

DSU hangs up on MT&T

by Robert Drinkwater

The Dalhousie Student Union has decided not to sell pagers to students on behalf of Maritime Tel and Tel, the regional telecommunications giant.

The decision came after Vice-President Executive Caroline Kolompar informed the DSU Council of a proposal from MT&T's Mobility division. The offer was similar to one accepted by the Saint Mary's University Student Association (SMUSA), which offers the council a commission for every paging device sold.

The deal would have seen the DSU receive \$3,000 up front, plus \$20 for every pager sold. In return, the DSU would have actively promoted and sold the units through MT&T Mobility.

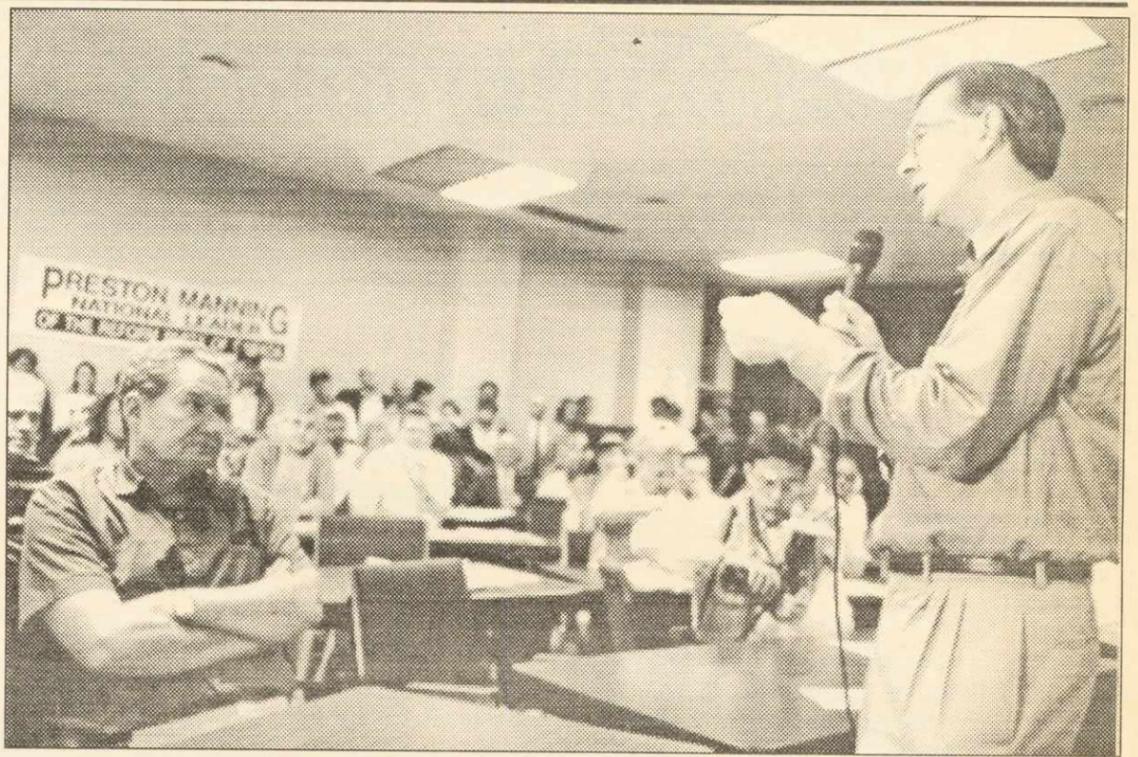
Kolompar told the meeting that she wanted direction from the council on the general principle of selling products on behalf of a company. She said it would be different from what they do with soft drinks or beer, where the DSU buys the product, and then resells it. With the pagers, she said that the DSU would have been acting as an "agent" for MT&T Mobility, and would

have been promoting the company.

That perception of agency bothered many DSU councillors. Others were curious as to why anybody would want to try selling pagers to students. One councillor questioned whether selling pagers was a suitable activity for a student union. Board of Governors representative Louis Jacobsen exclaimed, "We're a representative body, not a toy store!"

