

Where's the beef?

The sign "Hey Tom, Lick our Fucking Rods" bobbed in the crowd as Dalhousie president Tom Traves spoke about what he said were the harsh realities of university funding.

The guy carrying the sign was wearing a striped, spray-painted set of overalls, and he looked pretty unconventional — even in the midst of more than 500 students protesting a whole bunch of things. Protesting the possibility of a strike, protesting rising tuition fees, and protesting not being included in contract renegotiations.

The guy looked unconventional, but what he was saying couldn't have been more commonplace.

"Dalhousie is run as a business — the students are Dal's customers but businesses don't treat customers like we've been treated. It's not fair."

The rationale underpinning this sentiment, one that's becoming more and more prevalent, wouldn't look out of place on a cheap t-shirt.

"We pay, we say."

It's as eloquent as "Where's the Beef?" and just as useful.

Students, fed up with being marginalized in their own education, are taking a stand. Unfortunately by standing up for our rights as consumers we're missing the point and buying into the idea that education is a service and we are its passive customers.

The language of consumerism,

illustrated by the nonsensical market-speak of middle managers, is slowly seeping into everyday conversations.

Vice president student services, Eric McKee, used exactly this language to talk about student concerns during a strike.

"This is a labour relations conflict," he said. "In these situations users of services — whether they're customers at a store or users of public transit or students at university —

work by the student as it does the service providers — the professors and administration.

Nor can you quantify education.

Are people at universities with cheaper tuition necessarily getting more value for their money? It is impossible to measure, because you get from your education — to state a cheesy truism — what you put in it.

But no one talks about what they put into anything anymore — except cash.

I'm not saying that tuition fees are irrelevant, or that the university is not responsible for keeping education accessible. I am saying students negate their ability

to change and affect their education at this university when they put themselves in the role of a customer. A customer's only option is to buy, or not buy. Students are engaged in creating the system, there is no product.

If the faculty strike could have been that students are central to every aspect of a functioning university. Instead, students have become embittered and feel shut out.

And the only way they know how to respond is to say that if they were at the Price Club, things would be better.

I guess that depends on how much you like the Price Club.

SHELLEY ROBINSON

Editorial

tend to get caught in the middle."

To be fair, McKee was likening students' frustrations with those felt by others trapped in strike situations they are powerless to control.

But while all three share the same emotions, there are important distinctions between students and people who are either shopping or hopping on a bus.

To be a student is to be engaged in a profession. It is, granted, a profession that people pay for, but that does not diminish its value.

Buying a bag of chips is not a job, nor does it require any significant time or energy to achieve. It is a service. They make, you buy, you eat, you're done.

Obviously, learning just isn't comparable. It requires as much

Letters

Just another angry Dal student

To the editor,

On Wednesday, as the possibility of a strike and subsequent lockout grew to an almost certainty, I became very concerned with that which faces us all. I had been somewhat "out of the loop" — pretty disconnected with the negotiations between the DFA and the Dal higher-ups. I have a job set up in North Carolina this summer, and I don't want this strike interfering with American sun and American dollars.

To ease my nerves and to get a better understanding of the situation, I went to see Dr. Ugursal, the head of the DFA. What a mistake. The conversation started off on the wrong foot and quickly took a sour turn. In the span of about 10 minutes, things went from bad to stupid. Apparently I had said some things that Dr. Ugursal didn't appreciate, because at one point he told me (and I'm quoting) that "I didn't know shit about anything".

When I told him that I wouldn't be happy if the faculty walked out, he told me that it wasn't the professors' fault if there was a strike and to "fucking talk to Tom Traves" because the Dalhousie administration was refusing to negotiate. He also told me that if he had time to talk to all 14,000 Dalhousie students, he wouldn't have time to do his other job (head of Mechanical Engineering at DalTech). This is my first encounter with the classic "you're not a name, you're a number and a tuition cheque" — the Dal attitude I've heard so much about. There's an obvious teacher-to-student respect being displayed here, don't you think?

The whole thing left a bitter taste in my mouth. The type of responses I was getting from DFA head Dr. Ugursal was something I might have expected from Tom Traves, or more fitting, a nine year old child. Throughout this whole strike mess, all I've been hearing is that the

students are the ones who really matter, and that all these negotiations are for the good of the student. I gotta say, I didn't get that impression from talking to Dr. Ugursal. It seems I have been left without choice. I must take Tom Traves and the Dalhousie Administration's side in this farce.

Boo! Hiss! Curse the professors! You get paid too much as it is! Take a pay cut! OK, that's out of my system. If the professors do strike and it is not resolved by the beginning May, it won't matter to me; I'll be in North Carolina. Dalhousie can either refund my tuition or give me credits that I haven't earned. It's up to them, because if this bullshit prevents me from going south to work this summer, some other university will be cashing my \$5500 cheque come next September.

ANDREW WOODS
DalTech Sextant
Editorial Board

In search of a productive negotiator

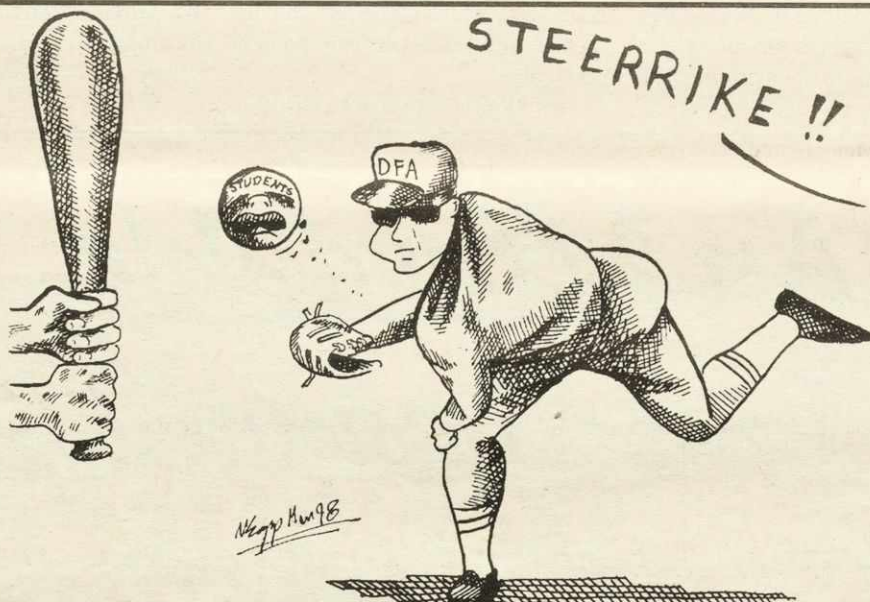
To the editor,

Is it not amazing that non-PhD negotiators like Tariq Azizz, Kofi Annan et al could sit down and reason on principles and in the process avoid a potential war? Yet with all these hundreds of PhD brains that we have on the faculty and the administration, both sides are using extortion, intimidation, and threats as weapons of reasoning.

Are these the same people who are supposed to teach the students reasoning skills?

Where are the sixties-style activists when you need them?

ABBIE HOFFMAN,
BOBBY SEALE,
JERRY RUBIN ET AL
The neo-Chicago 7 of Halifax



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