

DOING COMMUNITY RADIO: THE PRACTICES OF INFORMATION PROGRAMMING AT A
COMMUNITY RADIO STATION IN COMPARISON TO A COMMERCIAL RADIO STATION

by

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ABSTRACT

Information programming is carried out through unique forms and practices in the community radio environment. The major dynamic of one particular community radio station, Vancouver Co-op Radio, is identified as a "community of communities" in contrast to the dynamic of commercialism, prevalent at a comparable privately-owned station.

Based on data acquired through participant observation and compiled in two organizational ethnographies, the author shows how various practices and forms are developed uniquely in the two different radio settings to overcome the constraints imposed by limited resources.

Formational approaches differ and are discussed in terms of "professionalism" and "accessibility." It is found that professionalism in the conventional sense is underdeveloped in both situations; undermined at the community radio setting by the prevailing "community of communities" dynamic, and in the commercial setting by commercialism. Accessibility is limited in terms of direct audience input into programming at the community setting, yet the "community of communities" dynamic helps maintain its occurrence at decision-making, planning and management levels. This is in sharp contrast to the lack of accessibility at the commercial station, except in terms of direct audience input in certain areas of content.

The organizational dynamics and practices of community radio have significant, and largely unrealised, implications for the role of community broadcasting in the larger policy environment. One area briefly discussed is regulation concerning the concept of balance.

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I am grateful to all the personnel of the two radio stations at which I spent the better part of a year working and observing. To quote another Canadian study of information workers:

They showed remarkable patience when we were lacking in tact and were naive, when our reach exceeded our grasp. We wonder how many academics would tolerate someone peering over their shoulders while they were talking on the telephone, thinking, and writing.¹

Fellow students and faculty in the Department of Communication, Simon Fraser University spent much time and effort looking through early drafts of the ethnographies and analysis; thank you.

And thanks to Vivian for bearing with me over the last two years.

¹Erikson et al., 1987.

DEDICATION

To the brave students and citizens of the People's Republic of China; their shining ideals in Tiananmen Square did not stop bullets and tanks but will inevitably guide the Chinese and all people to a more fully human way of living.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Close examination of the dynamic and organization of the mass media shows that how people "speak" the world is dependent on how people are organized in institutions, and the relation of those institutions to society. In other words, the particular way in which things are said relates directly to how one goes about living and interacting with other people.

This principle is true of all human institutions, yet it is most clearly visible in mass media institutions whose manifest goal and output is communication. Studying the organization of mass media gives us a clearer picture of the manner in which communication output is framed. Examining alternative institutions, formations and forms of media organization, such as community radio is doubly revealing because it allows us to explore not just conventional patterns of organization but new possibilities in media communication.

In the last century a wide range of people -- scholars, professional communicators, and lay people -- have raised concerns about the power of the mass media and their messages to shape the decisions made by individuals and societies. The greatest focus of inquiry tends to be on the information programming of mass media -- news and public affairs. This is appropriate given that mass media information reports often summarize crucial thinking by key public individuals and groups on matters of broad public concern, especially in the areas of politics and economics.

The trend within scholarly news analysis has been to draw the links between information programming and the organization of the mass media

institutions and personnel who shape information's construction. Mass media institutions, to the extent that they can be thought of as mirrors of society's events and thinking, are increasingly seen to present a less than clear and undistorted reflection. The image that we see of ourselves in the media mirror is bent according to the warp of the organizational dynamics and practices of the media institutions themselves. There is, however, certain conventionalized organizational "warps" that reflect the dominant modes of doing things in society.

This thesis is devoted largely to an open-ended exploration of the limits and possibilities of two mass communication projects, although the comparison of the two radio stations is meant to more fully elucidate the dynamics, primarily, in the community radio context. How do the different institutions of radio provide opportunities for different types of communication experience? What limits -- both structured and unstructured -- are encountered by program producers in the two contexts?

The results of my observation indicate that the dominance of commercialism, and the commodification of workers and audience, function through all levels of the dominant form of private radio ownership. At the level of everyday radio production, the money-making goals of private radio provide a strong and unifying dynamic for workers at all levels of station activity. The dynamic spawns practices and forms of radio that allow personnel to overcome the greatest constraint on their activities: the lack of resources.

Community radio faces even greater resource constraints in many respects. Yet, for the most part, people engaged in doing community radio have developed forms and practices that escape commercial forces. Replacing commercialism is a

dynamic of control by and dependence on the locally-based, marginal communities of interest that come together in search of a mass media voice. A "community of communities" dynamic pervades and influences the forms and practices of doing community radio. Many of these forms and practices are similar to or borrowed from commercial and public radio models, but all are adapted to draw upon the strength of political, social and cultural sub-groups within the Vancouver area.

Methodology

Clifford Geertz wrote: "good interpretation of anything -- a poem, a person, a history, a ritual, an institution, a society -- takes us into the heart of that of which it is the interpretation."¹ In choosing one's methods, the researcher makes the crucial decisions that guide what sort of information will be collected and the conclusions drawn from its analysis.

The fundamental choice in this research project was to base the work on observation of two actual radio stations. The problem with case studies, however, is the extent to which one is limited in extrapolating from a small range of activity to larger social patterns. In terms of the community radio sector in Canada one must be particularly mindful of this caveat. As I have pointed out in other writings, the institutions of community radio vary significantly across Canada.² Nonetheless, the rich detail of the material in the ethnography of Vancouver Co-op Radio is illustrative of the major dynamics of community and campus-community stations, and how those dynamics can be acted out in the

¹See Geertz, 1973:18.

²See Savage, 1987.

volunteer setting, even though the unique characteristics in a Montreal or Halifax setting will have their own impact.

A comparative approach was chosen in order to establish a "control" in drawing conclusions about community radio. Methodologically, the commercial station was chosen as a control so that I might first develop objective techniques of observation and then apply them in the community setting. More importantly, the comparison allowed for an analytic base from which to make significant remarks about community radio and its unique functioning in relation to the dominant forms of radio in the mass media environment.

The privately-owned radio station chosen for comparison is a well-established British Columbian, medium-sized operation. It was selected on the basis of similarity in programming with Vancouver Co-op Radio, especially in terms of its high component of local, information-oriented programming. Comparison also with a CBC radio station would have been preferable but was not possible given time and resource limits. A commercial control rather than a public (CBC) control was felt to be justified on the basis of the dominance of commercial radio in most markets in Canada.

Ideally, comparison would have been made between two FM stations. From a regulatory point of view, FM stations in Canada operate under a slightly different set of rules than do AM stations. Part of FM stations' obligations involve the provision of greater originality and variety in programming. However, no commercial FM station in the region shares an information orientation similar to Vancouver Co-op Radio (save some CKO stations whose network characteristics make them unsuitable for comparison).

The identity of the AM station is kept secret to protect employees at the station who provided information on the basis of anonymity; throughout the thesis it is referred to as CMRL, a fictitious name. Personnel at both stations are also referred to with fictitious names throughout the ethnographies. Any attempt to hide Vancouver Co-op Radio's station identity, however, would be meaningless given its unique stature as a community radio station in Western Canada.

The two ethnographies which form the backbone to the thesis are based on four months of intensive participant observation at each station between September 1987 and May 1988.

University of Chicago sociologist, Buford H. Junker in his classic 1960 description of fieldwork techniques, *Fieldwork, An Introduction to the Social Sciences*, describes the range of fieldwork positions that a researcher can assume: "complete participant", "participant as observer", "observer as participant", and "complete observer". Given the different labour environments of Vancouver Co-op (volunteer) and CMRL (paid workers), the second and third positions were chosen for the respective settings. As part of my "contract" with Vancouver Co-op in which I negotiated what I would give the station in exchange for the opportunity to observe, I was required to participate in a range of volunteer tasks set out by the paid volunteer co-ordinator at the station. At CMRL, a similar contract meant that I could not get in the way of reporters, hence the assumption of a role with greater emphasis on observation.

It should be noted that I made every attempt to approach the operations and personnel of both radio stations in an equally critical manner. The context of the community radio station, however, allowed for a much fuller participation

given its volunteer, non-paid participants whom as a researcher I much more closely resembled than I did the paid workers in the commercial setting.

The Development Research Sequence (DRS) advocated by James P. Spradley in *Participant Observation* (1980) was used to develop and write the two ethnographies. The DRS involves four main stages repeated in a cyclical fashion: (1) asking ethnographic questions (2) collecting ethnographic data (3) making an ethnographic record, and (4) analyzing an ethnographic record. This approach provides the researcher with an adequate level of "insider's feel" for the situation without jeopardizing analytic detachment. Similar participant observation roles were assumed by Jean Ogilvie in her research at Quebec's Radio Pontiac and Gaye Tuchman in her observation of information practices at certain American media outlets.

Coupled with participant observation, interviews were carried out with key informants at both stations, both informally and formally. Of the latter, about eight at CMRL and a dozen at Vancouver Co-op Radio were conducted. Information from interviews has been melded into the ethnographies as was documentary evidence from both stations in the form of program guides, memos, assignment sheets, etc.

Thesis Layout

The thesis is divided into three sections: ethnographies; theory and analysis; and conclusions.

The ethnographies section begins with a chapter introducing the two stations. This also provides an overview of the two stations in light of major

organizational dynamics and severe resource constraints.

The ethnographies themselves provide the underlying data for the analysis. They are presented in a fairly open-ended manner -- readers are free to draw their own conclusions about how the stations are organized, and need not agree with the author's analysis.

The first ethnography, that of Vancouver Co-op Radio, is organized in two sections in order to parallel the discussion of professionalism and accessibility in the analysis section. This division also parallels a general division between activities at the program level and activities concerning the functioning of the station as a whole.

The second ethnography, that of the private radio station CMRL, follows the organization of the analysis section less closely. To force this ethnography into a shape fully parallel with the Co-op ethnography would take away from the reader's appreciation of the unique nature of the private radio station's organization. As a result, this second ethnography is organized more in terms of the activities of distinct groups of programmers -- i.e. reporters, producers and hosts -- as well as a brief section on the tendencies affecting the station as a whole.

Following the ethnographies, the theoretical background to the analysis of forms and practices at both stations is set out in the first section of the analysis chapter dealing with audience as commodity and community. Using this framework, the organizational approaches and their attendant practices and forms are examined in terms of professionalism and accessibility.

Professionalism is defined and discussed in light of media scholars' thinking on the concept. Then the practices and forms which correspond to professionalism as a formational approach at the two stations are discussed. The analysis makes it clear that professionalism in the conventional sense of collegial control and setting of standards is underdeveloped in both settings. In the community setting the dynamics of community control are manifested in the practices program collectives supportive of particular marginal communities. Certain journalistic approaches such as "balance" are not only rejected, they cannot be organizationally supported.

Commercialism subverts the development of collegial control within the commercial setting. Balance in this setting, for instance, is tolerated to the extent that it minimizes risk. More "expensive" professional approaches like investigative journalism or the use of a wide range of original sources are not tolerated.

Accessibility is discussed historically within the Canadian setting and certain theoretical goals are sketched. While the commercial dynamic in the private station is shown to tolerate and indeed encourage the practises by which audience members have some control over on-air content, audience control over decision-making, planning and effective management is prohibited both directly and indirectly through "professional" non-managerial involvement. While audience input into on-air content at the community station may have something to learn from the commercial model, the underlying community-oriented dynamic generally tolerates and encourages structures and practices that permit active participation by community members in all areas of station governance. An informal core group which emerges as the result of recurring financial crises, however, can provide a significant barrier to access.

The concluding chapter of the thesis provides a more general framework for understanding community radio's position within the larger societal context of mass communication.

CHAPTER II

INTRODUCTION TO ETHNOGRAPHIES

Information radio is expensive radio. Producers of information programming -- whether it be news, public affairs, or simply "talk" -- face significant resource constraints. People in two different settings, non-profit community and commercial, privately-owned radio, respond differently to the problem of limited resources.

Vancouver Co-op Radio

Broadcasting at 5,500 Watts and carried on cable television throughout B.C., Vancouver Co-operative Radio, CFRO-FM, shares certain characteristics with the community radio sector which if not typical are at least illustrative. One of these is the emphasis given to the production of live, locally-oriented information programming. While public affairs, commentary and news make up only about forty per cent of programming at the station, they are featured during Co-op Radio's prime listening time, namely, weekday evenings. The emphasis on information stems from Co-op's historic role as a provider of alternative programming in the Vancouver setting.

