

Problématique

Journal of Political Studies
Revue d'études politiques

An annual publication of the York Graduate Political Science Students' Association

Editorial Collective:

Julie Dowsett
Geoff Kennedy

Sean Saraka
John Simouldis

Critical Readers:

Traver Alexander
Tuna Baskoy
John Cameron
Jonathan Carson
Dan Crow
Deepika Grover

Daniel Kinderman
Marnie Lucas-Zerbe
Stacey Mayhall
Peter Nyers
Stephanie Ross
Christine Saulnier

Submissions For Volume VIII:

Problématique is a journal of politics, culture and society. Three hard copies and an electronic version of papers should be submitted to the below mailing address by February 15, 2002. Submissions should be in either English or French and should not exceed 8000 words. Reviews should not exceed 2000 words. Papers should be free of sexist, racist, homophobic and other forms of oppressive language.

Contributions do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editorial collective or others associated with the journal.

Full instructions for authors are available at the Problématique website:
www.gpssa.org (follow the links)

Mailing Address:

Problématique, c/o Department of Political Science
York University
4700 Keele Street
Toronto, Ontario
M3J 1P3

E-mail Address:
problema@yorku.ca

All Rights Reserved. All Wrongs Reversed.
Copyright © 2001 by Problématique
ISSN No. 1181-7488

Cover photo by Julie Dowsett

Number 7 Fall 2001 CONTENTS

Editorial:	CUPE'S Winter of Content	2
Chris Roberts:	Full Marks For Participation? Democratic Organization And The Cupe 3903 Strike At York	8
Tammy Findlay and Sabine Hikel:	Democracy On The Line: Reflections On Gender and the CUPE Strike	40
Marsha Niemeijer:	To Be On Strike	68
Julian Ammirante:	Democratic Transitions In Comparative Perspective	83
Cameron D. Bodnar:	Reconsidering The Private	108
REVIEWS		
Murray Cooke:	Walter Stewart, M.J.: <i>The Life And Times Of M.J. Coldwell</i>	145
Gavin Fridell:	David Ransom, <i>The No- Nonsense Guide To Fair Trade</i>	150
Geoff Kennedy:	James Holstun, <i>Ehud's Dagger: Class Struggle In The English Revolution</i>	154
David Friesen	Marshall Berman, <i>Adventures in Marxism</i>	160

EDITORIAL: CUPE'S WINTER OF CONTENT

Contract negotiations between York University and CUPE local 3903 had, for years, been characterized by a certain brinkmanship. The education cuts of the Ontario Progressive Conservatives' 'Common Sense Revolution' had made collective bargaining increasingly difficult for the union, with successive collective agreements being reached literally hours before pickets were to go up. Yet, on 26 October 2000—after months of stalled negotiations due to employer intransigence—approximately 2000 contract faculty, teaching assistants and research assistants walked off the job and formed picket lines around York University in what would be the longest university strike in English-speaking Canada.

After 11 weeks of picketing in order to save existing protection against tuition increases, to gain greater job security for contract faculty and to attain a fair and equitable first contract for research assistants, CUPE 3903 returned to work victorious. How did CUPE 3903 manage a victory where their counterparts at the University of Toronto were defeated less than a year earlier? Many different factors played a role in determining CUPE's ability to shut down York University and maintain picket lines through what would be an extremely bitter winter.

The balance of political forces seemed to be in CUPE's favour. Years of establishing and maintaining strong linkages of solidarity with faculty members, senate members and the York University Faculty Association provided CUPE with much needed leverage at the institutional level. Crucial to the union's victory was the ability to prevent students

from attending classes. Existing senate policies ensured students' rights to not cross picket lines, and allowed faculty members to cancel classes if they believed that the quality of their courses were compromised due to labour strife. While the distribution of student and faculty support was concentrated largely in the Arts and Social Sciences, it was strong enough to disrupt to day-to-day functioning of the university.

Just as important was the support that CUPE received from the Senate. Being the top governing body of the university regarding academic matters, the Senate played a crucial role in preventing the President and the bargaining team from acting in unilateral ways in order to undermine the strike. When the winter term was normally scheduled to begin in January, President Marsden attempted to go over the heads of Senators by calling for all students and faculty members to return to classes. In doing so, the President overstepped her authority and incurred the wrath of not only CUPE supporters, but also moderate senators within the senate. Within days of her decree, CUPE was back to work with a victorious collective agreement.

Although these external factors were important in CUPE's ability to win the strike, they weren't the only ones. First and foremost, CUPE 3903 is a unique union in its ability to mobilize its membership around important work related issues. Years of negotiating under the pretense of the inevitability of striking provided its members with valuable experience in reaching out to new and current members and informing them of strike related issues, despite the high turnover of members characteristic of university work at the graduate level.

This mobilizing strength allowed the union to maintain the militant dynamics of the picket lines, even in sub-zero weather. But is also enabled the union to overcome some of the harder line tactics of the administration, such as the forced ratification vote that was called on 14 December. Playing on the fear and fatigue of union members, the administration sought to force the union to accept an offer that it would have clearly rejected had it been tabled within the first few weeks of picketing. However, despite these tactics, a solid majority of members rejected the offer and returned to the picket lines, knowing that they would then be picketing well into January.

But what is meant by the mobilizing strength of the union? Chris Roberts argues that the strike exposed some of the structural weaknesses of the union, in terms of its mobilizing ability. However, this structural weakness was compensated for by what he calls organic ties of solidarity based upon a collective commitment to issues of social justice and equality. The problem that remains is one of linking the organic ties of a broad layer of activists with a stronger structural basis for mobilizing the broader membership that would provide a basis for future mobilizations.

Following up on this notion of the limits to union democracy during the strike, Tammy Findlay and Sabine Hikel look at three of the ways in which the gendered dimensions of the strike served to undermine democracy. First, they discuss the division of labour on the picket line and in the union office. Second, they examine discourse surrounding time use and how this relates to constructions of "militancy" and the "worker." Finally, they look at problems

that stemmed from the local's use of a decentralized decision-making process. Findlay and Hikel conclude their paper with a series of recommendations for strengthening CUPE 3903 and its democratic process.

Our final strike submission is not a critical assessment of the strike, but rather a series of personal reflections of what it is like to be on strike as a member of the union executive. Marsha Niemeijer was our first chief steward for the newly formed Unit 3 (research and graduate assistants) and had spent the previous year as part of the organizing drive for the certification of this unit. Here she reflects on the personal stresses involved in organizing a strike, as well as the politics involved in being a member of the union executive.

The last two submissions do not relate to the strike at all. Julian Ammirante's review essay of the literature on democratic transition argues that the dominant theoretical perspectives remain as constrained in their understanding of the current transitions as the older 'bureaucratic-authoritarian' models of the 1970s were of previous transitions. Consequently, fundamental questions regarding the political economy of transition are theorized away. Cam Bodnar's piece explores the relationship between the public and private spheres from a perspective that utilizes Connolly's conception of the public/private split as a porous universal. Bodnar argues that the notion of 'status equality' is a useful way to foster individual and collective self-development due to its sensitivity to non-economic inequalities.

This volume would not have come into existence without the help of many people. In particular, we would like to

thank the critical readers for their feedback, Duncan Moench for his work on the final stages of editing and layout, and Veeresh Narain for helping us unravel the mysteries of publishing software. We are also grateful to the Academic Initiatives Committee of the Department of Political Science, the Faculty of Graduate Studies, the Graduate Student's Association as well as the Vice-President Academic, all of York University, for their generous financial support.

The Editorial Collective

