

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** January 21, 2019

Welcome Reception for Interim President & Vice-Chancellor Peter MacKinnon - Halifax Campus, Dalhousie University - Sculpture Court, Dalhousie Arts Centre | 6101 University Avenue

**K'jipuktuk (Halifax, NS):** Today, Dalhousie Students engaged in a silent action to address Interim President MacKinnon's blatant support of anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism along with other forms of oppressive rhetoric, both within the academy and our institution. Dalhousie University students are here today to express our disappointment with the administration's decision to appoint Peter MacKinnon as the Interim President of Dalhousie. Both Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) and non-BIPOC students, united our efforts, vision, and concerns for our university, took action into our own hands today. We hope that this demonstration strikes a meaningful dialogue with our university and beyond, and that our university delivers on tangible actions in order to address both individual and systemic racism on our campuses. We do not believe this appointment was made with the University's best interests in mind. Despite being the biggest stakeholders<sup>1</sup> in the university, students were not consulted in this decision.

#### **List of Student Demands:**

1. The immediate removal of current Interim President, Peter MacKinnon;
2. Dalhousie University and Dalhousie Student Union issue a public apology for the direct and indirect harm caused by hiring MacKinnon, and therefore supporting the racist rhetoric portrayed in his published works;
3. A statement of recognition from the Dalhousie Board of Governors Ad-Hoc Committee responsible for hiring the Interim President. The Committee statement ought to recognize:
  - a. the error or negligence in the hiring and vetting process;
  - b. the safety of BIPOC and other students was jeopardized as a result of this hire; and
  - c. the Committee's responsibility to strike a new Ad-Hoc Hiring Committee that can accurately represent the diverse needs<sup>2</sup> and inclusive vision<sup>3</sup> of the University;
4. Mandatory Anti-Oppression training for all Administrators at Dalhousie University and all Executives at Dalhousie Student Union - from either an internal body such as the Human Rights and Equity Services Office, the Dalhousie Student Union's Equity and Accessibility Office, or an external body;
5. The immediate action of the University Secretariat, Dalhousie Board of Governors and Dalhousie Senate, by conducting and enforcing an institutional level review of the impacts of systemic racism perpetuated by the University, both in a contemporary and historical context. This includes but is not limited to:
  - a. Review of the Presidential Search Committee and the University representatives on the Committee;
  - b. Review of the University's Administrative bodies and the mechanisms used to address individual and systemic forms of racism and oppression;

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dal.ca/dept/financial-services/reports/operating-budget-report.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.dal.ca/about-dal/leadership-and-vision/dalforward/strategic-direction.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.dal.ca/cultureofrespect/diversity-strategy.html>

- c. Conduct Unit Reviews of Dalhousie Faculties and their respective governing bodies to ensure:
  - i) the Strategic Direction Initiative 5.2<sup>4</sup>, Belong Report<sup>5</sup>, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, along with other University sponsored reports and initiatives are being implemented;
  - ii) the impacts and consequences of the implementation of the University's vision are being documented, reviewed, and engaged with by the University;
  - iii) the necessary supports are given to our Faculties and other Units at all levels of Dalhousie University;
  - iv) the opportunities for learning about what 'Diversity and Inclusion' means to each Unit of Dalhousie, and how we can unite our efforts in order to foster an environment where everyone truly feels like they belong;
- d. Conduct trauma-informed, anti-oppressive research about student-centered issues within the institution, with institutional-level reviews of the following across all of our campuses (including our satellite campuses):
  - i) collect and document student experiences on/off-campus, including interacting with the institution at various levels and capacities and experiencing the impacts of policy development and implementation;
  - ii) understand and affirm the lived experiences of BIPOC students on/off-campus, in the classroom, reflected in course material and syllabi, and concerns of safety in all environments at Dalhousie;
  - iii) determine immediate and long-term issues outlined by students, and deliver student-informed approaches to address their concerns.

Had the university administration consulted students, they would have been made aware of our concerns with MacKinnon.

First, his dismissal of racism on campus demonstrates his inability to represent Students of Colour. In his book, MacKinnon claims that Black face is not an issue of racism<sup>6</sup>, and the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations to be "problematic."<sup>7</sup> Peter MacKinnon, as Interim President, is a concern of safety for Black, Indigenous, and Students of Colour across our campuses.

Second, MacKinnon's position on Palestine solidarity on campus further displays his reluctance to support People of Color, and raises concerns over his racist perspectives. MacKinnon has

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.dal.ca/about-dal/leadership-and-vision/dalforward.html> //

<https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/about/Strategic-Planning/ProjectCharter5-2.pdf>

<sup>5</sup><https://www.dal.ca/about-dal/leadership-and-vision/dalforward/strategic-direction/infrastructure-and-support/belong.html>

<sup>6</sup> MacKinnon (2018). University commons divided. Pp. 43-45.

<sup>7</sup> MacKinnon (2018). University commons divided. Pp. 97.

attempted to silence boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) movements on campus. Equating peaceful strategies with militancy skews the conversation when these movements are based in free speech and non-violence.

Third, MacKinnon demonstrates a pattern of misogyny in his statements on the Dalhousie Dentistry scandal. As our campus attempts to implement a new sexualized violence policy, it is alarming to have a new Interim President who does not believe survivors. Callista Hills, a Dalhousie student, states (quoting MacKinnon): "It is practically impossible for restorative justice and disciplinary processes to proceed in parallel." (26) because one is about "responsibility, repair, and hopefully reconciliation" (26) where "the latter...is about denunciation and punishment" (26) He then says that because people would have focused on (and they would be advised by their lawyers to keep focus on) only the future of their careers. Therefore "Any possibility for restorative justice would have been deferred, if not cancelled."<sup>8</sup>

Fourth, students are unimpressed with MacKinnon's undermining of students and faculty members' right to collectively organize and bargain. MacKinnon argues that "Governments should make it clear...that they will not countenance the hollowing out [of Senate] through collective bargaining of governance provisions established by legislation. Where this has already been excessive it should be rolled back; where it has not it must be resisted"<sup>9</sup>. It is unacceptable to us as students to have the university's president call for students to break from their unions, or have government intervene in student unions.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, MacKinnon also dismisses on-campus fossil fuel divestment campaigns, specifically naming Divest Dal. Divest Dal member, Laura Cutmore states: "In his book, MacKinnon states that he fundamentally disagrees with fossil fuel divestment because he does not believe that the pursuit of social justice is among the aims of a university. If Dal does not actively challenge climate injustice by divesting from fossil fuel companies then our institution is complicit in these injustices."

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For more information:

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<sup>8</sup> MacKinnon. (2018). University Commons Divided. p. 21.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 122.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p.47.