According to Rivers Corbett, Marketing Manager of MT&T Mobility, and Nick Peters, an MT&T sales representative, the proposal was an attempt to expand pager sales into the student market. They said that while pagers have traditionally been marketed to professionals and sales people, students can benefit from them too. They claimed that students need to stay in touch with study partners or employers, and that pagers are more reliable than roommates for forwarding messages.

"To really position these pagers in the university market, we must position them inside and on the campus", said Peters on why they favoured selling pagers through the DSU over sim-



National Reform Party Leader Preston Manning, on the campaign trail spoke to 300 at the Dal Law School on September 11.

ply doing so independently.

"The student union also knows their public", Corbett added, which he said gives them an edge over the company's own sales staff.

MT&T Mobility also offered a similar deal to the Saint Mary's University Students' Association. President Kyle Langille said that SMUSA council accepted the proposal, and did not share the view of many on the DSU that selling pagers on commission was like working for a company.

"We didn't see it as acting as an agent at all", said Langille.

"All we are doing is facilitating a service that could be beneficial to Saint Mary's students", he continued, adding that it was not much different from selling graduation rings or yearbooks.

Langille said that the deal was not compromising the image of his student union.

"We are not actively recruiting people to come into the office and buy it. We are simply offering it there." He

added that in these times of financial strain, all student unions must find innovative ways to provide services.

Despite the DSU's rejection of MT&T Mobility's proposal, Corbett and Peters said that Dalhousie students will still be able to purchase pagers on campus. Anticipating a negative reaction from the DSU, Rivers and Corbett have already negotiated a deal to distribute pagers through the Dalhousie Commerce Society.

Dal TAs, sessionals to form bargaining unit

by Ryan Stanley

They walk you through your crayfish dissection. They run your history tutorial. They work for an accounting firm and teach your evening statistics class on the side.

They're better known as teaching assistants and sessional teachers, and for the amount of work that they do, they typically don't get much respect from university administrations. Nor do they have the job security and other benefits that come with being a university professor.

That may soon be changing. If all goes as planned, educational workers

at Dalhousie — TAs, lab instructors, markers and sessional teachers — will be unionized by next spring, as a local chapter of the Canadian Union of Educational Workers (CUEW). This would mark the first time that educational workers at a Nova Scotia university have succeeded in organizing themselves to speak — and bargain — as a unit.

"Right now we're very cheap labour," says Jennifer Hoar, Chair of the Dalhousie Educational Workers' Organizing Committee (Dal-EWOC) and a PhD student in biology. Hoar says that most educational workers endure a great deal of insecurity because their

status is not formally recognized and because they are often the first to feel the crunch of funding cuts.

"If you were to look at the budget for any department or the university as a whole, you would not find where TAs are paid from or where sessionals are paid from," says Hoar. "They're paid off soft money." She said when a department experiences a drop in funding from the university, it is faced with the choice of cutting educational workers or taking the money from elsewhere in its budget.

"There's no guarantee of anything," she says. "There's no guarantee that what you make this year is going to be

what you make next year — you could make less if there's not enough money." In addition to the insecurity resulting from their unstable status, Hoar says educational workers are usually under pressure from the demands of a second full-time career or a degree towards which they are working.

At Dalhousie, only professors, instructors, librarians and counsellors who are employed at more than 50% are covered by the collective agreement of the Dalhousie Faculty Association (DFA). That leaves out graduate and undergraduate students who TA, as well as sessionals who only teach one or two courses.

Richard Mendonca, National Secretary/Treasurer for CUEW, says that although educational workers often slip through the cracks and are not protected by the collective agreements which cover full-time faculty members, they needs and concerns should be recognized.

"Our feeling is that anyone who does any sort of teaching should be protected in some way," says Mendonca. "Once you are employed by a university, there are certain rules and standards which should apply to everyone."

Mendonca and Hoar cited numerous issues over which educational workers should have the power to bargain with their employer, the university. Especially in the sciences, lab instructors often have health and safety concerns. Grievance and hiring procedures should be negotiated, as should needs such as medical coverage and daycare, which affects many educational workers.

