

# Lawvere presents his case

Prof. Lawvere wrote this letter to Professor R. L. Comeau, President of the Dalhousie Faculty Association, now investigating his non-rehiring, and Brian Smith, President of the Dal Student Union.

Dear Professor Comeau and Mr. Smith:

In 1969 I gave up my tenured position on the faculty of the City University of New York, Graduate Center in order to become Killam Research Professor of Mathematics at Dalhousie. This step was taken only because of assurances conveyed to me by President Hicks and the Chairman of Mathematics that a continuing research group at Dalhousie was being set up under my scientific leadership in the related fields of category theory, mathematical logic, universal algebra, and algebraic geometry.

Also because of these assurances, fifteen mathematicians have in the past two years joined the Dalhousie faculty on my recommendation, several graduate students have enrolled, and five other well-known mathematicians from France, Rumania, and the U.S. have been in residence for periods of two weeks to four months. That our research group has in its first one and a half years of work won the respect of the international scientific community can be evidenced by:

a) the grant of \$60,000 — for research expenses in the

period 1970-73 extended to me by the National Research Council,

b) the invitation to me to give a fifty-minute report on some of our results at the 1970 Congress of the International Mathematical Union,

c) the enthusiastic participation of over fifty mathematicians who attended a four-day international meeting here at Dalhousie in January 1971 organized by me and my colleagues.

On January 12, I was informed by Dean G. R. MacLean of Arts and Science that, with

the concurrence of President Hicks, my appointment would not be renewed beyond June 30, 1971. No reason was given. However, it is well-known and will be proved in detail that the sole reason is an attempt at political repression of a serious scholar by harassment and intimidation. If this is done to a "prominent" Killam Professor, every honest student and teacher is threatened. This attempt at political persecution has won the contempt of the international scientific community, as is evidenced by numerous letters sent to myself and my colleagues and to the administration, some examples

of which are enclosed.

On the basis of the CUT guideline demanding that university administration explain their reasons for non-renewal of contracts, I request that the Dalhousie Faculty Association undertake a full investigation into the facts outlined above and in the enclosures.

That the Dalhousie Student Union has undertaken to investigate the repression of myself and others, I commend. I will endeavor to assist both the DFA and the DSU in bringing all facts to light.

Sincerely,  
F. W. Lawvere

The petition signed by Hyman Bass and 34 other participants in the January math conference was already published in the Gazette on Jan. 29th, as were excerpts from Prof. Verdier's letter. Dean MacLean's letter of Jan. 12 contains nothing beyond what is stated in the above letter of Prof. Lawvere. Recently Prof. A. Grothendieck, a well-known mathematician who in 1966 was awarded the Fields Medal (the "Nobel Prize" of mathematics) requested that his letter to Professor J. Giraud be published.

Dear Giraud:

Your letter about Lawvere's troubles with the University Administration at Halifax, and the possibility (or probability, according to your letter) that he may be fired for political reasons has been quite a shock. Although some such scandals did occur in American universities in the last years, I thought that Canada was still immune.

I understand that it is as clear to you as it is to myself that no professional reason could possibly justify Lawvere's being fired. He is certainly a brilliant mathematician, perhaps the brightest in Canada of his generation — at least as far as I can judge from those I know of. It is particularly ironic that gossip concerning my own relations with Lawvere should be used as an extra motive for his being fired.

The only reason that could possibly have induced me to take part in the conference on category theory taking place in January, is precisely that it was Lawvere who extended the invitation to me, and (as far as I understood) who was the main inspiration of the conference. However, my own interests have shifted away so widely from category theory and algebraic geometry lately, that I finally decided not to attend.

The fact that Lawvere, unlike most of our colleagues, is still able of interest and commitment outside of pure mathematics, in areas of importance to the whole of mankind and not merely to a handful of specialists, has made

the prospect of attending his conference certainly more attractive, whatever differences in opinion we may have. What I am shrinking from more and more are only those people who refuse to take any stand whatever on issues which are clearly vital to all of us.

I wonder what your own position will be in case Lawvere is fired, and what your colleagues at the math department will do about it. It is my conviction that only by taking very firm stand against such political actions that some measure of freedom can be maintained — irrespective of what the opinions are that somebody is being fired for. If I were there now as a guest, I certainly would make it clear that I was not going to stay any longer after anything like a decision of firing Lawvere was taken, and that I would publicly advocate a general boycott of university of Halifax in this event.

From Jan. 1 to March 15, I will be at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. I hope you will keep me informed about the affair with Lawvere. Please extend to him my best regards, and my regret that I am not going to meet him in January. By the way, do you know if L. reads french? If so, I would like to send him Survivre (no4 just out), which I believe could interest him, even if he should disagree for the time being with many points we are making.

Very best wishes to you and your family,

A. Grothendieck



This likely is one of the reasons why Prof. Lawvere is being fired. He was protesting against the WMA at a meeting in the Law Building.

## Chronology of Lawvere's harassment

October 16, 1970

The Trudeau Government proclaimed the War Measures Act which contains provisions for arbitrary search, seizure and imprisonment and in my opinion clearly attempts to consolidate fascism.

At Dalhousie an evening lecture was given by a U.S. Philosophy Professor some of whose writings had supported a scheme for controlling the values of society by a small group of experts, as well as for chemical control of rebellious populations, which was analyzed by the Dalhousie Student Movement as pro-fascist. They attempted to question him during his lecture, but he did not answer. Prof. Braybrooke moved the lecture to another room.

October 18, 1970

I returned from lecturing in another city to learn of the above events.

October 19, 1970

In the regular meeting of the Faculty Senate Professor Braybrooke introduced the slogan "Disruption of Academic Activities" and supported by Prof. Samek presented a rather one-sided description of the Oct. 16th evening lecture. I tried to present the facts as I knew them and supported the right of students to do investigation and question lecturers.

Also at the Senate Meeting I presented a

resolution condemning the War Measures Act. The Senate refused to discuss it.

October 29, 1970

The law school held a public meeting featuring a panel discussion about the War Measures Act. The panel included the reactionary Professor Pillay and a Trotskyist billed as a "revolutionary". Carrying a sign which read OPPOSE CONSOLIDATION OF FASCIST LAW I accompanied members of the Dalhousie Student Movement and others in a demonstration. As predicted the panel made no serious attempt to analyse the War Measures Act or to oppose it. At the end of the first speech by a law professor I shouted the question: "Do you oppose fascism or do you support it?" When he refused to take a position on the question, I shouted: "Death to fascism!" Somewhat later a small group of law students physically attacked me and other demonstrators. We defended ourselves by fighting back. Professor Samek immediately said that this violence was a justified response to our demonstration. He then attempted to provoke me by saying: "Why don't you hit me?" I replied: "I'm not a fascist." He then participated himself in a physical attack on another demonstrator by choking him from behind.

(cont'd p. 13)