Communications researcher and policy analyst, Jean McNulty, described in a 1979 survey of new forms of local programming in Canada how:

Vancouver Co-operative Radio grew out of two earlier Vancouver community service groups called Neighbourhood Radio and Community Research Service. Neighbourhood Radio began in early 1971 with a plan to operate a city-wide FM station but the idea was dropped because of funding and licensing problems... In fall 1973, the two groups combined with other interested people to form Vancouver Co-operative Radio, a non-profit society incorporated under the B.C. Co-operatives Act. The society was formed for the purpose of seeking

an FM radio station licence and operating the station as a listener-owned, non-commercial station with access available to any Vancouver area group or individual interested in becoming involved (McNulty, 1979: 147-148).

Information radio is produced within a complex set of social relationships. The one overwhelming characteristic of people's relations at the station is the tendency for individuals to involve themselves with Vancouver Co-op Radio through specific program collectives. Most of the over 250 active volunteers rarely experience station-wide happenings as such. Almost all of their involvement is associated with the thirty or so public affairs and ethnic program groups which attempt to reflect local constituency populations through radio programming¹. The program "Radio Peace", for instance, attracts half a dozen volunteers with contacts within the Vancouver peace movement; their relationships at the station involve mostly other peace activists associated with the program. The same is true for four or five gay men in "The Coming Out Show", half a dozen trade unionists in "Union Made", a small group of Palestinians in "The Voice of Palestine", and so on.

Organization of volunteers at the program level allows for a flexibility that not only accommodates the wide variety of interests and motivations of the volunteers and five staff who form the station as a whole, but also provides a mechanism by which resource constraint problems can be solved. In turn, this basis of operating, which I call a "community of communities" dynamic², influences the practices and forms of programming that occur at the station and,

¹For a breakdown of the station's schedule see Appendix: Station Schedules.

²The term is taken from the station's 1988 licence renewal hearing in which a long time volunteer suggested to the CRTC Commissioners that Co-op should be thought of as "communities" radio rather than community radio given its basis of support among local social, political and cultural groups.

ultimately, the type of relationships developed with audience.

In financial terms, Vancouver Co-op Radio is impoverished. Operating with a yearly budget of just over \$200,000.00, the station is unable to provide programming groups with much more than studio and office space with a minimum level of technical facilities for radio production and broadcast. Less than \$100 per year is dedicated to an item called "programming" in the budget³.

Physical working conditions for volunteers and staff are at best tolerable. The station building is in a poor state of repair and smells of dust and urine, the prevalent odors of the skid row section of Gastown in which it is located. Traffic noise pours in through windows left open in the summer to keep the heat down. Stairs are rickety and walls are for the most part, dim and grimy.

The main resource strength of the station is the volunteer labour provided by individuals. Each volunteer contributes an average four or five hours labour to program preparation, usually in two or three chunks -- though the total can increase dramatically for certain people at certain times. Programs are scheduled on a weekly broadcast basis, sometimes bi-weekly, in order to accommodate volunteer timing. As a result, program collectives organize themselves and their tasks on a weekly basis -- daily deadlines simply cannot be met.

Individuals, through their program collectives, make up the difference between scanty resources provided by the station and what is needed to produce radio on a day to day basis. Members of the collective donate the money necessary for long-distance telephone interviews, and provide much of their own equipment for program preparation, everything from tape recorders to computers. Scripts are typed up on home computers and individuals offer their homes as

³See Appendix: Budget.

meeting places.

Individuals in collectives also make up the difference as sources of information. Although Co-op cannot afford to subscribe to news wire services, a few program collectives have access to news services through their community. The majority of sources, however, especially those used in interviews (which make up the bulk of information programming), are the result of personal contacts by individual collective members with different political, cultural and social communities. Given the wide range in programmers' backgrounds, most programs have access to a fairly wide and diverse group of personal contacts as information sources. The organization of sources and in particular the personal involvement of people with sources have significant implications in terms of the type of programming that is produced.

Decisions about what to cover and how to provide coverage are made at the program level. Standards for coverage, as a result, can vary considerably among programs. Program collectives are democratic to the extent that a consensus is usually reached among members before items are covered. The specifics of what are to be covered and how stories will be dealt with are debated and different people's interests are often accommodated. The main limit on democratic decision-making, and by extension on what gets covered, is the lack of time which individuals have to devote to preparing an item.

Standards in the quality of on-air presentation can also vary tremendously. Faultless presentation -- script-reading, pronunciation, sound quality, etc. -- is carefully monitored by certain program collectives. Sometimes individuals will be assigned the task of overseeing the smooth operation of all studio operations. "Post-mortem" critiques play a significant role in some program meetings. Still,

the main check on quality remains the emphasis placed on training by programs and the station itself.

One of the few aspects of a volunteer's Co-op experience which is organized at a station level is his or her training. All new volunteers are required to undergo an orientation session and about fifteen hours of radio training. This provides volunteers with a sense of the station as a whole and rudimentary skills in sound-recording, interviewing and script-writing techniques. Yet, some of the more established public affairs programs, not content with the station's training, attempt to maintain higher standards of radio presentation through their own training. Furthermore, new volunteers are sometimes "broken in" to more difficult tasks like on-air hosting over a period of months or even years.

Audiences also vary with programs. While little is known about who exactly constitutes the Co-op audience, there is one thing that staff and volunteers seem sure about: nobody really listens to the station's entire range of programming. Audiences, it is assumed, like programmers, focus on particular shows within the station's programming schedule.

The lack of any sort of research into who exactly listens to Co-op is a source of frustration for many programmers. Certainly, programmers tend to "grab" at any form of audience feed back. Transfer occurs between audience and programmers that does, in some way, substitute for the knowledge gap. Often audience members who start by contributing in a small way to a program are drawn into making greater and greater commitments until they find themselves full, active contributors. On the other side of the coin, programmers will "fade" into audience members as they lessen their contribution. Such "recycling" tends

to occur between community and program, rather than among programs.

There is a wide representation of various backgrounds among the volunteers at Vancouver Co-op Radio. A diverse mix of races, men and women, poor and middle class are visible. Overall, there is a tendency towards younger and more educated individuals. And within particular program collectives, especially those of public affairs, the mix is more homogeneous. In these groups there is a significant over-representation of young, white, educated, middle-class people (although the mix between men and women is equal). These people also tend to be more active in the political and social organizations within the larger Vancouver community.

The running of the station as a whole is characterized by a struggle to maintain a coherent organization made up of various communities with different interests. Resource constraints figure prominently in the process. Ironically, however, the almost continuous sense of financial crisis provides a unifying sense of purpose, although for those at the centre of it, especially staff, the affect is exhaustion.

Indeed, the effective running of the station is characterised by an informally constituted core group, highly over-representative of staff and individuals from a small group of non-ethnic public affairs programs. Formally set out governing structures such as the board of directors do make formal decisions which effect the overall direction of the station. Yet members of the core group tend to "be around" to make the key decisions and carry out crisis management on a day to day basis.

Most of the individuals who constitute the core group recognise the impact of their role. Some of them even try to make the process more open, especially

to individuals who do not share their largely, white, political-activist background. One of the methods of doing this is structured into the practices surrounding efforts to maintain a high degree of intra-station communication. Part of that communication involves the almost constant formulation and reformulation of the station's identity; a re-appraisal of what the station's role should be in the larger community.

CMRL: A British Columbian, Privately-owned Radio Station

CMRL is one of the original AM stations in British Columbia and is conscious of its history. For a while in the 1960's and 1970's, CMRL with its unique brand of "news and talk" (no music) radio was the leader in attracting a large, local audience. But recently its main historical commercial competitor (also with a high quotient of news and talk) has shot far ahead in terms of audience numbers. CMRL, which broadcasts at 10,000 Watts, has sunk back to the middle and lower end of the pack.

The station employs about 100 workers. A little less than half of these are employed in off-air jobs such as sales, production, copy-writing and administration. There are about twenty people associated with producing and hosting the "talk" shows on CMRL. There are also fourteen full-time news reporters.

Workers at CMRL, like volunteers at Co-op, are fully conscious of severe resource constraints. But this understanding, like all aspects of station activity, is rationalized in terms of the commercial goals of the enterprise. The commercial dynamic has one main effect on the type of programming at the station: a tendency toward entertainment-oriented information. There is a clear separation

between news programming and "talk", consisting of interviews and phone-in segments. The emphasis, especially in terms of budget, is towards the entertainment-oriented, talk programming. Those involved with news either resist this or learn, in a variety of ways, to accommodate it.

The main emphasis of CMRL's news-gathering is on producing hourly newscasts; this is what they compete with their main "talk" competitors to provide. As a result, one of the main constraints on the operation is time. The CMRL newsroom is run on the minimum budget required to provide hourly, factual newscasts covering a narrow spectrum of local, regional, national and international events. The fourteen full-time reporters constitute probably the minimum staffing resources required to cover both news-writing and beat responsibilities.

In the environment of paid workers, the main budget item is salaries. Yet station management is very successful in keeping costs down and extracting the maximum amount of work. Thus, in the CMRL newsroom, reporters, especially the young ones who form the majority, are low paid.

While equipment in both the newsroom and on the beat is fairly up to date and reliable, the workspace itself is cramped and does not allow for any privacy by either reporters or the news director.

The newsroom operates with the minimum necessary news sources. For a brief period, reporters at CMRL had access to two news wires, Broadcast News (BN) and News Radio. This occurred, however, as a mistake while management was attempting to change contracts and could not phase out the BN service as quickly as had been anticipated. The lack of different sources makes the reporters who work with the wire stories -- "desklers" as they are called --

little more than glorified re-writers. Deskers spend eight hours a day ripping copy off the newsprinter, re-writing it and then reading it in hourly newscasts. Although deskers also help process stories submitted by the beat reporters, and occasionally help write an introductions, they do little or no independent research of their own. In fact, they rarely even corroborate their work with newspapers.

About half the reporters at CMRL actually spend some time covering local news events. To call them beat reporters, however, is a misnomer since all reporters are entirely interchangeable and do not cover specific beats per se. Reporters are assigned on a daily basis to a limited number of news sites, most of which are guaranteed to provide news events: local city council, the courts, press conferences, etc. Reporters are not encouraged to initiate story ideas of their own, and they soon realize that the station is not willing to invest resources in anything resembling investigative journalism.

Overall, reporting work is low skilled and highly routinized. Some judgement is called for, at least among the deskers, in story selection, and, among the beat reporters, in interview techniques. Both types of reporters have to be good writers in the broadcast medium. But any "news sense" which they might wish to develop is limited by the very narrow range of news events and sources which they cover. Reporters often express frustration over the fact that they cannot exert the type of "professional control" over news reporting that they had anticipated while training as journalists at local community colleges.

Reporters are not organized into any union or association -- a situation not unusual in commercial radio in English-speaking Canada. Indeed, collegial bonds of any sort are lacking among reporters either at work or in their social activities. Reporters have almost no group control over their work situation,

either in terms of task choice -- as we've seen above -- or timing. Indeed, beat reporters are expected to file two to three stories per shift regardless of the news events occurring in the courts or at whatever other news site they are located. Reporters have no control over job entry and seniority.

Perhaps most significantly, standards of journalism are developed on an individual rather than a collegial basis, and as a result vary from reporter to reporter. The overall result of the situation is that most reporters, especially the younger ones, develop a sense that their work at the station is transitory; something to do until they get hired by one of the news agencies or by a TV or print news outlet.

The other side of information programming at CMRL is "talk" which takes up about 70% of airtime (news, weather and sports is about 10%, and advertising takes up the rest). While reporters both prepare and read newscasts, on the talk side preparation and presentation are divided respectively between producers and hosts. Producers share the low pay, low status and lack of occupational control as the reporters, while talk show hosts enjoy the high pay and high status of "stars" in what is seen as "show biz".

Usually there is one producer assigned to each two to three hour daily talk show. The producer's job is to arrange guests for the host to interview, prepare outlines to assist the host during the open line segment, and write up scripts. Usually producers spend much of their time consulting popular, light entertainment/news sources, and phoning "personalities" to arrange interviews. The scheduling for this is often quite tight and hectic. Like reporters, they have little control over task pacing. The difference is that their deadline is a daily program. Nonetheless, many spend up to twelve hours per day at the station.

Many of the producers came to the station after studying broadcast journalism; the entertainment-oriented nature of the programming frustrates standards of journalism that they have developed in school. But since they work more closely with hosts than with either journalists or their fellow producers they learn to assimilate hosts' notions of what makes entertaining talk radio.

