

Women commissionaires out of work and out of luck

by Elizabeth Donovan

Enter. Killam Library. Exit. Listen to the soft flutter of another product in our automated era. Gradually the women in the blue and white uniforms are weaned from the checkout desk, but not without controversy.

These women were once employed by Dalhousie Security through the Canadian Corps of Commissionaires. As of January 20 they lost their jobs due to the Killam Library's recent acquisition of a new electronic system. And one woman is seeking compensation at Labour Standards.

The responsibility for finding work is on their agency, which is designed to provide employment to ex-service persons over 35 years old.

Although given ample notice, these security workers are left in a precarious position. Why? Because they are women.

"The job opportunities for women commissionaires available within the Corps is limited. I probably won't get full-time employment this winter," said Clark, ex-security worker.

A letter sent to the commissionaires December 9 which thanked them for their service at the Killam Library also gave them extended employment until January 20. "Bearing in mind that suitable jobs for women may be difficult," read the letter.

"The Canadian Corps of Commissionaires in this province alone employs 858 men and 14 women," said Major Wellard at the Halifax Division.

"Although the Commissionaires made their first appearance in this province in 1956, it was not until 1972, with the Human Rights Bill, that women were allowed to join the commissionaires," said Clarke.

"If we're going to use women in the commissionaires, and your employer wants a commissionaire to work on a rotating basis, that means we would have to expose them to late night early morning shifts, and we can't have that," said Major Wellard.

Since the available job openings require equally shared rotation on three shifts, according to Major Wellard employers are hesitant in hiring women for these positions.

Job security for the commissionaires depends not on their employer, but the agency.

"If for any reason, a commissionaire is found unsatisfactory, a replacement is immediately supplied," reads a commission handbook.

Wellard echoed this philosophy. "The customer is always right. If the employer has any reservations, then what they say goes."

This may strengthen the rapport with employers, but in the case of one dismissal of a commissionaire at the Killam library it has resulted in an internal controversy.

Anne Amirault, corporal of her detail, was asked to leave for no apparent reason.

"On Jan. 3, at 3 p.m., I received a telephone call from the Headquarters and I was told to pick up my things. 'This is your last shift.' When I asked why, the

reply was that I was 'creating problems,'" she said.

Baffled as to the reasons for her abrupt dismissal, she was later told by the Corps that she had been telling the students how to beat the new security system.

"It's ridiculous, when I don't even know how!" said Amirault.

"On Monday, the day before, I remember telling one of the new women on staff that the security system had been triggered. She denied ever hearing it go off. Later, a student was telling me that he was aware of how to get books past the system undetected," she said.

Amirault has taken her complaint to the Labour Standards board and she hopes she will receive the pay she was entitled

to up to Jan. 20th. This dispute will not be resolved for several days.

Mr. Stevenson, at the Labour Standards, said, "If the allegations made against Mrs. Amirault were false then she would be entitled to the rest of her pay. If they are true then the commissionaires were justified in pulling her out on a minute's notice," he said.

Amirault is angry at what she calls the "undemocratic approach" taken in addressing the grievances made against her.

"The people in charge who made those accusations had not even heard me or seen me prior to my sudden dismissal. We could have sat down and had a discussion if there was a problem, rather than giving me one hour's notice," she said.

Debating art alive at Sodales

by Harold Porter

The art of debating and public speaking is alive and well at Dalhousie, as was shown by Sodales' participation during the weekend of January 27-29 in a national French debating tournament hosted by the Royal Military College in Kingston, Ontario.

Sonya Brander and Harold Porter represented Dalhousie at the tournament, which involved 46 teams from Canadian universities and colleges.

The tournament consisted of three contests: prepared debates, impromptu debates, and individual impromptu public speaking, all with sufficiently nebulous resolutions to keep the level of competition high.

Each team was given ten minutes to prepare for the impromptu debates but in the individual contests, after presentation of the resolution, the speaker had thirty seconds to

organize a coherent argument of five minutes' duration.

The University of Ottawa was well-represented by four teams, and eventually beat Concordia in the team finals. The first place individual award was won by Jean-Marie Pierre, a student at l'Université Ste. Anne.

Admittedly, Dalhousie did not place in the finals, but our team did quite well vis-a-vis the other "anglophone" universities.

Interest in French debating in the Atlantic provinces, demonstrated by the participation of Dalhousie, St. Mary's, Mount St. Vincent, Acadia, Moncton and Memorial, as well as the great success of l'Université Ste. Anne, has resulted in plans to organize

a regional debating tournament in French in March.

The members of Sodales are excited by the prospect of an expansion into this challenging aspect of debating, and hope to provide valuable input into French debating among the universities of the Atlantic provinces.

Students are reminded that membership in the debating club is open to all Dalhousie students and that interested parties are invited to attend Sodales. Regular meetings are held Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m. in the Student Union Building.

Harold Porter is a Sodales member.

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Young gays and lesbians find refuge

by Samantha Brennan

Gayline, in cooperation with the Gay Alliance for Equality (GAE), has organized a Gay Lesbian Youth Group in response to calls from young people in Halifax.

Young gays and lesbians between 16 and 21 have a hard time finding anywhere to socialize in Halifax as liquor laws restrict them from going to the gay bar, say the organizers.

"There's nowhere for them to go," said a Gayline volunteer. He says they receive several calls every evening from younger people wanting advice.

A couple of years ago there was a young person's coffeehouse in the Turret. According to Gayline the event used to attract "quite a crowd".

Since the Turret closed there's been no facility for younger people, he added.

The group took time and energy to get off the ground, as younger people tend to be nervous about attending a gay/les-

bian meeting. "We'd answer the calls, tell them the time and the place and then no one would show," he said.

Despite these initial problems the group is holding their first event on Friday, Feb. 10. The Valentine's Day Coffeehouse will be held at the Universalist Unitarian Church on Inglis St. from 8-11 p.m. and it is open to gays and lesbians ages sixteen through twenty-one.

The co-sponsors were torn between a desire to let as many youth know about the event as possible in hopes of recalling people and a fear of attracting pranksters. "That fear is always in the back of our minds," he said.

Eventually, Gayline and GAE want to see the youth organize the group themselves.

Gayline is an information, counselling and referral service for lesbians and gay men. Their office can be reached from 7-10 p.m. Thursday through Saturday at 423-1389.