

Trying to learn what's  
going on in the world by  
reading newspapers ...

# Struggle

Volume 1

Number 1

is like trying to tell time  
by looking at the se-  
cond hand of a watch.  
— Ben Hecht

## Changes in system proposed

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## TWO WORKING PAPERS PRESENTED TO CUP 40

### Introduction

These two working papers evolved out of what was initially a modest attempt to provide the news immediacy issue with a historical background. Along with the historical background we had also planned to include a brief analysis of the question.

What started out as a trickle of ideas, however, soon grew into a deluge. The scope of the analysis also grew. While the aim of the exercise was initially to provide a clarification of our position on the issue, it was not long before the analysis acquired another end, namely, to provide an illustration of what we consider the proper way to go about discussing issues inside CUP. Bored sick with the level of debate so far, we set out to give an analysis that we could feel reasonably satisfied with.

In the process we encountered theoretical problems which we had not even foreseen. We tried to solve them as best we could within the short time available.

Needless to say our successes were only partial. Within the context of the discussion we feel is necessary to understand the nature of news and the purposes implied, though, there is a real need for a continuation of this sort of critique. Our shortcomings should serve to stimulate further analysis.

### Struggle!

#### A PAPER ON NEWS IMMEDIACY

by Al Poulin

From a thought paper presented to 32nd National CUP conference we take our method in pursuing this discussion. It is one of numerous papers in the organization's archives, less frequent in appearance since the reduction of debate to a structural level, which attempts to ensure an analytic approach to questions facing Canadian University Press:

"What is a problem? A problem is the contradiction in a thing. Where one has an unresolved contradiction, there one has a problem. Since there is a problem you have to be for one side and against the other, and you have to pose the problem. To pose the problem, you must first make the preliminary investigation and study of the two basic aspects of the problem or contradiction before you can understand the nature of the contradiction. This is the process of discovering the problem. Preliminary



investigation and a study can discover the problem, can post the problem, but cannot yet solve it. In order to solve the problem it is necessary to make a systematic and thorough investigation and study. This is the process of analysis. In posing the problem too, analysis is needed; otherwise, faced with chaotic and bewildering mass of phenomena, you will not be able to discern where the problem or contradiction lies." 1

There is a problem in Canadian University Press, a fundamental problem evident throughout the chaotic and bewildering mass of phenomena which constitutes the organization's history. It is not financial, nor are finances independent of it. The problem, contradiction, is one of purpose -- the absence of a purpose defining the nature of the organization.

An understanding of the problem is complicated by the historical existence of CUP in itself, but it is in this complexity that we gain that very understanding. The problem is not solved, not even understood, until it is analysed within the history of the organization -- a rationalization of the existing structure demands an appreciation of its purpose, a historical task.

Within CUP this task reveals the problem, the contradiction, of purpose. With this understanding we must approach the question of structure prepared to analyse arguments and proposals beyond the level of structural functionalism, beyond the key of feasibility. Prior to this consideration there must be a resolution of purpose. As structure serves purpose in an effective organization, so purpose is implicit in all structure.

Then we must be critical in our investigation: we must understand the implications of structural proposals through an analysis of their place within the basic aspects of the problem; we must be purposeful.

Understanding the aspects of the problem, one or the other positions must be supported. A commitment to purpose is necessary -- it is necessary to argue against those opposing it; it is necessary to explain it to those who have no clear conception of the problem or no sense of purpose; it is necessary to work and build within purposeful structure.

Those opposing our purpose are not the enemy when their stand is principled, intentional. They are, rather, participants in the understanding and resolution of the contradiction. Only by confronting contradictions can meaningful change occur. Conflict of purpose is healthy, advancing understanding and revealing problems, establishing a basis for the analysis required to establish purposeful structure. From conflict



comes purpose and unity, creating a potentially strong, effective organization. An organization incapable of undertaking a critique of its own problems is no credible alternative source for understanding or demystifying social relations.

The enemy was identified years ago, correctly, as those who oppose the resolution of the contradiction through conflict. It is those who avoid the discussion of purpose, who bury their heads in structural wrangling (or those whose concern is purely financial) or who call upon the spirit of co-operation when the problem of unity and purpose demands strife. These are the enemy -- they are ideologues and their ideology is called LIBERALISM.

We have fought against hostile ideologies within the organization, resisted their imposition from our separate camps and, in the process, we have allowed LIBERALISM to imperviate the organization.

Who will not recognize these manifestations, published in a paper for the 34th National Conference (Wolfville, Nova Scotia) in 1971 as existent today? Who does not recognize themselves or some others?

"To let things slide for the sake of peace and friendship when a person has clearly gone wrong, and refrain from principled argument because he is an old acquaintance, a fellow townsman, a schoolmate, a close friend, a loved one, an old colleague or an old subordinate. Or to touch the matter lightly instead of going into it thoroughly, so as to keep on good terms....To indulge in irresponsible criticism in private instead of putting forward one's suggestions to the organization. To say nothing to people to their faces but to gossip behind their backs, or to say nothing at a meeting but to gossip afterwards. To show no regard at all for the principles of collective life but to follow one's own inclinations....To let things drift if they do not affect one personally; to say as little as possible while knowing perfectly well what is wrong, to be worldly wise and play safe and seek only to avoid blame.... To give pride of place to one's opinions. To demand special consideration from the organization....To indulge in personal attacks, pick quarrels, vent personal spite or seek revenge instead of entering into an argument and struggling against incorrect views for the sake of unity or progress or getting the work done properly....

