

Faculty one step closer to strike

Negotiations down to the wire as faculty vote 81 per cent against Board's latest offer

BY SHELLEY ROBINSON

A faculty vote rejecting the university's latest settlement offer could have Dal's profs striking within two weeks.

The results of the vote were announced on Mar. 3. Of the 79 per cent of faculty association membership who voted, 81 per cent were in favour of rejecting the Board's offer.

This rejection came on the heels of two other obstacles to settlement: a successful strike vote, and the failure of provincial conciliation.

The passed strike vote, held Feb. 18-24, allows the faculty association (DFA) executive to call a strike two weeks after the provincial conciliator files his report.

After the two week waiting period the university also has the option to lock-out the faculty.

The two-day conciliation process, mediated by the Department of Labour's Robert Durdan, finished —

unresolved — on Feb. 20.

The faculty association has asked Durdan to file his report.

But while strike is an option, both sides remain optimistic about the possibility for resolution.

The [faculty association] is hopeful there can be substantial negotiations in that two week period that will prevent the strike," said Dr. Andy Wainwright, external relations officer

for the Dalhousie Faculty Association (DFA) and an English professor.

Eric McKee, vice-president student services, agrees.

"When we say no one wants a strike, those of us who have been there, mean it."

The rejected offer included an 8.8 per cent salary increase over 32 months, significantly shy of the 12 1/2 per cent over two years that the faculty association had proposed.

The offer was rejected because it didn't come close to repairing the damage caused by wage rollbacks

and freezes, Wainwright says.

"If I were to accept the Board's offer...I would be making \$19,000 less than I would at Saint Mary's University," he said. "It doesn't make me feel very good that I'm doing at least the same job as colleagues at other universities for a lot less money."

Wainwright also says that "complement" — the number of teaching positions maintained by the university — is central to the negotiations.

Currently, the university can decide not to refill a vacated faculty position. It has cut, or not filled, 113 of these positions in the last 10 years. Wainwright says this 15 per cent decrease in the face of a 15 per cent increase in student population is ruining the quality of education at Dalhousie.

"We are talking about the quality of people who come to, and stay, at the university," he said.

The Board's offer made no concessions on complement, but McKee says that has more to do with a lack of funding than a lack of

caring.

"The argument that we walk a fine line is a legitimate one, it's a fair observation. We would have been better off if we could have replaced many of the faculty, [but] we've only

been able to replace some of them, [and] that's not a particularly good thing."

The association is asking for a freeze on current staff numbers for at least two-and-a-half years.

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Tuition freeze promised

MARK REYNOLDS

Nova Scotia's election campaign is in full swing and all three parties are trying to woo the student vote.

Both the New Democratic Party and the incumbent Liberals have promised a tuition freeze while the Progressive Conservative party has unveiled a youth employment strategy.

"Once we see the books we want to institute a freeze and up-front bursaries," said Robert Chisolm, leader of the Nova Scotia NDP. "Accessibility is a very important principle."

Chisolm, whose party currently has three seats in the provincial legislature, said the NDP is sympathetic to the needs of students in the province. He said that with the recent federal commitments to educational funding, it is an opportune time to put education issues on the table.

"We think it's an important signal to universities and community colleges that we need to stabilize funding. We would need to sit down and talk with

universities and community colleges to see how we would do this."

Nova Scotia's Liberal premier, Russell MacLellan, has announced that if re-elected, he too would institute a tuition freeze. His announcement came hours after Chisolm's.

"I think it's apparent that he recognized that students are hitting a financial road block," said David Harrigan, a spokesperson for the Liberal campaign.

"With the province's economy growing, we need an educated population," he said. "The secret is the funding of universities. We have to fund universities at a level where they can do this."

When the Liberals were elected five years ago, former premier John Savage made a commitment to cap tuition. However, no such policy materialized.

"When the Savage government came in...there just wasn't any money," Harrigan said, adding that the province now has a balanced budget.

Student groups and universities

are not enraptured with the proposed freeze.

"Without dealing with base funding, the government would be forcing us into a precarious financial situation," said Kelvin Ogilvie, president of Acadia University.

More than 50 per cent of Acadia's funding comes from tuition fees.

"The government can't just deal with this in a vacuum," Ogilvie said. "They must work with us, to do this."

Chuck Bridges, director of public affairs for Saint Mary's University agrees.

"We don't know what the funding formula would be," said Bridges, who was unaware of MacLellan's pledge.

"If you freeze tuition, you need to increase funding. It would have a significant impact."

The provincial Progressive Conservative party has not promised a tuition freeze. Its post-secondary education platform relies more on jobs, and tax and interest

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ANTI-WAR PROTEST: Several local groups, opposed to Canada's participation in another Gulf War, held a peaceful demonstration on Feb. 20. (Photo by Ryan Lash)

Union charges Dal with unfair practices

BY PAUL MANSFIELD

Part-time teachers and TAs are stuck in a waiting game that they say stems from the university trying to derail their attempts to strike.

Until the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) local 3912 attains an accurate membership list from Dalhousie, the union does not know the results of its strike vote.

A strike vote requires 50 per cent of union members to have voted.

The union says Dalhousie is throwing obstacles in their way in

order to stall proceedings.

"We need those lists to ensure we have a real democratic vote. There's no way we can be sure who our members are. For five years, we've tried to get a correct list of who is on the payroll from Dalhousie," said Barbara Moore, president of Local 3912.

Michelle Gallant, the public relations spokesperson for Dalhousie, says that two correct lists have been provided and denies any unfair action against the union.

"We provided them with a full

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