

Vagianos target of bitterness

# Cutbacks threaten union

by Rick Pociennik and Jeff Clarke

From bad, to worse, to ugly, to a state of permanent strain. Dalhousie is quickly accumulating one of the worst local labour relations reputations, and the focal point is their treatment of CUPE local 1392, the union representing the university's grounds and cleaning crews.

It's hard to find a worksite where there's any love lost between workers and bosses. But there are few places where they are as openly bitter towards management as they are here. There's growing lists of reasons. First, the history of atrocious wages. Then, a good contract the university agreed to and then refused to sign. Recently, the AIB ruling which has employees paying part of last year's wages back to the administration.

The latest issue is "contracting out" — the university is challenging the security of union members who do groundwork by giving their jobs to a private firm.

The workers' reaction is what you'd expect — they're mad, and they're determined not to get screwed again. "Right now we're going through the grievance procedure. If nothing happens there, we'll go to arbitration and if we're still not satisfied, we'll pull our people out on those bastards."

Local president Kelly agrees: "With our new contract coming up, we might be out on strike yet, because the University is trying to put us up against the wall by not hiring enough people. We're not going to sign a contract this year unless we have a little better security for the jobs we are doing."

The "better security" that Kelly refers to, deals with the issue of financial restraints and cutbacks in the university operations this year. The master mind for this operation, Vice-President of University Services Louie Vagianos put it this way, "We know we had to cut the budget this year by something in the



Dal Photo/DeLorey

neighbourhood of one million dollars. If you had any experience in this sort of thing, you must realize that the major saving always comes from people. We're in a labour intensive world. So in order to make up that kind of figure, we had to look carefully at any replacements. All year we've tried to look at each building and decide how many cleaners are justified.

## PEOPLE VS BUDGET

The result of this policy is a new computerized scientific management scheme run by one of Vagianos' subordinates who admittedly "knows nothing about cleaning". His job has been to analyze each university building, determine its manpower needs and shift the

staff accordingly.

Over the last year, the number of union members has dwindled from 295 to 221. Also student summer employment in the cleaning and ground crews has fallen significantly.

According to Vagianos, although problems have been created with this manpower cutback, any charges about overwork are untrue. "They are not overworked and they'll tell you that. What they'll tell you is that they work hard and I've got no argument with that. We all work hard".

When we asked Bill Kelly though, the union had a different story.

"They justify cutbacks by saying they have a budget and in their budget with us, its people vs budget. So the more people they can do without, is helping to bring their budget down. Also, if they have X number of people not with us anymore, this is money they are saving. The workers are doing twice the amount of work that they had been doing. We're paying for the raise that we got. We're even getting the rollback on account of it. Now management will not hire a sufficient number of people to do the jobs that we were hired to do."

## WHO IS TO BLAME?

Kelly added that with the rollback, overwork, shifting around and general insecurity, "morale is at an all time low. It's to the point now where the cleaning people feel ashamed, all of them, because they know there are filthy dirty areas, and it reflects on them. And the person who walks around and sees areas that were once cleaned daily and then sees those same areas now filthy dirty; who are they going to think is responsible for it, Vagianos or the cleaners? Naturally the cleaners!

Vagianos acknowledges that "there's no question there's been a

significant disruption in a lot of people's operations. Unfortunately, when this starts it always starts with the cleaning and support staff because they're the easiest target. Ultimately it may find its way into other areas if money gets tight. But you always start at the part that shows."

## BACKSHIFTING

Part of the "operation" which is causing extreme bitterness among the workers is the shifting of cleaners to the backshift (night shift 12:00-8:00). The university rationale for the move is that "we can't clean a lot of these buildings during the day."

According to Vagianos, "we told everyone when we went to the backshift, if anyone has any kind of legitimate hardships where they can't go to the backshift, we'll find a day shift job for them." He added, "we're not trying to be harsh. But there's no question some people are unhappy — they have to be. They had a much better deal before."

Even though Vagianos maintains that he has "tried to be fair and compassionate", one union member told the *Gazette* that he was recently contacted by a supervisor who informed him that "if he didn't like backshift he could look else-

where for a job."

