

In which we learn that 1970 wasn't that long ago I read the news today, oh boy

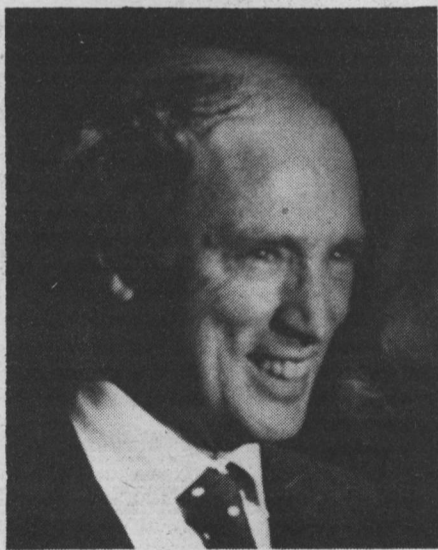
The Gateway had originally planned to run a special *Seventies* supplement, but instead, we have decided to run a series of short features on the decade.

Today's article is the first in the series. It's written by occasional staff member Jens Andersen, who takes a look at 1970.

by Jens Andersen

On January 5, 1970, ten years almost to the day before the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, American vice-president Spiro Agnew was in Kabul on a nineteen-hour stopover on his official tour of Asia. His visit, as Reuters noted, generated a protest by "200 left-wing student demonstrators" who carried placards reading "Down with U.S. Imperialism." In the *Edmonton Journal* of the next day the wire service story appeared as a mere squib on page 3, probably typical of press coverage of so minor an event. Ten years later, however, the incident takes on a sharply ironical flavor. One wonders what the 200 Afghani students, now grown, are thinking and doing these days. Are they exulting in the Russian takeover? Or are they fighting in the resistance? The answers to such questions would probably make a very interesting book.

Other news items from the *Journal* of January 1970 also elicit wry smiles. For instance Egyptian President Nasser's pledge of January 2 to throw a million fighting Arabs into a battle of liberation against Israel. Or UN Secretary-General U Thant's declaration of January 10 that "the Cold War is now coming to an end, after two decades." Or how about the story from the same day announcing that "European Central Bankers are considering reviving the gold pool to prevent prices in London and Zurich from falling below the official level of \$35 an ounce." The price had at that point dipped below the \$35 level twice, but in the end the wizards of finance decided against the manipulation, figuring that the drops were minor aberrations which wouldn't be repeated. A rather accurate analysis, to say the least.



Pierre: he's still fighting inflation.

Other stories are merely nostalgic. Jumbo jets, for instance, were a wondrous new development in 1970; the Boeing 747 made its "dress rehearsal" run across the Atlantic on January 13. Biafra fell to the Nigerians about the same time, after a war that cost more lives than the total lost on both sides in Vietnam up to that date. Senator Edward Kennedy began testifying at an inquest into the death of Mary Jo Kopechne. J. Edgar Hoover linked the huge anti-war rally of Nov. 15, 1969 with "international Communist elements." Bus fars in New York City were threatening to "skyrocket" from 10 to 20 cents. Barry Westgate named *The Sterile Cuckoo* and *Alice's Restaurant* among the ten best films of the year. However, while giving a nod to the young *Aufklärung* of the sixties, he added *Hello Dolly* to the list and pooh-

poohed the prevalent notion that Hollywood was in its death throes. There will probably be a place for Westgate among the European Central Bankers if he ever gives up reviewing.

Ah yes, the sixties reverberations... An ad for Molson's consisted of a psychedelically-drawn Maharishiesque fellow, sitting in a lotus position and holding a picket sign reading "Down With Golden." "Teach-ins" were still popular, even among the primitive folks inhabiting the banks of the North Saskatchewan, and the words "happening" and "flower children" were also mentioned solemnly. The Ontario Chamber of Commerce was conducting a "generation-bridge project" where oldsters and youngsters learned how to talk to each other, a difficult transaction in those days. And dig this extract from a letter to the *Journal* regarding John Lennon (alias "Jesus Christ returned") from "Follower" in St. Albert:

