

Q & A WITH THE FACULTY ASSOCIATION

by Jonathan Smith

Recently there have been many questions regarding how a faculty strike at UPEI will affect students, more than have been answered by the media. The information so far has been general and tailored to the public. However, it has seemed to do little in actually explaining how the changes that are being asked for will affect not only faculty but students as well. I decided that an interview with Dr. Lawrence Hale, head of the UPEI Faculty Association and the chief negotiator, was in order, to shed some more light on how the faculty's demands will make the university a better place for students.

Q. What are the long-term goals of the faculty, and how will those goals benefit students?

A. The point of unionization for any faculty in Canada is the long-term health of their institution. In recent years, universities have become less collegial and more corporate-minded, and that's led to practices that are not in keeping with university traditions. One of the ways the faculty can prevent this is to seek legal protection and unionize. That's good for the university long-term, because the faculty can negotiate the aspects that make a university a good place to come, maintain traditions that make universities work so well, establish working conditions and salaries, and generally makes the university a place where students will want to come and study, and perhaps in the future even establish careers. The long-term goal is to make UPEI a good, competitive place.

Q. What about students who see themselves at UPEI as "customers" and see their studies as only a stepping stone to get to their final goals?

A. We would hate for students to see themselves as that. We'd like to see students see themselves as students, and the faculty as professors, as teachers. It's unfortunate that we get caught up in these things, but we do see ourselves as defending principles. This includes our defending language in regards to academic freedom, on what is meant by collegiality and how that fits into tenured promotion considerations. Sometimes you have to take a stand. I hate to say people do get caught in the middle, but unfortunately that can happen. What has to happen is that the parties doing the squaring off, the faculty and the administration, have to be mindful that there is somebody else out there, and we are quite mindful of that. So we are doing everything we can to resolve this without any sort of work-stoppage. That's our goal, but unfortunately there is no guarantee.

Q. In the event of a strike, how will students fare?

A. I can only speak from the experience of other faculty strikes in Canada. This isn't the first - there have been several in Atlantic Canada. Right across Canada, a term has never been lost. A term has been delayed, extended a bit, but generally ways are found to get a term in. There is inconvenience, there is no question about it. At the end of the day, what comes out of these things is a university that is more sure of itself because it has things in place that really make it a better institution in the long haul.

Q. People have asked exactly how the issue of intellectual property fits into this whole matter. Can you explain a bit?

A. The intellectual property issue is emerging lately because pre-

viously, people did their research, published their papers, and there was no real economic benefit. Recently though, the things that are coming out of laboratories or individual creative activities are marketable, but at the end of the day it's the intellectual property of the creator. Faculty usually have to secure funding and develop the idea, and they want control over what happens to their intellectual work. It's a comparatively recent phenomenon, no question about it. Lately, universities have seized upon the commercial potential of faculty research to essentially make up for some of the loss of funding from provincial and federal sources. For example, Wade MacLauchlan is a signatory to a national agreement that commits the university to triple commercialization of faculty research at UPEI. One of its goals is to get more value out of research and capitalize on the benefits of that. The Faculty Association does not want to cut the university out of research, particularly because it provides resources, but we want members to have the ultimate control over what happens to the ideas. If it's to be patented or commercialized, we want the member to be able to decide that because ultimately it was their idea.

Q. There is concern among students that the intellectual property issue is coming up very late in the talks, which seems a bit odd. How recently has the issue come up?

A. We brought out the full intellectual property proposal over a year ago. It's only over the last little while that the Administration has gotten back to us. They had their own reasons, but if it's coming out late it's not because we put it on the table late. We had the proposal out early, and it's been late in being responded to, but when it finally was, we had to react.

Q. Are you concerned about hard feelings existing between students and faculty in the event of a strike?

A. The experience has been that that really hasn't been a problem in faculty strikes. There can be some residual frustration, but generally, when a strike ends, people become focused on getting back to the job and doing their best. I can assure you that if job-action occurs, our members are going to come back and be focused on making sure everything is done and the term is made up as smoothly as possible for everyone. I don't think any feelings last that long. People are mature and intelligent. We're scholars here, and realize something has to happen and we get to it. I certainly don't think any job action will happen. I still think there's enough good will around.

Q. In the event of job-action, will the faculty be doing its best to help and support those students who have deadlines, such as international visas, whom due to a strike would suddenly need their deadlines pushed back?

A. We're still a little new to the strike idea to be perfectly frank. The only thing I can say is that in terms of situations such as students with visas, these have been handled at other universities in the past, and we have a wealth of experience in talking to these other institutions all the time about things we can do. If there's anything we can do that doesn't co-opt our ability to carry out job-action, we will do anything we can for students.

Thanks to Dr. Lawrence Hale for taking the time to give an interview and for all his information.