Bread & Butter Battle at the Grad School

By Jeremy S. Bluhm

BREAD AND butter questions involving scholarships and tuition became political issues in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences this Spring, following the School's announcement in March that a special scholarship program for teaching fellows would not be continued past the end of this academic year.

The decision to abolish the scholarship program struck a sensitive nerve in the graduate student body. In response to the announcement, a group of teaching fellows and non-teaching graduate students voted to form a union, whose membership eventually grew to 1169--out of a total of 2785 graduate students.

Besides a demand that the teaching fellows' scholarship program be retained, the union has also demanded recognition as the graduate students' sole bargaining agent, the cancellation of a planned tuition increase for third-year students, a guarantee of financial support for all graduate students through their fifth year at Harvard, and a full, detailed disclosure of the University's operating budget.

The union held two "work stop-pages" this Spring--one a day long, the other lasting two days--to draw attention to its demands. It came close to striking in support of them. A formal motion to strike won more than 50 per cent support from both teaching fellows and non-teaching graduate students in the union. Under the union's constitution, however, a 60 per cent mandate from both groups is necessary for a strike vote to pass.

THE SCHOLARSHIP program whose abolition led to the formation of the union provided tuition support for all teaching fellows who lacked "outside"--federal or foundation--fellowship support and whose income was less than $6000 ($9000 joint income in the case of married students).

This year, 630 of the University's 1156 teaching fellows received these scholarships, which were called Staff Tuition Scholarships (STS).

R. Victor Jones, new this year as dean of the Graduate School, announced the abolition of the STS program in a letter sent to all graduate students on March 8. He stressed that this did not mean a reduction in Harvard's contribution to graduate student support. The $800,000 taken from the STS program would be added to the School's general scholarship budget for distribution by departments, he wrote.

Jones's letter also discussed the drastic decline in outside aid for graduate students which began in 1969-70. By 1973-74, annual outside aid is expected to have fallen more than $2.5 million from the 1970-71 level, he noted, commenting that Harvard could not possibly make up the difference.

Because of the reduction in funds, the Graduate School would have to develop a new approach to financial aid which emphasizes need as well as merit, he said.

In his letter, Jones called the STS program inequitable and unmanageable, but gave only one minor example
in his letter of the program's failings.

From an administrative perspective, the chief danger of the program was that it tended to expand as outside fellowship support declined.

**BECAUSE TUITION** charges and abatements were greater for first and second year students than for students past their second year, he program encouraged departments to appoint more of the new students as teachers; because students without outside support became eligible for support when appointed as teaching fellows, the program encouraged departments to divide up their teaching assignments among more and more of their students.

Jones has argued that these tendencies have had unhealthy educational repercussions. For instance, the tendency for the least experienced students to be hired as teachers. In fact, he commented last week that department chairmen, too, have expressed concern about these inherent tendencies. But undoubtedly of equal importance in the decision to abolish the program were the increasing costs associated with these tendencies.

The program was financially unmanageable for one other reason. As outside fellowship support was withdrawn, teaching fellows who lost their outside support became eligible for STS aid.

In order to combat these tendencies, Jones and the Faculty committee responsible for graduate aid policies decided to abolish the program and allocate its funds for distribution by the departments.

In this way, the departments would be prevented from taking further advantage of the program to increase their scholarship funds. They would also be required to find some way to allocate the existing total of funds to make up for the reduction in the outside aid received by teaching fellows.

**ABOUT 200 GRADUATE** students attended a meeting with Jones which took place five days after Jones sent out the letter announcing the decision. Many of them angrily attacked the abolition of the STS program as a cut in pay for teaching fellows.

Jones agreed several times that the scholarships should be viewed as part of teaching fellows' salaries, but stressed that there had been no reduction in the funds available for scholarships for teaching fellows.

"*If the system works well, there should not be a salary cut,*" he said.

