

The Letters/Opinions section of the Gazette is meant as a campus forum for all Dalhousie students. The opinions expressed within may not necessarily be those of the Gazette staff or editorial board. We welcome all submissions, but reserve the right to edit for style and content. It is the Gazette's mandate not to print racist, sexist or homophobic material.

# Life in the midst of great bureaucracy

Life in the midst of great bureaucracy is a confusing and discouraging thing. It is not simple and it can leave one with conflicting feelings. As a player in the great bureaucracy of Dalhousie University, that esteemed national institution, I either feel cut-off, ignored and unimportant, or like a co-conspirator in something that's a little ugly. Recently, it has been more the former, the "cut-off" feeling. I'm a teaching assistant, you see, and teaching assistants at Dalhousie are made out to be a bunch of suckers.

I took a job as a TA in the Theatre Department because I thought it would be a good way to ground myself and go about my research and work in theatre. I'd get another part-time job and, thus, carve-out a meagre living for myself. I quickly found out that this would be a little difficult. Since I am a TA in two courses (earning \$375/month instead of the \$250/month earned by most of my colleagues), it's difficult to achieve any regularity in my hours. Last week I attended classes, supervised a grammar lesson, read some plays and met with a few students. This week I have a hundred papers to mark.

Now I don't intend on writing a sob story. Sobbing is one of the various activities which I think are best left to the privacy of one's own home. I do enjoy my job, plain and simple. I like students, I like trying to help them, and I want to do it as well as I can. What bugs me is that it's hard to find the time to do it as well as I can (after commuting daily from my parents' house in Dartmouth), and for many of my colleagues who are running around from part-time job to part-time job, it's pretty much impossible. Things become awkward when you have to find a job so that you can afford the one you already have. But I'm not sobbing. I'm trying to convey something else, a sense of disappointment and let's face it, indignation.

When I came into this September, I knew nothing. I didn't know that as a TA I was part of a union. I didn't even know what CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees) stood for, and I wasn't

particularly concerned. Unions are for other, less enlightened places. Everything's state of the art here. We're out of the dark ages when people who work have to speak up for themselves in front of the people who pay them. Aren't we? But then I found out about some things. Last year, CUPE approached the administration to address concerns which had been raised

is just too easy to ignore the blatant unfairness of the situation and curl up with a good book. I mean, the university has hardly picked a tough opponent. It's easy to shove TAs around because most of them are just passing through anyway. It's a little pathetic to bully the group that largely consists of post-grad students, busy working and writing theses, dispersed among different buildings, and among different departments with different interests and little or no knowledge of each other. I feel like an extra in a John Woo film — small chance of survival. The administration have the advantage. They have the information, they make the final

decisions, they have a regular place of assembly; they are a unit. We all have separate concerns and very limited access to information, so that only with a strong union can we exchange concerns, meet each other and present ourselves as a voice worth considering. Until we do that, until we take advantage of our union status, we are a bunch of suckers.

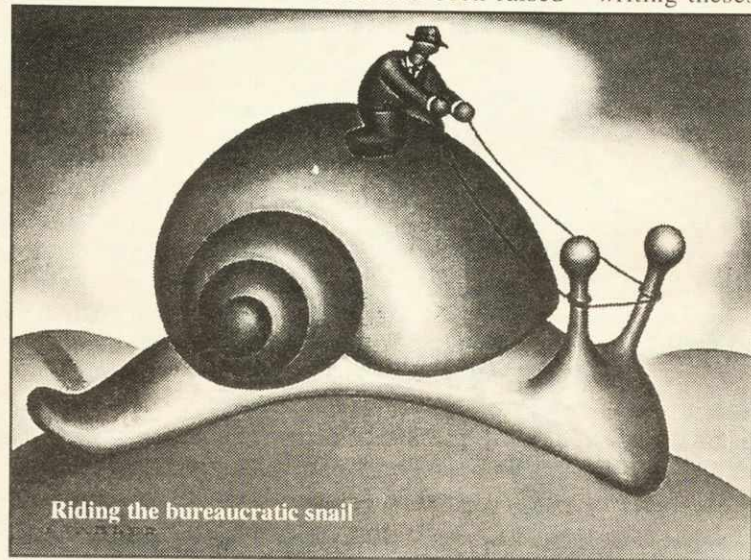
Just a few years ago, Theatre 1000, one of the courses I work in, had three or four sections of about 15 students. Each section had its own professor. Now there is one professor, one section, 150 students and their under-paid TAs. Tuition is up-up-way-up and the class, which used to take place in a studio space in the Arts Centre, now takes place in a lecture hall of the Life Science Centre, that bastion of fluorescence. It is only due to the exceptional abilities of the professor that the students remain engaged in the material. The other day was a bit of an exception due to the strong sulphuric odour making its way into the room through the ventilation system. Something's rotten at Dalhousie.

The saddest part of this, for me, is when it seems that there may be TAs who have no interest in any of this, or who have given up on political action and unionized labour as a thing of the past. The "cut-back" frenzy has taken its toll on the confidence of our public institutions. We are

blow is dealt. Who is going to stop the systematic destruction of our public institutions?

I can only do my part — write my little articles and talk to people. And sometimes it's encouraging. It does seem that more people, once informed, are beginning to question the judgments made on the value of future education. There is a buzz, and buzzes do get louder over time. And, ultimately, we are all a part of this thing. Administrations, students, teachers — this is ours and it's falling apart and if we value it, we have to show it. A good start is to value our own work and the work of those around us. It's an issue of respect. Currently, the administration is showing no respect for the work of its teaching assistants. Respect makes a school; it makes people come to a school. Sooner or later, we have to stop shooting ourselves in the foot.

ALEX MCLEAN



Riding the bureaucratic snail

by TAs over the unequal division of funds among different departments. A few of the more fortunate TAs were being paid in the vicinity of \$6000 for a year's work, something more along the lines of the national standard, while the less fortunate ones were sometimes earning under \$2000. The administration's solution to this problem was to equalize payment at \$2350 for the 1998-99 school year. Gee boss, thanks! The figure, supposedly, is the current "average" payment for TAs at Dalhousie, although close examination points out that it may be a little lower. It is certainly the case that the figures used to come up with this average did not include figures from DalTech where, apparently, many TAs are paid considerably more than at their new Mother Campus. In other words, the new "equalization" is actually a discreet "reduction" of the overall budget. The salary allotted per individual teaching assistant will be lower than ever. Look out folks, it comes into effect next year. The administration put forward its new payment scheme and refused to deal with the union any further. "That's what the TAs are worth," someone said (chewing on a cigar). That's it. Shut up and go home.

Well, sorry. You see I won't be here next year. I may never work in a university again; I might not even do a post-graduate degree, but I would feel like a bit of a slug if I didn't do something while I'm here. It

## Promise keepers and promise breakers

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Emphasis will be put on being the nineties sensitive man routine women fall for (which is really an excuse to abdicate any obligations or to not make them in the first place). We will also have talks on the benefits of drug use and adultery. Hey, think we could get Clinton to make a

personal appearance?

Sounds incredulous, doesn't it? With the increase of women's groups telling us men are superfluous to raise a family, the Promise Keepers come off as a welcomed regression back to family values. The political interest groups in Washington may be concerned over a bigger

issue than domineering men: losing a huge portion of political influence of the country. Will the Promise Keepers revert to a mere lobbyist group? For a group of men who have sworn not to be seduced by lust, not being seduced by power seems like an easier promise to keep.

ALAN LEBLANC

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