

# Why support workers?

A wage rollback for Dalhousie maintenance workers .... what possible difference could that make to students here?

Our interests, after all, are more intellectual -- thinking great thoughts, writing great papers, getting great grades, or indifferent ones, and then degrees. Nothing in the world can be further removed from a wage dispute, one of the everyday things which looms large only in the lives of average working people, so different from us.

But no matter how little we realize it, our daily lives are inextricably linked with the working people of Dalhousie, and outside.

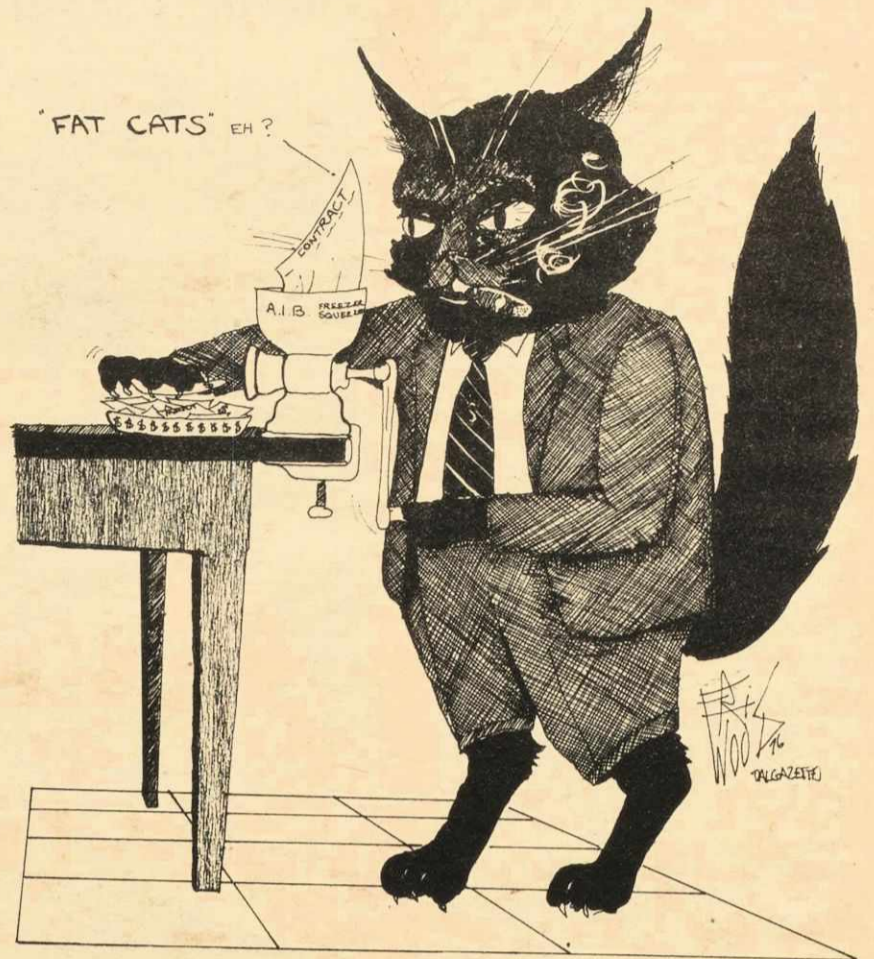
It doesn't take much insight to realize that it is workers who built our buildings and now clean them, sometimes cook and serve our food, record our grades, shelve our books, order chemicals for our labs, shovel snow in winter. Without their work, the university would grind to a halt, very quickly.

At the most crassly selfish level, then, we are linked to Dalhousie's workers because we need them. And the quality of our education is deteriorating **right now**, as the Administration's policies of real wage cuts and increased work loads reduces their own employee's effectiveness. No one could argue that the worker who has to hold two jobs to make ends meet can do his or her best at either. Nor that one person can do the job of two. Nor that a poorly paid person will do the same work as a well-paid one. Nor that an experienced, trained Dal employee will stay here and work for thousands of dollars less than can be made someplace else in town.

When Administration policies build low morale, their work has to suffer. And so does our education.

