

# La CHISPA

**TSSU**  
TEACHING SUPPORT STAFF UNION  
**ISSU**  
**AUCE 6**

Make the tutorial system work! MARCH 1980



## AFFILIATION ISSUE

Recognizing the importance of being part of the mainstream of the labour movement in Canada, last summer's AUCE Convention voted to apply to the Canadian Labour Congress for affiliation.

The motion that the delegates passed specified that if the CLC refused to accept AUCE intact then a Special Convention should "be called to further discuss terms of affiliation with the CLC." The motion was phrased in this

way because delegates were aware that the CLC would likely refuse the application: the CLC protects the jurisdiction of existing affiliates and several unions with jurisdictions similar to AUCE's are already members.

Convention struck a committee to begin talks with the CLC, to report to the membership on the alternative ways of affiliating and to research and document the possibility of joining other labour organizations such as the

Confederation of Canadian Unions (CCU), the BC Federation of Labour (BC Fed.), etc.

When the Affiliation Committee met with William Smalley, Regional Director of the CLC, the anticipated refusal came. Mr. Smalley suggested that AUCE contact the three CLC affiliates with similar jurisdictions. If satisfactory terms could be worked out, AUCE might join one of those unions and, in this way, gain CLC membership. In response to a question about the possibility of lobbying for a special motion at a CLC Convention to admit us as we are, Smalley agreed that it was conceivable but would probably take a long time.

At this point, the committee began researching the range of options. The CLC affiliates include the Office and Technical Employees Union, the BC Government Employees Union and the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

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OTEU is an American-based union with over 100,000 members, about a fifth of whom work in Canada: the union represents office, technical and some professional employees and has two locals in BC. BCGEU is a provincially based union and represents about 46,000 employees in 140 locals. Among its members are support staff from PVI, BCIT, Douglas College, Northern Lights Community College. CUPE, a Canadian union founded in 1963, has 260,000 members including 10,000 in universities and colleges across the country.

Members of the Affiliation Committee have met with representatives from each organization and compiled reports on their structure, activities, and the terms under which AUCE would be considered

for merger or affiliation.

Similar information was gathered from several non-CLC bodies. The CCU, comprised of mainly private sector unions was founded in 1969 to fight "for a democratic labour movement that is completely controlled by the workers of our country." Posed as an alternative to the CLC, it currently has 30,000 members in 14 affiliated unions including the York University Staff Association. The CCU is prepared to accept AUCE intact and would require no constitutional changes.

Another possibility researched was a merger with the Service, Office and Retail Workers of Canada. SORWUC is an independent union formed by working women committed to organizing those occupations which have been ignored by the traditional trade unions. In the event that we should decide to join SORWUC, that union's executive has proposed a joint convention to discuss any problems and terms of merger.

The Affiliation Committee has made its findings available to the membership in a series of bulletins which can be obtained either from the AUCE Provincial office or from the TSSU office on campus.

The Committee's final task is to set up the Special Convention in the spring at which delegates from all the AUCE locals will discuss affiliation and frame the process whereby the decision will be made.

The membership of all the AUCE locals must decide whether to remain as we are or to become part of one of these other organizations. Since none of the courses of action are without risk, this is one of the most important moments in AUCE's history.

This issue of La Chispa is designed to promote the discussion and debate necessary to ensure that our decision will be an informed one.

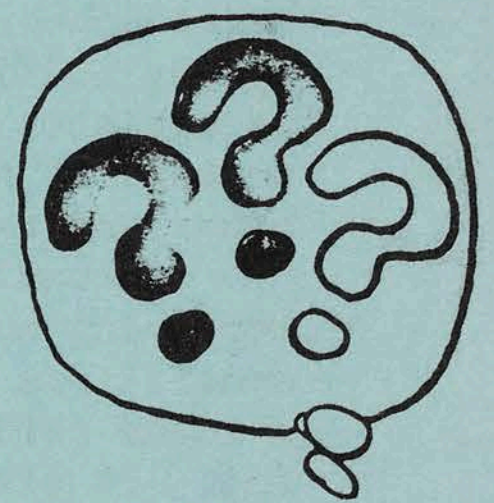
Michele Preston

This special edition of La Chispa is not intended to conclude the debate on affiliation but to promote it.

When we started to prepare this issue, we wanted to provide basic and impartial information about the various choices open to us and also give equal space to an advocate of each option. However, it became apparent that this project was utopian for two reasons: the amount of information available about other labour organizations was enormous and enormously varied in character; and we were unable to find an advocate for certain options within our bargaining unit in time for publication.

