

# President Owen comes under fire at council meeting

by Paul Creelman

Council President Gord Owen warded off a barrage of criticism and accusations of impropriety from Councilors at the Student Council meeting last Sunday.

The questions were sparked by an extension of nomination deadlines at a General Meeting of the Student Union only five hours before they were to close. Owen, the originator of the motion, filed his nomination papers to rerun for office after the original deadline on Saturday.

Three other candidates for various positions also filed their nomination papers after the original deadline.

Umesh Jain, chief electoral officer, explains the basis of the controversy as the revocation of a motion passed on Council to close the deadlines early, because there would be few nominations submitted during the reading week break.

"The constitution says that the deadline for nominations will close on a Monday this year", said Jain, "but in Council the decision was made to overrule the constitution and close nominations early. What they did in the General Meeting was to reestablish the regulation in the constitution. So it's not like Gord pulled a fast one, or rather that he did so by the constitution."

Owen bluntly states that he did not introduce the motion to change the deadline for his own personal advantage.

"I would have had the nomination papers in by five o'clock that day anyway," said Owen. "The reason that I introduced the motion was a request by someone else who wanted the extra time to enter their application."

Owen refuses to name the candidate who made this request, however, he points out that the positions of arts engineering representatives would have been uncontested if the nomination deadlines had not been extended.

Greg Graham, a graduate studies rep who is also a

candidate for president of the Student Council in upcoming elections, expresses the undercurrent of suspicions held by some council members.

"No, I don't think it was a proper action, but there's no way to prove it was unethical. There are hints of the constitution being abused, but no way to find out for sure." Graham identifies the major problem exposed in the controversy as the way in which the General Meeting was run, and proposed that a General Meeting regulation be used to prevent any further problems of this sort. (see separate story this issue).

"Was he making the motion as president or as an individual, and was Gord acting on behalf of the students? If he extended the deadlines to get time enough to find a running mate, then there was abuse. No one can prove he did it intentionally. It is very hard to

show it was manipulative", said Umesh Jain, the electoral officer.

Many of the councillors now feel that Owen's motion was not manipulation for his own self-interest. However, they are still angry because he voted against the previous motion to foreclose nominations which was passed by Council. Greg Graham, graduate rep, brought up section 2b of by-law 7 in the constitution, which states that the president can only represent the majority view of Council when acting in his official capacity. Since the extension of deadlines was not the majority view of Council, then Owen would have acted improperly if he was acting in his official capacity at the time.

Asserting that the regulation was unconnected with the issue at question, Owen seemed to relent when asked to identify exactly what the regulation 2b was supposed to refer to if not to motions such

as the one voted on. However, the possibility that Owen could have been acting as a student and member of the Student Union was also raised, and after further debate of the technicalities involved, it was suggested that the whole matter be referred to the constitutional committee.

In the atmosphere preceding the Student Council elections this spring, suspicion of allegedly improper conduct by Owen could very well hurt his chances for re-election.

"This may be a political comment," said Owen, "but I don't think my opponents would have a leg to stand on if it weren't for this. It's quite obvious that the momentum for the whole issue is being raised by a single presidential team. Certainly the Council members who voiced strong opposition to my action are all directly linked to the election team."

Owen states that although the issue of the nomination

deadlines is "something to raise to make me look bad", it seems to be nothing but a pre-election ploy. Pointing out that he had presented the arguments raised against the extended nomination deadlines when they were foreshortened by a motion in Council, Owen also feels that the procedure used to extend the deadline was valid, and that censure of the procedure is necessarily invalid.

The inflation of the issue due to the impending election was also brought up by vice-president Jeff Champion during last Sunday's Council meeting.

"If it weren't for the upcoming elections, I don't think that anybody would care about this motion", said Champion. Champion was also "somewhat offended" by the debate on the nomination deadline, considering it the opening game of the elections. Champion is not running for re-election this spring.

## Need for general meeting regulations

# Controversial meeting sparks hostile comment

by Paul Creelman

The controversial extension of nomination deadlines for the spring elections has provoked proposals for new regulations concerning the General Meetings of the Student Union.

