

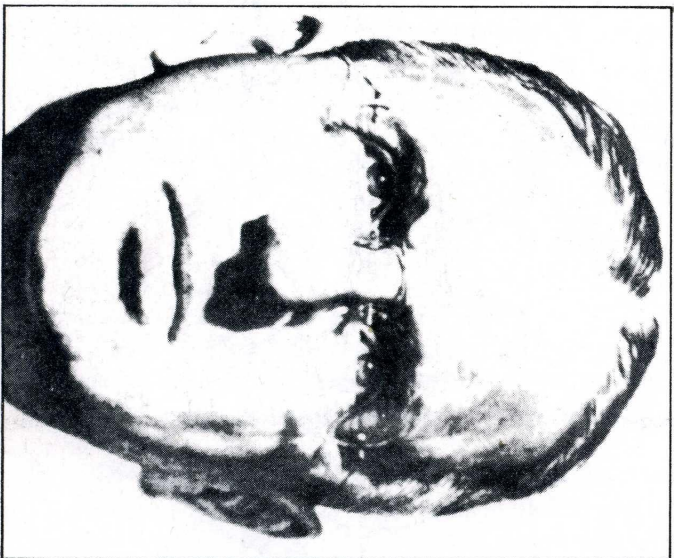
# The Kitchener-Waterloo Free Press



## this week

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# Mayor shot by dope-crazed hippie



by R. Bell and G. Robins  
A hookah-wielding, self-professed hippie burst through tight security last night and stunned city council members by opening fire on the mayor with a snub-nosed revolver.

The mayor was struck three times, once in the head, once in the abdomen and in the upper arm. He was rushed by ambulance to City General Hospital at 9:35 p.m. and died four hours later.

Police apprehended the gunman immediately, who offered no resistance to the arrest. Charged with non-capital murder is Norman V. Peale, 29, no fixed address. Police believe he may be using an assumed name.

Homocide detectives on the scene could offer no motive for the killing, other than "the usual enemies one picks up in the politics business."

a downtown redevelopment project when Peale, brandishing a hookah—a water pipe used by Asians for smoking heroin, burst from the spectators' gallery. Shouting "death to imperialist lackeys" he opened fire from about five feet directly in front of the mayor. He got off six shots, three of which struck the mayor. No one else was injured.

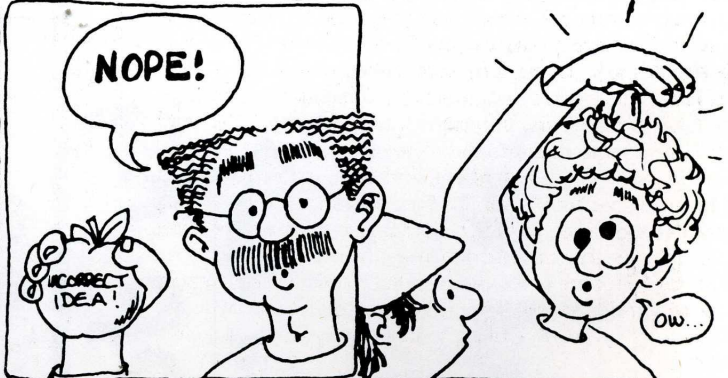
Questions of a possible conspiracy to assassinate the mayor were being asked within hours of last night's tragedy. Police would not confirm that a woman dressed in charperson's clothing was seen leaving the building minutes before the shooting began.

"Right now, it's a simple case of murder that we're dealing with," said chief of police Goerring. "If anyone else was involved we will find him or her. We have one man in custody and he has been charged with murder."

Police arrested Norman V. Peale (right) after he shot the mayor (left) to death in the city council chambers last night.

Council had just begun debate on

# WHERE DO CORRECT IDEAS COME FROM?



# The Kitchener-Waterloo A Brief History of **Free press**

(Or How to Publish a Weekly Newspaper on a 1:1000 Ad/Copy Ratio)

## Introduction

This paper is an attempt to describe what happened when a group of people in Kitchener-Waterloo set out to establish a weekly *alternative* newspaper in these cities.

Publication of the **K-W Free Press** lasted only 11 weeks (11 issues), and a history of some other, more successful (i.e. still publishing) newspaper might possibly be of more value to others planning their own paper.

