

THE BRUNSWICKAN NATIONAL NEWS

FROM UNIVERSITY NEWSROOMS ACROSS CANADA

Student Union locks Picaro Staff out of office

by Caitlyn Kealey and Tyler Kustra,
The Gazette

HALIFAX (CUP) — Staff of the Picaro, Mount Saint Vincent's student paper, say they were locked out of their offices by the student union last week. The two parties are in the midst of a bitter dispute

over a publishing contract.

The student union barred Picaro staff from their office before they had a chance to discuss signing a new contract. The student union had given their draft of the contract to former editor in chief Jennifer Henderson on Aug. 20.

They were barred on Sept. 3, the first

business day after the old contract expired on Aug. 31.

"The staff had a lot of questions about the interpretation of the contract. When space is used as a bargaining chip they can't ask those questions and feel comfortable," said Henderson, who added that there wasn't much difference from last year's contract. "Love it or hate it, you don't even get to the point of discussing it."

Other Picaro staff share Henderson's feelings.

Andre Duchene, who would be the editorial coordinator if the Picaro was publishing, said that the student union is being unreasonable.

"They could meet with us. My big beef is that they're too militant and it's gotten far too complicated," said Duchene.

The student union president Leah Lewis said she had never received a formal request from the Picaro staff for a key.

"Every year locks are changed. Even I

had to get a new key for my office," said Lewis. "They never made a request for a key so when you don't ask, it's kind of hard to get one. There's no solid line of communication and I've been very busy for frosh week. It's not my responsibility to go down there and make sure they're ready to go. They're an autonomous body."

Canadian University Press president Anya Spethmann criticized the student union's actions.

"Student unions in general always say that they believe in a free press and that they understand the importance of the student press, but that comes at a cost and the student press on campus requires major support," said Spethmann. "I hope that the student union will provide adequate funding. The student press isn't inherently lucrative and to have a good paper you have to invest."

The proposed contract specifies funding, lease arrangements and editorial content.

Henderson, who is now the Gazette's assistant news editor, said the contract is not that different from last year's.

Last year, the Picaro received \$570 per issue published. There is an increase in funding this year, although Lewis declined to say exactly how much is on the table.

Paul Hutchings, would-be news editor, says he is familiar with the funding issue.

"I understand about the whole budget crunching thing. Cuts I can deal with, kill the paper I can't."

Hutchings, who has worked as a reporter across Nova Scotia, said he has seen a correlation between the level of funding at the Picaro and the quality of its product.

Lewis declined to discuss details of the proposed agreement.

"The contract is confidential," she said. "We're in negotiations with them and until we have a face to face conversation it's not in the best interest of either parties to talk. We've left a poster on the door about setting up a meeting."

Duchene found that laughable.

"She put a poster on an office door that we're locked out of? Like we're going to spend much time there ... That's funny, you think they could do a little better to contact us."

Margaret Mcgee, university senior spokeswoman, had been trying to help the two sides come to an agreement on an unofficial basis. Mcgee was sympathetic as a former journalist and offered her help. Mcgee, unfortunately could not continue to mediate after she was hired as a senior communications advisor for the university administration at the beginning of September.

The university will not become involved in the dispute.

"The administration is staying at arms length," said Mcgee. "These are sacred issues - freedom of the press ... it's not a place for the administration to muck around. But the administration has stated publicly their support for the Picaro continuing."

"I feel really bad," said Lewis. "We met with them at the end of last year they seem to be a great staff and very enthusiastic. It's sad that we won't have a student newspaper for the month of September. It's a real shame that we can't talk."

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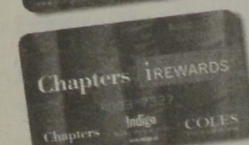
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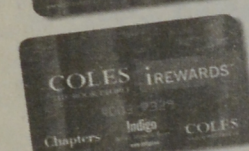
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