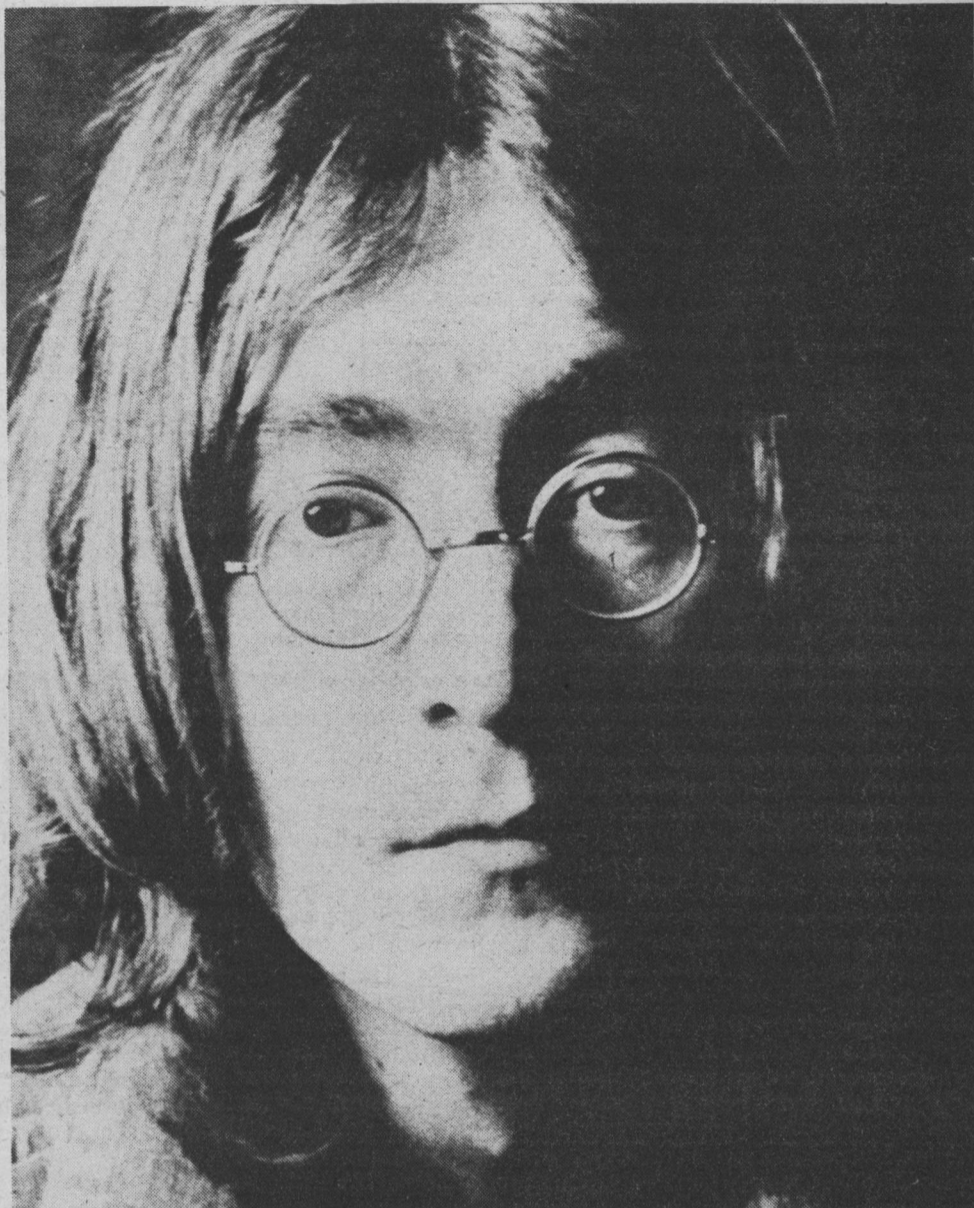
"If these troops (American, Biafran, Israeli) would only lay their arms down and disband, then the other side wouldn't have anybody to fight, and then we could all live in peace and happiness. If only England and the U.S. would have ignored the Germans and refused to get involved in a war, then we could have many more people alive today and they too could be listening to John Lennon's words of wisdom and to his beautiful music."