Nevertheless, someone thought it important enough to chronicle the **Free Press's** history, and I have undertaken that task. What follows is remarkable only for its brevity and incompleteness. It is composed mostly of personal observations and opinions, follows no logical, chrono- or otherwise, sequence and where it isn't sketchy or incoherent, it's probably half bullshit anyway.

But it might be useful in promoting discussion and criticism of various aspects of the alternate press in Canada.

Rosco Bell

December 19, 1974

The **K-W Free Press** represents perhaps the most ambitious effort of the *alternative* press in Canada. That it is no longer being published may be a direct result of its own ambition.

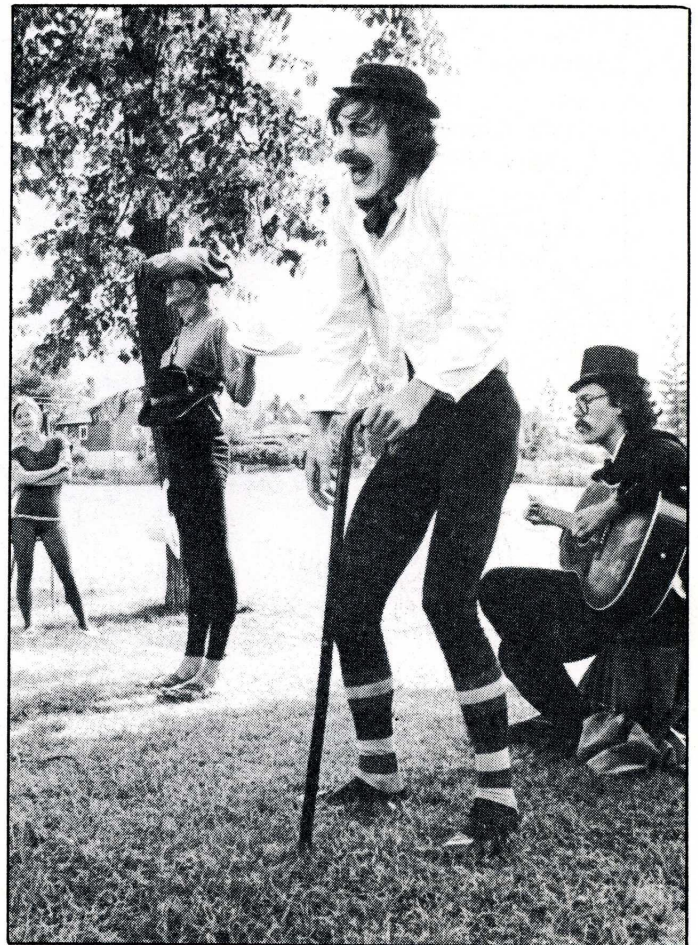
Discussions aimed at producing a weekly tabloid newspaper in Kitchener-Waterloo began in the fall of 1973. They involved a group of about 10 to 12 people who had been active in various radical endeavours over the previous five or six years, principally in the student movement at the University of Waterloo.

Several of this core group had helped to produce an alternative, labour paper, **On the Line**, which began publishing in 1970 and is still produced today under the banner of the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist).

It may be illuminating to examine the differences between **On the Line** and the **Free Press**. **On the Line** saw itself as a labour newspaper, one which would publicize workers' struggles and labour-related issues (plant safety, labour legislation, etc.).

The **Free Press** saw itself as an alternative, community-oriented paper and as such tried to give coverage to a wider ranging array of issues (sports, residents' groups, unions, co-operatives, etc.). It was felt that an alternative was necessary to the type of coverage given by the established, monopoly-controlled media to these issues that affect the cities of Kitchener and Waterloo as a whole (city and regional government, the police, women's rights, etc.), as well as those issues which are generally ignored by the bourgeois press, mainly on the cultural front.

**On the line** took a basically Marxist viewpoint editorially. The **Free Press**, though it espoused an essentially anti-capitalist line, felt that it was not necessary to present a



Harry the Hat Rack and Charlie Chaplin, part of a local mime troupe called *Theatrix Graphix*, toured local playgrounds and parks throughout the summer. From the *Free Press* 1:3.

Marxist analysis of all issues, because this might serve to alienate more readers than it attracted.

