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CHRONOLOGY OF THE UT STRIKE

This chronology prepared with files from the University of Toronto student newspaper, The Varsity.

1975 Teaching Assistant Union is formed. Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 3902 (CUPE 3902).

1989 First strike of almost 2 weeks.

1991 Second strike lasts 2 weeks.

STRIKE 2000

1997

In the last round of contract negotiations preceding those of 1999-2000, the University is facing massive cuts in provincial funding (see ACCESS 2000 articles elsewhere in this volume). In negotiations with all employment groups, the University's initial bargaining position is to ask all groups to take a 1.5% pay cut. In campus press, U of T president Robert Prichard declares the need for solidarity: everyone must pull together and give a little until the University could recover from the cuts. In the end, only the T.A.s take a pay cut (1.25%) while the staff association receives a raise and the faculty receive a raise and a pension contribution holiday. President Prichard receives a 7% raise.

June 1999 A new round of contract negotiations begins.

Aug 1 The existing contract expires.

Mid-Oct The Union applies to the Ministry of Labour for a mediator. The first meeting is scheduled for Nov 1.

Oct 28-Nov 4 The vote to strike gives the Union a clear mandate to strike. Voter turnout on the three campuses is the largest ever: more than 1200.

Nov 15 A representative of the Ministry of Labour issues a No Board Report, setting in motion the process for a strike and/or lockout. A No Board Report, filed at the request of a conciliator, indicates the two sides have been unable to come to an agreement. On the 17th day after a No Board is issued, the union is legally able to go on strike and the administration, to lock out. The union could go on strike as early as Dec. 2 at 12.01 a.m.

Nov 23 Membership meeting is held to set a strike date. Dec 22 is selected as the strike deadline, with pickets to go up on Jan 3 in the event that there is no agreement.

MEANWHILE Negotiations are also continuing with other several other bargaining units on campus.

Campus service workers, represented by CUPE 3261, will be in a legal strike position on Dec 27. Another unit representing OISE/UT's 182 graduate assistants (G.A.s) breaks off its own talks with the administration Dec. 9 and could also be in a legal position to strike by January. By Jan 6, a total of two unions will be in a legal strike position and three more will have a strike mandate.

Dec 7 The Students' Administrative Council (student government) organizes holds an information session for undergraduates. Professor Ian Orchard, vice-provost and the Union's liaison officer Stephen Pender debate the merits of their respective positions for 2 hours.

Dec 13 The Union files its first unfair labor practice complaint.

Dec 17-20 Mediated talks.

Dec 21 Union announces the postponement of strike plans pending a membership meeting after the return to classes from the winter holidays.

Friday Jan 7, 2000. STRIKE. Mediation fails and the Union decides to strike; the University locks out the T.A.s. The administration declares a disruption to the academic program and announces that contingency plans are being formulated (likely to include the cancellation of some courses).

300 attend a rally in support of the strike, organized by the new Campus Strike Support Committee, a coalition of students, professors, university staff, and union members (including members of the OISE/UT Graduate Assistants' union and CUPE 3621, the service workers' union). University of Toronto Faculty Association (UTFA) president Bill Graham and national president of CUPE Judy Darcy speak at the rally. Pickets are set to go up on Monday Jan 10.

Mon Jan 10 Pickets go up. Union's media campaign goes into gear.

Jan 12 First reports of "scabs" being hired to do work that would have been contracted to striking TAs (e.g. language teaching).

Jan 14 Over 30 courses are cancelled.

The Task Force on Graduate Student Financial Support is finally formed. (This Task Force will be a key to the later settlement. See update from the Task Force's union rep, David Goutor elsewhere in this section).

Now weekly Friday rally draws 600. Present are Sid Ryan, general vice-president of CUPE, and leader of the provincial New Democratic Party, Howard Hampton.

Jan 18 The University announces "course restructuring" plans, to be implemented if no agreement is reached by Feb 4. Courses would be "restructured" to run without T.A.s, effectively firing the T.A.s. The plans are widely seen as constituting strike breaking and union busting.

Jan 19 President Prichard receives a letter from Canadian Auto Workers' Union president Buzz Hargrove. "The administration's response to the union's [CUPE 3902] demands, and the subsequent lockout has been shameful," the letter read

Jan 20 Ministry mediator calls both sides back to the table.

