

Dr. Tom Traves talks...and talks...and talks

Dal's president graciously grants the Gazette an interview

BY ANDREW SIMPSON

In the first half of November the Gazette interviewed Dalhousie University president, Dr. Tom Traves. Unfortunately, the Gazette reporter has no recollection of this event. He claims that the president, using rhythmic and lengthy speech patterns, lulled him into a hypnotic state from which he has not yet recovered. What we do know about the interview was salvaged from a tape recorder the reporter was carrying.

We will be printing excerpts from the tape recorder in two parts. This week's instalment deals primarily with the university's labour relations, and the cost of post-secondary education.

Gazette: Dalhousie's TAs and part-time professors are some of the lowest paid in the country, and they are currently involved in a labour dispute with the school. Are their demands unreasonable?

Traves: I'm not in a position to comment on the reasonableness or unreasonableness of the demands. In any event there are always two parts to a negotiation [and I'm sure they are] behaving responsibly and attempting to find a means for a mutually agreeable settlement. I continue to be confident that at the end of the day we will find such a mutually agreeable settlement.

But in terms of the university's means, let me just put a couple of statistics on the table for you. In the last four or five years, the university's grants from the provincial government have dropped fifteen per cent, which is about sixteen million dollars. If we still had that sixteen million dollars available to us, there are a lot of things we could do, which at the moment we can't do because we don't have the money...

The university has steadily

increased the proportion of its budget that goes to wages and salary and benefits. Ten years ago, about seventy-two, seventy-three per cent of the university's budget went to wages and salaries and the rest was spent on everything else...since that period, the university now contributes almost eighty per cent of its budget towards wages and salaries...It's no question, from my perspective, that the university recognizes that it's a major priority for us to pay our faculty and staff — both full and part-time — wages that are comfortable, competitive and reasonable in the market-place of our times...

[T]he resource base that we have has been steadily shrinking and so you ultimately have to make do with the resources that you have. I can't spend money that I don't have, the university can't spend money that it doesn't have...

At the same time that people come forward and say 'we want more money for salaries', which I hasten to say, is a very reasonable request...[people] also come forward and say 'we want improvements to the library system' and 'we want improvements to the student aid system and better academic facilities' and 'we want the leaky roofs on our buildings to be fixed' and 'we want our residences to be wired so that everybody can have access to the internet from their residence room' and on and on — all of which are perfectly reasonable requests. Unfortunately, we don't have enough money to do all of those things all at once. So we have to make priorities, we have to make trade-offs and we

have to balance among all of those perfectly legitimate claims to find the right patterns and the right mix...

I personally believe Dalhousie is a community where people obviously see their own needs, but they understand them in relation to the greater whole and

a difference when it happens, who's on strike, what the issues are, how long the strike lasts. These are all specific matters and they all make a difference to the kind of answer you're looking for, and they would only make sense in the context of a specific dispute.

think that there is some appreciation that when they come to Dalhousie they get a first-rate education. We survey our students when they leave and we ask them if they're satisfied with their educational experience and most of them tell us that they are strongly satisfied...essentially they're prepared to pay the fees that are necessary for us to provide that program.

We could charge much lower tuition fees, it'd be no problem, the only thing that would happen is that we wouldn't be able to offer the same quality and quantity of academic experience that we now do. If that was the kind of university people wanted — a cheaper, and I would say lesser, university with a poorer education — then I guess we could do that, but I don't personally believe that's what our students want or our academic community wants.

But aren't there many other higher quality institutions with much lower tuition fees?

I think if you look at the tuition, the *real* tuition levels of a lot of universities you'll find it much closer to Dalhousie...

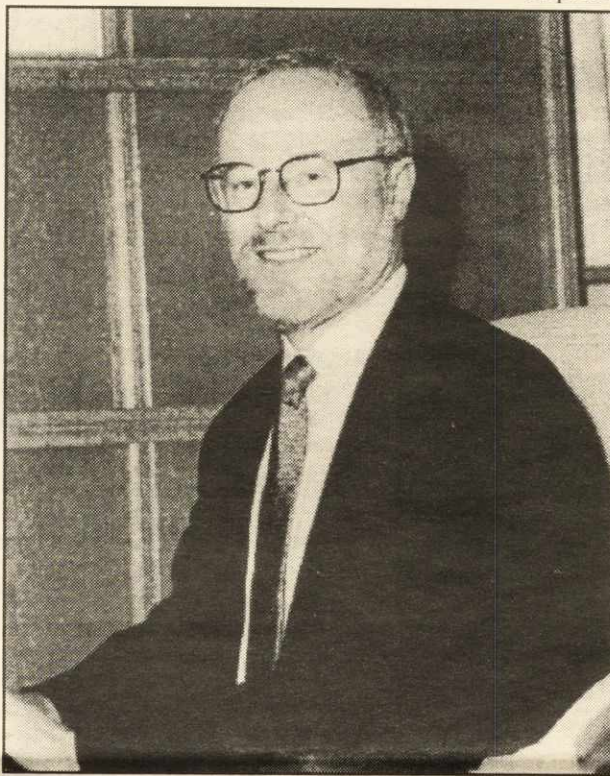
Real tuition?