The current editors of *On the Line* have criticized the Free Press staff for their bourgeois tendencies, and claimed that certain individuals involved were *careerists* more interested in newspapers than the struggles and issues they chose to cover. To a certain extent these criticisms are valid and I do not think they were given adequate consideration by the Free Press staff<sup>1</sup>. However, I believe that what the Free Press attempted was equally as valid and that it was a good example of what an alternative paper can be.

## A definite problem

One of the basic desires of the Free Press was that it be a reader-supported paper as opposed to an advertiser-supported paper. To accomplish this it would have been necessary to sell approximately 2500 copies of each issue at 25 cents apiece to break even. This would require an extensive promotion campaign and a relatively sophisticated distribution system. Neither of these materialized and it is generally conceded that inadequate planning was responsible for this. However, some advertising was to be solicited, as it was felt that to rely solely on the readership for financial support would be unrealistic. That so little advertising was ever solicited had as much to do with the unsavoury nature of the task as it did with inadequate advance planning. Nobody really wants to sell advertising. Nobody did.

## The Free Press and the University of Waterloo

The bulk of the Free Press' initial funding (\$2000 out of \$3000) came in the form of a forgivable loan from the Federation of Students of the University of Waterloo. The ties between the Free Press and UW must be considered to be *close* at the very least. Most of the staff attended UW over the past six to eight years; many received their first journalistic and/or political experiences there through the *Chevron*, and others were active in the Federation of Students up to and including the period the Free Press was publishing. It now appears that the Free Press may resume publication, as a monthly supplement to the *Chevron*<sup>2</sup>.

However, the Free Press was at times very reluctant to discuss its relationship with UW. When the paper undertook to describe its operating procedures, including its finances, both in the paper itself and in materials used to solicit subscriptions, the UW loan was carefully not mentioned, nor was the involvement of many ex-UW students. I voiced my objections to this secrecy on various occasions, but was rebuffed, principally on the grounds of the university's and the *Chevron's* *bad name*. It was felt that the reaction to this type of disclosure in the community could only be adverse and would affect the Free Press' subscription and advertising campaigns.

As I said, I objected to this secrecy, mainly because I saw it as a greater point of vulnerability for the paper. It was not honest. It was not necessary. I hope it does not continue.

## The staff of the Free Press

At any given time the staff collective numbered from 15 to 25 men and women. The men outnumbered the women by

about four to one. While this did not seem to have an effect on the production of the paper, it did have an effect on the content (i.e. women's issues were not given extensive coverage, although they were not played down).

However, divisions of the men-women variety did not develop to any degree, perhaps aided by the common wash-room facilities of the office. But it would be naive to assume that such splits were eliminated. It may only be that there was not enough time for them to develop. Whatever.

Most of the staff joined the paper during the period immediately preceding and during publication of the paper. In fact, several of the initial *core* group contributed substantially less than those who joined later. This created some tensions amongst the staff and was never fully resolved before the paper ceased publishing<sup>3</sup>.

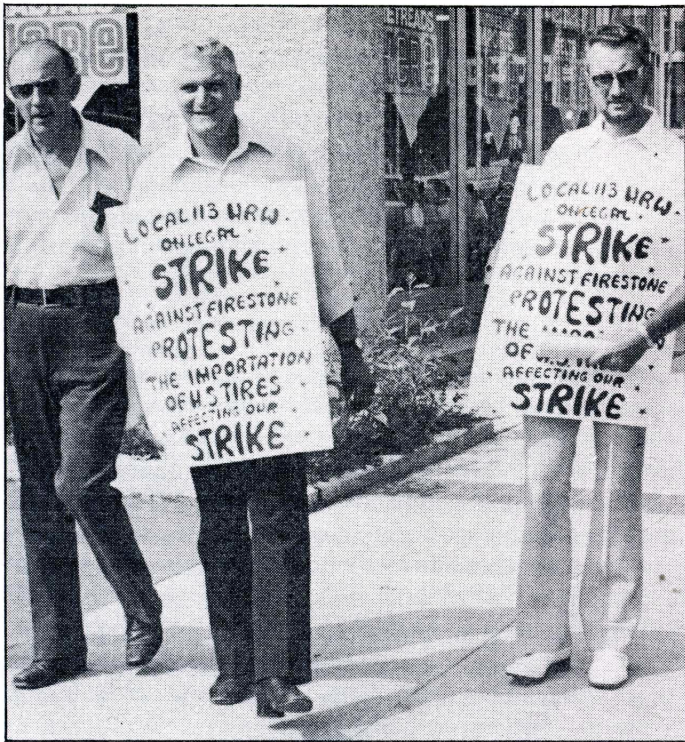
Though the ideal was to have a democratically or collectively controlled paper, including sharing responsibility at all levels, a group of six to eight people was required to assume a large bulk of the workload, with the possible exception of actual copy writing. This includes editing, layout, paste-up, distribution, etc. This unequal sharing of the work produced several problems, especially for the six to eight people doing more than their share. In addition to allowing no time for other activities, it was just too much to keep up for any length of time.