To hear incorrect views without rebutting them....

To work half-heartedly without a definite plan or direction; to work perfunctorily and muddle along--"So long as one remains



a monk, one goes on tolling the bell..."

To regard oneself as having rendered great service... to pride oneself on being a veteran, to disdain minor assignments while being quite unequal to major tasks, to be slipshod in work and slack in study.... To be aware of one's own mistakes and yet make no attempt to correct them, taking a liberal attitude towards oneself...." 2

In the "President's report" of the 1969 fall report, Stewart Saxe begins with the quote: "We have met the enemy and he is us"--Pogo. The charge is not such a light one within the organization -- how long must it stand before we absolve ourselves?

This paper takes the debate on news immediacy, one of long standing in CUP, as a basis for consideration of the purpose of the organization. The issue is by no means isolated from the fundamental ideological conflict -- for this reason we seize on it. The development of the concept and its attempted implementation illuminate the structural influence on purpose. The co-existence of a desire for greater emphasis on features and analytic copy is a graphic illustration of the problem, the contradiction.

The dichotomy between news immediacy and features/analytic copy is not absolute yet it characterizes radically divergent goals within the organization. The divergence has not always been openly declared nor fully understood. Thus our exploration cannot be satisfied with mere consideration of the positions taken in the past -- it must probe them, test them, expose their weaknesses, their failures.

We wish to understand how the nature of news implies purpose. Within CUP this understanding has been related to professed purpose. Our first consideration, then, should be the purpose declared in the Charter of the Student Press since it is to this that structural proposals generally refer for legitimization.

At the 28th National Conference (Calgary, 1965) a major discussion of this document was encouraged. A working paper submitted by the McGill Daily, Georgain and Loyola News deserves attention:

"The charter of the Student Press is a graveyard...neither the Constitution nor the Code of Ethics satisfactorily answers the question: Why is CUP?....

"Over the last few years there has been an attempt to redefine the student. The crisis in higher education in Canada,



the movement of democratization of university structures, the quest for participatory democracy by young people all over the world have forced students towards a new kind of self-conceptualization. This new conceptualization tends toward removing him from the enclosed world in which he existed as an apprentice learning a trade. He now regards himself primarily as an entity best defined in terms of his social role.... \*\*

"CUP members have of necessity allowed themselves to be defined in terms of their success or failure in achieving freedom of the press. In some cases, this kind of polarization remains an immediate problem. For the most part, however, the time has now come for the student press to leave behind the more negative attitudes forced on it by a struggle against outside pressure and to think positively of its position in the new world of the student as citizen. "

"The first question to be raised, then, is the question of meaningful responsibility; that is to say, a responsibility which springs from a social dynamic rather than one arising out of, and defined by, the struggle for autonomy....How long are we to continue thinking solely in terms of what we are free from? When may we begin thinking in terms of what we are free for?

"Concretely, we now exist in order to supply information of all kinds; and we have a perfect right to do so. Concretely, we enthusiastically acquiesce in the rather vague notion of training journalists. But we have not yet found a *raison d'etre* on any level other than a strictly functional one."

"This situation is partly the result of the obsession with autonomy already outlined, and partly the result of a kind of ethical vacuum that too often marks a press that is itself directionless."

"The student press must now redefine its role. Obviously, there is a crisis in both our public and private institutions. The student has been involved because one aspect of that crisis --the financing of higher education--has impinged on him directly....It must ensure that its educative function takes precedence over all other considerations. It must ensure that it does not detract from the dignity of the concept of student as citizen by allowing itself to be a sounding board for the kind of crankish attitudinizing best exemplified by interminable debates on free love."

"To make it (the Charter) central, it should combine both function and ideal until we reach a situation where function and ideal have become synthesized. The Charter, then should make as priority the social responsibility of the student press to reflect and encourage the genuine social concerns of the student-citizen."<sup>3</sup>

The proposal then, is to define CUP's purpose in relation to the real situation of students within educational institutions



and society. However, the level of analysis has not yet transcended the "responsible citizenship" complex, suggesting an inadequate understanding of the "real situation" -- this creates the danger of incorrect methodology and thus, of structural ineffectiveness.

But this discussion resulted in amendment of the charter recognizing "That one of the major roles of the student press is to act as an agent of social change; that it should continually strive to emphasize the rights and responsibilities of the student as a citizen, and use its freedom from commercial control to examine issues that the professional press avoids" (10/C/65), and "that the Candian University Press should incorporate as its primary purpose an educative function which is vital to the development of the student-citizen" (11/C/65).