A salary cut was inevitable, however. Even if all $800,000 from the STS program were distributed to teaching fellows, this amount would not have been enough to cover all the demands for aid from this group, given the loss of outside aid to some teaching fellows.

Students at the meeting were concerned with a different problem. Many of them doubted that teaching fellows would receive the full amount that had been allotted to them this year through the STS program.

Some graduate students said that their departments were receiving less money for teaching fellows' scholarships next year than teaching fellows in those departments had received this year and others predicted that their departments would use the money to support incoming students.

Most of those who spoke expressed a deep distrust of the arrangements that had been worked out to replace the STS program. "All we know is that you're taking money away from teaching fellows and that we may or may not be getting it back," one student said.

**SEVERAL STUDENTS** also criticized Jones angrily during the meeting for his failure to consult the graduate students before the decision was made to abolish the STS program.
His explanation was that there had been a "time problem." But he has also noted that it was difficult to find a representative group from the graduate student body to consult.

Last week he noted that the Graduate Student Association had called a meeting in December to discuss financial aid policies, in the light of reports that a major change was being considered. "I think that something like three students showed up at that meeting," he said.

But at the March meeting, one student stated that he belonged to a committee, chaired by Jones, which had been set up to discuss Graduate School problems. Jones had never called a meeting of the committee, he said.

At the end of the meeting with Jones, 156 of the 200 students present remained behind and voted to form a union. Two days later, at another meeting, 435 students ratified the formation of the union and passed the demands for recognition, retention of the STS program, cancellation of the third-year tuition increase, and full disclosure of the University's operating budget.

In demanding the retention of the STS program, the students specified that maintenance of teaching fellows' "real income" not come at the expense of other graduate student aid, undergraduate scholarships, the pay of non-academic personnel at Harvard, or through increased teaching loads.

**THE DEMAND** for full disclosure of the University's budget was designed to guarantee that this stipulation is observed and also to generate debate over Harvard's spending priorities.

Among union members there is a widespread feeling that, through the abolition of the STS program, the increased third-year tuition, and other measures, the University is attempting to solve its financial problems by "tightening its belt around graduate students' necks."

The formation of a union is seen by these students as necessary as a way of preventing the University and Faculty administrations from taking advantage of the otherwise weak and disorganized graduate student body.

In light of the fact that Harvard has not reduced its contribution to graduate aid while outside funding has declined drastically, it might be fairer to say that it is the federal government and the foundations--not Harvard--which are tightening the noose on the Graduate School.

Members of the union, however, have argued that Harvard's expenditures on new buildings and athletics--to name two examples which have been cited--and its policy of reinvesting current income in the University endowment reveal a general lack of commitment to education--graduate education included.

And many argue that it is unjust to reduce teaching fellows' income while the income of Faculty members remains the same.

Union leaflets have questioned why the University was going ahead with plans to build the Science Center in 1968-9 when the report of the Wolff Committee on the Future of the Graduate School, issued in the same year, called for a reduction in the size of the graduate enrollment.

**THE WOLFF** Committee's recommendation was not based on financial considerations, however, but on a judgment that the graduate enrollment had grown too large in proportion to the size of the Faculty--the excess of graduate students was hurting graduate student morale, according to the committee. The decline in outside support did not begin until the academic year after the committee issued its report.

Clearly acting in response to pressure from the union, the Faculty Committee on Fellowships and Other Aids for Graduate Students--the committee which had decided to abolish the STS program--decided in late March
to institute a new tuition abatement program for teaching fellows, with abatements based on a "careful assessment of an individual student's financial need." Dean Dunlop pledged to make available any necessary funds in excess of $800,000 which were required for the program.

Both the Committee and Dunlop also said that the Graduate School's tuition policies should be reviewed.

Representatives of the union, who had begun discussions with the Faculty Council, were invited to discuss the need criteria of the new tuition abatement program with the Committee on Fellowships.

But after seeing the tentative alternatives being considered by the committee, the union representatives walked out of the discussions, stating that the proposals were "unacceptable, insulting, and no ground for further discussion."