The other major staff problem was in the areas of financing and distributing the paper. As far as distribution is concerned, without a solid subscription base, it is necessary to spend a great deal of time selling the paper in the street.

It soon became obvious that not enough bodies could be found among the staff and elsewhere who were willing to spend five or six hours a weekend hustling the paper. In-



United Farmworkers Union leader Caesar Chavez (left) is introduced to CLC convention delegates by retiring president Donald MacDonald, blocking further debate on Canadian autonomy for international unions. Ironically, the CLC gave overwhelming support to Chavez' grape and lettuce boycott while ignoring the problems of the National Farmers Union in Canada. From the Free Press, 1:1.



Local rubberworker tried to organize a boycott of Firestone tires late in the summer to help end a lengthy strike against that company. From the Free Press 1:7.

stead, teams of two or three blitzed certain neighbourhoods, distributing 2000 to 3000 free copies a week, in the hope of attracting subs. This brought a very limited response, as did the idea of enlisting kids to sell it in their own neighbourhoods. We got lots of kids, but few customers.

At the same time, ads were not coming in. While this might be considered a solution to the question of sexist advertising, it did put a bit of a strain on our finances.

The solution to these two problems was to hire two people to assume responsibility for co-ordinating the efforts required.

Shortly after publishing began, four people were found who could work fulltime on the paper, as they had other sources of income. This was to be done for only one month<sup>4</sup>, however, so advertising and distribution were not made their specific responsibilities. The decision to hire two people for ads and distribution was made about seven or eight weeks after publishing began. By the tenth week, two people had been found, but it was too late to prevent the ultimate demise of the Free Press.

Encouragement did exist vis. staff. Few people gave up contributing to the paper altogether, and new staff trickled into the office up until the end. But this did not compensate for lack of funds, nor for the growing disillusionment of the staff members.

## The Free Press: "Every Week"

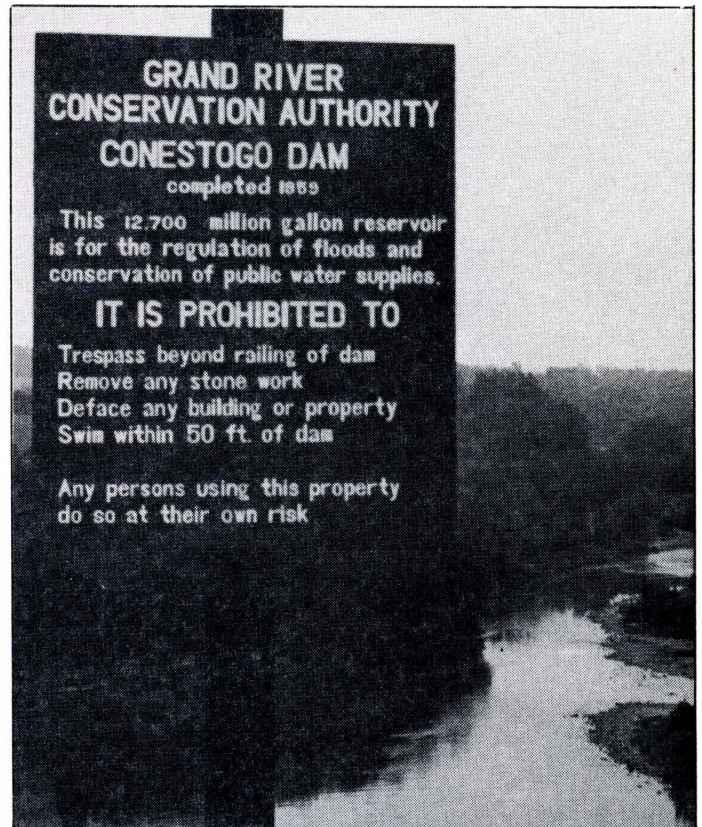
During the course of pre-publication promotion, someone came up with the slogan *every week*. It was felt that a weekly paper would be the goal for a number of reasons. Certainly, in an area the size of Kitchener-Waterloo there is enough going on to provide ample material to fill a 16 to 20 page newspaper once a week. At the same time, it was felt that a weekly could aspire to some sort of credibility more

readily than a less frequent publication. And a paper coming out each week would also be able to establish a higher degree of continuity in its coverage.