Kelly adds, "I would say 90% of the workers don't want to go to backshift because of family and related reasons. Its very inconvenient and hard on people. We have a hell of a lot of people who are A-1 workers and feel that they are being pressured into leaving their job because they have to go on backshift."

## CONTRACTING -OUT

Another major disruption at the present time is over the university groundscrew which has been contracted out of their jobs and replaced by a private firm, Edmonds Brothers. While the present force of 11 men (down from 22 men two years ago) will not lose their jobs, the university plans to have them work beside what the unions call "scab-labour" until they are phased out.

Vagianos told the *Gazette* that "we've looked to see if we can re-organize our operation to get more value. The Edmonds Bros. business came into this kind of category. The price of their proposal to do the groundwork appeared to be significantly cheaper than what our people could do it for. Well if that's the case, there's something wrong. We called our people and

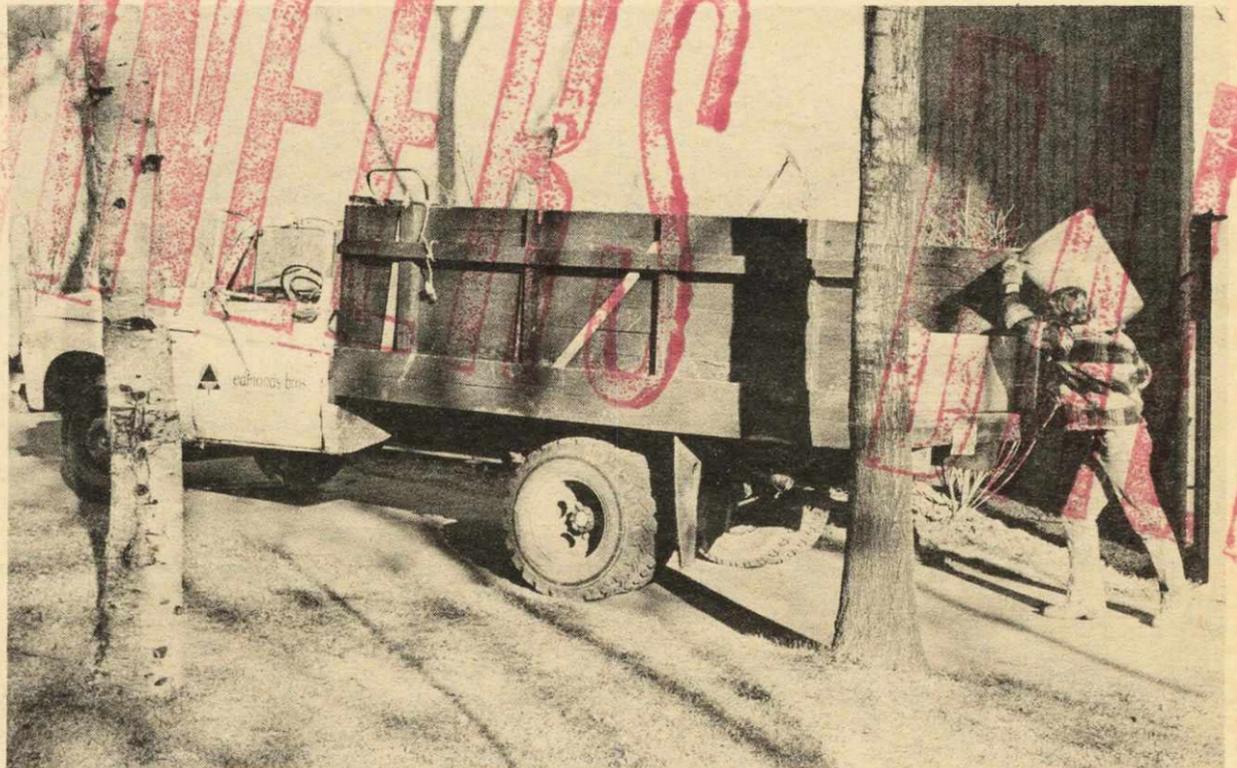
continued on page 2

# the dalhousie gazette

25 November 1976

Number 12

Volume 109



Dal Photo/DeLorey

## Inside This Week

Photo Essay

U of Waterloo Chevron

Support Staff Situation

## Coming Next Week

Sports Comment

AFS/FEA Conference