce the duration of the proposed contract from two years to eighteen months, and to improve the wage increase to \$54 for the first year and \$37 for the following six months.

On August 11, when a general membership meeting was held to discuss the settlement the University and our Contract Committee had initialed, the Strike Committee was prepared for the case in which the University's package was again rejected. The motions were:

- To give 'strike notice.
- To issue a press communique.
- To hold a next general membership meeting the coming Tuesday August 16.
- To initiate rotative strikes if for the August 16 meeting we had not yet reached a settlement.

- To have a referendum held to authorize the assessment of a strike pay to be given to the members participating in the rotative strikes.

The above-mentioned motions were not presented because the membership approved the initialed settlement.

4) Preparation of a Possible Strike.

Although the possibility of an all-out strike was almost discarded from the beginning, we prepared the draft of a questionnaire to find out the best picketing times for every member. We also investigated on the busiest times of various departments on campus and the legal implications of giving strike notice.

We did not send the strike questionnaire before taking the strike vote, and we had to hold it until after the strike vote was over in order to avoid alarming our members while holding the strike referendum.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

On the election and composition of the Committee

1. Division representatives' elections should be encouraged as vital so that the Committee may function with all its members from the very beginning.
2. Communication between the Strike and Contract Committees should be maintained. However when getting closer to the definition of the contract negotiations, the Strike Committee should be strengthened with the participation of at least some representatives from the Contract and Executive Committees. This becomes especially crucial when the Strike Committee actually leads a strike.
3. The Strike Committee should always maintain itself as a Committee which consults with and responds to the union membership. It must not be regarded as the appendix or work-party of any other committee. We should bear in mind that organizing action in defense of the union's interests whether this action takes the form of publicity, rallies or an actual strike, is a heavy task which requires all the attention and energies of the Committee. The sooner the importance of the Strike Committee is recognized, the more effectively the Union will be able to succeed in the fight for its rights.

The reports of the Committee and the discussion of same must have priority in the agendas of general membership meetings. The motions presented by the Committee should be as clear and specific as possible to help promote discussion.

4. The holding of all-committees meetings for the taking of decisions and discussion of important issues in general has proved to be useful.
5. It would be convenient to change the name of the Committee from "Strike Committee" to "Action Committee", in order to avoid misunderstandings as to the aims of the Committee.

On the Functions of the Committee

As directed by the membership and trying to involve as many union members as possible, the Strike or Action Committee should give priority to the following areas:

1. Preparation of Strike Strategy.-- The actual implementation of a strike should be prepared ahead of time. The different aspects of this work such as alternate strike methods, organizational aspects (picket packets, office requirements, scheduling, etc.) and economical, legal, and disciplinary aspects should be distributed among the members of the Committee with plenty of time. The Strike or Action Committee should as early as possible go through past reports and material.

The bulk of the work to prepare the strike-strategy logistics should be done before the contract expires.

The strike questionnaires should be sent soon after negotiations begin in order to tabulate them without having to rush, in the case of a strike.

2. Publicity Work.-- It should start at the same time the contract expires. We should inform the general public, including students and faculty, on what AUCE is asking for and the response AUCE is getting from the University as well as ask for public support in form of letters, press communiques or other from individuals and organizations. Publicity should be developed on and off campus. Among other events, we should make sure to be present at every convention held on campus.

To carry out the publicity campaign, the Strike or Action Committee should prepare leaflets and posters. The organization of the leafletting and posterizing activities should start with the remittance of a publicity questionnaire to everyone of our members as soon as negotiations begin to find out the amount of time they

can provide and the type of publicity they prefer to work in. Their answers should be tabulated in diagrams that facilitate the phoning.

Publicity work has proved to be very useful because it makes the University Administration pay for every day of delay in the settling of our contract. The more our negotiations are delayed, the more people get informed about the unfairness of our situation and the more pressure the administration has to face.

Publicity is the best and only means of avoiding having to on strike. It shows the university what we are able to do well before going on strike, because it involves many of our members and prepares them to participate in further action, and because publicity by itself means pressure on the Administration which is always interested in maintaining a good image in front of the students and the public in general.

3. Establishment of links with other unions and women's organizations.- All unions and academic associations on campus as well as selected unions off campus should be kept informed on the state of our negotiations and the actions we are taking in relation with them. Regular letters accompanied by our leaflets and posters should ask for specific ways of support, such as their sending letters to the newspapers with copy to the Administration, their helping us distribute our literature, their joining us in the organization of an action, their respecting our picket lines, etc.

A strike-support committee should be formed on campus as soon as the date for a strike referendum is set or earlier. The Strike-Support Committee cannot only be useful during the strike but before one, to organize joint publicity or actions of protest.

The Strike-Support Committee should include representatives from the Students' Representative Assembly and should plan the ways in which students can support and intervene in a possible strike.

4. Membership Actions should be attempted whenever possible: Noon-hour rallies on campus, benefits, public meetings, demonstrations, etc.

5. Increase of our Strike Fund.- Plan different activities which may result in the collecting of money for the strike fund.

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