

Dal students rally against impending strike

BY SHELLEY ROBINSON

(With files from Kaveri Gupta, Natalie MacLellan and Paul Mansfield)

HALIFAX (CUP)--Students rallying at Dalhousie University last week had a few words to say about the impending faculty strike — and the word of choice was “bullshit”.

Between 700 and 800 students marched through campus March 17 and staged a protest outside the building where the university's board of governors was meeting. They expressed anger at being caught in the middle of the stalled faculty contract negotiations, and demanded a set for students at the bargaining table.

Faculty could legally walk out, or the university could lock them out, as early as March 25. The administration has announced that in the event of a strike, classes will be cancelled.

The meeting was broadcast to protestors over a PA system, and shouts of “bullshit” greeted university president Tom Traves as he described the three options the university has — increased government funding, cutbacks or increased tuition fees — to deal with its current funding crunch. The university has repeatedly said that it does not have the funds to meet the professors two central contract demands a healthy pay increase and replacement of faculty who leave or retire.

Traves addressed the students interruption.

“These problems will not magically go away. Shouting ‘bullshit’, shouting ‘boo’ does not make the problems we face go away. It would be nice but it doesn't work that way in the real world,” he said.

At the rally, Brian Kellow, an incoming member of the student union, presented an alternative to Traves' plans.

“[The] fourth option is to allow students into the talks and allow us to take part in determining our own future, for Christ's sake.”

Student union president Chris Adams wants a chance to sit in on the negotiations as a student observer.

“The faculty will be fighting for their interests, the administration will be fighting for their interests,” he said. “Who's fighting for student issues? Without that seat there, student issues [are ignored].”

Earlier this year, the student union president of Acadia University in Wolfville, N.S. was permitted to sit in during faculty contract negotiations, and it was considered a first in faculty labour relations history.

Although he was originally opposed to the idea, Ismet Ugursal, president of the Dalhousie faculty association, says he is now in favour of having a student presence at negotiations.

“In retrospect, it would have been better if we had a student observing the negotiations [from the beginning], because they would have first-hand information on how the board stalled and didn't cooperate.”

“The students have to put their voice in this thing, [and] have to be heard. I'm on

their side.”

While Traves has not explicitly said whether or not he is in favour of students participating in negotiations, he has invited Adams to a meeting to discuss the matter.

At the rally students expressed frustration with a variety of issues connected to the strike, including high tuition fees, their professors low salaries, the deteriorating quality of education and the lack of information they have been getting about the status of negotiations.

“I'm tired of not know-

ing what is going on with the strike and the [administration] and the [faculty] are not listening to us,” Dal student Michael Arbuckle said.

Students did get some good news a couple of days before the rally, however, when they learned that the union representing teaching assistants and at-time instructors at Dalhousie (as well as Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax) accepted a tentative deal from the administration, effectively ending the threat of a strike by those university personnel.

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