

Subterranean Homesick News

Art Johnston

1969

The Hill was run by lanky Louie, an ex outrider with the Highwaymen. "The Grand Dude," as they called him now is sort of manager of a couple scraggly rock and roll bands that lived on and around The Hill. There was the Sun, but most notably, perhaps, were the Tate brothers, Terry and Hawg, who form the nucleus of the Tate Blues Band.

Terry and Hawg Tate are two grizzly motherfuckers who been blowin' together as only ornery brothers can do since they was street urchins in the south side of Chi. They drifted up to Ann Arbor somewhere along the line and have become John Sinclair's sidemen.

Terry, who howls like a panther in a bear trap and blows mouth harp, freaked out a couple weeks ago at a gig and tore all his clothes off and got busted and got his long kinky hair cut by the pigs. Terry is the only singer I know (if "singer" is the word) who is capable of pouring vengeance through his eyes like red-hot sweat when he sings.

The Hill is just that, with a house up top and old barns and a few underground bunkers and the like. It has a view of Ann Arbor and the surrounding countryside. There is a battered peace sign painted on a piece of tin down by the gate, and somebody stood guard there with a shotgun.

The occasion was the third annual gathering of the Underground Press Syndicate. The hosts was the loose gang of angry motherfuckers who call themselves The White Panthers. That includes me and Louie, as well as Terrible Terry Tate and the collected criminals artists and outlaws that live with Trans-Love Energies Commune in Ann Arbor.

A little more than 3 years ago the Underground Press Syndicate was formed as a loose coalition of six weekly or biweekly tabloid papers linked only by their belief in the emerging youth culture, whatever that was. The *Fifth Estate*, the *Berkeley Barb*, and Lansing, Michigan's *The Paper*, grew up around universities, and had a political interest, broadly defined. However, they were also involved in drugs, hippies and other anti-establishment stuff.

East Village Other of New York City was the supra-bizarre product of Lower East Side speed freaks. San Francisco's *Oracle* was the harbinger of the psychedelic revolution. The L.A. *Free Press* modeled itself after the staid *Village Voice*—the subdued avant-garde paper of the 'arts' founded in the fifties by the jet set radical, Norman Mailer.

At the beginning of 1967 the combined papers had a circulation of under 50,000. They were a syndicate only in that they exchanged articles freely. Since 1967, however, the number of underground papers in North America has grown to over 200. The combined readership is now over five million. We don't keep many records, so it's hard to determine exactly.

But in anybody's eyes, that's an impressive growth rate. And while the underground press grows at an exponential rate yearly, establishment dailies fold weekly. In the last 20 years over 400 establishment papers have folded. Anybody capable of seeing beyond their nose can see that in five or ten years, our media is going to have a larger readership than the collected Hearst publications.

We came together on The Hill outside Ann Arbor, 250 brothers and sisters from all over the country. We hitchhiked there, drove old school busses, flew stowaway on airplanes, but we got here. And it wasn't like a convention

of Hearst newspapers neither. We slept in fields and barns, cooked over fires in fields, we posted armed guards around our perimeters. We got stoned together, we fucked each other.

The Man tried to pick us off individually, and he busted our people in the streets of Ann Arbor for phony dope charges. On one occasion a posse of twenty gun toting Washtenaw County sheriffs closed in on us from all sides. Only clear thinking avoided a mass bust—or worst—a guerrilla war style shoot out.

We came together with the sober realization that we are no longer just drop outs doing their thing. We are becoming a force in American life, and the coming year is going to see increased attempts to shut down our presses.

While we met, the power structure of the State of Michigan tried to shut down the *South End*, the revolutionary paper published at Wayne State. Only the combined efforts of people from many papers got the controversial issue of the *South End* (about our cultural revolution) printed anyway. Detroit area papers—Ann Arbor *Argus* and the *Fifth Estate* especially—lent their resources and equipment to completely reset a paper that had been confiscated from the printer by University President William Keast and locked in his personal safe.

While we met, the *Berkeley Barb* fought for its freedom from its money-grubbing publisher Max Sheer. His dedicated staff, The *Red Mountain Tribe*, had built the paper from nothing to an enterprise which earned Sheer \$4,000 a week. Yet Max shared none of this with the staff and community that made the paper.

Timothy Leary offered to buy the paper on behalf of the staff, till we discovered his scheme to buy out all the California underground papers (except those he has already co-opted like the L.A. *Freeze* and *Rolling Stone*) and use them to push his own messianic campaign.

1969 marks a turning point in the 'underground' press. We're going overground this next year. And we're coming on strong. Our papers are going beyond the hip and political subcultures which congregate in our inner cities and around our campuses. They are going out to all the people of America with the word of total freedom.

The revolution is about a total change in our lives. It's about liberation from mental slavery. It's about freedom—from useless jobs, from cops, from teachers and probe officers who don't understand that god gave us hair to grow and blow in the wind, and to hang down over our eyes.

It's about new and free human relationships that realize that the human body is beautiful and free and neither a personal possession nor a commodity. It's about freedom from phony ego games which are merely the result of old insecurities.

It's about our powerful music—rock and roll—which is liberating us from the puritanical Victorian uptightness of the sick old people. It's about lives which are lived freely, creatively, and happily—rather than lives lived merely to accumulate money and status.

The revolution is about people. We're developing a new society—in the very womb of the old. Organic Change. The old ways, the old institutions crumble and die of their own dead weight.

And we must be aware that in their senile desperation those passing into history and gravestones may resort to violence—if only out of envy—to smash the free world we are building. So we of the underground press are discussing ways of defending our families, our thresholds, our culture, our freedom to come together and smoke The Weed of Our Choice, and run naked with the energy of the sun and our music flowing through us.

To work together, to spread word of our culture. and to build a common defense, we formed the RPM, Revolutionary Press Movement. The RPM is a working brotherhood of papers that understand what is happening in Amerika, and are ready to get down and do something about it. The core of the brotherhood will be the more together of the big-city underground papers. (Our revolution, we have found, is emanating from the big cities.)

The RPM is not just an organization—we are brothers. Our homes belong to each other. We think and act together. One for all and all for one.

We're starting our own communications network. We are getting involved with the electronic media, radio and television, and will be linking up with the more than fifty 'underground' rock stations that have sprung up around the country in the past two years. *Orpheus* magazine, published by the national staff of UPS, is becoming our trade paper.

The RPM is going to work together, for the common defense of each other. We will come to the assistance of our brothers and sisters at the *South End* or the *Berkeley Barb* when they are in trouble.

The main weapon of our revolution is the Truth about our culture, about our way of life. We will carry this beautiful free truth to the crossroads of every town and suburb in Amerika. And if you don't believe it just watch!

fifth Estate

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