At one time the very nature of who went to University allowed students the privilege of disdain for working people. Thirty years ago Dalhousie was the private preserve of those whose fathers were rich enough to buy them an education. Not any more. Now perhaps more than ever before, a significant percentage of the student body is made up of the sons and daughters of workers. Many of our parents' lives have been marked by the same struggle for living wages now being fought by Dal's maintenance workers. Many have fought previous anti-union laws -- Trudeau's attack isn't the first.

If you'd attended Dalhousie thirty years ago, your future after graduation was more or less assured. For some the military or professions, for most government posts, business opportunities,



teaching jobs. Not any more. A few of us will go on to professional schools, the best commerce students will still be snapped up by big firms. But for most graduates the doors of privilege have closed these past five years, and many have had to go out and work. We'll be hard-pressed to live comfortably on our wages and salaries, see them strangled by inflation. We will then begin to share, though for most of us to a lesser degree, the plight of Dal's maintenance workers.

But for now, we're privileged. We live, comparatively, easy lives. For many of us this is an opportunity to fall prey to the most petty academic concerns, to lose sight of the world outside. For too few of us, it comes as a rare opportunity -- and this is the real privilege -- of having the time to take a long, hard look at the world we are a part of. We have the chance to study what goes on, and to start to judge it. How does it work? What's good and bad about it? What's decent and what's unfair? And what can be done about it?

This is the best way we can see the maintenance workers' fight for good wages, and our connection to it. The unadorned fact is that the wages and conditions Dalhousie imposes on its employees are shoddy and unjust, and that the Anti-Inflation Board decision which made them even worse is, in every sense of the word, but the legal one, a crime. We should be in no great quandry about what to do: Where we see injustice we ought to oppose it. We should stand with the maintenance workers to oppose the roll-back of their wages, support them however we can.

During the 1960's a common theme in University newspapers was the corporate control of our Universities. Not only are big business interests the ones who sit on the governing bodies of our schools, wrote student editors, but in the end, the education we get reflects ideas which benefit corporate interests.

Their concerns, no matter how legitimate, were mostly selfish. Worried only about student powerlessness and quality of the education they were offered, they were blind to the even more real plight of campus workers, some of whom made less than half of their 1976 low wages. Despite themselves the newspapers raised a key question: In whose service does the university operate?

Dalhousie likes to be thought of as a placid academic community. For many of us that myth is gone forever; we've seen the ugly reality of the University as boss. We've been exposed to a situation we must take measure of, and which takes measure of us. We've seen the University adopt policies which threaten not only the livelihood of its employees, but the quality of our education as well. We've seen how the Administration allied with the government, through the Anti-Inflation Board, to literally steal tens of thousands of dollars from its own employees. We've seen how poorly the university serves those who have served it so well.

Which begins to give us an answer to the question: Who does the university serve?

The Dalhousie Gazette is the weekly publication of the Dalhousie Student Union. The views expressed in the paper are not necessarily those of the Student Union or the editor. We reserve the right to edit copy for space or legal reasons. The deadline for letters to the Gazette is the Monday preceding publication. No unsigned material will be accepted, but anonymity, if necessary, will be granted. The Dalhousie Gazette, Canada's Oldest College Newspaper, is a founding member of the Canadian University Press. The Dalhousie Gazette office is Room 334 of the Student Union Building, telephone 424-2507. The subscription price is \$5.00 per year (27 issues).

Editor

Allan Zdunich

Advertising Director

Richard Coughlan

Advertising Representatives

Dave Purcell  
Debbie Bugden

Circulation Manager

Joe Wilson

The staff and contributors for this issue included:

Trish Aikens  
Nigel Allen  
Jeff Clarke  
Fred Clessig  
Michael Cormier  
Lloyd Daye  
Michael Donovan  
Cheryl Downton  
Marion Fraser  
Dave Grandy  
David Gutnick

Harvey MacKinnon  
Christine MacLean  
Valerie Mansour  
donalee Moulton  
Malandwa Mwendapole  
Paul O'Keefe  
Rick Plociennik  
Donna Treen  
Bradley Warner  
Eric Wood  
Greg Zed

For National Advertising, this paper is a member of



**youthstream.**  
The Campus Network  
307 Davenport Road, Toronto, Ontario M5R 1K5  
(416) 925-6359

**Gazette staff meeting Friday at noon.**