The Goals and Development Commission at CUP 28 also published a report based on an ORCUP regional mandate to prepare a report on the purposes and goals of a university newspaper:

"All papers were in agreement that the primary purpose of a student newspaper was to report campus news as accurately and swiftly as possible. In this way, it is hoped the newspaper will provide information, not otherwise available....Although local news is of primary concern, most student newspapers attempt to avoid parochialism by covering national and world news, since it affects the community, as much as space and money will permit.

"It was generally agreed that the student newspaper has a duty to attempt to provoke thought and beliefs. Through editorials, features and comment section, the newspaper should try to guide public opinion and provide a medium of exchange of differing views....

"The campus newspaper, the members agreed, is completely responsible for whatever appears in its pages. Therefore it should strive in the best tradition of journalism, to be as objective and impartial in its coverage of the news." <sup>4</sup>

After 28 years of existence, then, we have the embryonic form of a self-conscious radical, analytic press surfacing. Contradiction is, of course, obvious in the criteria of objectivity and impartiality. This contradiction is ever more obvious in the organization's submission to the Canadian Daily Newspaper Publishers Association:

"The CUP is in need of professional advice and the CUP is in need of money to put that advice to good use....As its constitution describes it, the purpose of CUP is to provide



a national press service...and to provide an opportunity for Canadian student journalists to improve the standards of student journalism.

"....It would not be far from fair to say that CUP has contributed more men and women to the ranks of professional journalism in Canada than schools of journalism or any other single source.

"...The move to Ottawa and a staffed national office (1960) created, from what had been a fraternal association, a strong and effective service organization. From a network of more than 30 student newspapers a news and feature service was inaugurated providing complete, if not up-to-the-minute, coverage of Canadian student affairs. The Ottawa office filed more than 500 news and feature stories to 35 student newspapers from September 1974 to March 1965. Many were national wrapups of student opinion and activities which eventually found their way -- with or without credit -- into many of the leading daily newspapers." <sup>5</sup>

Here we have not only a naive understanding of the commercial press and its fundamentally different nature/purpose, but also an account of the genesis of the service vs. co-operation conflict which reflects the ideological contradictions of the organization as well. The submission went as far as to suggest "that an advisory board to CUP can be set up, comprised of the president and general manager of the CDNPA, six members of the CDNPA or their delegates, and to include the general manager of the Canadian Press, the president of the Canadian Managing Editors Conference and the honorary president of the CUP, to meet at least once yearly to advise the national executive of the CUP on the organization's long term policies and programs." <sup>6</sup>

An investigation into the technology of and co-operation with the commercial press is also presented at CUP 28 in response to a mandate from 1964 on "the possibility of establishing a wire service in co-operation with the CP network." CP flatly refused to carry CUP copy as did various businesses contacted that had telex between major cities. National president James Laxer did the costing of telex for the national office (\$2,350 per month) and for papers wishing to link in with the system (est. \$500-700) stating:

"The use of such a system would make it possible for the national office to send out high priority news to papers just before their deadline and would enable the large papers to maintain closer communication.

"Before considering such a step, we should consider carefully whether the amount of rush national news is sufficient



to warrant the cost. Such an expansion of the news service would require a boost in staff of the national office to increase the flow of copy; and a hike in the travel, telephone and telegraph budgets to give CUP access to a wider range of material.

"The cost at the present time, accordingly, would appear virtually prohibitive unless CUP is able to find new sources of revenue of a large scale. While investigating alternatives to the proposed system, we should consider the full implications of installing the system before accepting or rejecting it."<sup>7</sup>

The attitude toward the commercial press changes drastically as the 1960s progress, however, it assumes the status of a teacher by negative example. In 1967, the Code of Ethics is modified, changing "unbiased" to "fair" reporting -- recognition that the professionalism of the commercial press is a pseudo-objective facade serving the interests of the bourgeoisie. Similarly, the hierarchical system within the bourgeois press is rejected in favour of support for democratic papers, with staff policy formulated and elected editors.

In 1970, alternative and community papers are granted associate status in the organization. The next conference (CUP 34) creates a category allowing them full membership. In effect, a very rapid transition occurs allowing these non-educational institution papers a voice in the decision-making of CUP, acknowledging "the kinship of media which do not consider themselves part of the establishment media."

CUP 35 (Winnipeg, 1972) saw publication of a critique of freedom of press and control of media:

"Freedom of the press, like free enterprise, may have existed in the past, but in corporate society, it has become simply another convenient myth.

"For example, just before the First World War there were 138 daily newspapers in Canada -- and there were 138 publishers. In 1953 Canada had only 89 newspapers and 57 publishers. By 1966 there were 110 newspapers and 62 publishers. Today, 14 publishing groups produce more than two-thirds of the country's 116 dailies.

"Another significant fact is that only 10 cities in Canada have more than one daily newspaper....In essence, only seven cities have competing newspapers.

"The third English language daily of Quebec is the Quebec City Chronical Telegraph, owned by none other than Lord Thomson of Fleet....

"The three chains -- Tomson, McConnell, and Southam -- own 97.5 per cent of the daily circulation of English language newspapers in Quebec....

"Montreal, along with Quebec City and St. John's, are the only cities in Canada where an independant daily actually competes with chain papers....



