the Gazette November 28, 1996

letters

We read with both surprise and

disgust the University's article in the

October 24, 1996 issue of the Ga-

zette, titled "The Fizz Stops Here, Dal

Cracks Down on Pop Can Pirates".

Dal was completely out of line to

negatively portray people as "Pop

Can Pirates" when they choose to

recycle their own pop cans instead

We submit that, in this case, Dal

Dal definitely has the wrong atti-

tude towards recycling. A more ap-

propriate title to that article would

have been "In True Corporate Fash-

ion, Dal Tries to Bleed the Poor for

To Put this issue into its proper

(1) We Custodians have had our

wages frozen for the last five and one

half years. Raising our families on

a poverty level wage necessitates col-

lecting/saving our pop cans. Con-

sidering the cost of tuition fees.

many Dal students are in a similar

situation. Even professors and other

professionals who earn an above

poverty level wage collect their pop

cans. Instead of fighting over who

owns a can, Dal should be happy

that they are not going to the

landfill. After all, this is what the

recycling policy is actually about.

pay for the deposit on the can.

Therefore, Dal has no right to be de-

(3) We know that Mike Murphy,

Manager of Environmental Services,

can get around our collective agree-

ment. He has proven this. Custodi-

ans have been fired over a cup of

coffee, and for taking a smoke break.

Also, we now have over forty active

grievances in the grievance/arbitra-

tion procedure. If a Custodian had

ever taken pop cans from a recycling

bin, s/he would have been disci-

plined. If a Custodian collected cans

during working hours, s/he would

have been disciplined. The only

problem we are aware of was when

one of our supervisors took cans

from a Custodian - he was forced

the recycling of pop cans issue had

(4) Prior to Mr. Murphy's article,

to return them.

manding that can.

(2) Dal does not buy the pop or

perspective, we offer the following:

of giving them to the University.

Surprise and

Disgust

is the pirate.

Every Cent it Can.'

## op / ed page 4 **Behind closed doors**

Secret and in-camera meetings have been flourishing lately in the Halifax Regional Council. A meeting goes in-camera when the members of a body decide that the matters they need to discuss should not be open to the public. Secret meetings are even worse: they are not even announced. There could be secret council meetings going on all the time and we might not have any knowledge of how our situation is being decided

Last week, there were reports that urban councillors were set to

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have a secret meeting dealing with taxation for the whole regional municipality. Rural councillors were outraged when the idea was leaked the meeting was quickly cancelled amid hasty de-

nials of impropriety. It's quite possible that the meeting was in the best interests of everyone, but the process smells a little rank.

The ability of the public to scrutinize the decision-making process of their elected officials is a vital part of the democratic system. Whenever this ability is hampered, even if it may be for a straightforward reason, the process is tainted by the stain of deception.

Even in a body like a union, by definition ruled by its members, there are still instances of decisionmaking going on behind closed doors. This problem is present in our own

student union. On several occasions the Dalhousie Student Union (DSU) has gone in-camera this fall, mostly for the purpose of electing people to various positions. The speeches by the applicants are open to the public, but the actual decision-making process is closed. Supposedly it's so Council can discuss the merits of the various candidates among themselves before making a decision. This debate, away from the eyes of Union members - that's every Dalhousie student - is mandated by the DSU Constitution

The constitution also stipulates that the election of the positions

the Dalhousie Gazette

be by secret ballot. Now, I understand that rationale - voting by secret ballot allows one to vote in good conscience without worrying about how those around you will react. But why is it necessary for Council to discuss among themselves who is right for the job? What is it about a person who is applying for a position that

in-camera discussions?

I don't see why councillors can't read a few resumés, listen to the speeches, ask the candidates a few questions and then simply cast their secret ballot, but in the public view. By debating in secret, the suspicion arises that some nefarious plot in favour of one candidate is under way, that

The consitution states in Section 10, Clause 4, Part D that "Council may move incamera...only by a two-thirds vote of Council. No minutes are kept. In-camera discussions are privileged information regarding the private affairs of the Union, and as such shall be considered confidential.'

There is something inherently contradictory in "private affairs of

the Union." While certain conducted to respect the privacy of the individual emwe elected an executive to look after those matters. Council should be making the big decisions, and we have the right to know why our representatives made those decisions. After all, nothing that Council discusses is a matter of national security or anything. There are no SMU spies posing as Union members trying to steal the secret formula to Thursday nights at the Grawood, or looking to sabotage chairs so that they tip over easier.

