



# The Brunswickan

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## Editorial: Press and politics at UNB

by Lynne Wanyeki

The Editorial column this week is printed on the front page of the *Brunswickan*. This is as the result of a vote taken at a second emergency meeting of the *Brunswickan* Editorial Board and such staff as were present at the time the meeting took place. The meeting was convened in response to an apology forwarded to the *Brunswickan* Editor-in-Chief and Managing Editor from the Student Union President and Vice-President Finance and Administration. The apology was given in an attempt to clear the air because of proceedings which took place on Wednesday night at a Student Union Council meeting. A somewhat lengthy explanation is needed to clarify the events which led up to the fiasco on the aforementioned night.

The *Brunswickan* has expanded in size over the past two years. It has gone from an average of 28-36 pages/week to 36-44 pages/week. This is a huge increase in terms of typesetting, lay-out and printing - all of which are done on the *Brunswickan's* computer system. To facilitate this growth, the *Brunswickan* obviously was in need of a larger, faster and more efficient computer system. Therefore, almost five months ago, the *Brunswickan* submitted a proposal to the Student Union.

The proposal concerned the purchase of capital equipment including two new computers, one new laser-printer and upgrades in memory for all computers. The three items on the proposal were needed simultaneously i.e. if the *Brunswickan* was to be operating more computers, it needed more printing abilities. As the computers were to be networked together as a system, the *Brunswickan* needed upgrades in memory to ensure that the software could be standardized on all computers and that the system did not crash. Therefore, if the

*Brunswickan* was to receive any of the items on the proposal, it needed to receive them all.

The then Student Union seemed to understand the *Brunswickan's* position on the matter. It was agreed that the *Brunswickan* would purchase the two new computers in May from the *Brunswickan's* 1990/91 budget surplus and proceed to purchase the laser-printer and upgrades in September - ostensibly from its own 1991/92 budget, but in reality from the \$40,000 Student Union 1990/91 budget surplus. Thus, in May the *Brunswickan* purchased the two new computers in the expectation of receiving the printer and upgrades in September.

Two weeks ago, the Managing Editor of the *Brunswickan* forwarded a proposal concerning the expected printer and upgrades to the new Vice-President Finance and Administration of the Student Union. The *Brunswickan* was informed that the proposal would be tabled at a meeting of the Finance Committee of the Student Union on Tuesday night. The Managing Editor of the *Brunswickan* was present at this meeting to clarify the position of the *Brunswickan* to the members of the Finance Committee. He did so and left the meeting with the understanding that the *Brunswickan* would be informed of the results of the meeting the following morning.

The Vice-President Finance and Administration came to the *Brunswickan* on Wednesday morning and informed the Editor-in-Chief that the Finance Committee had decided to only grant the *Brunswickan* funds for the printer. The Editor-in-Chief inquired as to the reasons for this decision. Apparently, the Finance Committee had understood that if all back issues and personal files were removed from the computers, the *Brunswickan* would not

require the upgrades.

The Editor-in-Chief again informed the Vice-President Finance and Administration that the upgrades were needed to give all computers the capacity to run the *Brunswickan's* actual software in a networked system. He appeared to understand the issue, and gave his assurance that he would call a second meeting of the Finance Committee before going into the Student Union Council meeting that night to clarify the matter and amend the motion to include the upgrades as well as the laser-printer.

The *Brunswickan* decided to sit in on the Student Union Council meeting to explain the anticipated amendment by the Finance Committee to the other members of the Student Union Council if such explanation was needed.

However, at the Student Union meeting that night, the Vice-President Finance and Administration presented a motion on behalf of the Finance Committee which concerned only the purchase of the printer. Quite understandably, the *Brunswickan* members present were thrown into consternation and tried to protest. Their protests caused some Student Union Council members to question the decision of the Finance Committee. The Editor-in-Chief was permitted to explain the *Brunswickan's* desired proposal and, as a result, the President of the Student Union decided to make an amendment to the motion which would thus include the purchase of the upgrades. A member of the Finance Committee violently disagreed, questioning the appropriateness of the motion. Her strong stance was extremely surprising to the *Brunswickan*. Although she is a new member of the Student Union Council and thus may be excused for not being aware of past negotiations between the *Brunswickan* and the

Student Union, she is the Computer Science faculty representative. Thus, one would certainly expect that she should both recognize and understand the pressing necessity of both items to the present computer system at the *Brunswickan*.

However, her objections led to a five-minute recess during which the Finance Committee was asked to caucus and deliberate the issue. It did so without consulting any of the *Brunswickan* members present. After the recess, the Finance Committee maintained that their motion would only concern the purchase of the printer. This was unbelievable to the *Brunswickan* members present and the Features Editor stood up to disrupt the proceedings. His feeling was that the Student Union was "acting without any sensitivity to the needs of the paper". He was completely ignored, and the Chairman moved on to the next item of business even though the Student Union Council had not made any decision on the issue. The *Brunswickan* members left the room in protest.

The Editor-in-Chief immediately convened an emergency meeting of such Editors and staff as could be contacted at that time. There was quorum of the Editorial Board, but the staff that were present spoke and voted on the issue at hand as well. At this meeting, much discussion took place concerning the issue. Finally, a motion was voted upon and passed 11-3. As the result of this motion, the *Brunswickan* agreed that this Friday's issue would consist solely of advertising with no editorial content whatsoever - with the exception of an explanation for all advertisers, students and community members. Considerable concern was raised about the fact that the *Brunswickan* would be seen as being irresponsible for publishing a paper bereft of content. Moreover, it is the

students who support this paper, and they have a right to expect editorial content each week. But the students have placed trust in their elected representatives for the administration of funds affecting the *Brunswickan*. Until the students feel the direct impact of the decisions taken by their elected representatives, they will fail to pressure them to change these decisions. Any complaint regarding the *Brunswickan's* action was therefore to be directed to the appropriate Student Union Council member. The *Brunswickan* Editors and staff thus stopped their work and the Editor-in-Chief immediately drafted a letter to all Student Union Council members to inform them of the *Brunswickan's* decision. The letter was delivered to the Student Union President.

The *Brunswickan* made it extremely clear that there had been a misunderstanding between itself and the Finance Committee. It was therefore the duty of Student Union Council members to question the final decision of the Finance Committee. When the comment was made to the effect that the Finance Committee had not done its homework, the Finance Committee was asked to caucus. Unfortunately, the pride of the Finance Committee members prevented it at this point from examining the issues clearly and impersonally. It came back with the same decision to avoid being seen as a group of pushovers. The lack of research into the background of the negotiations meant that the Finance Committee ultimately failed to understand the issue at hand as being part of the long-term carefully-planned process of growth for the *Brunswickan*. It thereby acted in a manner which was not in the interests of the organizations it is required to serve. Its supposed concern for protocol and due

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