"The analysis of ownership patterns of Montreal papers indicates that control of the press is based on the same economic organization and financial advantages common to any corporate enterprise. The fact that, legally, the right to publish exists, does not guarantee a free press. Apart from ownership, one can look at the control advertising exercises over the press....any publication which wants support in the form of advertising from large corporations must maintain an editorial policy consistent with the interests of those corporations. This does not mean that advertisers verbally dictate editorial policy but that corporations wield power by their ability to withdraw financial support.

"Likewise owners do not tyrannically impose their views on the editor. Their main criterion in choosing an editor is the past record of the particular individual. This process of selection permeates the entire structure so that a cub reporter knows that if he or she is to rise to the top, he or she must fall into line."<sup>8</sup>

This growing definition in opposition to the bourgeois press along with the incorporation within CUP of some alternative papers, created greater distinction of purpose and, consequently, more pronounced conflict. The fluctuating attitude toward full membership for alternatives is in itself an indication of the conflict, as are the contents of house organs and conference working papers; the dichotomies are numerous -- service vs co-operation, condemnation of isolationism vs local prioritization; objectivity vs. investigation, spot news/filler vs analysis/features, professionalism vs democratization, technical vs political fieldworking.

CUP 34, indeed, passed a "directional" motion "recognizing" the problem:

"Whereas: The report of the national office to this conference makes it clear that CUP lacks direction and needs a new organization;

"Whereas: The national office should be oriented toward fulfilling functions that promote constructive struggle and service among and between papers on the basis of new ideas;

"Whereas: Old ideas and the bureaucracy that reflects them in the national office have stood in the way of close contact with and among member papers;

"Resolved that the member papers should restructure their co-operative styles of work as opposed to maintaining a bureaucratic service and that to do this end they instruct the national office to choose as its first priority fieldwork with member papers to promote new ideas on the problems facing Canadian and Quebec students and the Canadian and Quebec people..." (5/5/71)

The most definitive statement of purpose is that for the national news service, adopted at CUP 38 in 1975:



The newsservice operates in accordance with the CUP Code of Ethics.

Canadian University Press recognizes that a class society exists in Canada, and the important role the post-secondary education system plays in maintaining the existing social order. This role is reflected in the policies regarding accessibility to post-secondary education and the resulting composition of the Canadian student body, in the content of the education we receive, and is evidenced by the future positions which we are expected to occupy within the economic and social order.

Canadian University Press, as an agent of social change, must as its main priority attempt to use its national news service to provide Canadian students with information and analysis of the nature and role of post-secondary education within the Canadian economic and social system, relate the current policies of financial cutbacks being waged against post-secondary education and other social services to the general economic crisis facing Canada, and assist students in mobilizing opposition to these policies.

Further, the news service should report on and critically evaluate the role played by existing student organizations in responding to this situation, and encourage change in the leadership and/or structure of these organizations where they fail to recognize their responsibility to mobilize students.

Canadian University Press must also use its national news service to provide Canadian students with information and analysis of the capitalist economic system in which we all live, and to assist students in mobilizing against that system where it is found to be preserving the class structure or to be oppressive to women, minorities, or others within Canada.

But since the 38th national conference some papers have voiced strong opposition to the mere formal declaration of such purpose, even withdrawn from the organization, while others have complained that the structure of recent organizational expansion fails to serve it (or more basic formulation of purpose).

With the reduction of debate in CUP to the functional level, the debate on telex (historically documented as a faltering and expensive "tool" since implementation in 1967) assumed great importance. News immediacy, of course, was the concept in question.

In Guidelines for News Exchange (Cam Beck, September 1975 House Organ) some guidelines are presented. Two basic ways to provide news are considered:

"One is to report an event or incident; the other is to report what someone says. The latter is the most common."<sup>9</sup>

We must object that this view of news is so simplistic as to ignore the context in which the news occurs and through which it assumes its very nature. News does not constitute itself; it is the product, initially, of social demand -- fundamentally, of those in control of the media. Those who, in effect, have a near monopoly through the shared assumption of "free competitive" ideology which works to protect their established "interests."



We say that journalism as social activity is intentional, purposeful -- that irresponsible journalism ignores or denies this premise.

It may question, thus, change. It may "describe," thus preserve.

But its effectiveness depends on the quality of understanding produced, for understanding is the key to meaningful change. Analysis offers the solution. Reporting cannot in the real world, divorce itself from interpretation.

That most news reports dialogue is a sign of barrenness in the field. Orwell puts it thus: "Political language and with variation this is true of all political parties, from Conservative to Anarchists, is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give appearance of solidity to pure wind."<sup>10</sup>

Beck further reports:

"The immediacy of these statements is one of the factors that makes them news; that is, the more recent the statement, the more it is news. But immediacy, as often as not, is contrived."<sup>11</sup>

Essentially this is the point: immediacy, whether contrived or actual, is a technique of the commercial press. News is a commodity within such structure. The newspaper is a business exploiting news for profit, exhausting the use-value of a subject and subsequently discarding it.

"News immediacy keeps the issues timely, gives them momentum. There's a feeling that something is happening,"<sup>12</sup> Beck's article maintains.