Hoar also noted that pay scales frequently discriminate against undergraduate TAs. She said they generally get paid less than graduate students, despite the fact that they are usually more familiar with the subject of the courses they teach.

In general, says Luke Ashworth, a PhD student in Political Science at Dalhousie, "It's very important for a group like us to have a say in our work

environment. It's a group that has traditionally not had a voice."

The Dalhousie administration has contested Dal-EWOC's application for union certification before the Nova Scotia Labour Relations Board (LRB). Hoar said that the administration appears to have accepted the need for some kind of educational workers' union, but is trying to negotiate a reduction in the size of the potential bargaining unit. She said Dal-EWOC will push for sessionals to be included along with TAs of all kinds.

A representative from the Dalhousie administration could not be reached for comment.

In fact, CUEW has already virtually recognized Dal-EWOC as its tenth local chapter, according to Derek Blackadder, Executive Assistant at CUEW's national office. A charter will take effect on September 23, when Dal-EWOC is scheduled to hold a general membership meeting to pass its by-laws.

To date, CUEW locals have been founded only in Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario. Blackadder said that once Dalhousie's educational workers succeed in negotiating their first collective agreement, it may present an example for those at other universities in the Atlantic region and stimulate the founding of organizing committees elsewhere.

In the meantime, however, Hoar said certification of educational workers at Dalhousie may be a slow process. Preliminary hearings, where the administration and Dal-EWOC presented their cases before the LRB, were held in June, and hearings resumed September 14.

Several hearing dates are booked for October, says Hoar, "and we could easily use all of those because the administration is being really nit-picky." After the hearings, the LRB must then deliberate and announce its decision on what groups will be included in the union.

New loan to be tested

by Nick Vanweerdenburg

TORONTO (CUP) — Two hundred University of Toronto students will test a controversial new type of student loan this fall.

The Ontario government is introducing the "Income Contingent Loans Pilot Project," which will run alongside the regular Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP). The program will award a total of 1000 loans whose monthly repayment amounts will depend on a student's income after graduation. Under the current system, repayment is calculated based solely on debt load.

Under the pilot program, a graduate earning under \$20,001 per year would not be required to repay anything. Graduates earning more would have to pay 4-6 percent of their income, depending on how much they earn.

Rick Martin, liaison officer for the University of Toronto's Part Time Undergraduate Students and one of two student members on the five-person Ministerial Committee on Student Aid Reform, said he welcomes the experiment. "[It] was a step in the right direction."

"OSAP as a whole should be income-contingent," Martin added. "It is fairer and more equitable to students, and also makes more efficient use of government money."

While the pilot program is strongly supported by the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA), it is opposed by all other student advocacy groups.

Uma Sarkar, president of the Arts and Science Students' Union (ASSU) said the program would make university less accessible to lower-income groups by increasing the amount students pay for their education and thus, their final debt load.

"It's a pilot program now but it establishes a damaging precedent for students who have a problem with accessibility to post-secondary education. (It is) establishing a framework in which more of the burden is placed on the student."

Unlike in the current system where the federal government pays the interest costs of a loan while a student is still attending school, under ICLRP the government would not cover interest payments. Interest would accumulate on the student's loan from the moment the loan is negotiated.

Sarkar said the removal of the interest-free provision while a student remains at school could drastically increase the cost of an education.

"Right now we pay 18-20 per cent of [the cost of] education," Sarkar said. "With interest payment on the debt you could end up paying 40-50 per cent."

But according to Martin this is beneficial. He says the current program's interest-free period is effectively a partial write-off given to all loan recipients, irrespective of their ability to pay. Martin said under income-contingency, write-offs only go to students who need them.

Sarkar, however, pointed to the effects ICLRP has had in Australia, one of the countries (along with New Zealand and Britain) that have similar programs.

Since the beginning of the Australian program the government has repeatedly lowered the amount of income graduates must earn to be exempt from repayment.

Ontario hasn't yet decided whether to run the experiment over one or two years. The maximum value of the loans will be \$2500 per year, or a maximum of \$5000 if a two-year pilot project is undertaken.