Talk hosts, on the contrary are generally well-paid. There is, however, a great deal of variance dependent upon the sort of "star value" that they bring to the station. Thus, hosts receive a lot of publicity through the station (for instance, all the shows are named after the hosts as opposed to the subject area covered or the time slot). They are also encouraged to increase their public image through other media and through participation in community events. At the same time, most successful hosts do conscientiously work alongside their producers in preparing the daily show. They, in particular, are aware that their continued success relates directly to the ability of their program to attract a large audience and thus, advertisers.

The audience is well-known by all station programmers -- reporters, producers and hosts -- particularly in terms of their demographic composition as determined by audience ratings. Most programmers can describe in detail certain characteristics of "their" audience.

Many of the programming decisions related to program scheduling and, sometimes, the selection of guests or the mix of stories within a program, are made on the basis of attracting a large and affluent audience. This is especially true during quarterly "ratings weeks". During these times the pressure is felt by all station employees to do whatever they can to create a rise in the station's audience ratings as measured by the audience research firm, the Bureau of

Broadcast Measurement (BBM).

Nevertheless, most programmers are eager for more personal signs of audience interest in what they do. Letters, phone calls or a casual remark on the street are given a special emphasis by programmers, especially if they are positive and thus, act as a sign of "real" support in the face of poor ratings.

Information workers at CMRL share a largely homogenous background: white and lower-to-middle class. Indeed there is only one non-white at the whole station. She is a Chinese-Canadian technical operator. In the lower status positions of reporters and producers men and women are equally represented. Men, however, dominate the higher status hosting and management roles. Few of CMRL's personnel are highly educated. Most of the veteran reporters and hosts have completed high school, while the younger reporters and producers have received broadcast training at local colleges, most often the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT).

Decision-making at the station is made in a business-like manner and in a clearly defined hierarchy. The line of command for information workers is clear: reporters have their tasks outlined by the news director who is responsible to the station manager. The station manager is responsible for the bottom line of CMRL as a business enterprise to the owner of the conglomerate of which the station is one small part. On the talk side, producers are responsible to hosts who are themselves responsible to management.

During the observation period the station was losing money from its operations, and had been since the recession of the early 1980's. Ratings had dropped overall, but more crucially, the station was having difficulty attracting the "right" audience, i.e. young people with disposable income. Instead the station

had settled into a pattern that attracted older, more socially-conservative people.

Management does not hide the financial crisis facing the station. The problem is conveyed in both formal and informal discussions with staff. Employees are expected to work harder without an increase in pay to produce upbeat programming that attracts a larger, younger audience.

VANCOUVER CO-OP: ETHNOGRAPHY OF A COMMUNITY RADIO STATION

Organizations and Practices at the Program Level

Resources: Time

Deadlines have relatively little impact on news and information programming at Co-op Radio. Most shows are broadcast weekly. The main exception is the weekday evening half hour program of general public affairs, "The Rational", commonly referred to as "The Rat".¹ For volunteers who work on different Rats, however, the show may as well be weekly. Rat teams are organized according to day. Monday Rat volunteers work closely together planning the show a week in advance. The Tuesday team takes care of its evening and so forth. Volunteers from different nights have little contact. This general pattern is shared by other shows at the station.

Preparation time for newscasts are also organized on a weekly basis. There are no hourly newscasts, not even daily newscasts. The programs that choose to include a newscast (roughly half of all public affairs programs) assemble their news items like the rest of their show items on a weekly basis. The Wednesday edition is the only edition of The Rational with a newscast, in this case a ten minute or so round up of international events.

¹ There are different explanations for the show's name. According to the station handbook, "Behind the Mike", the program was created in 1983 as part of the station's involvement in "Operation Solidarity" against the B.C. government. The idea was to provide a "rational" media alternative by including oppositional elements as part of the community that the station serves. Others say the name is a parody of the CBC's main evening TV news broadcast "The National". If this is indeed the case it illustrates the position of CBC as one of the main points of comparison for news and information programmers at the station. The shortening of the name to "The Rat" is one of the few examples of journalistic jocularly indulged in at the station.

On the day a program is to go on air -- most shows go live -- the volunteers who contribute items to the show arrive an hour or an hour and a half before broadcast time. This allows volunteers plenty of time to prepare up to the minute portions of the show, including: billboards, the introduction to the show and a discussion of the interviews (most of most shows' programming) to follow; calendar, a listing of upcoming events culled from the station or the show's collection of PSA's; and a selection of music to accompany the interviews or other items. Some contributors may arrive three or four hours before broadcast time if they need to arrange a final minute interview or if they need to edit tape. Individuals are limited in the amount of time they can commit to preparing items (lining up an interview, writing scripts, collecting news items, etc.). One frequently hears good-natured complaints at post-show meetings in which people discuss their commitments for next week's show:

Penelope, looking up from the press release, asks, "Is anyone covering this? It's interesting... plus a free lunch." Bert looks up, "I like to keep my Fridays as free as possible." Penelope replies, "I like to keep all my days free, but I end up doing stuff!"

Depending on the show, and the role the volunteer takes within the show, the amount of time volunteered may be considerable. A veteran producer of the Thursday Rat spends over ten hours each week preparing and co-ordinating the half hour broadcast. The producer of the weekly, hour-long gay program, "The Coming Out Show" says preparations are "on-going, it never ends. About half my leisure time goes to the show."

Some programs require an intense period of work shortly before the broadcast itself. Redeye requires detailed billboards to help script the show over its three hours of broadcasting. The billboards are produced by one person on the Friday. It's not uncommon to hear the producer responsible complaining, "I

always spend all Friday working on it!" And if this person is called upon to direct studio operations the next day -- which is often the case -- the workload takes on exhausting dimensions, as this one producer/studio-director complained:

I'm generally up at 7:30 on Saturdays. I come to the station and meet Nick (technical operator) and we prepare for the show. Then starting at 9:00 there is three hours of total concentration. Then we all meet for about an hour and a half for a story meeting. Then we have lunch together to unwind. I collapse at 3:30.

Hosting duties require similarly taxing routines.

Time within broadcasts themselves is less variable. Most public affairs shows are half an hour long. Interviews are between five and twelve minutes as a rule. Music is rarely played for more than a few minutes between pieces. There is even less variability in particular shows where the length of interviews and so on are determined by years of habit. When a contributor misinterprets the amount of time s/he is to devote to an item there is often little flexibility.

An interview lined up by the new contributor, Bonnie, for the arts show "Pigeon Park Review" is a good example.

Christie arrives in the middle of the show and chats with the operator while the producer is out in the hall. She tells the operator that she was expecting 15 minutes for the interview she lined up. She's quite surprised when he tells her she's only slotted for seven. Ken says, "I'm just an operator..." When the producer returns Christie questions him about the time. He says, "we've got a little time, we can stretch it a little bit and probably squeeze another two or three minutes."

Resources: People

No one at the station is paid to present programming over the air. Some of the paid station staff do a bit of on-air work with different shows but are not paid to do so, it's on their own time. It becomes very important, therefore, for each program collective to be able to recruit, integrate and maintain

volunteers to work with them.

A successful program like the weekly, half-hour "Voice of Palestine" maintains a consistent five or six people working on the program each week. Two people host. Two others line up interviews or collect items for the newscast. One person operates the studio equipment. One of these contributors acts as a co-ordinator or producer. They may change and combine roles over time.

If any show's membership drops below these levels pressure and stress quickly increase. The remaining members of the program collective face the double task of producing a show with less than optimum people power while devoting a considerable amount of extra energy to recruitment and training. The result can be a period of stagnation and frustration in which the remaining individuals give up on the recruitment function and concentrate on producing a weekly show. Meanwhile they must watch better staffed programs "grab" new volunteers appearing at the station.

It's apparent to others at the station when a show is in a slump. At a finance committee meeting I sat in on, for instance, discussion turned at one point to the station establishing its presence at a May Day event in East Vancouver. All agreed that the obvious choice to staff the table would be members of the Union Made (labour show) collective. Everyone was aware, however, of the difficulties the program was facing trying to put together a weekly show with its membership down to three. The motion eventually adopted reflected the awareness: "Due to Union Made's temporary shortage of people power, board members be approached to help out with the station's May Day table at La Quena (a local coffee house)."

People often make themselves available to work on particular shows or even particular portions of a show, but rarely offer their labour to work as general reporters or contributors to whatever show might need their services at a particular time. This is not to say that people from one show will not lend a hand to another. An exchange usually occurs through a personal contact. Witness the discussion among programmers before the broadcast of the Monday night Rational:

Ron, who provides an international segment for the Monday Rat is still trying to decide what topic he wants Debra, the host, to interview him about. It's half an hour to air. He floats the idea of interviewing one of the station's board members: "I wonder if Tim would come in and do something on Central America?" Bert, another contributor replies, "he said if there's ever an emergency..."

Another example comes from Redeye, in the week before the annual Vancouver Jazz Festival. The producer that week, Frances, phoned up one of the station's music programmers. She set up an interview to acquaint the listeners with some of the jazz performers coming to town.

Such exchanges are quite common during the fund-raising periods but are generally not the rule in the rest of the year. The vast majority of volunteers associate themselves with one show, and, sometimes with just one area of the show. An example of the latter can be found in Marjorie's participation in the Wednesday Rational's International News segment.

Marjorie works closely with Ron and the program co-ordinator who helps write the news in his spare time. She has very little contact with the rest of the Wednesday Rats. She arrives from work ten or fifteen minutes prior to the start of the show and reads through the news items with her co-reader. She leaves shortly after the newscast finishes at about 7:10.

The technology available at the station is generally unreliable, a constraint on production that most volunteer programmers quickly find their way around. The station takes responsibility for providing a bare minimum of equipment and freely acknowledges this fact: "Learning to be flexible with ancient technology... is part of the educational experience of working at our station."² But even 'technology' as basic as chairs can be a problem for programmers.

For larger collectives, like Redeye or some of the larger Rat crews, meetings are often difficult to hold because of lack of space and chairs. Observe any of the weekly Redeye meetings and one is likely to encounter half the participants propped against door jams or leaning delicately on rickety tables. Some shows feel compelled to handle this basic technology themselves. Members of The Voice of Palestine conduct their preparation meetings at the nearby home of a volunteer, arriving at the station as a group only a few minutes before broadcast time. Rat crews frequently adjourn their post-mortem meetings to nearby bars (although in this case there are other inducements to a change of location).

Typewriters, the basic implement for script-writing, are common enough in the station's two meeting rooms on the third floor (where most of the program groups meet), but finding one that works is another matter. It's not uncommon to find programmers playing their own version of musical chairs; the man typing up the last of his interview introduction changes places with the woman typing up the billboards, to be replaced again by the calendar contributor. Most volunteers simply avoid the typewriters at the station, arriving at the station

²"Behind the Mike" page 22.

with scripts typed up at home or in their workplace (e.g. Redeye, Voice of Palestine, Coming Out Show).

The most frustrating part of the station's poor resources are the poor sound recording and studio equipment. Poorly functioning cassette tape recorders and reel-to-reel machines often lead to frustration and a poor sense of morale among volunteers. A Rat contributor describes how:

often we scramble and just manage to get something on. A few weeks ago we had an argument; we were trying to get something together and the sound quality was poor. It's frustrating working with the equipment we have, trying to get things done on schedule. Communication too was poor. Things have improved a lot since then. It goes in fits and starts.

Chronically poor equipment is wasteful of limited staff time as well. In my experiences preparing pieces for broadcast, I have had to interrupt meetings of staff or committees to drag out the program co-ordinator to help repair a tape machine for a piece that needs to be ready "tonight!" I was by no means alone in such demands on staff.

The half-time station engineer spends most of his time at the station working on equipment that has broken down while he's away. He expresses his utter distaste for things like, "working on broken cassette machines -- spending four hours on something worth \$60." He rarely gets a chance to do preventative maintenance and often points out to people at the station that they could spend their money better by investing in some decent equipment and using less of his time to fix cheap goods.

Most of the program collectives -- especially those which have been established for some time -- avoid entirely or minimize their reliance on station equipment. They invest personally or as a group in new equipment for the

show's use. Redeye, for instance, took contributions from the members of the collective to buy a \$200 SONY cassette recorder.

Resources: Money

In terms of budgets for each show, the station again provides the minimum -- a small monthly allowance for long distance telephone calls. The Rational gets the most with a budget of \$40/month (for all five shows combined). Redeye receives \$20/month and others less than this or nothing at all. It's common for both the Rational and Redeye to go two, three or four times beyond the budget with the difference paid out of pocket by the volunteers involved. The reality of the telephone expense is apparent at almost all program meetings. One Redeye story meeting is typical.