After lengthy discussion, we decided to collate and publish what we have and attach a kind of Welfare Canada warning that the danger of misrepresentation increases under these conditions. We undertake to publish letters, full advocacy statements and, indeed, any additional information before the Special Convention of Affiliation to be held in April and make every effort to give them the widest and earliest possible circulation.

If you have questions or criticisms after reading this La Chispa, please call the union office at 291-4735. We look forward to hearing from you.



# WHY SHOULD WE REMAIN AUCE ?

I am not opposed to affiliation with the CLC. I voted in favour of the motion to affiliate at the last AUCE convention, and despite its shortcomings, clearly understand the advantages of belonging to the "mainstream" of labour in Canada. However, the CLC has refused to affiliate AUCE and I do not think it is worth sacrificing the strengths of our union by merging it with another union - merely to gain admittance to the CLC. There are two sets of reasons for this position - the unique strengths of AUCE, and problems with merging. I shall first consider the features which I consider to be important within AUCE, and then look at the problems of merging with another union.

AUCE has a more democratic constitution than any other union being considered for merger. Whether it appears to us that membership participates in the running of the union or not, this is important. The potential for participation exists, and it will never be possible for a union leadership to force an unwilling membership into anything. The executive can be called to account for their actions at any time by the membership. While this may pose problems in times of crisis when leadership is needed, it is an important right to be maintained. And despite the apparent apathy and lack of involvement, there is a higher level of participation by members of AUCE than there is within most other unions.

Secondly, AUCE's policy of not employing business agents or other specialists to do the work required has a sound rationale, and has been successful. It prevents the development of a hierarchy within the union, and ensures that some rank and file union members are trained in union business - be it organising, negotiating, legal work or anything else. AUCE has been more adventurous, and has won precedent-setting LRB rulings, arbitrations etc far beyond the limits of their apparent strength. Because we are not restricted by the mainstream of labour, we are free to embark on projects which might otherwise be overruled. Because our members

have done most of their own work, more energy, care and dedication has gone into our struggles.

Finally, while AUCE has not spent a lot of time discussing women's issues at conventions, forming women's committees etc., our practice has shown a genuine commitment to women workers. The benefits derived from just one of our struggle - concerning maternity benefits - exceed empty resolutions passed at conventions. The importance of AUCE to all women within the labour movement is not merely the we have won equal pay for work of equal value, and good contracts for clerical workers - but many women have gained valuable experience within AUCE which sets an example to women and men in other unions.

The first point to be considered with reference to the problems of merging with another union is the position of our own bargaining unit. TSSU represents workers quite different from those in any other local of AUCE. Our bargaining unit members have always expressed a fear of being swallowed up, and coerced by other large and militant unions. Within AUCE it is relatively easy to demonstrate our independence from any other local, or union. Within any CLC union this would be less true. Further, CUPE is the only one of the three alternatives being considered which represents other teaching support staff, and they only represent two or three locals. In BC the only local is at UBC, and they are not yet certified. Thus the percentage of workers with similar interests and needs, even within CUPE, is very small. Our organising task within TSSU will be even more difficult if we become affiliated to a large trade union.

One of the unions being considered is BCGEU. The structure of the union could scarcely be more different from AUCE. It is a highly centralised union, which frankly admits that it does not encourage membership participation. The executive of BCGEU controls almost every aspect of each local's business - and even has to approve the way money is spent. The BCGEU offers the services of efficient business agents - in return for

total control of the union. I think that a merger with BCGEU would be totally inappropriate, not only for TSSU, but for any local of AUCE.

Another option would be OTEU - which is a more decentralised union. It is part of OPEIU - an international union, based in the US, but the Canadian section does retain some autonomy, and control of its finances. Each local of OTEU is autonomous, though subject to the limits of the international constitution - and the effect of that autonomy is that the union provides very little in the way of services to each local. For example, the strike pay from the international defence fund is only paid after the third week of a strike, and then is to a maximum of \$20.00 per week. So we would give up our independence for very little security.

The third option is CUPE. This presents fewer problems than the other union considered. It has substantial resources, guarantees strike pay of \$50.00 per week; provides extensive research and educational services. Each local is autonomous - but again this is subject to a national constitution, and the national executive has the right to place any local under trusteeship if they suspect corruption or policy contrary to CUPE policy. The most important point, however, is that per capita tax paid to the national body is \$6.60 (\$3.30 part time) per member per month - provincial dues and local dues are above this. If AUCE had been charging per capita tax at this rate, our resources would be much greater - and we would control the disbursement of them.

