

Plans, ideas for this year

We want internal democracy

by Dorothy Wigmore

RIGID STRUCTURES ARE TYPICAL of the society we live in. Roles are defined and must be adhered to, in both the social and business worlds.

Newspapers are no exception to this rule. In the "professional" press, there is a hierarchical, authoritarian order. Responsibility and authority run up from the copy boy in the newsroom to the various editors to the publisher.

This results in a mechanical writing process. Events are covered, stories written and handed to the appropriate editor. The story is not seen again until the paper comes out. Reporters and layout staff have little or no say in the content and form of the paper.

John Porter explained the results in *The Vertical Mosaic*. "No major newspaper is owned and controlled by its employees and working journalists... The ideological orientation that results from the existing pattern of ownership is conservative, supporting the status quo over a wide range of social and economic policy."

This is also explained by the fact that advertising pays for up to 85% of production costs for a "professional" paper.

STUDENT PAPERS, ON THE OTHER HAND, are not tied down to the structures prevalent in the professional press. They are funded by student unions, and some advertising. Their existence is thus guaranteed.

They are then free to experiment with new structures, creative writing and layout, and new ideas.

The student press is starting to discover new structures, different writing and layout styles, and often presents and discusses ideas not dealt with in the professional press.

New structures often result from one simple fact. The people who work on a campus newspaper are students. They are not, usually, professional journalists or layout experts.

A NEW WORK STYLE MUST BE FOUND which allows the staff to learn some journalistic

techniques, while producing a good paper. Time factors must be taken into account.

The new work style which many papers are experimenting with is getting rid of the hierarchical authority-ridden structures of the "pro" press. Weekly staff meetings are held. Everyone has a chance to voice their story, ideas and to make complaints about past or future efforts. This is all an attempt to run the paper on a co-operative, democratic level.

At the GAZETTE, this was our biggest achievement last year. And we want to continue it this year.

However, several problems present themselves. The hardest one to deal with is the fact that new people expect some kind of hierarchical structure. They want to know who the editor is, who the news and assistant editors are, who does layout and who proof-reads copy.

THIS AUTHORITY STRUCTURE IS BAD, especially for a student newspaper. It depersonalizes the production of the paper. Copy becomes a mechanical effort. Layout is for layout experts only.

It also means that participation and the work load is limited. The editors are expected to do most of the work, while the reporters, layout staff, and others are expected to only do their work, and not have any say in the operation or content of the paper.

Since we are all students, and are not professional workers, a division of labour is necessary. It means that people do what they can and want to do. They work together, helping each other when necessary. Roles are not explicitly defined, for experimentation brings new life to the paper.

Out of necessity, and a desire to democratize our paper, we worked in a relatively collective or co-operative way last year. Copy was read by everyone who was around. Comments about the style, approach, and content were made by anyone who

wanted to do so. New ideas were tossed around and usually appreciated by the writer.

On layout night, the same people who wrote usually worked out where copy would be placed. Generally, they worked together. Questions were always asked of others around and suggestions accepted. Everyone who was working saw and checked all the layout sheets when they were done.