Jan 21 News conference and Friday rally. CUPE's Judy Darcy is present for the second time. Also present is president of CUPE 1230, a library workers' union, and president of CUPE 3261, the service workers' union. This day is also the strike deadline for Graduate Assistants (GAs) at OISE (CUPE 3907).

MEANWHILE supportive coverage in major media (radio, TV, newspapers) and campus media is rising. 154 faculty issue an open letter that expresses "deepening dismay" at the administration's handling of the labor dispute, protests restructuring plans and calls on the administration to bargain in good faith. (The full text of this letter and others from high-profile figures are online at CUPE 3902's website at www.cupe3902.org.) Other letter writers include University Professor Richard Lee, University Professor Emerita Ursula Franklin FRSC, and Margaret Atwood. Media coverage builds to unusually strong and sustained levels and has showed no signs of decline at strike's end. Letters

Jan 24 Mediated talks are broken off by the Union before they can get under way. In bad faith, the administration has come back with the same offer rejected by the membership in Dec. Further, the administration not only maintains the course "restructuring" deadline of Feb 4, but establishes Feb 1 as the deadline for the Union to accept its offer and avert "restructuring."

Jan 25 CUPE lawyers file two new unfair labor practice complaints. The union cites, among other things:

∕The university's threat to essentially fire all of the TAs if no deal is reached by February 4. Such action would be in direct violation of the province's labour laws, which clearly state that employers cannot cancel work as a result of a legal strike or lock out.

∕The university's tabling of an offer in mediated contract talks this week that was actually inferior to their last offer, also in contravention of the Act.

∕The university's threat to cancel at least 50 courses before the lock out even began.

∕Their refusal to address the central issue of tuition rebates because they would not benefit all graduate students.

President Pritchard receives a call from CAW president Buzz Hargrove .

OCCUPATION. On January 25, 300+ striking T.A.s and supportive undergrads occupy Hart House, blocking attendees of an awards ceremony, including president Pritchard, from leaving. The group spontaneously enters Hart House after picketing outside to protest the presentation of a teaching award to professors of a biology course that makes extensive use of TAs. Angry at the continuation of teaching "business as usual," the protesters demand to speak with president Pritchard, who refuses and is hissed as he leaves three and half hours later at the peaceful end of the protest. Three members of the local subsequently receive letters indicating the administration will undertake proceedings for their academic expulsion. (For article and photo, see "Angry TAs Occupy Hart House" in the Jan 27 campus newspaper The Varsity, available free online at www2.varsity.utoronto.ca/groups/varsity/archives/)

Jan 27 Margaret Atwood sends a withering letter to President Pritchard. She receives wide coverage and speaks to the issues in television interview.

This Friday's rally - in which students attempt to create a "student wall of debt" where students sign their names with the amount of debt they had incurred as a result of their university studies - is shut down by campus police. Police videotape participants.

A NEW ROUND OF BARGAINING is opened in the evening.

Jan 30 A tentative agreement is announced after four days of grueling mediated talks. Reactions are mixed, with many disappointed by the deal. For summary, see "TAs Go Back to the Grind" in the Varsity, Feb 7 (www2.varsity.utoronto.ca/groups/varsity/archives/). The full text of the agreement will be available shortly at CUPE 3902's website at www.cupe3902.org. For analysis see the relevant articles in this section.

Feb 1 On the eve of the administration's course restructuring deadline, the Bargaining Committee presents the agreement to the membership. Heated discussion continues for hours. Those in disagreement wonder what happened. From their perspective, there was no reason to settle without achieving the major goal of tuition relief. Morale on the lines was strong, even building. Media coverage was holding strong. The picket lines were about to be joined by the thousands assembling in Toronto on Feb 2 for ACCESS 2000, a nation-wide day of protest against cuts to education. On the other side, the threat of irrecoverable job loss (restructuring) was real, as was the even greater threat of the local's decertification. Media coverage and public support are always unpredictable (how much longer could it last?). For further arguments, see Bargaining Committee member Mikael Swayze's essay in this section.

Feb 2 Ratification vote succeeds on the 2-yr contract. The contract receives 62% vote with high participation.

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