

CUP



Don Humphries, current CUP vice-president.



Delegates at plenary session of 35th national CUP conference, Winnipeg.

Liz Willick is a former CUP president
Reprinted from the Chevron

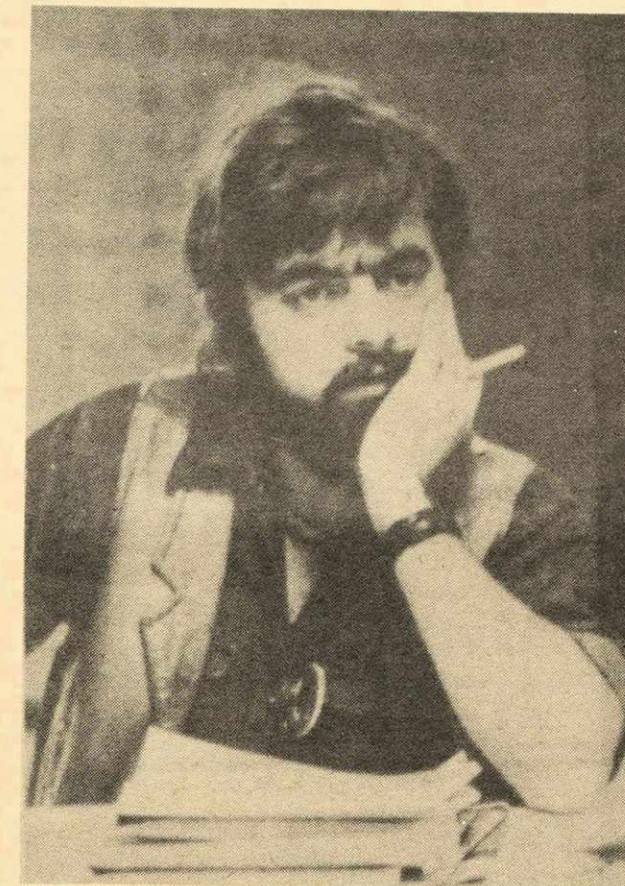
photos by Brian Cere,
Dick McGill and Gord Moore



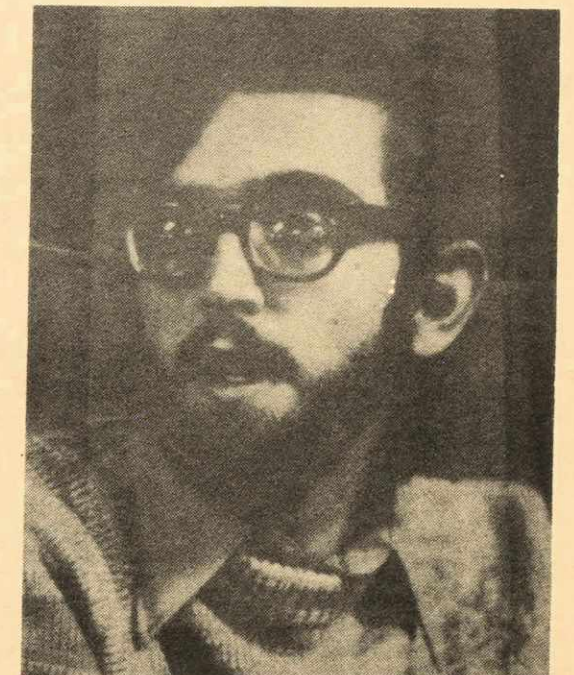
Dorothy Wigmore, CUP president, and former GAZETTE editor.



Stewart Saxe, former Chevron editor, former president, and CUP perennial.



Terry Mosher (Aislin) CUP cartoon service.



Peter Foster, delegate, Marxist—Leninist Daily, Montreal.

by Liz Willick
Canadian University Press can now lay claim not only to being the oldest national student organization of its type in the world, but also to having the potential (if only structurally) of being one of the only viable alternate press networks in existence.

Although historical records of CUP prior to the fifties are almost non-existent, it is known that in 1922, a Western Association of Canadian University Newspapers was founded, primarily for exchange purposes among the four members from B.C. and the Prairie provinces. Then, in 1938, at the instigation of the National Federation of University Students, Canadian University Press was officially founded at a gathering in Winnipeg.