Yet the issues facing students, within educational institutions and society, are historical. Momentum is not the creation of on-the-spot coverage but of detailed investigation and analysis. The feeling of "something happening" produced by sustained but superficial exposure is mere manipulation. News must be educational, not simply informative, if it is to effect any "social change."

To be educational is to expose the nature of an event in the context of social conditions. Only in this context do phenomena reveal their essential properties, the properties they possess by virtue of presenting themselves to humanity within a



definite social construction. The relationships characterizing this social construction impose upon phenomena properties not inherent in their material specificity. Essentially, the purposeful activity of humanity effects a transformation of the material world and in this fashion objectifies itself within it.

Description of an event, then, is not merely an account of that interaction which is immediately observable. It is an active exploration of the purposeful activity which constitutes the events and of the social relationships within which this activity occurs. Ruefully, it is a complex and demanding task -- activity, the precursor of understanding, tends for this reason to operate as an under regulated human modality

Journalism, as an integration of activity and understanding, and occurring continuously within the larger movement of history, is faced with formidable tasks. To accomplish any demystification of the objectified activity of man, to expose the contradictions of social relationships, requires detailed investigation and penetrating analysis.

There are, consequently, more attractive approaches: anarchism and schematization. The attraction of both is their relatively simplistic account of events.

Anarchistic journalism enjoys some popularity with the Canadian University Press -- it can be defined as a frustrated, fatalistic or cynical appreciation of the absurdity of human activity, given the existence of alienating and seemingly intractable social relationships.

Schematization may assume various specific forms but its nature is essentially arbitrary reductionism. Within sectarian opposition to the existing social conditions this can assume the form of a highly sedimented language in which analysis is replaced by the application of pre-existing jargon to events (on the assumption that analysis has been carried to its completion necessitating simple recognition of the generic theory behind a specific event.)

Schematization is most powerful, however, within the commercial press. Here, "devout liberalism buttressed by a positive methodology"<sup>13</sup> supports the transformation of human activity into a commodity. This occurs both within the context of the news (through the offereance of sensational or immediate news, news out of context) and within the actual production of the news (through the undemocratic, hierarchical structure of the work).



The liberal scheme assumes the moral dictums of individualism -- the concept of the discrete, autonomous and morally accountable individual within society. It applies empiricism in the description of human events, regarding historical facts as analagous to the facts of natural science, "discrete, atomic, and supremely indifferent to the position of the observer."<sup>14</sup>

The myth of objectivity and the practice of consideration of events in isolation still exists within the commercial press long after their rejection in other fields of social investigation. In "History: the Poverty of Empiricism" G.S. Jones puts forward the position of the modern historian E.H. Carr, which may serve as a cogent summation:

"The main opposition to world-weary liberal pessimism or wistful nostalgia has recently been led by E.H. Carr. In What is History? Carr launched a vigorous attack upon empiricism, pseudo-objectivism and the subordination of historical analysis to moral stricture....Above all, Carr demolished the exhausted dichotomy between "facts" and "interpretations" which was the cornerstone of latter-day positivism. The liberal approach has always assumed that theory "interpretations" will emerge after the collection of facts: ie by induction....Theory would come, like steam from a kettle, when it reached boiling point. The initial illusion is evident. Those who tried to create theory out of facts, never understood that it was only theory that could constitute them as facts in the first place....Similarly those who focused history upon the event failed to realize that events are only meaningful in terms of a structure which will establish them as such....Pointing out that all writing of history involves a selection from the sum of facts available, he demonstrated that any selection of facts obeys an implicit evaluative criterion. "Facts" are thus inseparable from "interpretations" which in turn are determined by "values." These values should, he argued, be grounded and verified by the imminent movement of history itself....that this movement is essentially that of man's increasing control over nature and society, their environment and themselves....Socialist historians must form their own institutions, run their own journals, and stage their own debates without sliding into either sectarianism or eclecticism. They should not retreat into the safe pastures....They should instead establish the rhetorical foundations of any history, they should advance into the structure and history of the ruling class, into the interpretation of the historical morphology of whole cultures....Only vigorous intellectual imperialism and collective assault will make a mark. Otherwise the limp ghosts of long departed liberal mandarins will forever weigh like a nightmare on the brain of the living."<sup>15</sup>

So too, in journalism.



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### The Specific as an Introduction to the General

We chose to deal with news immediacy in an extended fashion because we felt that a critique of this concept, if carried far enough, would reveal the broader issues facing CUP. Indeed as we ourselves found out in the course of this analysis, the passage from the specific to the general, is in this case, almost instantaneous.

We are not surprised at this. The more specific and closely defined the issue the more it points outwards for its resolution. The specificity of the issue and its context are mutually definable. The specific derives its character from the context and the context is a synthesis of all the specifics. Consequently the more rigorous one is in defining the problem the more attention one must pay to its background. In other words the best way to deal with a specific problem is to pay close attention to these general considerations (historical and analytical) which both precede and flow from it.