Apart from these specific concerns about individual unions, there are some general reasons for opposing the idea of merging with another union.

a. I am extremely sceptical about the availability of the vast resources of CLC, BCFED, District Labour Councils and individual unions to AUCE, even if we did merge. No organisation distributes money without strings attached. Mainstream labour would not be interested in our merger if they did not believe that it would enable them to control our activities.

b. AUCE has played a significant role in fighting for the rights of working women. I think that voice can be more effective outside conventional unions than it will ever be from within a paternalistic, male dominated union. And despite the presence of token women, all three unions under consideration fit this description.

c. While we face cutbacks by government and administrations which make our struggles more difficult - pressure is being placed on "mainstream" labour. The response of the CLC and many of its affiliates appears to be to clamp down on left wing elements within the unions. Thus any notion that AUCE will be able to reform CUPE or any other union from within seems unrealistic - particularly in the face of cutbacks.

If we do not merge with another union, several things could happen in the next few years. We could:

- a. continue to lobby the CLC, and its affiliates, and try to gain admittance as AUCE;
- b. affiliate with the CCU - a body of unions with principles and practices much closer to those of AUCE than any of the unions being considered for merger;
- c. continue to be independent of any other union or group of unions.

If we follow any one of these options, the worst thing that could happen, is that individual locals will be raided - and thus be merged with other unions on less favourable terms than those we could negotiate as a Provincial Association. It is my opinion that what we would lose by a voluntary merger is sufficiently great, to make that a chance worth taking.

I would urge every member of TSSU to consider carefully the issues involved before writing off AUCE as a viable union. I believe that AUCE has the potential to continue to be a valuable organisation within the labour movement in Canada, and that it would be a far more useful exercise in the next year to build a stronger union, than to negotiate a merger, in which we would inevitably give up a great deal, for dubious advantages.

Mary Mabin

# JOINING CUPE: RESOURCES & LOCAL CONTROL

We need to join CUPE (the Canadian Union of Public Employees) to be able to finish the job we have started. We need the resources and the experience of a national union to defend the interests of teaching support staff and the quality of education at Simon Fraser. The TAs at UBC made their decision to become a local of CUPE because they believed that only CUPE could offer them these resources and still give them the power to make their own decisions. It is time for us to make the same choice.

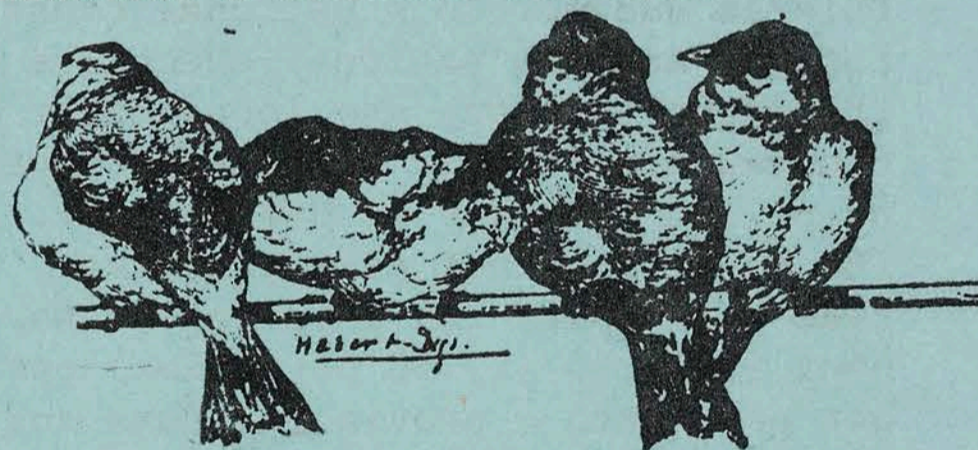
The TSSU was organized and became certified almost entirely through the efforts of volunteers. The work involved to bring us to this point has been enormous: corresponding with the Labour Relations Board to win the decision that gave us our 4% pay raise, drafting the contract proposals and negotiating with the Administration, fighting to prevent the sessional instructors in English 010 from being laid off have taken scores of hours of dedicated effort. We have made some very important gains since certification for people who work here: the Administration has made us an offer of a pay increase which recognizes that TAs with split Taships have to be compensated properly for their extra work, for example. And we are still determined to struggle for a limitation on tutorial size which would benefit not only our bargaining unit but thousands of students.



Recently, our meeting with the Administration and filing an unfair labour practice complaint helped to bring about the creation of two new lectureships in the English Department that can be used to ensure that the basic composition course is adequately staffed and open to students who really need it.

But in order to continue to press for these basic rights, we require the kind of back-up that a larger organization can provide: CUPE has the best research department of any union in Canada, they can afford legal advice and pay for arbitration when a local can't afford it. If we ever had to go on strike, we would be guaranteed between \$50 and \$100 per week strike pay. CUPE has printing services and people to staff them so that we could keep in closer touch with our members.