And this is merely a letter to the *Journal*. Try to imagine what the correspondence to *Gateway* must have been like!

On the other side of the chasm was the unnamed *Journal* writer who concluded a decade-opening editorial thusly: "But without being dogmatic about it, surely it is safe to say that the coming decade will see some beneficial change, however small, in our priorities, some small progress toward what is possible for man, despite his nature. But no one knows all the answers, and this includes the young revolutionaries, on and off university campuses, who think they do." Clearly, the writer's talent for stringing together platitudes was in no way shaken by the tidal wave of drugs, rock and long hair which had swept the sixties between Beatlemania and Woodstock.

But while both sides of the young imbroglia went through their routines, the workaday world rambled along as usual. Consider, for instance, this timeless statement from a 1970 politician: "In the turmoils of our rapidly changing society there is a need to reflect on our values and consider the areas in need of attention. Real inequities exist where there is poverty and need and difficulties of communication, and we must consider what can be done to overcome these problems." The immortal lines were spoken by Opposition Leader Peter Lougheed at the annual Wetaskiwin Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture dinner, but they might just as well have been uttered by Thutmose III before the Karnak Kiwanis ca. 1500 BC.

The troubled economy was an even bigger issue in 1970 than it is now; impossible as the claim seems. Trudeau's Liberal government, like Joe's Conservative one of three months ago, was about to introduce a "tough anti-inflation budget." Finance Minister Benson met with provincial Treasurers in Quebec City to discuss, at taxpayer's expense, the thorny problem. Editorial writers fuelled their wind machines on the high octane subject, as well as the still-familiar themes of



The peaceful, beautiful and talented John Lennon. Christ, you know it ain't easy.

Indian rights, Arctic ecological damage, pesticides and violence in the media.

Of all the commentary, that on Richard Nixon is the most amusing. On January 2, summing up the President's first year in office, a Southan pundit figured that Nixon had restored trust in government (so battered after Johnson); cooled off the antiwar movement, de-escalated the war itself, and still managed to check the machinations of Hanoi — all with his Vietnamization program; and, finally, by his official visit to Rumania and the initiation of SALT talks, "he may be bringing about a permanent end to the Cold War with the Soviet Union." Concluding with de rigueur equivocation he said, "On balance, not, perhaps a great year ... but a good year ... hopefully a year when America turned the corner." Less than five months later the U.S. was reeling from the Kent State killings; less than five years later Nixon had been forced from office in disgrace; and even today Saigon is not quite bygone.

Other antique news that is still interesting:

Rene Levesque addressed U of A students in SUB January 12 and predicted the eventual victory of the Parti Quebecois. "Two elections should do it," he said; a prophecy that probably seemed cocky then (the party had only two out of 110 seats in the National

Assembly) but which came true just the same.

Women's liberation hadn't reached the *Journal* yet either, as glance at the classified-section shows. The listings then were labelled "Male Help Wanted," "Female Help Wanted" and "Male-Female Help Wanted." The *Journal* also had no qualms about printing the following "humorous" note on the Op-ed page: "The Ontario Tax Reform Commission recommends that husbands and wives be allowed to sue one another. But what if she has already spent the stuff?" In an intimation of things to come, however, there was the curious news item from Ireland that the readers of the Dublin Sunday Independent had voted Bernadette Devlin "Man of the Year."

Let us conclude this retrospective by noting one last gaseous emission, this one exhaled by a writer for the *Economist of London* (in the *Journal* Jan. 15). Looking ahead into the Seventies he proclaimed, "There is unlikely to be peace in our decade." Even as you read the ten-year-old banality, someone, somewhere is coining even more staggering truisms about the eighties, which, no doubt, will be nicely accentuated by events of the decade ahead. If anyone is alive in 1990, let us hope that the idiotic statement and the embarrassing facts will be resuscitated, that men may not forget how to laugh.