The specific is a window into the general. One cannot raise the issue of news immediacy without inquiring into the function of news. How else is one to determine whether immediacy is a justifiable demand to be made on news. And yet as vivid and immediate the connection between function and immediacy is to us the debate on the issue has only dealt with the connection intermittently.

A sustained ignorance of what should be obvious cannot be accidental. One has to recognize behind this "ignorance" an ideological position. The precise nature of this ideology is best

defined through an examination of the methods that have been used to cover it.

### The Mystifying Power of Operational Logic

The debate on news immediacy has been conducted for the most part from an operational perspective. To put it differently, news immediacy has been viewed as a technical problem calling for a technical solution (telex, bureaux, telephones, mail etc.). This has meant that even when news immediacy has been opposed the opposition was based on the grounds that the operational capability of CUP does not allow for it ("Most papers only publish once or twice a week and can't take advantage of fast news... It's too expensive"). The question of whether news immediacy and the function of news are even compatible remained unraised. The characterization of Telex as a means of "shovelling shit faster around the country" is the first recorded attempt to subject the problem to critical ie. genuine analysis. Even so CUP 39/39.5 never came to grips with problem.

We do not want to suggest by this that operational objections to news immediacy are not cogent ones. Indeed we consider them very powerful objections. News immediacy <sup>would</sup> is too expensive and it is true that most CUP papers ~~xxx~~ not be able to exploit fast news. As long as these arguments are viewed as secondary objections, subservient to the fundamental question of how immediacy and function are related to each other, we regard them as valuable additions to the debate. However, the moment these



If objections become the most important ones, or worse the only ones ~~considered~~, they not only cease to have any value but actually become a source of mystification.

The operational approach, it should be recognized, is itself an ideology, one ~~new~~ that confronts us regularly in capitalist society. The key feature of this approach as we have noted above is the reduction of a given problem into a technical task. The consequence of this is to deprive the original problem of its moral significance and transform it into an ostensibly neutral demand on the ingenuity of those who are called upon to solve it. The operational approach was brought to its peak at the time of the Vietnam war. It was at that time that the press familiarized us with such terms as "strategic", "tactical" and "surgical" "strikes", "incursions", "containment", "escalation", "counterinsurgency" -- terms all designed to transform the crimes of US imperialism into technological innovations outside the realm of morality.

That this approach should find such widespread application in capitalist society (it has been widely used for example to "neutralize" labour ~~unrest~~) is most appropriate.

Any system based on domination, requires for its perpetuation, a mechanism that will reshape extraneous and potentially subversive concepts into concepts that conform to the established order of things. Concepts like "freedom" or "truth", which are necessarily alien to a system based on oppression and lies, have to be degraded into something that the system can cope with or even exploit. Capitalism, in other words, has its own digestive system.

Capitalist society can deal with any threat to itself as long as it can convert the threat into a marketable commodity. Such was the case, for example, with the counterculture in the 60's.

The operational approach is the outcome of the transformation of intelligence into a commodity, a transformation that depends for its success on the purification of intelligence from all traces of intentionality. Since the world is a moral world only insofar as it offers resistance to the moulding force of human intentionality the outcome of this purification is a morally neutral world on the one hand and a purely mathematical intelligence on the other. The operational approach represents the application of this sterile intelligence to the challenges of an equally sterile world.

Applied to the specific task of gathering information operationalism gives rise to empiricism. Bourgeois journalism could also be called empirical journalism. However the empirical gathering of facts does not completely describe this kind of journalism. Another important function of the bourgeois press is the marketing of sensationalism. These two functions have one thing in common (apart from being the products of alienated thought): they are both of them a response to a demand on the commodity market, they are both ingredients that go into making news that sells.

A basic contradiction within CUP is that it promotes itself as an agent of social change while at the same time adopting a method of self-analysis that is patently bourgeois, a method that is responsible for the kind of journalism that CUP is so fond of denouncing.

#### ALL the News That's Fit To Sell

We noted earlier that bourgeois society maintains itself by translating all potentially subversive concepts into the language of commodity production. News too is potentially subversive since it is capable of laying bare the contradictions that lie at the heart of capitalism. By turning news into a business capitalism manages not only to eliminate this threat but to actually turn it into an advantage. Capitalism's digestive



system, as we have had occasion to illustrate, not only degrades foreign ~~material~~ material but actually turns it into nourishment.

Empiricism and sensationalism sell. Why? Because there is a demand for them. For the left this is a traditional stumbling block. It is hard, for example, to accept that the Toronto Sun, a sexist, blatantly anti-working-class paper, is read everyday by the people it insults. Reactionaries, needless to say, see the popularity of the Sun as a vindication of their politics. Inherent in both views is <sup>(underlies)</sup> the belief that if something is popular it must be good, from which it follows that to prove something worthless, one must show it to be unpopular.

