

CUP supports GAZETTE

January 29, 1973

Brian Smith,
President,
Dalhousie Student Union,
Dalhousie University,
Halifax, N.S.

Dear Brian:

I am shocked by the Dal student council's actions of Sunday, January 28, overruling a Gazette staff choice of editor and appointing a student councillor to the editorship.

The further action of censoring this week's edition (and perhaps future editions) by establishing a situation where copy must be approved by the student council chairman or yourself is equally intolerable.

Both actions are undemocratic and grossly violate the Canadian University Press statement of principles. As you know, the Gazette was a founding member of the organization and so has a special interest in retaining this membership.

The sections violated are as follows:

That in no case should a representative or representatives of the student government or administration have the explicit or implicit power of censorship or the power to set editorial or advertising policies;

That the appointment of the editorial board and staff of the student newspaper should be internal, not subject to the discretion of external bodies;

That the editor of the student newspaper should be selected by the staff of the newspaper.

The blatant censorship and interference in choosing the Gazette editor directly violates this statement and may lead to a formal investigation of the situation or expulsion of the Gazette from CUP.

That expulsion would mean a loss of contact with other student newspapers, a loss of technical aid through field-working, and a lack of national copy for the paper, both in news and features. The contact with other student journalists is all important to any student paper for both technical assistance and suggestions of how to solve common problems. Our regional and national conferences, as well as the exchange of papers among CUP members, provide this contact; if the Gazette is expelled from CUP, any

staff members will lose this valuable asset of CUP membership.

As an organization, we encourage member papers to democratize their internal operations so all the staff may participate in decision-making. The logical conclusion and most important aspect of this democratization process is the staff's electing an editor.

A newspaper staff is the best judge of who it can work with and respect in editorial positions. While I was Gazette editor, we worked hard to achieving some measure of staff democracy and cooperativeness. I became more of a resource person to aid and train the staff; policy decisions were made by the staff and I had to defend them whether or not I agreed with them. I was legally responsible for the paper's content, but the staff often decided what would go in a certain issue. After all, it's the staff members' paper as much as the editor's; if staff members are willing to devote long hours of hard work to producing a newspaper, they should have a say in what goes in the paper and where.

The Gazette's decision to elect Marg Bezanson editor was based on the staff's knowledge gained through working with her, and the respect she has gained from the staff for her work. She has been a Gazette worker since September, 1971, almost as long as anyone else now on the staff.

The council's decision to ignore and overrule this democratic election of Marg Bezanson seems to be very much a defensive reaction against the paper's criticisms of the council this year. The councillors acted impulsively and used the small amount of power they have to get back at the paper.

Most student councillors rarely venture inside the Gazette office to talk to the staff or find out about newspaper production. They know little or nothing about newspapers, except that they don't like criticism of themselves in the campus student paper.

If the council had real evidence to show Marg would be incompetent and irresponsible, it should have asked the staff to select another editor for ratification by council. This was not done, as council members decided they'd rather be autocratic and petty and exercise some power. Appointing another candidate from outside the newspaper —

especially a student councillor — is undemocratic.

Ken MacDougall worked on the Gazette for a short time while I was editor. He was unwilling to accept criticism of his writing, did not co-operate with the other staff members and caused a lot of frustration and tension in the office for all staff members. He also did not participate in layout sessions.

It is very dangerous to appoint as editor someone who not only hasn't worked on all aspects of the paper, but is a student councillor. A student councillor-editor will be confronted by too many occasions when conflicts of interest will arise seriously affecting the quality of the paper. The paper then often becomes a puppet mouthpiece for the student council, and provides neither adequate critical comment nor fair coverage of council for students.

If the Dal council wants a mouthpiece, it should remember its constituents and how they will be affected. Will Dal students be willing to pay more for their newspaper?

They'll have to if the Gazette is expelled from CUP because of the undemocratic selection of the editor and the possible censorship of news on the situation. This happened to one CUP newspaper — the Gateway at the University of Alberta — last year.

When it was expelled, the Gateway lost its national advertising almost completely. Our national advertising agency, Youthstream, acts only for CUP members, so the Gateway's contract with Youthstream became invalid and void when it was expelled from the organization by the membership.

If the Gazette is expelled, the loss of national advertising revenue could amount to \$6,000 easily. This loss would have to be made up somehow if a technically good newspaper was to be produced.

I hope you will take this issue to the Dal students to let them decide if you acted in their interests or your own. It would be a shame to have Canada's oldest college newspaper become a plaything for student bureaucrats.

Yours sincerely,
Dorothy Wigmore
President,

Canadian University Press
c.c. Dalhousie Gazette staff