I'm not suggesting that councillors shouldn't be trusted to act in the best interests of those they represent - they were elected by those same people to their positions. I don't think, however, we

should just send them on their way without checking up on them once in awhile. That is, we should trust our elected officials, but to keep that trust healthy, we should distrust them from time to time until we're satisfied that the proper process is being followed.

Some of Council's decisons, whether policy or hiring, seem to defy logic. These decisions should be reached in front of the Union membership, so we can ask our representatives why they decided as they did. If the decision is not based on in-camera discussion. councillors will not be bound by rules of confidentiality. Open decision making, at the very least, will erase any whiff of suspicious action on the part of our elected body and satisfy incredulous curiosity.

Start coming to council meetings. You'll soon smell what I mean.

## **TIM COVERT**

Managing Editor Shelley Robinson Copy Editor Tim Covert News Gina Stack Arts Andrew Simpson & John Cullen

editorial board

can't be discussed in public, espea few individuals on council are cially when their employers — the brow-beating the more impressionable members into unani-I'm sure Council, in some cirmous decisions that those few cumstances, has saved some can-

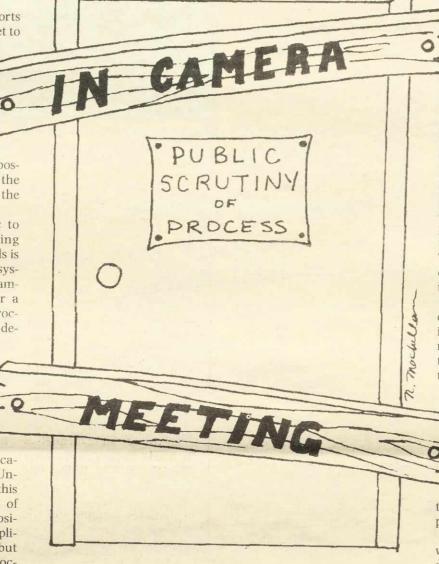
want made. Maybe that's something that should be changed in the constitution: that in-camera debate no longer be used on issues that councillors ultimately have to make for themselves.

employee matters for SUB staff and the like should be ployee, what does this have to do with Council? I thought

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been well discussed and documented and we thought that an understanding had been reached. That is why we were surprised and disgusted when we saw the article. After all of the effort by both parties. Mr. Murphy still would not leave this petty issue alone. It was especially wrong of Mr. Murphy to reopen the issue in a public forum. Also, we find that his opinion borders on incom-

petence, and is just another example of how he attempts to manipulate for the sole purpose of causing trouble. His Gazette article was negative, in bad taste, and no good could possibly come of it. Mr. Murphy was using the power of the media to try to manipulate the campus community against Custodians. The "Crack down on Pop Can Pirates" is a ruse. We know that the issue is not really about the cost of some pop cans, but is about a large and serious labour relations problem that we are experiencing, caused by Mr. Murphy. We see him as a liability to the University, not an asset. What we cannot understand is why the University continues to back him on his abuse of workers. We wonder if Mike Murphy was acting on his own behalf and for his own personal reasons, or if he was acting on behalf of management. (Is Dal a good corporate citizen or just another corporate robber?)



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## contributors

Alan LeBlanc, John Kaldas, Reham Abdelaziz, Tania Laba, Mohanad Morah, Catherine Craig, Tracey Major, Eugenia Bayada, Greg White, Carmen Tam, Scott Aldridge, Steve Pattingale, Andrea Ward, Neal Graham, Neil Fraser, Amber MacArthur, Chris Yorke, Erinn Isenor, Karen Densmore, Marc Godin, Sohrab Farid, Nik Madan, Jeanne Ju, Melissa Bristol, Stuart McMillan, Aaron Dhir, Suzanne Kazmel, Jeremiah Hiers, Fadi Masoud, Brandon Butler, Dina Guirguis, Dal Custodians CUPE Local 1392

iversity, 6136 University Ave, rm 312, Halifax, NS, B3H 4J2 editorial tel. 902 / 494-2507 fax 902 / 494-1280 http://is2.dal.ca/~gazette/ e-mail GAZETTE@is2.dal.ca

Student Union Building, Dalhousie

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students — are the public?

didates a modicum of

embarassment when they are re-

jected for embarassing reasons.

But the process seems entirely sus-

picious. What exactly do council-

lors have to decide in these

Gazette will be publishing its last issue of 1996 next Thursday, December 5th. Our first issue of the new year will be published on Thursday, January 6th.

> **Dalhousie Custodians, CUPE** Local 1392