A barrage of hostile comments at the Council meeting last Sunday resulted from binding motions passed at a poorly attended General Meeting in the preceding week. Besides the extension of nomination deadlines, which was moved by candidate for re-election Gord Owen (see separate story in this issue), there was also a motion passed directing the executive to meet with the **Gazette** Publishing Board to express the concern of students re-

garding the editorial content of and direction of the **Gazette**.

The main spark for the discussion, however, was undoubtedly unspoken concern about the propriety of Owen's motion to extend the deadlines.

Electoral officer Umesh Jain explains the basic problem with procedures at the general meetings:

"When only a small handful of students show up, a small group of students have a very large influence. There is basically a quorum of two people, which is all you need to hold a general meeting, and they can overrule anything passed at a Council Meeting," said Jain. Although a minimum quorum of 100 was in effect for the

General Meeting some years ago, the rule was abandoned.

Graduate rep Peter Rans, who moved a motion of concern about Owen's actions in the General Meeting during Council debate, feels strongly about this danger.

"If we had only a few people from the extreme left or extreme right come to the General Meeting, it would only take 8 or 10 people to pass binding motions on whatever they wanted. At least, there should be a minimum of 100 people or so established before the General Meeting can go ahead."

"In the future, then if that were made necessary, neither would Council be able to manipulate the General Meeting, nor vice versa. I believe very strongly in democracy, and the General meetings must be well attended."

Rans also points out that he and other councillors feel there is a strong problem with communication of the agenda items, and that this was a contributing factor in the low attendance of the last Council meeting. Vice-presidential candidate Marie Gilkinson echoed the complaints that the most important and controversial motions passed at the General Meeting were not on the agenda, and there was no apparent mention of new business.

"The meeting was poorly attended, and poorly advertised", said presidential candidate Greg Graham. Stating that changes in the precise

date of the General Meeting were confusing and poorly advertised, Graham sees a real danger in the domination of a General Meeting by a special interest group.

"I feel that a minimum plurality of 1% of the student body should be the quorum for meetings, with any motions coming to the floor also brought before Council," said Graham.

Council President and candidate for re-election Gord Owen agrees that there is a danger of manipulation in the General Meetings.

"To give you an example, last year they passed a motion to increase fees by \$3.00. This motion was passed in Council by about 23 members. Yet when it went to the General Meeting, I forgot whether it was 9 or whether it was 13 people that showed up. So yes, in the normal course of events, the General Meetings are not very well attended," says Owen.

However, growing more defensive concerning the advertisement and promotion of the meeting dates, Owen said that it was the duty of each individual councilor to find out about the time and place of the meetings and to attend.

Atul Sharma, science rep on council, echoes a similar and familiar sentiment. Although, he doesn't feel that there was any purposeful irregularity in Owen's motion to extend the nomination deadlines, Sharma also sees a danger of abuse of the General Meeting procedures.

# Women not complaining

by Gretchen Pohlkamp

"Women! They're never satisfied! They're always complaining..."

This familiar disclaimer may be heard in Halifax this Saturday when the third annual International Women's Day (I.W.D.) celebration gets underway. But this does not seem to worry the organizers. In fact, even though I.W.D. is March 8th, the demonstration march is being held on Saturday in order to make an impression on shoppers and business people downtown.

The march, which begins at one p.m. at the corner of South Park

and Spring Garden Road, will give women of Halifax a chance to show their solidarity and celebrate victories won in the battle for equality.

Other activities are planned for both Saturday and Sunday. Films and displays will be shown at the YWCA on Barrington Street. A social evening planned for Saturday while workshops on daycare, reproductive freedom, minority women, women and work, lesbians, and violence are organized for Sunday.

Halifax's first I.W.D. celebration was held in 1979 with 75 women attending the march. In

1980, 150 women gathered. This year, organizer Heather Harrington, hopes to double the turnout again. She said the response to the leaflet campaign has been favourable and more leaflets had to be printed.

March 8th has been a day of protest, solidarity and celebration for women for several generations. In Canada the day began to grow in popularity in the 60s. Since then, Canadian women have joined women throughout the world to help make the observance of I.W.D. a truly international event.