THE ALTERNATIVE most favored by the committee was based on a standard "budget" of $2500 a year for single students and $4000 a year for married students. As first presented, it would have effectively taxed away the last $500 in earnings of a teaching fellow earning $3000, since it would reduce his or her abatement by whatever extra income he had in excess of $2500.

The program would also force students to exhaust their bank accounts by the time they received their degree--an objectionable requirement to Ph.D. candidates facing a glutted job market.

The Committee on Fellowships has since modified the program so that the first $1000 of a student's bank account is exempt, as is all teaching income up to $3000.

As teaching fellow appointments are made for next year, the Graduate School has begun sending out letters to students informing them what their abatements will be for next year. Many students will receive full abatements under the program. Many will probably receive somewhat less than under the STS program, and some--who just barely missed eligibility and received nothing under that program--will receive something under this one.

Jones called the new program a "lame duck Staff Tuition Scholarship system" in a conversation last week. He noted that some of the conflicts which made the STS program both unmanageable and educationally undesirable still exist in the new program.

JONES SAID HE thought a more manageable program might meet the needs of more students. "If one has to speed a good deal more money, I'd prefer that we sit down and try to solve as many problems as we can," he remarked.

The tuition abatement program is "a kind of blunderbuss arrangement," he said. "It doesn't provide anywhere near the level of help you can give," he added, speaking of help for graduate students as a group, not teaching fellows alone.

Jones's view of graduate aid as an administrative problem is clearly different from the view of the union. The union regards the Staff Tuition Scholarships as part of teaching fellows' pay and not subject to redistribution through the scholarship system, More generally, it perceives graduate issues as subjects for negotiation, not administrative solution.

Looking back over the Spring. Jones said that, though he felt the Staff Tuition Scholarship system was "the wrong system," he had taken a cautious view of "what the community would accept, how fast you can change things."

"There was a feeling in the Committee on Fellowships that it was a sufficiently bad system and maybe we
ought to be bolder," he commented. "Ultimately, I think that was the right course of action," he said.

As its last meeting in May, the Faculty passed a motion to establish a graduate student-Faculty commission to review graduate aid issues next year, but rejected two other motions, which would have continued the STS program for one year and provided support for all non-teaching graduate students who have lost outside aid while the commission's review is in progress.

**THE MOTIONS** were proposed by Stanley L. Cavell, Cabot Professor of Aesthetics and the General Theory of Value.

Against his proposal on continuing the STS program, James S. Duesenberry, Maier Professor of Money and Banking and a member of the Committee on Fellowships, argued that the new tuition abatement program is more equitable than the STS program and the changeover to it should not be delayed.

Members of the Graduate Student and Teaching Fellows' Union--who listened to the meeting over WHRB--were angered by the rejection of the two motions and attempted to stop Faculty members leaving the meeting in order to read them a statement.

When many of the Faculty refused to stop, union members linked arms to prevent them from leaving. A few minor scuffles ensued as Faculty members attempted to ram through the circles.

Barbara Herman, an active member of the union this Spring, commented last week that the union's experiences following its decision in April not to strike demonstrated the futility of depending on legalistic means like Faculty resolutions for solving its problems.

She stressed the importance for the union of remaining active next year, since reviews will be occurring then not only of the tuition abatement program for teaching fellows, but of tuition policy and of teaching fellows' workloads.

Dean Dunlop has written to members of the union expressing interest in "establishing procedures by which further discussions can be fruitfully carried forward" with them on the subjects of graduate tuition, need criteria, and teaching workloads.

**THE UNION** last week rejected his overtures, stating, "The only type of meeting which we would consider is one in which we meet as a recognized union for purposes of collective bargaining."

Dunlop, a labor expert and seasoned negotiator, has stated that he thinks collective bargaining is out of place in an academic community.

To the union, however, the need of graduate students to be represented by a recognized union is a central assumption, not something peripheral to its other matters of concern.