

University newspapers in the Maritimes

by Paul Clark

From St. John's to Halifax to Cape Breton Island, Atlantic University newspapers are suffering from meager funding, censorship by student councils and printers, and shortages of staff. But the fight is going on everywhere to achieve financial and editorial autonomy and produce good, informative newspapers.

These were the main themes brought out of the Atlantic Region Canadian University Press (ARCUP) conference hosted by the Xaverian Weekly at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish this weekend.

There's no denying it, things are tough for university newspapers.

At Acadia University in Wolfville, editor Roger Taylor and staff worker Heather White regularly stay up to three and four a.m. pounding out the Athenaeum.

The Muse, Memorial University's paper, is suffering under a student council which has been reported to have a long history of interference with the newspaper. John

Parsons, the Muse editor, said Memorial's student council president last year was quoted as saying, "When the Muse gave us any trouble I just closed it down".

Financial problems also trouble the Muse.

"We don't know whether we're having a 16 page paper, 12 pages or no paper at all this week", said Parsons.

At St. Mary's University five members of the Journal, including editor Eligio Gaudio, recently resigned in protest against council interference with the content of their paper.

"Councils have a tendency to look at student newspapers as their own worst enemy."

Last week James Quick, the Journal's rep at the conference, was forced to crank out five news stories and a commentary. He plans to do the same this week.

All of the seven papers at the conference are financially dependent on their student

unions. Student councils accept, reject and alter their budgets as they please and can withhold funding at will. In most cases, they have the power to place free ads, to prevent an article they don't like from being printed and to shut down the whole paper if they choose.

The solution to problems of dependence on the student council is a constitution which protects the rights of a student paper. In the long run, a status of complete autonomy like Mount Allison's Argosy Weekly (not present at the conference), which re-

ceives its funding directly from students, is desired.

Complete autonomy is far away for most papers, however. Situations vary from that of Dal's *Gazette*, which has recently obtained permission to initiate the formation of a publishing board to assume the management decisions of the paper, to that of the College of Cape Breton's *Caper Chronicle* which does not have a constitution and whose students elected a student council only last week.

But progress is being made in these directions everywhere.

Matt Adamson, CUP's fieldworker for the Atlantic Region, spoke on newspaper relations with student councils and emphasized the need for constitutions to protect paper interests.

"Councils", he said, "have a tendency to look at student newspapers as their worst enemy".

A constitution which protects a paper's right to sufficient finances and to editorial control, he said, allows papers to fulfill their roles as "watchdogs" and not just "house organs" for council.

Student newspapers are often unpopular with council, he said, "because it's your job to tell them if they screw up".

Below are reports on the universities which attended the conference.

The Xaverian Weekly

Things seem to be rosier at St. F.X. than at other Atlantic university newspapers. Editor Jules Fauteux said financially the 'X' Weekly is in good shape.

"There are no hassles as far as purse strings go."

The staff turnout has been big this year and enthusiasm is said to be high. Fauteux says everyone reads the paper which is a "barometer" of activity on campus.

There has been one important setback to date. Last council meeting the Weekly presented their student council with a proposed constitution for the paper. The constitution was, among other things, designed to give staff members at the 'Weekly' power to elect their own editor. Members of the Weekly said their council barely looked at the proposal and

quickly voted against it.

The issue is still alive, however. "Council is kind of worried", said Fauteux, "the students are behind us".

The Caper Chronicle

Cape Breton College's newspaper is "set back four or five years", says Alan Cash, editor of the *Caper*.

The College sits a few miles outside of Sydney and, with no residence, when classes end, students go home. Students are consequently not very interested in university affairs.

To make matters worse, the council is frantically searching for \$24,000 which has been "lost, stolen or misplaced" from the treasury. This makes the *Caper's* financial situation precarious.

The newly elected council members are inexperienced and apparently have little knowledge of the role of a university newspaper.

Cash said the only real controversy has been over a Julius Schmidt condom ad (see past issues of the *Gazette*). Members of the council executive have "personally told me they don't like it", he said.

Staff members on the *Caper* are few, inexperienced and still without a typewriter. Despite these difficulties, however, they are working on their third issue.

The St. Mary's Journal

The Journal finished publishing last year with an \$11,000 deficit and a council which closed the Journal offices all summer, said entertainment editor James Quick.

At the start of the year there was a "hassle" between council and the Journal regarding the content of the paper. The censorship of the paper by Dartmouth Free Press contributed to the declining morale. When Tom Nesbitt, vice-president of student council (and described by Quick as the paper's "self-appointed moral guardian"), wrote in a letter to the editor condemning the content of the paper, the staff had had enough and editor Eligio Gaudio and four others resigned in protest.

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CUP Fieldworker Adamson said the whole debate stemmed from the sexual content of the paper. Nesbitt's "threatening, criticizing" attitude, he said, ruined the debate.

The Journal is still publishing, however, with Pam Lawrence the new acting editor.

The Muse

Freedom from council is a hot issue. For example, in order to ratify a budget for the Muse, Parsons said he had to go in alone to negotiate with the council executive, who finally took six or seven hundred dollars off his proposed budget. Council de-

layed their decision until about one third of the way through the term, he said, so it wasn't possible to start planning the term until a few weeks ago.

Another problem is council's desire to have free ads in the paper.

Problems like this have led the Muse to push for a revision of their constitution to give them greater autonomy.

Right now there is a committee studying the Muse, consisting of the interim Vice-President, "unbiased" councillors and Muse staff. Their report is expected in January.

The Athenaeum

Staff and money problems predominate at Acadia.

"Everyone leaves after 11:00 on layout night", says editor Roger Taylor, causing him and staffer Heather White to stay up till the wee hours of the morning putting together the paper.

The budget was delayed this year and the Athenaeum wasn't given any input into it. Council is now reported to be considering cutting down on the conference and travel budget.

The Picaro

Susan Drapeau, editor of Mount St. Vincent's paper, said this year there have been more of "the usual problems with council".

Currently a "big battle" is going on over whether council will be able to funnel the Picaro's advertising profits into other areas.

A first draft of a constitution, which Drapeau described as like the one the 'X' is proposing, has been prepared and will presumably be decided upon later on in this school year.

The Gazette

The *Gazette* has a bigger staff than last year, but we still need more people. Staff meetings on Thursday night are well attended and discussion is vigorous and enthusiastic.

Editor Tom Regan said council relations are better than last year, "but still not too good". A new constitution

was passed this September 30 which provides a "fair degree of autonomy" with a board consisting of three students, the *Gazette* editor and business manager, a student council member, a journalist, a lawyer, and a faculty member.

It is still up in the air whether council will buy the *Gazette* typesetting equipment.

Apart from Kentville Publishers' refusal to print a story of ours on the Dartmouth Free Press's censorship of St. Mary's paper, there have been no major crises this year. So far anyway.



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