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'seditor 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

port 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-chiefwashired, 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

belonging to CUP, has national sup- never run a debt and had consistently met its production deadlines.

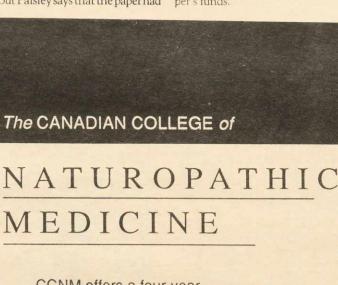
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'The real reason for our shut-down was political," she said. "The first editor of the Aquinian didn't see eyeto-eye with council. The current staff tried hard to work things out, so this is really discouraging."

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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