Early in the meeting a contributor brings people's attention to the show's telephone bill prepared and put in the Redeye box by the station's accountant. It's \$61.42, or \$41.42 above the \$20 allowance. The eight volunteers present reach for purses, wallets and knapsacks and pay what each can -- the teacher puts in \$10, down to the unemployed artist's \$2. They get a total of \$35. The volunteer who made many of the calls that month, offers to "swallow" part of the cost of his calls himself. The discussion then moves to story ideas for next week. Later as they discuss items for the upcoming Marathon (fund-raising) show, someone suggests they interview the station's former program director, now working in Nicaragua. Immediately someone else points out the cost and reminds her of the \$40 bill they just paid. The Nicaragua interview they agree is impossible.

At Rat post-mortem and story meetings similar concerns become apparent. Once when someone mentioned the planning she'd been doing to program a remote broadcast involving interviews with prostitutes in their place of work, the other programmers reacted with excitement. All but the program co-ordinator, who pointed out that the minimum charged by the phone company to install a "hard line" needed for the remote would be \$200. The idea for the remote was quickly dropped.

Keeping within the phone budget seems especially difficult for The Rational which because of its daily nature and provincial focus ends up calling Victoria frequently. While I was at the station The Rational had accumulated debts in the hundreds of dollars. To cover costs contributors organized fund-raisers. Volunteers at the first of these, at La Quena, a local coffee house, raised over \$200. However, the energy required to organize such events is considerable and takes time away from show preparation.

Other costs for things like audio tape, photocopying and editing materials are small in relation to the telephone. They too, however, add up. The station provides reel-to-reel tape for shows that are to be re-broadcast. But if the program collective damages the tape they are expected to replace it. Other tape, like cassettes for interviews or other purposes, must be supplied out of pocket. Similarly with photocopying -- the station has its own machine but charges users ten cents per copy -- and tape editing kits, which the station assembles and charges \$17 per kit.

Working Conditions

The physical working conditions at the station for all volunteers, including those involved in public affairs, might be at best described as tolerable. Although different shows take responsibility to clean the station on a weekly basis there is a basic level of grime usually apparent. The smell of urine is strong as one enters the building on the ground floor. One proceeds up rickety narrow stairs past staff offices on the second floor to the third floor where cramped studios and two small meeting rooms are provided. One of these, the "Rat Room", is typical of working surroundings, here described as the Wednesday crew prepares the show:

The fluorescent lights are on, illuminating about eight people crowded into the 10' by 12' room. Coats and bags are all over the place, on the backs of chairs, on desks or on the floor. The furniture looks like it comes from a 1940's office, massive and scarred wooden desks (three) and enough chairs (non-matching) for half the people. The room is smokey since the Rat room is one of three designated smoking areas in the building. It's also loud from the din of conversation and typewriters, added to by the loud sound of traffic coming in through the one open window, and occasionally from the loud flush of plumbing in the half-functioning bathroom across the hall.

The look of other studios and rooms on the third floor is similar. Carpets are mangy and often cigarette-burned. For a long time scrap wood was piled in the main hall as people worked on new studios. Garbage cans are often filled to overflowing and cigarette ash lies on window sills where no one can find an ashtray.

Volunteers however are relatively uncomplaining about the physical squalor surrounding them. They seem to accept the mess as part and parcel of a facility through which hundreds of volunteers pass weekly, operated on a shoe-string budget.

Sources

The station does not subscribe to any news wire service. Some story ideas for interviews -- the bulk of the public affairs programming -- are generated from the daily press and from listening to CBC radio. The station also receives a large number of press releases and PSA's which the program co-ordinator reads and then passes on to the appropriate show or shows. Depending on the show, there may be a high degree of direct input by listeners who, according to one Rat volunteer, "hear about our shit-disturbing type of journalism and phone us up -- easily one third of our (Rat) story sources come from people calling the station." The number is probably somewhat inflated. Other public affairs programs receive much less direct listener input. Nevertheless the mixture of

these types of sources is explained this way by at least one Rat programmer:

For my ideas, a lot comes from the daily press. They have the people power to report on stuff. Where I get information from and interviews, tends to be the other side of the side of the sources of what the daily press uses... If you asked me to name my five best sources, I couldn't really tell you -- it's too diverse. In general, it's the people's organizations -- tenants' councils, trade unionists, women's groups, environmental groups. Who I tend to interview are people in those organizations. Or, academics who are sympathetic to that particular side of issues.

In practice, these "peoples' sources" or "ignored groups" are individuals who the programmer knows socially or politically.

The lesbian woman who hosts the Monday Rat, for example, lined up an interview with director of communication of the United Church's B.C. Conference about a church report promoting the acceptance of lesbians and homosexual men into the ministry (months before the issue of gay ordination became an issue in the mainstream media). The host works for the United Church and knows her guest through professional contacts.

A regular contributor to the Tuesday Rat lined up a story on clear-cut logging on Saltspring Island after his girlfriend who lives on the island brought it to his attention. She had tried in vain to call local authorities about what was going on in her community. Later the same contributor lined up an interview with a member of the Single Mothers' Housing Network after getting a job with the organization. The producer of the same show frequently arranges interviews on the subject of street kids -- she works on contract with a program funded by the provincial government to provide assistance to street kids.

Volunteers frequently suggest colleagues in community or political activities as sources or contacts. One afternoon, for instance, a group of Rat contributors sat in the Rat Room preparing that evening's broadcast. The conversation turned

to increasing the contacts for the volunteer who does a weekly provincial feature called "Mainstreet B.C.". One of the volunteers just returned from covering a pro-choice rally in Victoria (she was chosen to cover it because she was also participating in the event and so was going anyway) suggests, "if you want another Nanaimo contact there's Sheila. She's doing pro-choice work." The feature writer replies, "Oh?" The woman continues, "Yeah, you might have met her. She worked on Union Made."

Volunteers choose to cover the events or issues which interest them. Only one volunteer follows a beat per se. This is Drew, the City Hall reporter. He, however, openly disdains other volunteers' personal involvement with their sources. He prefers to cultivate his sources in the detached manner favoured by his colleagues from the commercial media at City Hall. This approach, however, is both uninteresting and too time consuming for most of the other volunteers at the station. Indeed, when Drew took a break from City Hall for a few months, no one else at the station stepped in to provide coverage. Volunteer interaction with their sources is more likely to fall along the lines of the following scene:

It's about quarter to seven, 15 minutes before The Rational is to go on air, and one of the show's contributors notices some prostitutes gathering in Pigeon Park below the station window. She grabs a cassette player and microphone and rushes down, along with a contributor to "Women Do This Every Day". There they wander into the crowd of fifty women, joking with the protestors and talking with people they seem to know. The Rat contributor eventually sits down with an older woman and does an interview.

Meanwhile commercial reporters have arrived on the scene and get out of their cars. Press and TV reporters cluster together by the corner of the park. Eventually they isolate women who they interview. The appearance of these reporters sets them apart -- well-dressed, in suits and ties (all men). The Co-op volunteers (both female) are indistinguishable from the other women gathered to protest the murder of prostitutes.

Although personal contacts constitute the major source for arranging interviews, volunteers also have access to a limited number of alternative media sources. One of the Rat volunteers was active during my observation period trying to reactivate a news feed from El Salvador. He contacted people at the University of Victoria campus radio station to share the cost of twelve minutes of news per week fed from the Central American country through the United States. The same volunteer spoke of plans by the provincial NDP to set up a news feed from Victoria. I never saw concrete results from either effort however.

A more practical (and free) alternative information source is the relatively large numbers of periodicals -- newsletters, calendars, and newspapers -- dropped off at the station each week. The contents of these publications range from gay issues, to the environment, to native rights, to alternative lifestyles, etc. The station also subscribes to a number of alternative publications of a more regional, national and international scope. Few volunteers on the various programs, however, seem to be aware of the station's subscriptions.³

For one Redeye broadcast, for instance, contributors contacted and lined up interviews with first a commissioner from the Vancouver Parks Board, and for another interview a provincial MLA. When I asked about the sources for these interviews, the contributors explained their preference was to *not* interview politicians. One explained that she initially tried to talk with animal rights activists about the planned Stanley Park Zoo extension, but when that failed opted for the Parks Board Commissioner. On the arts show, "Pigeon Park Review"

³For instance, at a news workshop, among a dozen or so fairly long-time volunteers, only a few were aware of these magazines kept by the program co-ordinator in the informal station library, jokingly called, "The Pigeon Park Memorial Library."

an art therapist was interviewed because one of the show's newer contributors "knows a person who runs the Art Therapy Clinic... she told me to do this," meaning, she gave the volunteer the idea for the interview and supplied a contact person to be interviewed.

Another example comes from Radio Peace. A man representing the group Save Our Seas was interviewed about his arrest for participating in a demonstration against American nuclear warships in Vancouver Harbour. When I asked the contributors how they made contact with the demonstrator, one volunteer replied, "we all know him, we've been on the boats with him." On the same broadcast the host spoke with a member of Friends of Strathcona. Contact was made when four of the show's contributors went up to Strathcona Park and took part in a protest.

Friendly sources often become regulars on shows. The advantage is that it creates a certain format stability and saves contributors from having to come up with new ideas for pieces each week. The producer of the Coming Out Show talks excitedly about his success with:

John (who does creative arts pieces, eg. a reflective piece on art and poetry and) is a good friend of mine. He was dragged down inch by inch. He did a piece on the history of the gay movement. Now he does a ten minute piece every month. That's how I like to get people involved, doing specific things on a regular basis... I met some gay lawyers who'll be doing a regular piece on gays and the law.

Items for newscasts, which form a smaller part of programming at the station, are less the result of personal contacts. Sources are more likely to be the mainstream mass media or, among the more energetic news presenters, less accessible alternative sources.

Ron, in preparing the Wednesday Rat's International News, devotes a considerable portion of each week listening to shortwave radio for items: Radio Nederlands, the BBC, Radio Australia, Radio Moscow, The United States Armed Forces Radio, etc. Tom also buys a number of foreign newspapers and periodicals including: The New York Times, Miami Herald, Tsing Tao (Hong Kong), and The Far Eastern Economic Review. He also scans the local dailies to see how international stories "are being played",

Because I see my role as giving information that's not available to people. Co-op won't cover a story that's being beaten to death out there, for example, "Super Tuesday" (the American Presidential primaries). We ran one story mentioning it in the last two weeks, but we didn't cover it last week (when it actually occurred).

Ron re-writes the stories culled from various media, attempting to combine the background which the periodicals provide with up to date shortwave information. The shortwave sources, he feels, give him the edge on some of the other writers at the station because:

They generally have print sources. That means their information is colder. For example, we had one writer who had a story about Surinam's new president. Unfortunately he was picking it up four months later in a magazine.

Another approach taken to news, especially by those without shortwave sources, is to highlight stories or aspects of stories that receive coverage in the mainstream media but coverage of a low priority. A contributor writing a story on developments in the Philippines said, "I found it in the New York Times. But it was buried on page 23. I thought I'd dig it up."

Redeye has two weekly newscasts to which half the show's volunteers contribute items. Many items are taken from alternative print sources less accessible to the average listener; the rest are simply re-written from the daily press. One of the contributors who works in a bookstore regularly contributes

items from the British publications The Index on Censorship and The Manchester Guardian. Other volunteers have regular access to publications of special interest groups, eg. "The Energy Probe Newsletter" or "The West Coast Environmental Law Foundation". One woman brings in items from her monthly subscription to the developmental journal The New Internationalist. When everyone is contributing, the newscast assembles interesting and slightly esoteric items from a spectrum of sources.

The news on Union Made at its best also provides volunteers' "round-up" of news items from various sources. The usual practice is to cull various union publications -- newspapers, newsletters and magazines -- mailed freely to the program.⁴ Items taken from the "Canadian Autoworkers Newsletter" or the carpenters' "On the Level" are supplemented -- or, on bad days, greatly overshadowed -- by articles from The Sun and The Globe & Mail. Articles may also originate with various working class publications, in particular, the Communist weekly, The Pacific Tribune.

Some public affairs shows have access to unique news sources. The Voice of Palestine compliments its coverage of Middle-eastern politics with newspapers from the region as well as information from the PPS-JPS (Palestine Press Service - Jerusalem Press Service) which is faxed to one of the program's contributors from the Palestine Information Office in Ottawa.

