

Harvard Teaching Assistants Strike

Harvard's teaching fellows, to protest a cut in their financial support, have formed a new union which has apparently succeeded in getting their support restored. However, it is too soon to tell whether the group will wither away or become a long-term force on campus.

On 28 March, some 500 union supporters picketed Harvard classes to protest a decision made by R. Victor Jones, Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, to redirect half of Harvard's contribution to assist teaching fellows—\$800,000—to academic departments' discretionary funds. The change would have affected graduate student teachers by knocking in half the tuition rebates by which, in the past, Harvard has reimbursed them on the basis of need. While not exactly a pay cut, the decision would have had an impact on approximately half of the graduate school's 2200 resident graduate students. Union spokeswoman Barbara Herman says, "this was felt to be inequitable." After the cut was made public, the Graduate Students and Teaching Fellows Union was formed and made their one-day picket of Harvard classes.

Herman estimates that the union's pickets stopped 85 percent of all Harvard teaching activities. Although the administration does not recognize the union and no negotiations were held, Jones did announce shortly after the day-long strike that the \$800,000 will go to teaching fellows' tuition rebates after all. While pleased with their success, Herman says the union now plans to continue to press for recognition—either by Harvard or by the National Labor Relations Board—and will take up other issues.

The union claims to represent about 1050 graduate students, of which 500 are also teaching fellows. It has some faculty support. "After all, we were graduate students once too," commented one professor. Another, Karl W. Deutsch, professor of government, said "I am not frightened at the thought of a union. Many highly skilled people have unions." Deutsch was one of those professors who rescheduled his 28 March class rather than cross or have his students cross the union's picket lines.

The tuition rebate issue is specialized, and also appears to be resolved. But Herman claims that there is a larger issue which may help the union to last: dissatisfaction with the university's new president, Derek C. Bok, who took office only last year. Herman says that Dean Jones is Bok's "major academic appointment" in the graduate school, and that the tuition rebate cut is typical of decisions the Bok team has made. "They seem to have been making statements on the basis of financial efficiency and not heeding their educational implications." As added evidence, she cited a lowering of graduate school enrollments and a plan to have Harvard University Press publish fewer works that are purely of scholarly interest and more that will sell profitably.

If dissatisfaction with the Bok administration is widespread, the union could have fertile ground to take root permanently. One index of such dissatisfaction has come from undergraduate Garrett Epps, outgoing editor of the *Harvard Crimson*. In the editor's traditional "parting shot" editorial, Epps criticized the Bok appointees as "slick maximizers" and contrasted them unfavorably with the "zany yankees" who characterized the administration of Bok's controversial predecessor, Nathan M. Pusey. Bok, Epps wrote, makes "cosmetic concessions which divide and pacify the constituencies he must manipulate." Whether or not the student's charges are accurate, it would appear that in some quarters the new President's honeymoon is over.

More important, however, for other campuses is the success, if limited, of the union tactic. As one administration official pointed out, a whole series of events, including investigations of alleged discrimination by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, is changing the tone of decision-making on campus. "The universities are now in the real world of economics," he said, "and this has a whole range of implications for labor regulations. It is clearly one of the issues of the 1970's."—D.S.

Still, there is no clear evidence that government officials are using this new information to a significant extent in their day-to-day decisions. It would be excessive to say that thousands of impact statements are piling up uselessly on the desks of obdurate bureaucrats; one can in fact find instances in which NEPA studies have prompted changes in a project, not the least of which is the trans-Alaska pipeline. But, on the other hand, such examples are hard to come by, and those that do exist are often complicated by overtones of judicial duress or the threat of it. It is important to note at this point that nothing in the law gives anyone veto power over any project or decision; nor is there any language which says explicitly that an agency must use an impact statement once it has gone to the trouble of writing one. Environmental groups hope the courts will eventually make that interpretation of the law, but so far the courts have not.

On balance, it seems as if federal agencies are still much more intent on meeting the letter of the law than on voluntarily adopting its spirit. As Robert Cahn, a member of the CEQ, puts it, "NEPA has been a very effective tool for arousing and informing the public, but it is not yet an effective tool in the decision-making process. . . . Perhaps it's too much to expect this kind of revolutionary measure to work as fast as we'd hoped, and for agencies to cancel or modify projects as a result of it this soon."

In the past 2 years, more than 4000 environmental impact statements have poured into the CEQ's small quarters near the White House. Six employees screen them for poorly done or otherwise remarkable statements, although the CEQ tries to avoid commenting on them individually; that is the job of the various agencies and it is the council's intent to make the process as self-operable as possible.

The volume of statements is deceiving in a way, since roughly half of them are brief and rather perfunctory documents concerning small highway projects and new airport construction financed through the Department of Transportation. (DOT is the leader in numbers but not quality. The Department of Housing and Urban Development and the FPC also rank near the bottom of the quality scale. Although impact statements are generally improving in sophistication and thoroughness, many, CEQ sources say, still amount to little more than post facto justifi-