

DSA: Intends to stop the flood of layoffs

by Lyssa McKee

The Dalhousie Staff Association (DSA) could be in a legal strike position within a month, says Executive Director Bette Yetman. The union, which represents approximately 740 clerical, secretarial, and technical employees at the University, has entered the conciliation stage of negotiations with the Dalhousie administration. A conciliator from the Department of Labour has been assigned, but has yet to meet with the DSA's five-

member negotiating team. If the conciliator fails to bring the two sides to an agreement, the union will legally be able to strike two weeks later. A strike vote is to be held October 3, 4, and 5th, and it is expected that the majority of the DSA members will vote to strike if necessary.

The major issues on the negotiating table are job security, wages, and pay equity. Many DSA members are very concerned about the number of lay-offs that have occurred in the last few years, and they wish to see a "no

lay-off" clause in a new contract. Management's wage increase offer of 1.85% is far below the level of inflation, and is a major point of contention. The union says that their wages have not kept pace with the rising cost-of-living, and note that their members' buying power has decreased over the years.

Pay equity — equal pay for equal value — is another serious issue, particularly for this union whose membership is about 80% women. Pay equity involves establishing a single job evaluation system for both clerical and technical employees. The present system treats these two occupational areas separately, a practice which creates gender bias.

The union as a whole is very concerned about how the students will be affected in the event

of a strike. They do not wish to see students' education suffer, but they feel that in many ways, the students are already suffering. For example, cutbacks in library staff have meant a decrease in library hours, and a general decline in library service. By stopping the continual stream of layoffs, the DSA says it hopes to improve the state of education at Dalhousie.

Though a DSA strike would less directly affect classes at Dalhousie than would a faculty walk-out, Dal students would still notice the lack of staff. Almost all library personnel, lab technicians, and support staff are members of the DSA. If faculty did not take over the staff workload, most departments would grind to a halt. The DSA say they hope that the faculty would not

step in, but would in fact support the DSA in such a situation. There is also, of course, a good chance that the DFA will already be on strike when and if the DSA takes to the picket lines.

Bette Yetman stressed that the union does not want to see a strike happen. "The most common misconception about unions," he said, "is that they go on strike lightly, just to get what they want. That is not the case here. The staff feels it is in a forced choice situation; they have seen declining undergraduate services for years, and to let it go on would hurt future students. It's just a shame that the students have to be the playing field for our football game with management. They're the ones who are going to get hurt."

DSA issues

Three DSA members were interviewed on September 27th, and they made the following comments on the union's three major demands:

JOB SECURITY

Connie de Sousa, technician, Biology dept: "It doesn't matter if I get a 5% or a 25% raise; it won't do me any good if next month I don't have a job. Give me the job security so that I can be around for the next round of negotiations and I'll fight for higher wages then."

John Barry, technician, Audio Visual: "Job security is the most important issue for me. I've seen it happen: they use the best years of your life and then they drop you. I would like to see a no lay-off clause."

Diane Landry, clerk, Killam Library: "It's not even personal security about your job. I consider the union as a whole: whether it's you or somebody else, a lay-off is still a loss, a cut in service for the students."

WAGE INCREASE

de Sousa: "I think that the offer of 1.85% is an insult. I think we're

being generous only to ask for 5%. We've been losing money for a number of years. I think 6, 7, or 8% is reasonable."

Barry: "I think that closer to 4% would be reasonable, looking at inflation."

Landry: "I think we should at least get the cost-of-living increase. It's not great, but at least you're breaking even. But I wouldn't necessarily vote for the contract if that's all we got, with none of the other articles, like job security."

PAY EQUITY

de Sousa: "It's not a big concern in this department. Most of the people here are technicians, which is a 'male-dominated' occupation."

Barry: "I'd be a lot more concerned about it if I were a woman. But it's not a big issue for me; job security is my big concern."

Landry: "Pay equity on its own isn't worth striking for. It's all the issues together which make the difference."

Negotiations begin for CUPE

by Lorna Irons

The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), representing 135 Dalhousie workers, has entered into contract negotia-

The union whose members include Dal cleaners, trucking staff and mailroom staff, has had two meetings with the board of governors but according to president Florance Logan there is no

sign of an agreement. "We've just had two meetings, we're just getting started." She also said that it is still too early in the negotiations to predict a strike.

Ms. Logan would not comment on the demands of the union nor would she say how the negotiations are progressing. "I can't divulge anything like that." CUPE members have been without a contract since the end of March.

by Geoff Stone

A strong strike vote from Dalhousie faculty may well be the bargaining chip needed to settle the ongoing negotiations between Dal faculty and the Dalhousie Board, says Caroline Savoy, spokesperson for the Dalhousie Faculty Association.

"The best bargaining tool is a massive strike vote," says Savoy, noting that a 70 percent strike vote at Acadia University brought the two sides together and averted a strike.

Savoy says quality of education, assurance of fairness, pensions, and salaries are the main issues as they continue negotiations with the Dalhousie Board.

Savoy says Dalhousie faculty have only been offered what amounts to a 0.9 per cent increase in their cost of living by the board of governors, only aggravating wage disparities that put Dalhousie Faculty salaries at 17 per cent below those at the University of New Brunswick.

Savoy says pensions at the university are also sub-standard. "There is a very poor pension here (at Dalhousie)" Savoy says, pointing to the fact that pensions end up less than 50 percent of previous income, while most other universities give pensions ranging from 70 to 75 per cent.

Savoy says at present the Board has refused to discuss the two money issues, stating that "non-monetary" issues should be settled first.

But according to Savoy, one non-monetary issue of great concern to students isn't even being considered by the Board. That issue concerns the quality of education at the university. The DFA

says that to adequately service the students, the administration attrition of faculty (not hiring new faculty after faculty leave or retire) must be controlled so that students' class size and quality of instruction remain high. But the Board maintains such attrition will continue.

Savoy says the DFA will negotiate the issue of replacing lost faculty, and ensuring that students get the high quality education that Dalhousie is noted for.

Along with salaries, pensions, and the quality of education, Savoy says the DFA is pressing for a fairness article in the collective agreement. This article would ensure that professors are treated fairly by the administration,

according to rules of "natural fairness".

Savoy says the DFA has been so picky in details of the collective agreement because they have already had verbal agreements that were later denied by the Board. "We can't trust each other," says Savoy, "we need an iron-clad agreement, which makes it (negotiations) very difficult."

Savoy says it will be very important for students to support the faculty during the strike, in order to help negotiations for quality of education, and for adequate salaries to keep good professors at the university. "If students put pressure, it will make those issues," says Savoy.

DFA issues

Attrition-

Dalhousie faculty who retire or otherwise leave the University are not always being replaced. This attrition has meant departments are losing professors and there are fewer courses available to students. The DFA wants new faculty to be hired so that Dalhousie faculty levels are maintained.

Pensions-

At present, Dalhousie pensions are: 2% x the number of years teaching x a professor's final average salary. This often comes to well below the 70 to 75% of former earnings in retirement which other university professors enjoy.

Salaries-

Average salaries at Dalhousie are 17% below those at the University of New Brunswick. Associate professors earn \$6,000 less than St. Mary's and UNB profs. The DFA wants an increase in wages to close that gap. They say this will help to keep good professors at Dalhousie, and maintain Dalhousie's present quality of education.

Fairness Article-

The DFA wants fair treatment (i.e. reasonable procedures) for professors at Dal. This would ensure that the Board could not suddenly impose restrictions or other rules on professors without due reason.