And, perhaps most important of all, employers know that CUPE has these resources and the determination to use them to secure proper working conditions for its members. If anything this makes the necessity for taking industrial action less likely because employers understand the strength of the union and, therefore, that is in their interests to conclude a contract and stick to it.



The SFU Administration has spent fourteen months so far talking about our contract. It is hard not to believe that, in some part of their minds, they hope that we will get tired and go away. The best way to dispel this illusion and get the contract signed is to become a local of CUPE. The Administration would understand that this was an unmistakeable signal of our determination to conclude an agreement and continue to defend our working conditions.

Of course there are other large unions we could join besides CUPE. But none of them has CUPE's democratic structure, none of them represent university teaching support staff and none of them would give us the opportunity of form-

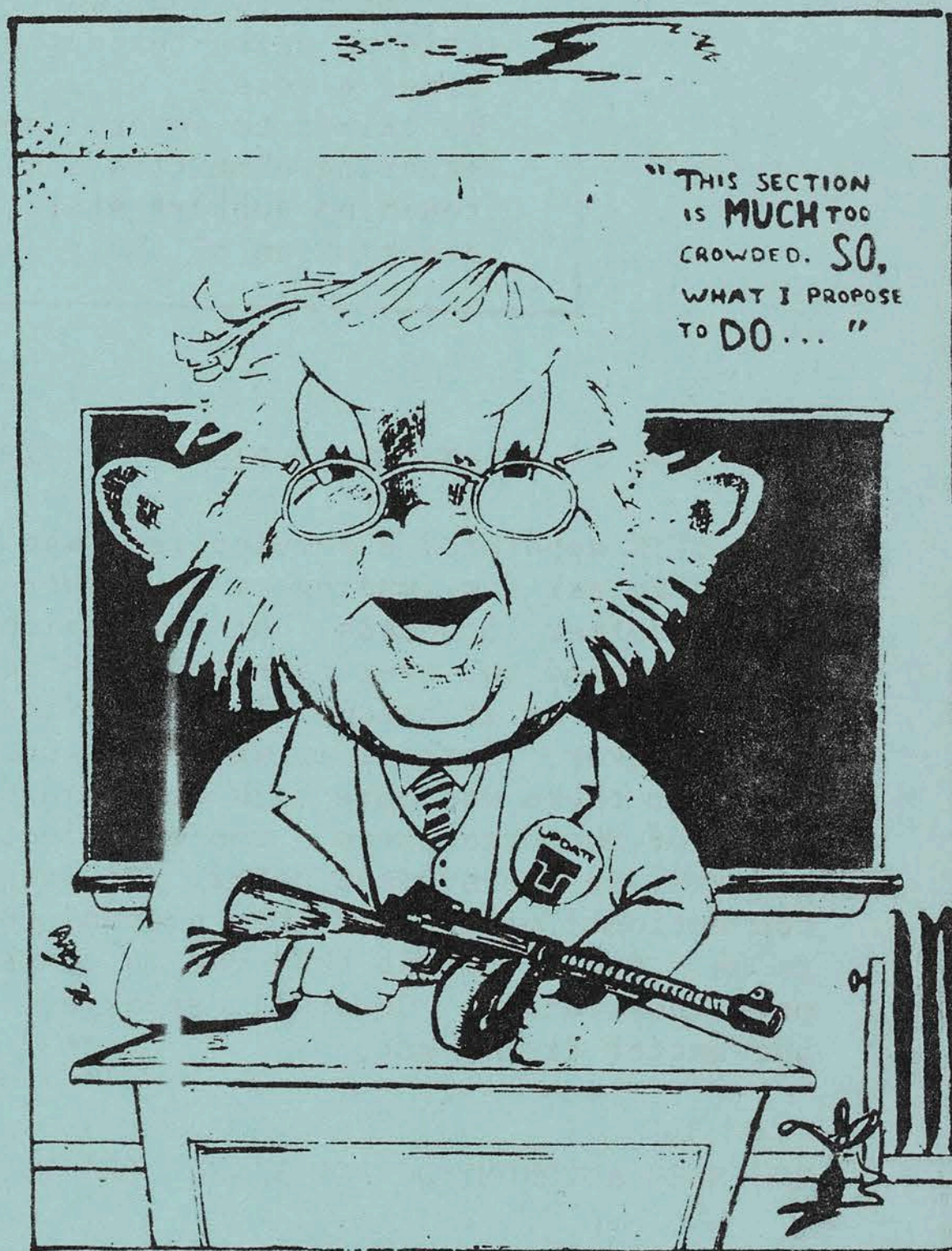
ing organizational links with other TAs across Canada.

