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Campus janitors have staged a walkout

By RICK BASTON

On Thursday, January 31, the janitors of Modern Building Cleaners, Custodian Cleaning Services, and Jet Cleaners, announced their intention to walk out on their employers. The men are demanding a salary increase from their current rate of \$2.28 an hour to \$3.00 an hour.

The strike came about after the men learned that they might possibly find themselves working for yet another contractor on Friday, Feb. 1. The university had given notice that it wished to reopen the bidding on several buildings on campus. This would result in yet another loss of benefits to the men, who in many cases, have worked for the university, and possibly as many as two of the contractors within the last nine months.

As spokesman Kent Blades explained, "Many of the men have been working here for \$2.28 an hour for the last two years."

The problem originally began in May of last year, when the university decided to call for tenders to clean the university instead of continuing to do the job itself. The result was the laying off of over a hundred janitors. Many of these subsequently went to work for the contractors at the wage rate of \$2.28 which they were receiving when their contract with UNB had expired in May. The contractors promised a wage increase sometime in the future.

The problem was that the contractors suffered their own problems in cleaning the buildings. The result of this was a kind of musical chairs of cleaning in which contracts changed hands a number of times. Each time, the janitors lost seniority, sick benefits, and still had to work for the same wage.

In January of this year, the employees of Custodian Services Ltd., and Modern Building Cleaners learned that there would possibly be yet another change in bosses. They decided it was time to act and signed a petition to the effect that they won't work for less than \$3.00 per hour for janitors and \$2.25 an hour for maids.

On the 29th, the representatives of the employees and the contractors met. Many of the issues such as the question of statutory holidays, paid vacation and blue cross were settled. The only problem left was that of wages. The negotiators failed to agree on this.

The result of this was the meeting on Thursday night. Kent Blades, janitors' representative, didn't mince his words as he addressed the janitors.

Blades said that when the contractors bid they were aware of the fact that the men were due for a wage increase, yet they still entered their bids based on \$2.28 per hour. He said that the contractors were aware of the minimum number of men required to clean a building and employed only this number. The result of this was to create a delicate balance that could be upset with any janitor not showing up for work.

Blades said that the university was not unaware of these facts. He said that they had done a cost analysis of each building and knew how much it cost to clean each and how many janitors and maids were required.

Blades then proceeded to plead for student support in the form of petitions, meetings of support, and to demand that the university reveal the figures behind the costs of cleaning this university.

The use of the word strike isn't appropriate in this case as the janitors form no part of a union.

Because of this, the employees of Modern Cleaning who quit their jobs, and the employees of Custodian Cleaners who were laid off, have no legal status. They can't picket in front of buildings and must allow anyone hired to

replace them into the buildings. After the meeting the janitors and their scattering of student support marched over to Annex B in order to persuade anyone who had been hired to replace them not to work for \$2.28 an hour. Only one

or two replacement workers showed up and they were persuaded not to report in.

At this point, Blades said, "Perhaps the university got tired of the headache, but now it's time to hand it back."



Photo by Jerome Kshetsky

Employees of three campus cleaning companies have staged a walkout to enforce their demands for higher wages.

Anderson discusses walkout

By LILLIAN RIOUX

The university will continue to contract out work to cleaning companies, stated President John Anderson.

In the interest of not causing any unnecessary disturbances the

university is not interfering with the protestors, but at some point the line must be drawn on the "laissez faire attitude," said Anderson.

Anderson said that we can get along with dirty buildings for a while.

The major concern is for the eating halls where health standards must be maintained. There have been reports of damage being done in various buildings on campus.

The university has a few cleaners that have remained on the job. These are people who have been with the university for five years or more.

UNB has been negotiating with the Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 1326 for several months. Salaries are being negotiated and it is hoped that a settlement can be reached as soon as possible. The end result will be a new rate for janitors. At this point it is hoped that an exact equivalence will be reached between contract employees and university employees, said Anderson.

Anderson also stated that there is a misconception in the minds of the public and the university community including faculty, staff and students. One is that if the university gets in financial difficulty it can go to the government through the Higher Education Commission. This is not true, the university must stay within its budget. The total percentage allotted for salaries is 72 percent.

Anderson said the protestors have some cause for complaint but are going about it in the wrong way. The protestors are protesting without knowing the end goal of the negotiations.



Photo by Stu Majka

"Happy" UNB'ers swung lighted torches over their shoulders and traipsed down the hill for the annual event of the 1974 Winter Carnival which concludes Sunday.