I agreed with these sentiments and was very hopeful that the Free Press could meet its deadlines every week. However, this goal may have been too ambitious, considering the amount of money available and the number of people willing to do the work. Without the benefit of a sizeable income from each issue, it became necessary for the Free Press staff to make cash donations to pay for the paper in addition to contributing their labour<sup>5</sup>. There is a limit to how much an individual can give away before it becomes a real burden on him/her.

At the same time, the core production group was spending anywhere from 20 to 50 hours per week on the paper, in addition to working at fulltime jobs to support themselves. These people were virtually burnt out when the paper folded and it is unlikely they could have continued at the same pace for much longer.

Publishing every week also meant that most people's energies were directed to the production of the paper. When problems began to surface, there seemed to be so little time to deal with them before it was time to get back to the business of putting out the paper again. Monday nights the staff held its weekly meeting. However, Mondays were also production nights. The pressures of having the meeting and then having to work on the paper itself meant that both



The above plaque, located on the downstream side of the Conestoga dam clearly lists flood control as the primary function of the facility. But one important fact brought out at the public inquiry into the causes of the May flood is that dams and reservoirs under the control of the Grand River Conservation Authority are necessary to flush sewage, a contradictory function, generated by economic development and expansion. From the Free Press 1:3.

suffered. Problems that came up during the meeting were quickly set aside, while people who could not afford the time would leave before production began<sup>6</sup>.

## The Free Press and the community

One of the goals of the Free Press was that it be a reader-supported paper. In addition to having its financial base in the community, the Free Press staff also hoped to draw on its readership for editorial content as well.

While the paper was partially successful in the first instance (what outside support it got came from its readers) it could not claim to have attracted many readers who contributed to the content of the paper. Feedback from the readers, though generally favourable and encouraging, was sparse, seldom more than one or two letters and a few phone calls a week.

This poor response could be attributed to various factors. The Free Press may not have been *issue-oriented* enough. Editorially, the paper tended to social democratic or reformist postures offering little to agree or disagree on.

The natural apathy of most people may have been a factor. Kitchener-Waterloo, despite its large working class population, is traditionally a conservative area. Though they vote NDP, they vote conservative NDP. Most of the paper's content came from the area's intellectual left-wing. This split between the workers and intellectuals is something which deserves considerably more attention if the Free Press is to revive itself.

## The Free Press and the "free" market

In a society whose people are conditioned to respond to slogans and logos, jingles and sex, selling anything else is, needless to say, somewhat risky. As I have nothing new or insightful to add to resolving this dilemma, I shall move on.

## Content of the Free Press

As I said earlier, editorially the paper tended more to the reformist than the overtly Marxist. News coverage was heavily weighted to civic politics and residents' struggles with local government. Culturally, the paper tended to be somewhat nationalistic—reviews of Canadian books, a critique of the Stratford Shakespearean Festival, articles on local theatre and film-making groups. Sports never really got off the ground. Features included a five-part analysis of the food-retailing industry, two four-page supplements—one on the K-W women's centre, and one paid for and written by the Service Employees International Union, who were involved in a hospital organizing drive—plus several photo-features. The paper also carried a community bulletin board and a crossword puzzle.

The first few issues tended to be copy-heavy, stories too long, in a non-journalistic style, that sort of thing. However, the writing improved considerably in subsequent weeks, at least for those who contributed regularly.

## The Free Press and Dumont Press Graphix

The Free Press's problems would have multiplied had it not been supported by Dumont Press Graphix to the extent that it was. In addition to getting cheap typesetting from Dumont several workers there contributed to the paper as

well. Problems like incomprehensible layouts, no headlines or cutlines, late copy, department logos, etc. could usually be solved as the paper was typeset to most people's satisfaction. Deadlines could be relaxed a bit, though this had to be discouraged. The paper's contributors could help with the typesetting and get a more complete view of how a newspaper is made. Since the paper stopped publishing, it has moved its offices into the same building which Dumont occupies.