Members of "America Latina Al Dia", an English-Spanish language program which follows Latin American politics, have access to the wire services of UPI

⁴ At time of observation Union Made was receiving about 15 union publications. The volume varies over time says one contributor, depending on the show's efforts in requesting them.

(United Press International) and CP (Canadian Press).⁵ They compliment this with some shortwave sources, periodicals from the region, as well as information passed on to them by local solidarity and information groups like the El Salvador Information Office. Earlier in its history the show received information on Chile via California's Berkely University and a special Latin American news feed.

Story Selection: Guidelines and Negotiation

One Rat contributor put it this way "there are no articulated guidelines for what we can and can't do. In terms of content I'm sure there are limits, but it's not an issue because the people who get involved, as they go through the process, they learn what the standard is."

Redeye story meetings are a good example of how content is negotiated. Each week immediately following the end of the broadcast at noon on Saturday, a dozen or so Redeye contributors gather for a one and a half hour meeting in which they discuss story ideas for next week's show, as well as doing an assessment of that day's program (post-mortem). This scene is typical:

As the show wraps up and the Latin America Al Dia people move into the studios, Tim, the studio director, and Nick, the operator, put away mikes used for a piece of live music performance. Meanwhile in the programmers' meeting room down the hall, Frances, the producer, elicits story ideas from the ten volunteers gathered there and writes them on the chalkboard. After about twenty minutes of brainstorming, Frances asks them to choose items for next week. They discuss a story item on the VanCity Credit Union. Frances says, "I have background information -- really an article in The Sun (ha, ha) but I don't want to do anything with it."

Tim says he might be interested in following it up. He takes the article from Frances saying, "I'd prefer to talk with Sharon than Ed

⁵ Probably through a personal contact at a commercial media outlet. Volunteers were reluctant to explain how, telling me when I asked, "that's the business of our collective."

(two people running for the VanCity board against the incumbents). But why don't you want to do it Jane?" She replies, "I don't want to do it because I spent a whole lot of time with it and I'm sick of it!" People laugh because this is untypical of Frances to give up a story she's worked on.

There's talk about the angle that Tim should take on the VanCity piece. Some people suggest that he concentrate on the issue of racism suspected in companies VanCity deals with. Other people suggest he focus on the issue of sub-contracting. Tim replies, "I'm not keen on double focus interviews." Someone suggests they move on to other story ideas, but Tim says he wants more direction on the item. Another contributor, Hugh, suggests that Tim take the time slot for the item and fill it in as he sees best. Others agree, trusting Tim's experience in producing items in a way they agree on.

Ideas for upcoming shows have to be vetted with the show's collective membership in the story meeting. As we've seen, people may suggest angles on a story or contacts. If there are areas of controversy, volunteers may argue over an approach, as in Tim's case above. Sometimes the collective may instruct a contributor to avoid certain angles or even to avoid a particular interview entirely. The latter occurred in a Redeye story meeting when one of the volunteers suggested interviewing the head of the B.C. Medical Association about a court ruling in favour of extending billing numbers to young doctors. The collective persuaded him that they didn't need another doctor's point of view on the health system, rather he should talk to people who aren't getting an adequate level of health service with or without restrictions on billing numbers.

In every day practice, however, it's more common for program collectives to approve just about anything suggested at story meeting since people seem most concerned with filling the show's time without having to offer to do too much themselves.

The actual post-mortem part of the story meetings follows at the end of meetings. In the case of Redeye and most other shows, the post-mortem is

rushed, and often omitted entirely. Volunteers then complain that they do not get enough feed-back for their contribution and that the criticism or compliments they get are too vague; people rarely seem to offer steps to improve performance.

Usually the final business of the story meeting is to assign preparation roles for the week. A producer is chosen to co-ordinate preparations. The various contributors will phone the producer to discuss their progress, or more likely, problems, in setting up an interview. The co-ordinating role is difficult, requiring time, availability, a knowledge of the way the show has been done in the past, as well as a diplomacy in getting contributors to get their material prepared correctly and on time. It almost always falls to one or two of the most long-standing members of the collective.

Banter about program items before the show usually has little effect on the content of the show -- for all their concern for timeliness of interviews and representing significant happenings, programmers are often forced to take what they can get. At other times, however, personalities can impose their will upon others and change the direction of an interview or show. For example, as one Monday Rat was being prepared, I observed Debra taking a script provided by Bert and changing it to provide what she felt to be a less editorial introduction. Here's what Bert's original script looked like:

Green Party -- Intro: The ecology people are still with us, *much to the dismay of the Social Credit Party*. And here, as in Europe, they are becoming organized.

The Green Party held a convention last Friday, (and) came out strongly in favour of a *sane* policy regarding abortion.

Though they seem to take a position diametrically opposed to that of the premier, the Greens are hopeful. *Dialogue and consideration of the real concerns of women may yet win the day.*

Earlier today, Rat Reporter Bert Roper asked Green Rep. Laura Porcher where the Green party stands on abortion and related issues.

Debra substituted her own introduction:

Intro: The Green party might not be a name that one hears overfrequently in the political scene in British Columbia, but it is a party that is not spinning its wheels.

Last Friday the Green Party held a convention in Vancouver, one that addressed a number of important issues. One of those issues was that of abortion. Rat reporter Bert Roper spoke with Green party representative, Laura Porcher, about the party's perspective on the question.

Negotiation over story content goes on in a similar fashion at the other public affairs shows. Here's a scene from a post-mortem/story meeting of Union Made. In this case Dennis used his role as producer to quell a story suggestion from one volunteer which he feels goes beyond the show's mandate:

They don't have much time for the meeting and Dennis keeps trying to keep the four or five volunteers on track. He says, "Any other ideas?" Adding himself, "we can for next week have a report on the Vancouver and District Labour Council."

Emma holds up an information sheet put out by the B.C. Coalition for Abortion Clinics, saying, "This is really topical. We might want to do something on it pointing out that any union can make a donation..." Dennis interjects, "We want to cover this issue only from a labour perspective. Soon there'll be stuff coming out from labour on it. Let's wait till then." No more ideas are discussed and the volunteers leave.

Producers, however, rarely assert their point of view too strongly. They are well aware of the limit of their power, which is derived only from an informal agreement among volunteers that s/he can have more say if s/he does most of the work. One of the veteran Rat producers puts close limits on his power to determine what does and doesn't get on air:

I suppose the producer has the final say, but it's not organized like business radio in which the producer calls all the shots. Because they're all volunteers here. If you tried to be too authoritarian they'd tell you to go to hell.

For a new volunteer, the theory behind the station's existence is clearly articulated in "Behind the Mike". Under the section, "Statement on Programming Policy Objectives", the volunteer reads:

(We) see ourselves as a partisan station to the extent that we make an effort to promote access to those denied access to conventional media, and also that we try to cover issues and events from the perspective of social movements concerned with and affected by those issues and events.

At the everyday level of operation, volunteer programmers tend to support this approach. Many people told me that they see the role of the station as providing a "balance to the imbalance" of the broadcasting system as a whole. They have varying degrees of success in justifying this approach to outsiders, especially the CRTC.

Volunteers working on advocacy public affairs shows are particularly open about their "imbalance". They are committed to an audience group, whether it be pro-labour, pro-Palestinian or pro-gay and express the sentiments of the audience as they interpret them. Within the station no one sees a problem with the Coming Out Show actively promoting gay rights and a gay perspective on issues. Certainly it would appear ludicrous to station members for the show to balance every pro-gay sentiment with an anti-gay one. The same applies for other points of view whether it be labour, anarchistic, or ecological.

The station, through its programming committee and ultimately through the board of directors, decides what groups are deserving of time on the radio schedule in order to put forward their point of view. The decision is made by a group of people elected from the community. The members of the programming committee make the judgement based partially on what groups have been denied

access to other media.

At the show level, volunteers are free to decide the approach of their programming within the limits of the programming contract they originally made with the programming committee. The bi-weekly "Main and Hastings" show has a mixture of informal news, banter, satire, arts and music based on the life experiences of Downtown Eastsiders. Part of that experience involves a harsh criticism of political leaders:

Claude: We like to cover the more serious issues. Generally speaking: environmental, psychological -- by that I mean problems in people's lives. We like to cover the serious stuff and at the same time throw in some crazy stuff... black humour.

P.S.: Do you think black humour strikes a chord with downtown eastsiders?

Claude: It has to. It must. People here are cynical. They've been through it all and they like to make fun of it. I think people like to hear Vander Zalm parodied. It's not difficult, the Socreds are living cartoons.

Because a show represents a community, however, doesn't mean they are always clear on how they should program for that community. Union Made has traditionally supported the labour movement in a non-critical manner. This meant involving as many unions as possible in the actual programming of the show. But for a period of time ending shortly before my observation at the station began, contributors decided to take a critical view of certain elements of labour. As one current member put it:

the show went down for a while. It was dictating (contributors' points of view on the movement) to people. It's gone back to giving people a voice on the air.

Of course some volunteers don't see it quite the same way. One Rat contributor complained, "Union Made used to be about unions and be critical. Now it is just a mouthpiece for unions." More recent contributors to the show point out that they don't have the resources to sustain a critical point of view on the union

movement (if indeed they wanted to). They simply don't have the time or money to create separate channels of information aside from that provided by the unions themselves. One contributor gave as an example the difficulty in covering the legal aspects of labour disputes:

The court reporter for *The Sun* is our only source. Occasionally the CBC does it but we personally don't have the resources to sit and watch (court cases).

General public affairs shows like *The Rational* and *Redeye* have a more difficult time explaining their programming role while suffering from a chronic lack of resources. Volunteers with *The Rational* talk of the importance of "muck-raking", a "critical approach" or "shit-kick journalism". Explaining their role a bit more fully one Rat said:

Being critical means exploring issues thoroughly. And just coming to grips with an issue. Because especially in B.C. it's rare you don't have some sort of conflict between two groups. The Rat tries to give a voice to groups that are ignored... Everyone at Co-op is pretty political. Not because of bias. But if you look at any one issue long enough, you get pretty critical.

Volunteers' decisions about how to treat a story are based on a perception of this critical role. The following scene from preparations for one of the weekday *Rationals* illustrates this:

One of the regular contributors, Penelope, talks to some fellow Rats about the interview she's prepared on VanCity Credit Union's elections of a new board. She's talking with a new candidate running on his criticism of the credit union's involvement with non-union companies. Asked if she'll also be interviewing existing board members she replies, "No. I want his (the critic's) side of the story first. Because it's fairly complicated and from what (the critic) said, I wouldn't get much response from them (existing board members). And as a member (of the Credit Union) I know I wouldn't get much response... Because Co-op gives a voice to the underserved I don't feel I have to do that sort of thing. The CBC would do it, or try to do it, and call it balance."

At least one Rat contributor, Drew, the City Hall reporter, disagrees with this approach:

Co-op fails as an alternative... When the CBC covers a government-labour dispute, they'll talk to the labour rep and the government minister. Redeye or the Rational will only talk to the union guy. They don't do anything different, only half of it.

I have no problem with the station's advocacy role. Radio Peace or Union Made, they're good for certain segments of the population who don't have a voice. The others, The Rat and Redeye, they should operate more or less as the mainstream media do.

This is part of a debate within the station whether people have the resources to effectively program any general issue public affairs programs. The majority seem to support the continued existence of shows like Redeye and The Rational. As one contributor said: "Someone might listen to Radio Peace because he gets a real bang out of peace stuff, but there are lots of people who want the kind of information provided by more generalized public affairs shows."

The one area of agreement among all station participants is that there are real limitations on the kind of job public affairs can do because of the limited resources available to programmers. For instance, on the subject of providing a daily newscast one Rat contributor says: "It's a big gap and I'd love to fill it. But given the situation of dozens of people who work for us on U.I. (unemployment insurance), it can't be done."

The contradiction between high information ideals and financial realities is particularly obvious if we examine the news-writing workshop. In the first session volunteers were asked to list the strengths of the station's existing news casts. Here's part of their listing:

- Co-op Radio news is credible because it is: honourable, believable, well-researched, intelligent, trustable;
- Co-op newscasts are not: manipulative, sexist, racist, censored through advertiser ownership or station administration, dependent on a single personality focus;
- Co-op news reports changes brought about by ordinary people.

In the same session participants came up with suggestions for improved

newscasts including: "Avoid: mainstream media and official 'sources'; 'In-groupy' terms; (and) Use the collective process in news production."

