

news

Campus papers under fire

by Marie MacPherson

Student newspapers across Canada have recently begun to face investigations, threats of closure and even shut-downs by their students' councils. Here in the Maritimes, victims include the *Picaro* at Mount Saint Vincent University and the *Aquinian* at St. Thomas University in Fredericton, N.B.

At a February 12 meeting of the Mount Saint Vincent Students' Union, the council passed a motion, 12 to 1, that the position of *Picaro* editor be hired by a council-appointed selection committee. The reason cited was that "this initiative would give more accessibility to the students." The motion was passed without any prior consultation with the *Picaro* staff.

A week later, the paper issued a statement saying that the staff would not recognize the motion on the grounds that it would "jeopardize what is intended to be a press free from editorial pressures."

"The *Picaro* and the Students' Union should remain separate," says Paula Adamski, *Picaro* editor. "A government shouldn't be involved in the press in any way, even if it is just the government of the school."

Despite the council's decision, the *Picaro* proceeded to elect new staff for the 1993-94 year. Joe Strolz, one of the new editors-in-chief, said, "The council motion doesn't really affect any of us. We're simply not recognizing it. Both Bob [LeDrew, the other new editor] and I were elected according to the *Picaro* constitution, and that's what we're going by."

The voting process employed by the *Picaro* is much the same as that followed by most other student newspapers across Canada, including Dalhousie's *Gazette*, the Saint Mary's University *Journal* and the King's *College Watch*.

Those eligible to vote for the *Picaro*'s editor include current staff members and any students who have made contributions to two or more issues of the paper during the school year.

In an editorial rebuking the student government, the *Picaro* wrote, "Council should not be allowed to make major decisions for societies on campus. We are shocked that the student council passed this motion. We are even more shocked that they thought we would sit back and take it."

The *Picaro*'s constitution clearly outlines that the student council is not responsible for the administration of the paper.

The *Picaro*, the *Watch* and the *Gazette* are all members of Canadian University Press (CUP), a wire service and network of more than forty democratically run student newspapers. Chris St. Croix, regional coordinator for the Atlantic Region of CUP, sympathizes with the *Picaro*'s position. "CUP very strongly recommends that student papers have elected editorial staff. The *Picaro*, by

belonging to CUP, has national support for its position."

St. Croix points to the case of the *Caper Times*, the campus paper at the University College of Cape Breton. The paper applied for CUP membership in December 1991. Since its editor-in-chief was hired, not elected by staff, the *Caper Times*' application was turned down. Shortly afterwards,

"Government shouldn't be involved in the press in any way."

the paper changed its policies to allow for the election of its editor, and was granted full CUP membership.

St. Thomas University's campus paper, the *Aquinian*, was shut down by its students' council on March 9. At a closed-door meeting of the students' union, council voted to stop production of the *Aquinian*.

Maria Paisley, editor-in-chief of the *Aquinian*, says, "The reason given to us was that we had not kept adequate financial records of our operations."

But Paisley says that the paper had

never run a debt and had consistently met its production deadlines.

"The real reason for our shut-down was political," she said. "The first editor of the *Aquinian* didn't see eye-to-eye with council. The current staff tried hard to work things out, so this is really discouraging."

This is the sixth time that the *Aquinian* has been closed down by its students' council, Paisley says. "It comes down to a difference of opinion between the editorial staff and the council. The impact on the paper is huge — it has jeopardized our standing with the community. Trying to get local advertising will now be much more difficult."

The *Aquinian*'s situation is very much like that faced by the student newspaper at Alberta's Grand Prairie Regional College. The *Tapestry*'s accounts were frozen in December by the students' union, which cited "student concerns" with the paper's finances and with articles printed in the previous term.

However, the *Tapestry*'s General Manager Peter Sanderson disagrees with this explanation. He points to the *Tapestry*'s decision to investigate the students' association's employee relations, and a number of alleged bylaw violations by the council. These initiatives coincided with the council's decision to freeze the paper's funds.

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