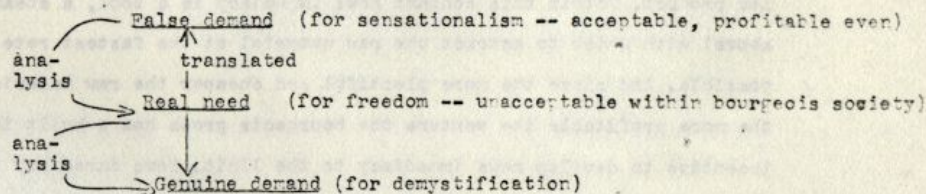
Sensationalism however is not unpopular. If it was, the Toronto Sun would not indulge in it as often as it does. One should not conclude from this, however, that the bourgeois press is justified in being sensationalistic. The demand for sensationalism, given its persistence, should be viewed as a distortion of a desire that is genuinely human, the desire for freedom.

In the absence of real freedom, freedom that ~~one~~ one lives everyday in one's relation with others, the desire for freedom becomes desire for contingency i.e. unpredictability, which <sup>(is)</sup> the closest approximation to real freedom. The yearning for sensationalism is a yearning for contingency. News of disasters or examples of unusually good fortune serve to introduce into people's lives an element of uncertainty that would otherwise be absent in the well-ordered universe within which they normally operate. The news need not be "good". An airplane crash serves just as well as news of Sadat's visit to Israel. The important thing is to be convinced that anything can happen, that the predictability of one's own life is not absolute.

Ought it not to be possible to change back the distorted need

for sensationalism into the original need, the need for freedom? Ought it not to be possible <sup>OWN</sup> for news to make people aware of the potential power they hold over their lives?

We have given here a simple demonstration of demystification. We acknowledged the existence of a false but persistent demand, discovered the real human need underlying it and on the basis of this genuine need formulated a new demand. The diagram below ought to be helpful:



Within the bourgeois press empiricism is counterposed as an alternative to sensationalism. However, like sensationalism <sup>(empiricism)</sup> only satisfies a distorted need. It is a response to the fundamentally human need to understand one's environment. To put it naively it is a reply to those who seek the truth except that for truth capitalism substitutes rounds of ~~raw~~ raw data. Deprived of its context and presented in a completely fragmented fashion information satisfies the purely technical requirements of ~~capitalism~~ capitalism without betraying <sup>(any of)</sup> its secrets.

Sensationalism and empiricism are but two sides of the same coin. If the Toronto Sun is devoted to outright sensationalism the Globe and Mail only manages to avoid it by resorting to empiricism. Different papers cater to different markets but they all serve the same purpose: mystification.



### News Immediacy in the Bourgeois Press

When news is treated as a commodity, as it is in the bourgeois press, all news becomes filler. The paper (or air time in the case of radio and television) is transformed into packaging: there is a certain amount of space to be filled, a certain amount of advertising to be taken advantage of. Ads demand a paper within which to be published, the paper serves the ads.

News is the raw material from which the news industry fashions its product. Within this context news immediacy is a tool, a steam shovel with which to extract the raw material at the fastest rate possible. And since the more plentiful and cheaper the raw material the more profitable the venture the bourgeois press has a built in incentive to develop news immediacy to the limit. News immediacy is to the news industry what the invention of steam power was to the manufacturing industry. In fact not only is news immediacy vital to the bourgeois press but it is important for a paper to get its news at least as immediately as its competitors or at least to pretend that such is the case. There is no end to the gimmicks used to achieve this. One radio station, for example, broadcasts its news in between hours <sup>just so it can claim to present</sup> ~~for the news purpose of being able to claim that~~ the news half an hour before everybody else. News like eggs, is best before a certain date, which makes sense if you sell news the same way you sell eggs.

The important point is this: news immediacy is not just a neutral technique suitable for all purposes. It is a form appropriate to a certain function, that of selling news. If one attributes to news a <sup>revolutionary</sup> ~~different~~ function, as we would like to do, <sup>one has to</sup> ~~simultaneously~~ revolutionize the form used to present it.

### The Student Press As an Alternative

What is the purpose of the student press? To train journalists for the bourgeois press or to fight for the interests of students?

In principle CUP fights for students. Its statement of principles declares CUP's intention to be an agent of social change. In practice CUP's main function is to train the very people that the bourgeois press will later on use to mystify and preserve the very social structure CUP says it wants to change. The Mayor of Halifax welcomes this agent of social change to Halifax and the government of Nova Scotia throws a party for its delegates. Could this be CUP's version of the "historic compromise" or is it simply that the best way to train journalists for the bourgeoisie <sup>is to</sup> ~~start~~ them off betraying their fellow students?

Yet from a structural standpoint student papers and CUP are ideally suited to demystify bourgeois society and serve student interests. For one thing, student papers don't have to sell their news, they do not have to be caught up in the commodity cycle. For another the internal organization of student papers is radically different from that of the bourgeois press. Staff democracy, in principle, ensures that the content <sup>of student papers</sup> ~~has been~~ decided on by the staff and that consequently it will serve student interests. The student press, in other words, has every possibility to be a free press.

The reality, once again, is different. CUP, the embodiment of the student press, is viewed by most papers as a supplier of filler, the issue being whether filler should flow very fast or just fast. That this should be an issue at all inside CUP demonstrates how deeply ingrained within the organization is the bourgeois concept of news as filler. In retrospect CUP's statement of principles has only served to provide an indication of how far CUP has diverged from its real function.