Yet for all the discussion of news-writing values and techniques there was relatively little change in the newscasts following the workshop's five sessions. Few volunteers had the time, money or inclination to develop news contacts with "ordinary" people's organizations and regularly solicit news items. Mainstream sources like *The Globe and Mail* or *The Sun* continue to be the main source of many stories. And individuals or, at best, a pair of people, continue to work on their own to produce enough items to fill a show's five minute newscast.

The exact role of news, public affairs and information programming will continue to be debated at the station. During my observation period the discussion was occurring with some urgency as a license renewal hearing approached. The following scene of one news workshop session indicates the struggle among volunteers to make clear (particularly to themselves) their positions on the important issue of balance:

Workshop Leader: Historically Co-op radio has argued that we represent a third force, a community created radio that gives a voice to groups that are not represented in mainstream media.

Participant: Is that why we are not balanced?

Other Leader: Voice of Palestine and the Lesbian Show are examples of things that balance out the mainstream 'balance'. In the mainstream media they sometimes don't give you the 'why'. They may tell you 'how'. That's where our news comes in.

Newscasts

Many people at the station feel that Co-op does not have the resources nor the volunteer expertise to compete with these newscasts. Said one long-time programmer:

The news on Redeye was disastrous. It was just a collection of whatever the person assigned to do it felt was interesting. We don't have access to news sources, but we can do good news magazines. So we can do an assessment of what happens in Israel weekly, but we can't do it daily. Nor can we do anything from Ottawa or Victoria.

Many of the volunteers on Redeye itself seem to agree, at least they did for a while.

A few years ago a majority of the Redeye contributors proposed eliminating the show's two five minute newscasts. A minority held out against the decision and proposed that the issue be put to Redeye listeners through the calendar, or call-in, portion of the show. A large number of people called in -- nine, Calendar usually receives five or six over the fifteen minutes -- expressing support for the news, some saying the news was the main reason they listened to Redeye.

The story itself has become part of the mythology of the station. I heard it in a number of versions, once repeated to the group of us at the news workshop seemingly to confirm the value of newscasts at the station.

Indeed, the organization of the news workshop which succeeded in attracting over a dozen volunteers serves as some proof of a minor renaissance of newscasts at the station. This view is also expressed by other programmers. At a Rat post-mortem one Rat producer commented:

I think the news has changed for the better, the writing is better. I've heard comments from people who used to turn it off and now listen because of the news.

Now about half the public affairs programs feature newscasts (only three or four years ago few had them). In many cases, however, they continue to get low priority from a planning point of view. One of the common complaints among news writers at the workshop was poor presentation of the news because shows

"abuse news reading as a training ground for new hosts."

People interested in starting a newscast on their public affairs program immediately face the reality of lack of resources. Unless one has access to (and possibly a good deal of money to spend on) esoteric journals and newspapers, or a shortwave, a newscast becomes little more than a copy of the mainstream media news with some emphasis given to certain points. As one frustrated news writer at the workshop put it: "I'm tired of hearing old stuff that I've heard on the CBC."

Standards of Presentation

Professionalism is not always a dirty word at the station, but it often is. Here's a typical conversation with a Rat veteran:

P.S.: Do you want to project a professional sound on The Rational?
Bert: That is a constant debate. Some of us use the word to mean 'sounds polished'. Others mean 'commercial'. It's a constant debate.

It's a debate that takes place throughout the station. For while most of the veteran programmers strive for a high quality in their radio presentation, there is always the concern voiced that imposing too high a standard might limit some people's access.

Many volunteers and their program collectives are exacting about the quality of programming they produce. Each time Redeye goes to air two members of the collective are organized to give their full attention to its smooth operation. One of these is the operator, managing the technical details of mikes, records, tapes, etc. The other, the studio director, makes sure that show personnel are in the right place at the right time with the right scripts:

Tim, the studio director, keeps all unauthorized people out of the control room and studio and warns hosts and newsreaders well in

advance of when to get into the studio. He has arranged a hand signal system with the hosts to cue their intro's and the like.

During one longer interview, Nick, the operator, checks out promotional carts for play at the end of the hour. The first he rejects, commenting to Tim, "It's sort of slow." The second, a promo for the upcoming Marathon he also rejects because, "it mentions beer by trade names" (as it urges listeners that supporting Co-op is cheaper than drinking beer). Tim agrees that it's inappropriate. Then a third cart is rejected; they agree that it's "badly mixed." Finally they resolve the problem when Tim explains to one of the hosts to simply announce the upcoming marathon in their chit chat.

Some programmers adopt professional guidelines as promulgated by professional radio journalists. At a news workshop, the two organizers circulate a style guide based on tips gleaned from published professional guides like *The Electronic News Lead*. Among the tips are:

- read with emphasis; deliver so listener has no doubt you know exactly what you're talking about
- practice training the eye to read 3 lines ahead of the line you're working on
- make use of pauses
- make correction within item; don't apologize, use 'what I meant to say' or 'I'll read that again'

But under a list of do's and don'ts in the guide one also reads the ambivalence with which such copying is done:

Do attempt to keep it simple -- the listener can't go back and re-listen; broadcast schools teach K.I.S.S., Keep It Simple Stupid. Mainstream radio news somehow manages to Keep It Simply Stupid.

Similarly in a handout produced by a Redeye contributor, professional techniques are freely drawn upon to impress upon the new Redeye recruit the importance of a high level of quality in presentation. The hand out is called "Scripting for Public Affairs":

All on-air roles are essentially performances -- they require good timing, presence of mind and precision of action... As a scriptwriter you succeed when you bring it about that any nincompoop can use your script successfully.

The same programmer carries on his personal campaign for better quality

performance throughout the station by contributing a monthly "Pronunciation Guide" to the volunteer newsletter:

French: Well according to some we should have no difficulty with this our official language. For most anglophones, however, reality does not accord with the bilingual utopia we might want. For those who need a little clarity about French pronunciation, I'll look at a few major features...

Programmers often make the careful distinction that while they are not untrained amateurs, neither do they copy paid reporters. Witness this conversation I had with an experienced Rat:

P.S.: Is what you do a professional job?

Karl: I don't like the term so, no... but I wouldn't describe it as amateur either.

P.S.: Could anyone walk off the street and do what you do?

Karl: Yes, in the sense that I don't think there's some special, mystical qualities needed to work on radio or public affairs shows... It takes training and commitment.

One show that while not actively cultivating an anti-professionalism, certainly doesn't see its lack of preparation as a drawback is Main and Hastings:

P.S.: When do you prepare the show?

Claude (the producer): It's arranged at the last minute. (He points to Bev at her typewriter, writing up part of the "Brainstorm" script). Like Eve's typing up her script right now. We don't even get to read through the script. We have goofs but they are now a running gag.

P.S.: Is that a strategy, that lack of preparations?

Claude: Not when we first started. We were so disorganised... And we've kept it. Now we can goof off and joke about how we can't read a script. It's mostly a rap anyway.

On other shows mistakes are scrupulously avoided, and some individual programmers chide themselves strongly for mistakes. There is, however, generally a high degree of tolerance for mistakes on other shows. The following scene is from the paid program co-ordinator's office on a Friday morning:

The radio is on and tuned to the station so that the program co-ordinator can keep an ear on the programming as he goes about the task of typing up copy for the program guide. Suddenly over the taped Native Indian program can be heard the voice of one of the

hosts of "Instructions Not Included": "one, two, check... one, two, check... one, two... Kate are you there?" Allan looks up saying, "What's going on there? (pauses) Oh, the Native program must be going late. They (the hosts of Instructions Not Included) must have got a bit impatient."

A few moments later the Instructions Not Included host introduces the children's program, apologising for his "screw-up" and then goes to music. The program co-ordinator laughs at the mistake and then hums along to the music good-naturedly. When the song ends there is four or five seconds of dead air before the host extro's the Leonard Cohen song. The program director doesn't even look up from his typing. Then a few minutes later he hears a high-pitched noise under the host. It's tape rewinding on another reel to reel machine in the control room. The program director laughs to himself and continues with his work.

Technical foul-ups on air are quite common. Even the most quality conscious of programmers learn to laugh about them, often on-air. A regular occurrence are mikes that don't go on when hosts are cued to start their show introductions. Frequently hosts re-introduce themselves a number of times. By the second or third attempt they may be laughing at the foolishness of the situation, on air.

I observed the following post-mortem meeting of one of the weekday Rats:

Discussing a taped interview with the vice-president of the B.C. Teachers' Federation the operator comments: "too much tape hiss." The contributor of the piece says, "I did all the right things..." One of the other Rats interjects, "Which one (tape machine) was it (that you used to dub it)?" and they eventually locate the problem. The conversation then drifts to a good-natured reminiscence of various technical failures. The mood becomes almost congratulatory as opposed to chastising people on being involved in foul-ups.

Programmers learn to accept a situation that prohibits perfection. As this conversation with a Rat contributor indicates, however, they believe that their unique and committed approach makes up for these deficiencies:

P.S.: Is the Wednesday Rat professionally done?

William: Sometimes. It depends on what you mean by professional?

P.S.: What do you mean?

William: We have a lot of limitations. If I could work eight hours a

day I could do different things, could have more breadth. But not necessarily more depth. I could go in (to the story) with a particular angle in mind. Now it is more a process of discovery (...) I think professionalism refers to quality of equipment, the the voice and presentation, and intelligence of questions... and preparation. We are hampered by equipment failures. For example, last week we had four equipment failures but we ended up having a good interview with Svend Robinson.

Training

The paid volunteer co-ordinator organizes new volunteers' activities, getting them to attend an orientation session and then signing them up for a four or five part basic skills course (or for some, a more technically oriented, "operators course").

As the introductory booklet given to all new volunteers says:

On the last Tuesday of every month there is an Orientation Session held at the station which introduces new volunteers to our studios and offices, the basic policies and structure of the station, and an introduction to our programming.

Basic Skills courses are intended to "give a basic introduction to techniques in radio production and operation."⁶ Participants learn through about fifteen hours of instruction and experience how to prepare and conduct interviews, how to script items, and how to record and edit tape. My own experience of the course -- both as student and instructor -- suggests that the time serves equally to integrate new volunteers to the station and the station way of doing radio. Through interpersonal contact with a veteran volunteer programmer, new volunteers get a sense of the station and how they might "fit in".

Looking at the people who lead training courses one notes the large representation of people from the core group of the station, in particular,

⁶From "Behind the Mike", page 8.

volunteer programmers from programs like Redeye or The Rational Part of the reason has to do with the large number of volunteers general public affairs shows need. These shows also seem to "burn-out" volunteers more quickly. Existing members of these program collectives take it upon themselves to train and integrate new volunteers for their programs.

The first session of a basic skills course functions partially to inculcate a sense of the station in new volunteers. Two stories oft re-told which suggest the struggle of the station to survive against all odds come from the station's early days. I call them the "Pigeon droppings fable" and the "Burnaby Mountain tape trek" These were related to me and other new volunteers by staff and veteran volunteers alike. They are also captured in passages from "Behind the Mike":

An extensive search for a building to house Co-op Radio began that summer (1974, after receiving the first broadcast license). When it was finally located in the downtown eastside, it had been unoccupied except by pigeons, for the previous 15 years... The buildings old world charms were lost on volunteers who scraped six inches of pigeon droppings from the floor without the benefit of functioning plumbing.

(The next year) the transmitter was installed on the BCTV tower on Burnaby Mountain and a fresh hitch became apparent: there was no clear line of sight from the studios to the transmitter... The first programmes were pre-taped. The operator would take the tape, catch the Hastings bus out to Burnaby, go up to the transmitter shack at Simon Fraser University and broadcast the tapes from there.

New volunteers pay \$25 for the course or as most prefer, \$5 plus their guarantee of three contract hours of work with the station -- usually helping with the mail out of the station's program guide, Radio Waves. As part of the price they receive three well-produced staple-bound books: "Basic Equipment Manual", "From Beginner to Broadcaster", and "Behind the Mike".

A lot of care goes into the production of books and the course itself. The instructor I had when I took the course spoke competently about situations based on his own radio experience:

When you go to do the interview the first thing to do is to listen. Some kinds of noises can ruin your interview. Some noise, ambient sound we call it, can really add to your interview. Some noise you don't want like a fridge going on and off or some florescent lights. And never use a condensor mike, it doesn't approach broadcast quality.

Occasionally training workshops are organized for experienced volunteers who might want to brush up on certain skills. For instance, the news-writing workshop was organized by two public affairs volunteers who do the news for The Rational and America Latina Al Dia. Another was led by an experienced acoustic composer on advanced field recording methods. The volunteer co-ordinator is involved in helping to organize such events. Her priority however is new volunteers and their integration.

