

Dal and profs still at odds

BY SHELLEY ROBINSON

Despite conciliation, informal talks and more than 500 screaming students, the faculty and administration keep plodding towards a strike.

An inability to settle on salary increases and faculty replacement plagues the negotiation process, with both sides saying they're the ones making all the concessions.

The bargaining teams of the Dalhousie Faculty Association (DFA) and the Board of Governors met Mar. 12 to try and re-establish talks after conciliation failed.

The meeting was arranged by the Department of Labour's Robert Durdan. Durdan was the assigned provincial conciliator and has continued to help in the negotiations even though his formal role has ended.

The latest talks were unsuccessful.

Michael Cross, chief negotiator for the DFA, says both sides will have to compromise in order to settle. He says the faculty association made significant compromises in the latest talks, and wonders why the Board rejected their proposal without a counter offer.

"It's hard to understand why they came to the table if they weren't prepared to talk," Cross said.

The DFA went from

asking for a 13 per cent salary increase over 32 months to an 11.8 per cent increase over the same period. Originally, the association was also asking for full replacement of all departing professors, and instead proposed replacement of only those professors leaving through early retirement packages.

The university's latest salary offer is 9.5 per cent over 32 months with no guarantee of a faculty

replacement. But university spokesperson Michelle Gallant says the faculty association is asking for something the administration has already made clear it cannot give.

"The issue at hand is the financial gap...the university has some very serious financial limitations and the DFA continues to have very large expectations," Gallant said.

Cross disagrees.

"Why is there a mania for downsizing in the nineties? It's the managerial philosophy of the

day, and the problem is [the administration is] running the university like a widget factory."

Cross says the university has options in how it can spend its money.

"You choose to build buildings or not to build buildings, you choose to use the endowment or not.

"The first priority in a university is students and faculty."

Graduating student Stu Kemp agrees.

"There's more than a few people who care about what happens at this university," he said. "I support what the faculty's doing...it's the faculty that shapes the [university]."

"The quality of the school is more than finances."

But Gallant says the university is doing what it can, with what it has.

"The board is committed to replacing faculty when there's money available," Gallant said.

So while the faculty and administration tussle over the issues that have been a problem since talks began last September, the possibility of a strike creeps forward.

"We don't want a strike, [and] we don't think it's necessary," Gallant said. "But if there is no flexibility a strike may be unavoidable."



Top left: DSU president Chris Adams rallies the troops outside the MacDonald Building on Tuesday. Above: Protestors warm up their voices outside the SUB. (Photos by Ryan Lash)

No classes if profs strike

BY PAUL MANSFIELD

All classes at Dalhousie will be cancelled in the event of a strike — with only a few exceptions.

Tom Traves, president of Dalhousie University, informed the Dalhousie Faculty Association (DFA) and non-DFA instructors that if there is a strike, all classes will be shut down based on recommendations from the Senate.

During the 1988 strike, some classes were taught while others were cancelled. As a result many students were confused — about which classes were still in session and which were cancelled — and missed classes, lectures and assignments.

At the time, Senate decided that if a strike situation was to ever occur again, the university needed to have a plan to handle the situation.

The Senate then adopted the following resolution stating that "in future, all classes in faculties and departments where most

members of the academic staff belong to the DFA bargaining unit be cancelled for the duration of the strike." This step was "to avoid unfairness and uncertainty and create uniform conditions for all students."

Ruth Bleasdale, a history professor at Dalhousie, expressed much relief about the decision the administration made.

"I was very delighted and relieved when the directive came out. I teach over 300 students and I was very worried about the situation that would have developed with certain professors teaching and others not."

Mellisa Furrow, an English teacher at Dal, does not see the benefits of cancelling all classes.

"It is a decision that is...a strategic one on the part of the University. I don't think it is very smart because I don't see how it truly benefits students," she said.

Many students have expressed concerns about assignments and readings they say professors are telling them to do during the

strike.

Bleasdale cannot speak for the other professors, but thinks the rules have been laid down by the administration and should be followed.

"It is really quite inappropriate for teachers to be piling up the work on students," Bleasdale said.

Furrow doesn't see how the lock-out will be a benefit to students, but agrees that work should not be forced on students.

"A strike has a paralyzing affect to students. I'm not moving any assignments up any earlier. I will make other arrangements if a strike occurs after it has ended," Furrow said.

All part-time instructors and teaching assistants (TAs), will be expected to carry out their duties to the best of their abilities for the duration of the strike, and will not be penalized monetarily. Part-time instructors and TAs do not belong to the DFA. They are represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE).

Student rally

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waving backing him up.

"I'm sorry for interrupting your classes, maybe now you get the point," he yelled to students in the nearby Arts and Administration Building. "We want to scream as loud as we can so people across the country can hear how pissed-off we are."

Psychology student Jeremy Sears may not have screamed, but he says he is pissed-off.

"I think it's just screwing everyone over. We've got one of the highest tuition [fees] in the country but residence is crappy, [and] profs aren't getting paid enough."

Jeff Ostin, a student in the History department, agrees.

"The administration doesn't seem to care. They seem to be pricing Dal out of the range of all the people who want to come here."

Other students expressed anger at the lack of information being provided to them by the university.

"I'm tired of not knowing what is going on with the strike — and the [Board] and the [faculty] not listening to us," said Smith House president Michael Arbuckle.

Psychology and Neuroscience professor John Fentress says he understands students' frustration with both sides of the negotiations.

"As soon as it seems like something's going on behind people's backs — that's bad."

But it doesn't matter to Fentress anymore.

"I'm quitting this place anyway. I'm fed up with it. The deterioration has been so great in terms of...educating students it's a much less attractive position than it used to be.

"It's not the same institution it was twenty years ago."

University spokesperson Michelle Gallant says the administration is doing the best it can with limited resources.

"The university...has to not only be concerned about the students this year, but the students next year, and the next year, and every year after that. We have an absolute responsibility to ensure that the decisions we make now — that have substantial price tags attached to them — are decisions we can live with and that do not totally jeopardize the future of the institution and its students."

Despite the festive mood, fourth-year Psychology student Sunil Bhalla says it's sad it took a crisis to pull students together.

"Dr. Traves should be named Dr. Travesty," he said. "I was upset that the most spirit I've seen at Dal was in order to stop a strike."

With files from Kaveri Gupta and Natalie MacLellan

IN THE EVENT OF A STRIKE, ALL CLASSES WILL BE CANCELLED EXCEPT THE FOLLOWING...

1. Classes in the Doctor of Dental Surgery and Oral Maxillofacial Surgery programs, and the Doctor of Medicine, Postgraduate Medical Education and Continuing Medical Education programs, except for classes taught by faculty who are members of the Dalhousie Faculty Association. The Faculty of Dentistry and the Faculty of Medicine will notify students of the classes which will not continue.
2. Classes in the Diploma in Health Services Administration and Diploma in Emergency Health Services Management, and classes in the Dalhousie-Yarmouth School of Nursing.
3. DalTech Continuing Technical Education classes.
4. Henson College regular Distance Education Continuing Education classes.
5. Practicum activities, including co-op work term placements, which are conducted or supervised by persons who are not members of the Dalhousie Faculty Association.