How is it that the student press, so suited to be an alternative to the bourgeois press, has degenerated into a poor imitation of the latter?

What would an alternative to the bourgeois press be? A press committed to demystification. Demystification however is not a standard ~~technique~~ technique, a tool to be used the way one uses typewriters. The world only reveals its secrets to those who challenge it -- to understand oppression, or even notice it, one has to be against it. Facts by themselves are not enough. Woodward and Bernstein, for example, when given an excellent possibility to demystify the role of the state in American ~~society~~ society chose instead to concentrate on the evil doings of Nixon and company, thus obscuring further the class nature of the bourgeois state.

Demystification has to start with a conscious challenge, namely, a challenge to the world ~~x~~ to explain itself or be swept away -- "a ruthless criticism of everything existing", wrote Marx.

If then we return to the question of why CUP ~~x~~ has failed to perform its proper function despite its potentially democratic structure the question to ask becomes whether or not CUP has complimented these structures with the appropriate activity (praxis). Has CUP been willing to undertake a "ruthless" criticism of itself and the world around it? The answer is that it hasn't. Consequently CUP's democracy has actually turned into a hindrance, a hodge-podge of legalism and parliamentary ~~maneuvering~~ maneuvering. Having betrayed its real function CUP now finds itself in contradiction with ~~its~~ its own structure. Conference's, for example, instead of being forums where papers can arrive at a deeper appreciation of their's and CUP's function, have become a source of dread, a depressing ritual that has to be endured once a year. The same condition can ~~be~~ be observed in those papers ~~which~~ have swerved towards careerism and now find that staff democracy is just a source of aggravation. In both cases, the

structure, having become alienated from its intended structure, oppresses those whom it should benefit.

But how can CUP be expected to be progressive? Is it not true that it is a mass organization, one that embodies all manner of divergent ideologies?

CUP mass character should not mean that the organization should not have a purpose or that all its parts should be ~~x~~ moving in completely different directions. On the contrary the mass nature of CUP calls for vigorous and relentless internal debate. Those who want to make CUP a viable organization have to persistently encourage this.

In order to be able to demystify its environment CUP must first of all demystify itself. This cannot be done through compromise. On the contrary only ruthless criticism will do. One reflects on one's views, indeed one starts to become aware of them, only when they ~~meet~~ meet resistance. If a person's views are correct then criticism of them will only serve to convince him further of their truth. He will then be in a better position to convince others and isolate those who refuse to listen to reason. Those who hold incorrect positions will upon criticism either change their position or else be exposed as ~~demanders~~ <sup>demagogues</sup>. Thus it ought to be possible for CUP to serve a worthwhile function without eliminating its mass character.

In summary: CUP is an organization whose structure serves purposes ~~that~~ that are the opposite of the intended ones. Conferences serve to confuse, the "cooperative" ideal is an excuse for stifling dissent, the news service acts as filler and so on. <sup>In order to be resolved the</sup> ~~the contradiction has to be taken to the limit.~~ contradiction ~~has to be taken to the limit.~~ has to be taken to the limit. The way out is through vigorous debate. Without this CUP will remain a cripple.



### News Immediacy in CUP

From the general we return to the specific.

We have said that CUP'S present function is in contradiction with its structure. A specific example of this is the trend towards news immediacy.

The vast majority of CUP papers publish once or twice a week. Some publish three times a week and one paper is a daily. And yet CUP has become increasingly geared to a system of news dissemination that could only be useful to papers which come out every day.

Accompanying this trend has been a tendency to view the infrequency of publication of most CUP papers as a drawback, a handicap on ~~an~~ what might otherwise be a worthy rival to the bourgeois press. The term "alternate press" has come to mean a press that both rejects the principles of the bourgeois press and attempts to rival it.

We suggest that the infrequency of publication of CUP papers is actually an advantage that should be exploited. For one thing it should allow them to escape completely the idea of news as filler since it should be possible to print only those stories that serve a useful purpose (apart from filling space).

In fact we believe that the correct approach is to have the contents of each issue justify their inclusion. A paper should only come out when it has enough good quality material to justify printing it. Infrequency of publication should be an incentive to provide this quality, an opportunity to give news the depth it would otherwise not have.

As we said at the beginning of this paper an essential prerequisite to demystification is putting things in context. The greater the distance between an observer and an event the more it is possible to

situate the event <sup>within</sup> a general scheme. This is true of both physical and temporal separation. What happens in one's hometown may seem quite vital to one's life but only acquires its full significance when situated within a larger geographical area. Similarly one's understanding of events changes with reflection, which takes time. Novelists know that good novels cannot be written on events that have just taken place. George Orwell actually suggested that a good novel might take up to five years of sheer reflection before one could even attempt to write it. And yet a good novel might explain more about people and the world around them than all the newspapers printed within that period.

In conclusion: news immediacy is a concept that should be alien to CUP, a concept that <sup>(not only)</sup> is useless but potentially harmful to the student press. The trend towards news immediacy inside CUP should be viewed as a manifestation of a larger trend, namely, the progressive degeneration of CUP into an imitation of the bourgeois press. In fighting news immediacy one fights this degeneration.