Other Media

The most striking aspect of programmers' relation with other media is the overwhelming reference made to the CBC. CBC radio figures in the discussions of public affairs volunteer in terms of career aspirations, programming decisions and what people listen to. In comparison, commercial radio provides almost a non-existent point of reference for programmers.

A number of committed station volunteers speak openly about career aspirations with CBC radio: "To me CBC's the beginning and the end of radio journalism. I'd be so happy to take a job there, even as a researcher."

Aspiring public affairs programmers are quick to point out the number of ex-volunteers who have gone on from the station to work with the CBC:

I keep hearing from people in the CBC who remember Co-op radio. And when CBC starts to do its hiring again, they look at Co-op just as much as B.C.I.T.

During my period of observation at least three volunteers produced items on a free-lance basis for the CBC. One of these free-lancers had only completed a basic skills training course with me three months prior to his CBC piece.

Even one long-time programmer who has no career intentions in radio, talked of his desire to produce a documentary piece of a high enough quality to be played on CBC radio's "Sunday Morning" or "Ideas". The principal comedy writer for Main and Hastings reflects on her future: "I'd like to work doing comedy with the CBC."

CBC programming serves as a point of comparison in discussions of standards at the station. At a Sunday meeting of Rat producers, for instance, when the discussion turned to saving taped pieces like a recent interview with the head of the Alberta Nurses Federation, the Wednesday producer said: "I think we should make a point of saving stuff. 'Morningside' does it and plays it all summer." The fact that her fellow producers were all familiar with "Morningside" as the CBC's national morning program is also telling.

One news-writer describing some of his best pieces commented to me, "It's not rare that we'll scoop the CBC or other media." The same contributor, in a post-mortem meeting, argued in favour of always extro'ing small musical interludes between interviews. Describing the success of one particular "stinger", as they're called, he mentioned the "coincidence" of CBC radio using the same stinger a few weeks after the Rat first used it. The volunteers chuckled at the thought.

Occasionally too a contributor uses the CBC as a negative reference point. One Wednesday evening I watched as the news reader anxiously awaited the news writer's appearance with news stories. The news reader said to me with a chuckle, "Oh, it'll all arrive at about 7:00 (the news is to be read at 7:02)" adding, "we don't do things like the CBC around here."

Still the greatest impact of the CBC might simply be that Co-op volunteers listen to it a great deal. According to the station's volunteer co-ordinator, "the CBC is the main competition for listeners." It might not be an exaggeration to put it the other way around, "when Co-op public affairs volunteers aren't listening to CBC radio they may tune into Co-op."

According to the station's volunteer co-ordinator, new volunteers when asked if they listen to Co-op respond in a surprisingly large number (any where from 30 - 50%) that they don't. My own observations indicate that most of the public affairs volunteers listen to the CBC.

At a Basic skills session when the instructor asked all the participants to listen to Co-op public affairs on Saturday morning a debate ensued over the timing. One of the volunteers said, "Saturday and Sunday I have the CBC on all day. 'Basic Black' is my favourite show." Another volunteer asked, "not 'Sunday Morning'?"

On another occasion I met a new volunteer who wanted my advice on what shows to listen to on the station. She explained, "I have to admit, I'm mostly a CBC listener."

Dedicated listeners to the station also have divided loyalties. At one point during the Marathon version of Redeye when one of the hosts described the

station as more interactive than other stations including the "state-controlled CBC", a member of the station who had already pledged called up again to complain about what she considered "CBC-bashing."

Audience

Public affairs programmers at the station know surprisingly little about their audience. Some react to this ignorance with frustration while others fill in the gap with their own conjecture about audience. A lot simply get on with the job, hoping that what they program is appreciated by someone.

For certain shows the knowledge about audience is almost entirely non-existent. The producer of Main and Hastings says:

I don't know who our audience is. Radical activist people with a sense of humour? There's no feedback. It's like pitching everything into the void.

Rather than admit they might be actually communicating with no one, the contributors to Main and Hastings have learned to accept the reassurances of staff about an extremely inflated audience:

P.S.: Does it bother you that you don't know who your audience is?
Producer: It did at first. Then Co-op had a survey through the Marathon. They estimated that there is a peak audience of 40,000. We estimated that there are about 15,000 people listening to us. So then we visualized 15,000 people in a large auditorium. 15,000 is a large audience.

Instead, programmers put a lot of weight on audience feedback whether in the form of letters or telephone calls.

The Main and Hastings contributors, for instance, remember the specifics of all the recent letters (3) and calls they've received:

Producer: Once an ex-council member called and said we were biased. Someone downstairs took the call and talked about free speech and managed to get her to renew her (station) membership.

P.S.: Any other calls?

Producer: The week before last someone else wanted a copy of a Reagan parody we did. It's difficult but we try to make copies.

Another incident in which I was directly involved indicates the infrequent nature of feedback for most volunteers.

The volunteer operator who monitors the live broadcast of City Hall on Tuesday afternoons said:

No, I don't get that many. Most of the calls I've got are people looking for other people at the station. Once a guy from West Vancouver called up and said he liked the music (played during council breaks). He was going to take a membership... I know that someone is listening.

In fact, I was downstairs that afternoon and took the call during my volunteer shift of answering phones (two months previous). I relayed the information to him by intercom. He'd forgotten my involvement but remembered the rare example of feedback he'd received on his musical selections.

Any "fan mail" or other comments about programming received in writing are posted by staff on a bulletin board at the end of the second floor hall. Usually one finds about a half dozen letters there. Some are spontaneous reactions to programming but many seem to come in response to station letters requesting membership renewal. Some are also generated by the Marathon or Autumn Airlift. The turnover of the fan-mail is slow -- the same letter may stay posted to the board for months.

An important forum for direct feedback are ticket giveaways on shows. Each public affairs show usually has two or more tickets given them by the funding co-ordinator for upcoming arts and entertainment events:

During a broadcast of Redeye, the two hosts announce during the calendar portion of the show that they have two tickets to give away to a Tools for Peace benefit. Calls come in quickly for the tickets in the control room but the hosts are not aware of this, until one of the

co-hosts during the next musical piece rushes in to see what happened to the tickets. The operator explains and she replies, "good, someone's listening."

During one broadcast of Radio Peace when one of the contributors arrived late she immediately asked the producer, how's the show going, adding, "are we doing a ticket give-away?" "Sure," replied the producer, "to see if anyone's listening."⁷

Another source for direct audience feedback is the calendar portion of public affairs shows. On a few of the shows, like Redeye, an on-air phone line is opened up to listeners for fifteen or twenty minutes. Callers are invited to phone in their announcements or respond to the "calendar question" on a current issue. This Redeye scene is typical:

At 10:30 Calendar starts. The co-hosts repeat the on-air number. One co-host invites callers to phone in with their announcements or to respond to the question: "What is your gut reaction to news that U.S. troops were sent to Honduras?"

Someone phones and the studio director taking the call in the control room asks the caller what they want to talk about and then puts them on hold. He signals the hosts that they have a call. As the listener gives his information on-air about an upcoming pro-choice rally, the studio director and the operator discuss how they recognise the caller by his voice.

After this call there is five minutes of no calls. The hosts read their own announcements and the operator comments, "It's dead today isn't it?" One of the hosts pleads with listeners to call in, joking, "we'll give you \$30!"

Eventually they receive a call by a man announcing an event at the LaQuena coffee house. The studio director says, "It's a familiar voice..." The operator responding, "Must be Scott from LaQuena." The studio director: "No, it's not Scott."

By the end of the twenty minutes a total of six people have called in, most towards the end of calendar. The operator comments,

⁷ In this case the ticket give-away was never announced in the rush to sort out a technical mistake. Later none of the volunteers seemed concerned about the oversight. Contributors received at least two other calls on an interview piece that night anyway.

"They always come in at the end. Our listeners are so together."

At the daily level of scrambling to put together shows, however, it seems clear that the greater emphasis is put on good relations between programmers than with audience. Programmers most often look to feed-back from their own collective members on their programming. Similarly programmers often give low-priority to specifically listener-oriented items. As the Radio Peace example shows, ticket giveaways are often neglected in the rush of events. Listener input in other ways is often neglected for organizational reasons as the following scene illustrates:

During the last minutes of Pigeon Park Review a listener calls to announce an upcoming performance of a new theatre piece in town. A volunteer with the show takes the information over the phone and hands it to the show's producer. He explains that they don't have time to include it in today's show so, "why don't you pass it on to The Rational?" The volunteer takes the announcement down the hall to the Rat Room. There he is informed by a Rat that the calendar of announcements is already typed up. They take the announcement but don't include it in their broadcast. They say they'll pass it on to the next Rational. A few days later the paper is among a pile of scrap paper in the Rat Room, still unannounced.

During fund-raising periods the audience is kept more in mind by programmers. The reason is apparent -- they need to capture the listeners' attention to get them to pledge. Special publications are distributed and planning workshops organized to instruct programmers on how they can best "reach the audience member where he or she is." At a pre-Marathon pitching workshop the following suggestion is made:

One way of doing this (getting listeners to cross over the line and actually give money) is to keep in mind where your audience is when you make the pitch (and) talk to them in that situation. Eg. if it's a dinner hour show, make reference to their dinner preparations.

All programmers seem convinced that the audience changes dramatically at different times during the day or week. The volunteer co-ordinator says: "there

may be some people who are Co-op Radio addicts but my sense is they're not the majority." Instead different people with different interests tune in for particular shows or types of shows. Volunteers thus describe the programming as 'horizontal' rather than 'vertical'.

Another basic "fact" of audience that volunteers seem to understand is that public affairs attracts a smaller number of listeners than the music programming. One Rat explained: "we have a very dedicated audience but it is small. Our jazz programs have a really big audience but we're the smallest, aside from some ethnic shows." Indeed, at a programming committee meeting at which volunteers were discussing pre-empting certain music shows for a specially produced series of documentaries, someone added ironically, "that lucky documentary is going to get lots of listeners." The others laughed in agreement.

An indication that people at the station are moving towards a greater concern with audience is the interest people express in some form of audience research. The volunteer co-ordinator at the station said:

Of course we'd like to better know who is listening, if we had the money to do it. But I'd be wary if it was targeted to commercial audiences. You'd have to see what minority listeners want... Sometimes you think 'Is anyone listening?'

A long-time volunteer shared similar thoughts in a conversation we had:

P.S.: What needs most study at the station?

Paul: The audience; who is our audience and what do they want from us.

P.S.: Why?

Paul: I believe we should reflect the community back to the community and do some community development in the process, to enhance life.

P.S.: Why do you think the mass medium of radio can do it better than say, a community baseball team?

Paul: We have better access; right into their living room. And if we do it well, we are a welcome guest.

For certain advocacy shows, the guest is not only welcome but seemingly an important connection with a community. One of the contributors to The Coming Out Show says:

A large part of our audience is rural. One reason why I know this is that people there might not have access to gay magazines, and may not want to have access to them for reasons of secrecy -- it's difficult to sneak around with a gay publication. But with radio there's no evidence. Also there's a lot of kids listening, I mean teenagers. No one will know, especially in the age of the walkman.

Backgrounds

One of the most noticeable aspect of programmers' backgrounds is the number of people without full-time, paid employment (most people are unemployed, unemployable, self-employed, or employed part-time). One programmer described his contribution to Union Made and the station in general, "it's a lot of work -- you've got to be unemployed full time." Another long-time programmer remarked that the ratio of employed to unemployed people at the station seemed to him to be, "50-50, many of the volunteers do it full time around here only there is no exchange of money."

Indeed, there is a small but important number of people at the station who through some circumstance or combination of circumstances (commonly: disability, single mother status, criminal record, etc), work full time at the station while collecting social assistance.

One of these is Bert, who spends the better part of each day in the Rat room fielding phone calls or preparing last-minute items that would otherwise go undone for the show. Bert also regularly operates in the studio on an emergency basis for some other contributor on the Rat or other shows. He relays messages.

He helps clean the back alleyway of Co-op garbage when the city calls and warns that it must be done right away. Bert also helps keep the aging Co-op equipment running -- attending to more of the daily technical foul-ups than the salaried engineer who is only at the station half-time. In short, he is an essential liaison person and general helper for most of the public affairs programs and the station as a whole.

