Union Bests Dunlop

Press Tacks

By Dan Swanson,

WHEN JOHN T. DUNLOP is not keeping watch over the Faculty of Arts and Science, he wings his way around the country mediating labor management disputes. Dunlop in considered the nation's foremost labor theoretician and negotiator. Last Spring, when teaching fellows irate because of an abruptly announced change in financial aid policy formed the Graduate Student and Teaching Fellow Union, they anticipated sparring with a canny and skilled adversary.

But Dunlop has not quite lived up to their expectations. Two vital student-Faculty committees that will have much to say about future policies at the GSAS began meeting last week. All twelve student representatives are members of the Union's Steering Committee and are dedicated to advancing the Union's policies. Union strength on the Committee on Graduate Education and the Commission on Graduate Education exists despite Dunlop's strenuous attempts to minimize the organization's influence. The man who has skillfully wheeled and dealed with industrial barons and hard-boiled trade union leaders has been outfoxed by a bunch of amateur academics.

The dispute between the Union and the GSAS administration was one of a host of issues that sparked activist activity last Spring, but it was the issue with which Dunlop was most directly concerned. The Gulf stock embroglio was handled by President Bok and the whiz kids in Mass Hall, but the dispute in the GSAS fell directly into Dunlop's lap. The Dean pursued a dual strategy: without officially recognizing the Union or responding to its demands publicly, Dunlop moved behind the scenes to minimize its strength. Special committees to study the problem' were formed, formerly moribund committees were re-activated, and a raft of financial tables purporting to prove the necessity of the change in aid policy floated out of University Hall. All the while, Dunlop refused to admit that his actions were prompted by the Union's existence. For example, at 11 p.m. on the eve of the first of the Union's two successful work stoppages. Dunlop released a series of financial tables disclosing the stringency besetting the Faculty budget. Asked whether the release of the information had anything to do with the imminent work stoppage. Dunlop serenely replied that the tables were only meant "to satisfy requests for financial information from many individuals and groups."

IN THE END, one of Dunlop's moves paid off. The Committee on Fellowships and Other Aid (CFOA) released an interim proposal for graduate aid that placated enough Union members and sympathizers so that Union growth leveled off and a strike vote taken in May narrowly failed.

The Union had rapidly coaleced following an abrupt March announcement by R. Victor Jones, former dean of the GSAS, that the Staff Tuition Scholarship program was being phased out. The STS provided tuition rebates to teaching fellows, who comprise between one-third and one-half of the graduate population. As the Nixon recession induced a precipitous decline in outside aid for perennially impoverished graduate students, students increasingly turned to the STS program to satisfy their financial needs. Jones's announcement
consequently upset many teaching fellows, who knew a long-standing source of assistance was being taken away and were fearful of not getting it back in the Fall.

In April, the CFOA released an interim proposal that substituted a Tuition Abatement program for the STS and pledged to maintain the same level of aid--$800,000 for teaching fellows as a group--for the '72-73 academic year. Jones had initially announced that funds for teaching fellows would be distributed by the individual departments: the CFOA recommended that tuition abatements be administered centrally, thus further reassuring teaching fellows wary of change. The report concluded by advising that the entire financial aid structure of the GSAS be reconsidered at a later date, prompting hopes among moderate graduate students that their fears would be allayed.

The CFOA report worked. Union membership, which had been climbing astronomically, slowed and then leveled off and a strike vote taken in May--which would have crippled the University--narrowly failed. The militant leadership on the Union's Steering Committee was increasingly isolated from the more moderate membership, whose concern rested more with financial issues than with social issues.

DUNLOP FINISHED the Spring term virtually unscathed, but the Union still posed a potential problem of large proportions. He worked over the summer to minimize the threat. Victor Jones, whose inept performance as dean of the GSAS had exacerbated the Spring's difficulties, resigned in late summer. Dunlop installed in his stead Edward T. Wilcox, a personable man who had been friendly to the Union during his tenure as director of the General Education program. Dunlop also sent Regina Kyle, assistant professor of English, on a cross-country junket to research the problems of teaching fellows at other universities, and prepared for the Union's fall organizing drive, hopeful that the tuition abatement program would limit Union strength.