It is not so much the tuition level, but I would ask, what is the size of the cheque you have to sign. Because Dalhousie could do what many other universities do, which is say O.K. our tuition is 'X', and we're now comparable to [the other universities], except you now have to pay five hundred dollars extra to study this, and you have to pay an extra fee for this kind of equipment and if you want to study this kind of subject you have to pay an extra fee for that. So at the end of the day when you add it all up, lo and behold, their tuition looks sort of like Dalhousie's tuition.

If you look at many universities in the country — I spent a long time in Ontario so I can speak from first-knowledge about that — they have two tuition levels. They have the tuition level that is advertised, and the tuition level that you have to pay to go to the university...

On the other hand, I think our tuition levels are high. They're higher than most other parts of the country. That's due to the fact that our government grants are lower than most other parts of the country. Universities are fundamentally financed by government grants plus tuition, and if one is lower than the other is higher...

Stay tuned for part two of the Traves interview when the tape recorder will reveal the president's views on Dalhousie's Strategic Directions Plan, technology in universities, corporate funding and academic integrity.



Hypnotic: Dr. Tom Traves. (Photo by Ryan Lash)

At what point does a strike become a big deal?

No strike is easily dealt with. All strikes are unfortunate episodes and one wants to avoid them, if at all possible. And you have to obviously take steps to deal with them. But at this point, since I don't think we're going to have a strike and I certainly don't want to have a strike, I'm not going to get into the rabid speculation and the 'what if' questions...

You wrote [in Dalhousie's Strategic Directions Plan] that Dalhousie needs to attract quality teachers and quality students,

how can the university expect to do either of these with some of the highest tuition and lowest paid teachers in the country?

I think, fortunately for Dalhousie, we have a strong reputation and lots of people want to be here. I think the reputation is built on the quality of the people who are here and it's based on the quality of life at this university, in this particular place, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

I think people find there are many values they are seeking in their life. High pay is one value, but there are others and [people make] trade-offs and balances because they would like to be at a university that has a strong reputation and Dalhousie does...

Similarly for our students, I

greater good of the university and collectively we will sit down over time — it's not a simple process, it takes time and patience and goodwill on both sides — and we will come out at the end of the day with something that is mutually agreeable.

Are you confident a strike will be averted?

I'm certainly hopeful that a strike will be averted.

If a strike were to occur, what would be the effect on students?

I think that a strike at a university is never a happy occurrence, but to answer your question then you'd have to know a whole lot more particulars. It's a hypothetical question, it makes

Fundraising feast Korean style

BY LILLI AND JEANNE JU

Dalhousie's Korean Student Association (KSA) held its first annual dinner evening this past Saturday. About 200 people attended the fundraising event, held in the Student Union Building's Green Room, to taste traditional Korean foods ranging from steamed rice to hot and spicy kimchi; both staple foods in Korea.

Less than ten years ago, you could probably count the total number of Korean Dalhousie students on your hands. Saturday's event made it quite obvious that the Korean student population at Dalhousie has

grown considerably.

The group of KSA volunteers were led by event organizer, Jin-Hwan Kim, in learning how to cook the traditional Korean foods on the menu that night.

"The event was very successful. We are very thankful to those who helped us," Kim said. "We received a lot of support from the Korean Church, the Korean Association of Nova Scotia (KANS), St. Mary's and the International Language Institute.

"The event was not just a party, but also an opportunity to celebrate the Korean culture," Kim added.

"We were really excited with

the turnout. It was great to see so many people from so many different backgrounds attending," said Kate Fiander, KSA treasurer. "The dinner party was a huge success and a lot of fun."

The dinner was followed by karaoke and dancing to both Korean and North American music. Karaoke is very popular in Korea's many *norae-bung* (Korean for bars that have rooms for singing karaoke-style). There is never a shortage of willing participants at these *norae-bung*, as was demonstrated on Saturday night.

In attendance were Dalhousie's International Student Exchange

Director, Dr. Shaffai, various members of KANS, and other prominent Koreans in Nova Scotia.

As well, a number of mothers from KANS volunteered their time to help KSA members with much of the preparations.

KSA is in its first year of existence as a society at Dalhousie. It is hoped that fundraising events like the Korean Night will help reach KSA's greater objectives of promoting the Korean culture and encouraging multicultural exchanges. In addition, KSA members hope to raise enough funds to establish a traditional Korean drum band called *Sam I-nori*.