## Conclusion

The problems faced by the Free Press were numerous and no simple solution to them exists. However, some problems appear to me to be more significant than others. These are its internal organization and its financing<sup>6</sup>.

Implementing effective collective control of a voluntary venture of this nature is not easy. It may be desirable, but in actual practice it can break down very quickly. The amount of work involved is enormous and unless all the staff realizes this some people are going to end up doing most of it. The alternative is to pay people for their labours and assigning specific responsibility for different areas. It may be that it is impossible to support a paper without full-time people to handle advertising and distribution.

The Free Press's financial problems may have been lessened to some degree had it not chosen to publish every week. This would have allowed more time to work on distribution and soliciting subscriptions. I still believe that the goal of a weekly paper is desirable, but it should probably not have been attempted until the finances were secure.



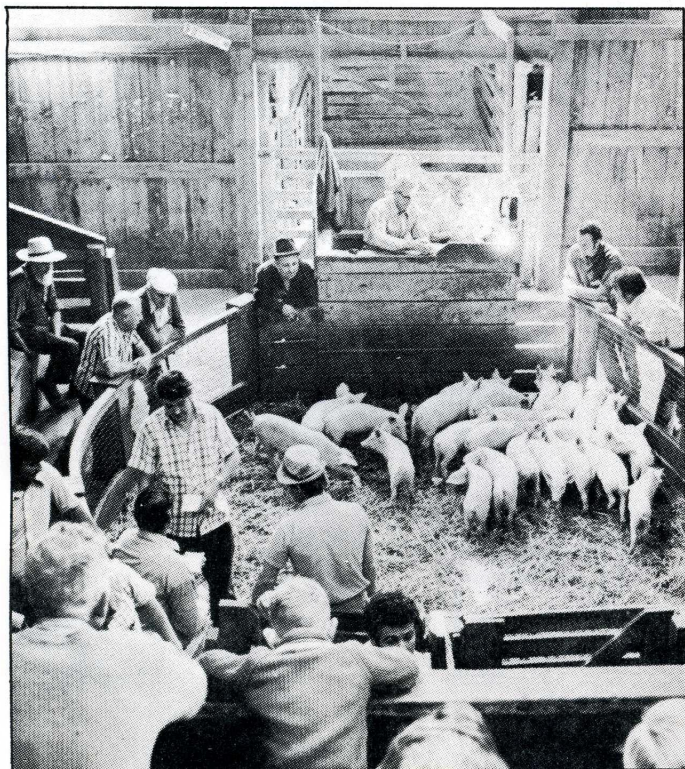
## Footnotes and comments

1. I think this criticism was valid to the extent that for any newspaper to really be an alternative, to be an effective agent of social change, it must strive to build a base in the community it is attempting to serve, that is, the paper must play a role in the issues and struggles it chooses to write about. This makes the task of producing an alternative paper an even more ambitious one, but in the long run, to me, only serves to underline the need for a strong support base.

One thing I think most of the Free Press people failed to realize from the beginning was that any newspaper is at best only an indirect form of communication (something inherent in print media) and consequently not nearly enough work was done to build solid contacts with community and neighbourhood groups, labour unions and other organizations engaged in some form of positive social change, to learn from their experiences or to find ways we could most effectively work together. I should probably add that the support and suggestions we received from On the Line staffers was quite helpful in this regard.

2. Since the Free Press ceased publication, there have been several individuals working to find a way of getting the paper off the ground again. The Chevron proposal, which was presented to us about two weeks ago, would involve publishing the Free Press monthly as a 16 to 20 page supplement to the Chevron with about 10,000 extra copies of the Free Press for free distribution throughout the community, with the Chevron covering all printing costs (about \$300 extra per issue). Initially, some of the Chevron regular advertising would be placed in the pages of the Free Press, and then, if things go well, ads would be sold specifically for the Free Press on the basis of a 23,000 guaranteed circulation. This should, after a period of time, give the Free Press a stable advertising base when it resumes paying its own printing. Under the Chevron proposal, the Free Press would remain editorially independent with the paper still being produced out of the Free Press offices. In effect, the Chevron would assume the role of publisher.