With financial support from NFCUS (and later, its successor, the now-defunct Canadian Union of Students) CUP weathered its first inconspicuous years with a rotating system of executive papers that looked after records and co-ordinated exchanges of papers and stories. In 1951, CUP had an annual budget of \$2,000 with one permanent officer, a treasurer, and 22 campus members.

At this year's annual national conference (the 35th) which concluded last week in Winnipeg, membership rose to unprecedented levels with the admission to full membership of 15 new papers. There are now 48 universities or community colleges represented in the CUP co-operative family as well as 6 members of what is commonly called "the alternate press". The '73-'74 year will see a projected income of \$32,280 funnelled through the organization's national office in Ottawa, which is now run by a staff of four people elected annually at the national conference. There are also four elected and paid executive members who function as fieldworkers outside the national office.

With the ever-increasing membership, finances and personnel of the organization, the services offered to members have correspondingly increased and been refined. The simple exchange of papers (with full reprint rights) continues to be an important link for the far-flung campus journalists of this country. As well, the Ottawa office (CUPOTT) writes, compiles and or co-ordinates a thrice-weekly news service — transmitted by mail or telex, depending on the finances and wishes of the individual member paper — and a feature service; sporadic and sometimes of limited value, but still a useful if too-infrequent addition to many of the papers' feature files.

One of the more important programs

evolved over the last four years has been fieldwork. Four of the eight national office people are fieldworkers — three regional (Western, Ontario, and Atlantic) and one national. These are the people who visit member papers for several days once or twice every year. They are usually experienced paper people who can offer help and advice from anything to hassles with student councils to newswriting to design. They are CUP's trouble-shooters, liaison officers, and public relations men. They sleep on floors, and eat in cafeterias, become well-acquainted with the country's bus, train and plane schedules, and generally have a much more interesting time of it than the bureaucrats who remain in Ottawa to pound out the news service and look after the books and files and machines.

Rapidly rising in importance to the member papers since its inception three Christmases ago, is the national advertising co-operative, Youthstream. With offices located in Toronto and three employees, the function of this group is to sell the student newspaper market to national advertisers. Because it centralizes the bureaucracy of insertion, billing and so on, and offers reduced rates on package deals involving greater numbers of CUP papers, it is able to increase member revenue — in some cases substantially. Youthstream allows the massive advertising business of the big corporations access to the student market without the hassles of locating and doing business with numerous hard-to-find and inexperienced ad or business managers.

But, back to the student press as alternate. Much of the history of CUP and the process of its development lies in the records of its national con-

ferences and the legislation originating therefrom.

In 1959, both the Charter of the Student Press in Canada and the CUP code of ethics were adopted. These set forth a more-or-less nebulous political and social framework for the student press which has been altered through the years as events and processes changed the consciousness of student journalists.

In 1965, the Charter, now the Statement of Principles, altered to contain the statement: "The major role of the student press is to act as an agent of social change," examining "issues

that the professional press avoids."

This was a formal and official statement of purpose (on paper anyway) approved by the majority of member papers represented at that year's conference. It envisioned some sort of alternate role for the student press as the watchdog of the established press. Two years later, reflecting the upsurge in student radicalism, the rarified atmosphere of the marathon week long Christmas conferences sparked long, heated debates which relegated (unfortunately not once and for all) objectivity in journalism to the proper status of

"myth". The use of "unbiased" in the Code of Ethics, similarly was abandoned in favour of "fairness".

Two years ago, sexual bias was added to racism as counter-progressive prejudices to be avoided in the pages of all member papers. It was at this conference held in a beautiful small town church camp in B.C. that it was decided to create a special membership category for alternate members, with minimal fees.

The original intent behind the move was primarily to acknowledge the infant Canadian alternate and underground press as sister media and a vaguely parallel development in the broader community in opposition to the bourgeois press. The structural inclusion of this segment of the Canadian media was meant to extend a helping hand to the alternate papers from the more technically experienced and better financed student press. The new members were given access to the ad co-op and non-voting status as participant-observers and resource people at the conference. It was also hoped that their inclusion would infuse new blood into an organization suffering from the stagnation of student activism which followed the final crumbling demise of the student movement of the late sixties and its leadership organization, the Canadian Union of

Students.