BUT, MORE THAN THIS, DEMOCRACY PREVAILED,

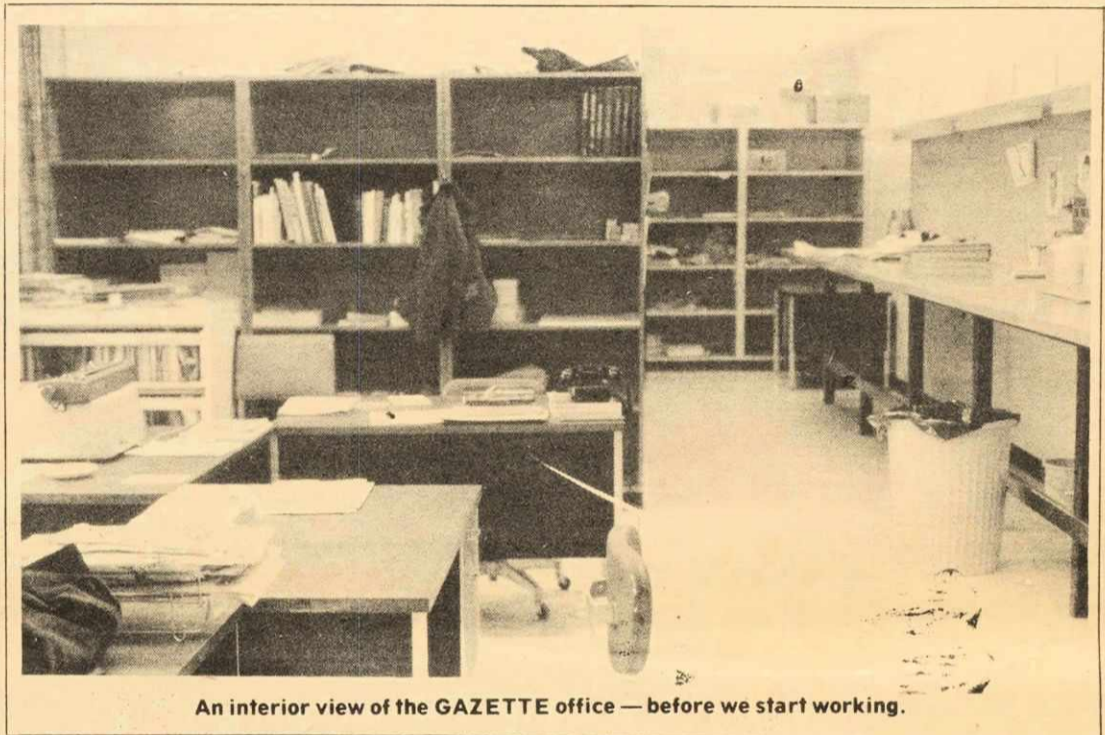
paper.

1. Service — what's going on on campus, clubs, frats, traditional news on Council, etc., Dal people doing their thing elsewhere, lots of sports and social events. Like a newsletter.

2. Educational — somewhat wider scope, student problems generally and their relation to the outside world, housing, education, the student and the university and society, anything else that people think is important to people.

purpose, a letters to the editor column will be continued. We will also accept articles written by anyone, provided they are willing to go over them with staff members, and have their inclusion in the issue approved.

This may sound elitist, but in practice, articles are rarely refused. If the author drops a story off to the office, and does not come back to find out about it, or if the article is so horrendously written that a lot of re-writing is required, it will likely not be published.



An interior view of the GAZETTE office — before we start working.

to a certain extent over content and selection of articles for each issue. Unfortunately, often only one or two people would come up with all the story ideas. But through the year, this changed, as the staff became aware of issues and events around the university.

Those of us who worked on the paper last year would like to see this collective, democratic approach at work this year. It will be difficult, because a collective or democracy does not exist simply because those who want it say it's there.

After the advantages of working together have been shown by older staff, mainly through example, new writers will hopefully understand the need for our approach. They will not be forced into anything. In general, people will be able to do what they want to do.

ANOTHER PROBLEM ANY PAPER FACES is the decision about its purpose. This is the most important basis for any newspaper. A consensus of opinion should be arrived at democratically, and remain relatively consistent throughout the year. Only through reaching a collective idea of our objective will the paper be able to achieve any purpose and still produce good work.

A former editor once listed three possible purposes for the

3. Some combination of the two — is it desirable, possible with any degree of success? what balance?

We would like to see the GAZETTE follow the third path if possible. Since we are funded by students, we owe you a service. However, as the Canadian University Press Statement of Principles says, we should also act as agents of social change.

The balance would have to be determined by staff, in accordance with the democratic principles we want to adhere to, or attempt to reach.

Right now, the old staff wants to do lots of local features, including off-campus events or problems. This would be mixed with the needed or desired service coverage.

MOST OF THE NEWS WE PRINT is one week or more old. News reporting, except on special events, and important organizations (when they do something that affects or should interest readers) is therefore often useless.

This means that we could assume more of a magazine format, with lots of comment, and researched features dealing with every aspect of student life, here and in the community.

Comment should come from outside people too. For this

If there is something we feel we cannot agree with — a comment piece — it could go in the letters column. That will have to be worked out by the staff and contributors, after we have some practice.

IF WE ARE TO PROVIDE A SERVICE, we need information. As previously mentioned, we are all students and often do not have the time to go around to everyone, each week, finding out what their organization or club is doing. We have to put out a paper and live at the same time.

For this reason, we hope to establish contacts in each department and active organization on campus. Hopefully this can be extended off campus, so that community organizations can let students know about their activities.

For this to function, though, we need co-operation. Complaints about an event not being covered or mentioned will, after a time, be treated the same way. If you thought it was interesting, and important, why didn't you let us know? This should not happen often, if contacts are made.

ANYONE WHO WANTS TO BE A CONTACT only has to come to the office or give us a call when something is going on in their department or
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