Publishing the Free Press as a monthly would likely mean a number of changes in content, however. Essentially there would probably be a decrease in the amount of coverage given to meetings and activities of the dominant social and political institutions and more emphasis placed on people and their struggles against these institutions, and more discussion about the development of



various practical alternatives. Monthly publication would, as well, give Free Press staffers more of an opportunity to become directly involved in these struggles and also to be able to develop a more solid support base.

It's difficult to say at this time when the Free Press will resume publication, or how long it might exist as a monthly before attempting more regular (perhaps every other week) publication. The Chevron proposal is presently the only feasible alternative we have. Certainly our goal is still to produce a weekly alternate newspaper, but more importantly, to do it well.

3. Although a number of people had been meeting for eight months prior to publication of the paper, they were, to a large extent, ill-prepared for the task that followed. For many, the Free Press was their first involvement in the community and their commitment to community activities and struggles came more from an academic understanding than from experience. And except for people in the news department of the Free Press, little effort was made to develop political unity or a collective understanding of how the community operates and how we should collectively deal with it both in what we decide to write about and how we write. Consequently, at the end of



the summer a number of people made individual decisions to go back to school, find another job or some other activity, and just disappeared from the office and the paper.

The same situation arose with On the Line in 1970 when about half the staff decided at the beginning of September to return to school and informed the rest of the staff that they would no longer have any time to work on the paper, which led to the temporary demise of the paper two months later. This of course was not On the Line's only problem at the time. See also the War Measures Act.

4. At the beginning of August, four people committed themselves to working on the paper on a fulltime basis for the month in an attempt to straighten out our organizational hassles. Two were involved in OFY projects which ended at the end of the month, one lived off his savings and the other tried to work his responsibilities at Dumont Press around the activities of the Free Press. There wasn't really any money at the Free Press for salaries and there was a healthy reluctance on the part of most of the staff to get involved directly in any government grants for such things.

5. Known as the "Ten Week Plan", it involved Free Press staff and friends donating from \$2 to \$35 each week. The paper was losing less and less money each week, and the donations were to offset the loss and also to pay a salary for someone to build up and co-ordinate advertising and circulation. Generally, I think the system of donations was a good idea, for it helped to build a more solid financial base from the people committed to the paper. Unfortunately, there was still a severe staff shortage and the Ten Week Plan only survived for four weeks.

6. Primarily, these problems arose from a lack of adequate planning beforehand and the pressures of weekly production. This is not to say that problems were not worked out, but by and large most of the discussions took place among the core staff, most decisions were made by the core people, and staff collectivity as a whole suffered. It would be difficult to lay the blame for this on anyone, as collective responsibility to the paper was never clearly defined. Basically,

though, most of these problems should have been worked out before we began publication; we weren't really ready.

7. While internal organization and financing are the two major physical problems to be confronted at this point, a few words must be said about the politics of the Free Press. We didn't have much of a base to start. We should have initially spent time talking and working with community organizations and people to develop a greater collective understanding of the community we were supposedly committing ourselves to. As it was, when the paper first appeared, it was as if it fell out of nowhere. People didn't know who we were or where we came from. And, although we dealt with those questions fairly well, it takes a long time to build credibility. Our lack of collective politics hampered us on two levels: what areas of coverage we wanted to emphasize and what positions do we take which will lead us to practical solutions to many of the issues confronting us today. Do we cover city council because some individual on staff gets a kick out of hanging around city council, or because the decisions it makes affect our lives. How do we deal with the problems of urban growth and housing in a consistent way. How do we talk about police and crime without going into the social/economic/political causes and roots of it all. How do we pull all this together to build a paper that helps to move people.

In the past five years in Canada, there have been well over 60 different attempts at publishing an alternative/community/labour newspaper. These are as well, only the projects that actually managed to get a paper off the ground. Of these, perhaps half a dozen exist today. But I don't think it means that the alternative press in Canada is inherently doomed to failure; rather, most of us suffered from inadequate planning and resources, and we never bothered to learn from each other's mistakes and successes in order to be able to move forward.

Trying to make an alternative paper work is a complex task. Newspapers, like correct ideas, don't just fall from the sky or our typewriters. It's a lot easier when we're all moving together, and at least have some idea of where we're going.

**Gary Robins**