The TAs at UBC were able to hire their own organizers, draw up their own contract proposals and write their own leaflets. CUPE is the only large organization that I am convinced would not "swallow" TSSU but also has the size, skills, strength and experience to turn our efforts so far into a working reality.

Finally, you often hear people say that teaching support staff are really "professionals" and either don't need or don't want a union. These people may be alive and well but they are living in the 19th century. The nature of work has changed dramatically for the majority of the population who are now in what used to be called "white collar" jobs. The largest growth area for unions in the last twenty years has been among people like us who have discovered that they need to protect their interests because no-one else is going to do it for them. As public sector cutbacks continue, everyone employed in education is going to feel the pinch; the only question is whether we feel it now or a year or so down the road when we are looking for a job or applying for a grant. We have to do something about the future now. Joining CUPE offers us that opportunity to act and plan ahead without losing control of our lives. To remain AUCE is like trying to bring back the past; to join the CCU (Canadian Confederation of Unions) would be to link up with an organization which has the same problems we have: too much to do and too few resources to get it done.

I hope the other AUCE locals vote to join CUPE so that we can stay together. But if they don't, we should join, get our contract and move on.

Mark Lushington.



# INTERVIEW:

## TA UNION AT UBC

The TA Union at UBC is Local 2278 of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). The union has recently filed an application for certification with the Labour Relations Board which has just accepted all the categories of employees they wanted included in the bargaining unit - except one - and is about to order a vote.

We talked to several members of the TA Union steering committee and asked them, as fellow teaching support staff, to give us a candid description of their experience with CUPE.

WHAT KIND OF RELATIONSHIP DID YOU ESTABLISH WITH CUPE IN THE INITIAL STAGES?

CUPE appointed a service rep. who was our major link with CUPE when we wanted to ask for funding or any other services. In addition to us, he serviced about another 15 locals. At the beginning our relationship with him wasn't particularly good but over time and with persistence it improved. It took a while to gel but as it became clear that the organizing drive was serious, things got a lot better. Part of it was a personal thing: we just didn't know each other. At first there was more talk about services than actual services but later CUPE paid for two organizers - who we selected - and for an answering service and adverts. in the student paper. We even sent drafts of posters and leaflets to the national office and they cleaned them up, printed them and shipped them back to us. And of course they put us in contact with lawyers when we needed them and paid their bills. Generally speaking, the longer the relationship has gone on, the better it has got.

HOW MUCH AUTONOMY DO YOU HAVE? CAN YOU REALLY MAKE YOUR OWN DECISIONS?

Well, the service rep. has no formal authority over us, he can't force us to do what we don't want to do. We have to follow the CUPE constitution of course but that allows plenty of room for democracy. Obviously if you had a passive local where nobody did anything or ever made a fuss - then the potential exists for just becoming a branch plant of the provincial division. Once we are certified we can begin to have input into CUPE, participate in the provincial and national conventions, in the elections for the National Executive, sponsor resolutions and so on. We are very interested - and so is CUPE - in setting up a national group of TA unions who are organized inside CUPE to meet, correspond, share common problems. CUPE's structure allows for this kind of network.


HAS BELONGING TO CUPE HELPED OR HINDERED YOUR DEALINGS WITH THE UBC ADMINISTRATION?

Definitely helped - though the administration still tries to mess us around. Knowing that there is a strike fund - about \$50 a week - even if we never have to use it, has given us confidence and made the administration more careful with us. At least we know if it ever came to that, we wouldn't be surviving on peanut butter sandwiches. If we had been a small, independent local like GAA (Graduate Assistants' Association in Ontario), things would have been much tougher.

HAVE YOU ANY COMMENTS ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE TSSU MIGHT VOTE TO JOIN CUPE?

Well, if TSSU members are worried about being swallowed by CUPE, they needn't. It is not a highly centralized trade union like some are. It is basically a federation of locals which have created centres to provide services. There is a lot of leeway within the constitution. For instance, the individual local generates its own contract proposals - of course, any strike vote is taken in the local. Because CUPE has this loose structure, it's really easy for different locals to fit in - and for other unions, like the TSSU, to make a deal. Notwithstanding the problems we have had, we recommend CUPE. If we had to do it all over again, we'd still go with CUPE.

And, finally, our thanks to the Affiliation Cttee.:



## TSSU Special Membership Meeting

- to elect delegates to  
Affiliation Convention
- to report on  
negotiations & mediation

BLUE ROOM

THURS. APRIL 3 AT 4:30

Please call TSSU now for daycare