Union strategists realized that the financial issue was their strongest suit, and opened the hostilities in September by claiming that the new program was providing insufficient aid. On the basis of a survey taken at GSAS registration they alleged that teaching fellows as a group were receiving $250,000 less aid under the new program. Hoping to repeat the Jones debacle of last March, they sent several strongly-worded letters to Dean Wilcox requesting his presence at a public meeting to explain the alleged discrepancy. Union organizers hoped that enough teaching fellows would feel a financial pinch from the new program to swell the Union's ranks once again.

By mid-October, it became apparent that the Union had drastically miscalculated. Attendance at its meetings fell to 30 or so from Spring peaks of 500 to 600. Wilcox released a preliminary report in mid-October that explained the Union's weaknesses. Wilcox told the Faculty that teaching fellows as a group were indeed receiving less money than last year under the new program (he estimated the difference at about $100,000) but attributed the smaller total to the declining number of teaching fellows. His figures implied that fewer graduate students were teaching fewer sections, although the remaining teaching fellows were receiving rebates in comparable proportions to the STS abatements of last year. Larger sections for undergraduates were taking up the financial slack. Although teaching fellows might eventually complain about the overwork presented them by larger classes, the issue was not as immediate as the size of a tuition abatement.

UNION ORGANIZERS PROPOSED two strategies to meet this problem. A confrontational wing of the Steering Committee continued to attempt to smoke out either Wilcox or Dunlop, planning to organize after their hoped-for inept public performances. Union members confronted Dunlop at an Economics Department colloquium and asked him barbed questions about the Union and the GSAS financial aid policies.

But neither the Dean nor Wilcox bit the bait, and Union strength continued to dwindle. Then, almost as a last resort, a proposal advanced by a minority faction within the Steering Committee was accepted. Disturbed at the militance of graduate students, liberal Faculty members last May had proposed at a faculty meeting that the STS be retained. The substantive parts of the motion, introduced by Stanley Cavell, Cabot Professor of
Aesthetics, and Everett I. Mendelsohn, professor of the History of Science, were roundly defeated, but the Faculty did vote to establish a student-Faculty Commission on Graduate Education to investigate the financial aid policies at the GSAS.

Any proposals made by the Commission would carry great weight with the Faculty, and both Dunlop and the Union understandably had to take it into account in their tactical calculations. The Union initially favored boycotting the elections for student members, but after the confrontational tactics failed, the minority faction prevailed and the Union decided to run a slate for the Commission. Another student-Faculty group, the Committee on Graduate Education, which had been long-dormant, was activated, and the elections would also select student members to this body. The Committee has wide-ranging responsibilities; it was charged by the Fainsod Report with preparing legislation for Faculty consideration on a variety of issues affecting graduate education.

**The Elections Were Held** early last month and with 1300 students voting, the Union unexpectedly swept to victory. The graduate student voters chose 60 people to a panel--40 of the victors were Union members. The panel selected six graduate students to sit on each of the committees--all of them Union members. The 12 students pledged to work together or the two groups and seek to advance the Union's interests.

Although Dunlop declined to comment on the elections, he was understandably miffed at the results--which perhaps explains why Faculty members of the Commission were quietly appointed only last week. The Union members looked forward to boldly raising issues within respectable forums mandated by the Faculty. Although only a month ago the Union appeared headed for a premature demise, the organization took a new lease on life following the elections.

After a series of successes, Dunlop had faltered. Although the Union is certainly not as strong as it was last year, it still commands respect among graduate students and teaching fellows. Students willing to attend Union meetings or take part in confrontations with administrators still back the Union, even if their support is presently passive. The Union has survived as a vehicle for expressing graduate student discontent: even if its efforts on the two committees come to nothing, the organization has outlived its first crisis and established itself as a force to be reckoned with in Harvard's affairs for some time to come.

Dunlop must shoulder much of the responsibility for the continued vitality of the Union. Although his previous strategems have succeeded in defusing much of the Union's support, his refusal to even publicly acknowledge the organization's existence has hurt his position. The incongruous spectacle of a labor expert of Dunlop's stature mouthing nineteenth century platitudes about the inviolability of a university community has called his sincerity into question. The Union on the other hand has been consistently out front with its positions--an attitude that undoubtedly struck chords of sympathy with the GSAS student body.

**Dunlop Is Honestly** concerned that exorbitant Union demands would wreak havoc on a Faculty budget that has only this year edged back into the black. On a less statesman-like level, he is undoubtedly also fearful that the Union would erode his strength in dealing with his Faculty constituency. But his refusal to publicly recognize the Union and its legitimate concerns has seemingly gained him nothing and helped to insure that it will be around to plague him for some time to come.