The 1971 conference in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, at the urging of the national office, legislated the alternate members into full voting membership, thus giving them the right and the potential power to directly influence the aims and direction of what had once been a totally student-controlled organization. At the same time, a push begun the previous year to recruit the burgeoning community college papers into the ranks, was marked for further work.

This year, these new directions bore fruit. Six Alternate members were admitted to full voting status. There are 34 university members, and 14 community college members. In addition, there are eight prospective members, papers who are checking out the organization and its services for a minimal fee and which, in the normal course of events, will become full members in a year or two.

This then has been a brief and necessarily simplified sketch of the history of the Canadian University Press with a similarly brief look at some of the theory and political development behind the current state of the co-op.

And now for a fast peek at the reality. Theoretically then CUP is a co-operative. Each member is an equal

is the alternative?

part of the whole. But each member is only the people who work on that particular paper. Most of them are volunteers. Most of them are students. Few of them share or even interpret in the same fashion, the lofty sentiments of the Statement of Principles and the Code of Ethics. Many of them never think of CUP except as filler copy that comes in the mail, and bills that sometime accompany it — except for the conference and post-conference annual upswing in interest and co-operation.

Most of the time, CUP is a few people, with some experience in journalism, working their asses off in hopes of contributing to the development of a viable and radical alternate press in this country. Some of these people work in the national office, more on the papers scattered across ten provinces, and even a few at Youthstream.

These are the people — a minority of those involved with CUP through their papers — who provide the leadership at the conference (and what there is of it throughout the year). They are usually the more "political" ones, more experienced, often more articulate; the people who discuss, argue, debate, analyze; the ones who look at the world and see the need to find a way to change it.

And because these people are involved with journalism, they focus their efforts on the press. They use the established press generally as a standard not to be emulated. Because they are young and to some extent protected by their ivory-tower university environments, their relative

financial security, and the nature of their readership; they have much more leeway for creative experimentation with form, content, design, style.

Large newspapers are in effect large businesses. Profit-making comes first — and newspapers are a profitable business for those who own and control them. Inside the paper, that usually means a structure built for efficiency — the biggest return for the least expenditure.

Student journalists contend that this drive has resulted in a standardized, uniform style of writing — a formula which can supposedly be applied to any situation without damaging the quality of information supplied to the reader. A writer is allowed to make decisions on what he writes and how only within very narrowly defined limits.

The professional writer must strive for the nebulously defined "objectivity". In doing so, he must deny his own social history, biases, the fact that the selection of facts for presentation, their ordering and wording are subjective choices he makes every time he sits down at the typewriter. This is so even while the necessary "professionalism" limits the choices he or she is allowed to make.

The young journalists who often play key roles in papers like the Chevron feel that this technique has everything to do with efficiency and little to do with accuracy and fairness, or even truth.

Campus papers do not face the same strictures. Financed by grants and operating solely on a loss-basis, writers in this medium have a freedom unavailable to the "professionals" to develop standards for style and content

unaffected by the directors of corporate entities or the heads of journalism schools.

Yet the specific problems endemic to the student press at times provide almost insurmountable barriers to the theoretical and practical development of a successfully alternative mode of newspaper communication.

For many papers, scarcity of money is built into the paper's structure by student councillors who do not place a high priority on grants for their paper. Few papers have student fees pool from which to draw the size of that of U of T or UBC or even U of W.

The majority of CUP papers run entirely on voluntary labour. Their staffs are students carrying normal course loads who work on the paper in their spare time. While many try to strike a balance between competence and responsibility and the time required to achieve them; the price of occupying an editorial position is too often the sacrifice of the academic work. Few papers can afford to pay their staff members.

In addition the cyclic flow of people into and out of campus papers seldom allows them to stultify into rigidly maintained patterns, but it also too-frequently precludes continuity and the productive passing on of experience and technical expertise.

Ideally, and according to the CUP Code of Ethics, campus papers are democratically-run instruments for education and information — open to participation from the readership and full of dynamic dialogue, creativity and political social consciousness. Pretty ideals but seldom practical reality.