Other key people seem to keep shows going. One of these is the frequent producer and almost continuous contact person for Redeye, Frances. She works flexible hours at home as a self-employed potter. Indeed, almost the entire Redeye collective shares a working flexibility that allows them time to dedicate to preparing the weekly program. Lee, the program's main arts contributor, is a visual artist who gets by on a combination of U.I.C., Canada Council grants and odd jobs. Tim, the oft-time studio director, moved for a long time among temporary and part-time jobs. Another contributor works part time as a language instructor. Only one or two of the collective members have full-time jobs. One of these is a full-time teacher who gets more involved with the show in the summer months when her schedule is more flexible.

Some of the contributors to Redeye, and other shows, are students at the universities or colleges in the area. Other volunteers to public affairs contribute marginally to programs until the point at which they choose or are forced to make a job change. During the interim period of a month or two (or more) they may devote themselves to almost full-time programming at the station.

Age-wise the majority of public affairs programmers are in their late twenties or thirties. It's difficult to construct an average because of the number of students who may be much younger, as well as a small number of

individuals with an important impact at the station who are in their forties or fifties.

A fairly broad range of class backgrounds are represented at the station. Although I didn't set out to compile a socio-economic profile of station personnel, if we are to consider the main components of status, that is, education, income and occupation, one would observe quite a bit of variance in the last two variables, although almost all participants in public affairs at least share a high level of education. Most programmers have some university education. In this sense one might conclude slight bias in terms of middle to upper class backgrounds. Politically, however, a bias towards working class and left-wing sentiments is obvious.

A lot of the programmers share a strongly developed political background. I discussed with one programmer how he became involved with the station:

Karl: The Rational was falling apart. A lot of people working on the show didn't have much experience.

P.S.: How so?

Karl: Little political sophistication. A lot of people had fairly narrow interests, like they might just be interested in environmental things. I had lots of political experience and worked on papers in the past.

P.S.: What newspapers?

Karl: Like I was talking about earlier. I worked on the split off from The Georgia Straight, The Grape. Later it became The Western Voice, an explicitly socialist paper.

P.S.: Were you paid?

Karl: No, not paid.

P.S.: What sort of political movements were you involved in?

Karl: One group was called 'In Struggle', marxist-leninist -- we organized monthly around issues, trade union stuff.

Although, as Karl claims, his viewpoints have moderated from earlier days, he does represent an extreme political point of view at the station. There is little problem with such a background from the perspective of other volunteers. Indeed, for a majority of shows this sort of activist background is welcomed.

One of the Union Made contributors has been involved with the B.C. Teachers Federation and was a shop steward for CUPE. All the programmers of "Main and Hastings", a satire of living conditions in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver, have been involved in the activist politics around the Carnegie Centre and the Downtown Eastside Residents' Association.

There is some debate at the station about whether people with a less political background are denied access.

Val is a young Chinese-Canadian student, very eager to get involved. She contacted the Radio Peace collective one week explaining her interest in the show and her willingness to contribute. Darlene, the producer that week, suggested that Val attend a conference on Central America at U.B.C. and set up an interview with one of the conference speakers. Val attended the conference and arranged an interview with a UBC professor. He however cancelled out shortly before the show was to go on air. Darlene, needing to fill the allotted time, persuaded Val to herself be interviewed about the conference. This is a practice often carried out in emergencies, although it's predicated on the fact that the volunteer is knowledgeable about the subject area. Darlene simply assumed that Val was equally political and conversant about Central American politics.

As the show started however it became clear that Val was very nervous -- she had never been interviewed before -- and went into the studio with a small pile of disorganized notes. Darlene, busy with last minute show preparations as host, had not felt her out on the subject beforehand.

During the interview Val came across as confused and unknowledgeable. She would race through her notes before responding tentatively to questions. At

about eight minutes into the interview the show's producer came into the control room and listened -- the other three or four contributors had been chatting among themselves and not paying attention. The producer says, "She doesn't quite know what she's talking about does she?" The operator replies, "I don't know." The producer signs to Darlene to wrap up the interview. The interview ends and Val rushes out crying in her embarrassment, not to be seen again at the station that night. Darlene comes out quietly behind her.

Later in the post-mortem the subject turned to the disastrous interview. Darlene says, "Val is probably in tears... I feel like the Wicked Witch of the West!" The producer says, "I think she had a bit of trouble speaking," and Darlene replies, "if only I'd known she was less politically informed."

The post-script to the Radio Peace episode comes a few weeks later when Val tried again to integrate herself into a program collective -- this time, that of Redeye. Again she was initially openly welcomed. This time, however, the veteran producer, Frances, took Val under her wing, assigning her simple tasks for her first show -- helping to read the newscasts. Unfortunately Val didn't show up next week.

Staff

In terms of background, staff are mostly young, well educated, previously underemployed and politically involved. They do not represent any racial or ethnic minority. A surprising aspect of their background is a lack of radio experience per se.

None of the full-time staff at the station have training in radio. Nor do they have much experience. The funding co-ordinator is typical:

I only learned radio two months before I started here... The second day on the job I was asked to put on music because there was no one upstairs (in the studio). I didn't know how. I learned it all as a volunteer.

In fact, the only staff member with any professional radio experience is the half-time engineer who started out doing radio technical operations in the 1960's with a local commercial station. His attitude toward work at the station, however, is more transitory than the others, "I won't be here for too long," he says openly and good-humouredly, "I'm filling in an open spot in my life."³

The volunteer co-ordinator has some radio experience. After leaving her native country of South Africa, she worked with the African National Congress' "Radio Freedom" in Tanzania. She had a fairly minor programming role, "reading in Afrikaans and English anti-conscription messages. Telling South Africans how they could avoid being signed up." She came to Canada as a political refugee subsequently.

Such a background of political involvement is common among staff, although not to the same international degree. The accountant, who's been on staff at the station far longer than any other -- thirteen years -- is active in a local refugee-assistance group. The funding co-ordinator is occasionally kidded by the Radio Waves editor about her radical background -- she once ran as a socialist for the Vancouver School Board. Meanwhile the editor herself has an involvement with feminist causes, and has worked on a local feminist publication.

The part-time commissioned salesperson for Radio Waves is also politically active. And although the salesperson for station sponsorships is not, they both share a commitment to the station's survival.

³ By time of writing the engineer had given notice. He had found a better position elsewhere.

The Station as a Whole

Governance: Formal Structures and Informal Core Group

Formal power structures are clearly set out at the station. There are parallel ways for getting things done, however, which operate in conjunction with these.

"Behind the Mike" isolates four decision-making bodies at the station: board, committees, staff and volunteer assembly.

A nine-member board of directors elected at the annual general meeting meets once a month and makes all final decisions effecting the station. Board members, staff and non-elected volunteers at the station take part in a series of non-elected committees which according to the handbook, "deal with the day to day nitty gritty of Co-op Radio life and report back to the board at each meeting."⁹ During my observation period the following committees met regularly: Programming, Volunteer, Finance, Fundraising, Engineering, and the Radio Waves sub-committee.

Staff are composed of four full-time positions: volunteer co-ordinator; program co-ordinator; administrative co-ordinator/fund-raiser; and an accountant. The half-time engineer seldom takes part in staff decisions -- never attending weekly staff meetings for instance.

The introductory handbook also describes a fourth decision-making body, the Volunteer assembly which is supposed to meet quarterly and advise the board on volunteer concerns. Although my contact with the station ranged over eight months I saw no evidence of such an assembly except for a party for volunteers planned by a group within the volunteer committee.

⁹ Page 13 of "Behind the Mike".

There is a relatively small group of individuals, almost entirely active programmers in a few key public affairs shows like Redeye and The Rational as well as staff who are repeatedly involved in formal and informal decision-making bodies of the station. Some of these people are ex-staffers at the station, while most of them have a fairly long involvement as volunteers. The core group is flexible and dynamic, it certainly has no deliberate cohesiveness or special agenda for the station.

If we examine, for instance, composition of the station's board of director's we discover two members who are active contributors to Redeye. Two Rat contributors hold board positions, and two other members of the board help produce Union Made and "Women Do This Everyday", the feminist show at the station. Although music programming makes up the bulk of air time, only two music programmers are represented on the board. Another member of the board produces an ethnic program at the station.

Membership on committees is also dominated by a small group of public affairs people, often the same as on the board. Redeye contributors are on four of the station committees, including the powerful programming committee which decides what programs make it on air and, in special circumstances, what programming is unacceptable. Rat volunteers play an active role in three committees.

Similarly, if we consider the degree of involvement among board and committee members we discover a higher rate of participation by the core. These are the people more likely to attend all meetings, stay longer and volunteer for extra duties, eg. special task forces. Typically, board and committee members representing music or ethnic programming show up for meetings on time and

leave when the meeting is supposed to end whether it is finished or not (almost always not). At one long programming committee meeting the Chinese-language programmer and the music programmer left, leaving the core group and staff to deal with the major decisions of the evening. The sole remaining music programmer was the sleepy host in whose apartment the meeting was being held. He, however, excused himself when the rest adjourned to a nearby bar to discuss station politics for an hour or so more.

Newer volunteers to the station are often quick to sense the existence of a core group carrying out much of the day to day power. Many, like the following, do not see it as undemocratic so much as inevitable:

P.S.: Are there cliques at the station?

Mark: Yes, I think so.

P.S.: Do you ever feel left out?

Mark: I feel a bit left out.

P.S.: How?

Mark: Because I'm not a programmer and I'm not politically active. I'm probably not around enough to be part of it.

P.S.: Do other volunteers feel this way?

Mark: I'm not sure. Having worked on a kibbutz, though, I know that people don't get involved with others emotionally until people make a commitment.

There are a number of genuinely likeable, highly capable and dominant personalities at the station. These people are especially likely to be found among the core group and often from the Redeye collective. These people are not particularly strident or dominating at meetings, yet their word seems to carry a special weight -- often because they have shown a long-term commitment to the station already.

Also, staff play a significantly greater role than their formal job requirements would suggest. According to "Behind the Mike", the accountant is responsible for keeping track of income and expenses and reporting the financial

situation of the station to the board. The fundraiser takes care of grants and project applications, co-ordinates fundraising campaigns, and develops membership structures and membership drives. The program co-ordinator is responsible for day-to-day programming operations. This includes developing new programming in co-operation with the programming committee of which he is a member. The volunteer co-ordinator's role is to recruit, train and integrate new volunteers.¹⁰ In fact, the staff do much more than this.

Staff meet weekly to define staff positions and various issues at the station. Their point of view is well considered by other groups at the station, partially due to the high esteem and confidence they have earned in carrying out their jobs.

Staff attend board meetings where they are invited to speak on all matters concerning the station. They have no vote but their opinions carry a lot of weight since they end up administering most of the board's decisions.

Staff are the dominant members -- sometimes in practice the only members -- of committees. Volunteer members change frequently, board representatives on the committees rarely extend beyond a year, while staff members continue over a number of years. And since almost all decision-making is done by consensus (with the exception of a few highly contested decisions at the programming committee), staff play a major role in actual decisions. When the committee meetings are small -- commonly consisting of a couple of staff and one board representative -- staff effectively have a majority say.

Most of my observations of committee work focus on the work of the volunteer committee. Committee meetings and tasks were almost entirely

¹⁰ Pp. 14-15, "Behind the Mike".

co-ordinated by the volunteer co-ordinator. She phoned committee members to remind them of upcoming meetings, and she inevitably reminded people of the various duties to which they had committed themselves, such as minute preparation. Indeed, it was her personal impetus that created the committee in the first place:

Basically we didn't have anything before I came on staff in 1987. There were attempts to set up a volunteer committee but without a staff person it didn't work.

Money

Money, or more precisely, the lack of it, plays an important role in the preoccupation of people at the station.

During the few months of my full-time observation, the station lurched through a series of fairly significant financial crises. An annual crisis, especially in the late winter, is a chronic cash shortage ameliorated only after pledged money from the April Marathon begins flowing in.

The annual cash flow problem was augmented this year by a significant drop in sponsorship revenue provided by the Chinese language program, "Morning Voice". A competitive Chinese language program had started up on a local commercial station. Estimates of lost revenue monthly were between \$1000 and \$2000 -- adding up significantly in an annual budget of \$200,000.00. Furthermore, an expected annual Canada Council Grant for \$18,000.00 for one of the station's experimental music programs was renewed for only \$13,000.00. Still, the crisis that seemed to play the most dramatic role during my observation period occurred in March when the City of Vancouver's Social Planning Committee sent a letter to the station explaining their recommendation to City Council to cancel a yearly grant of \$5000.00.

Within days of the letter staff and volunteers at the station were organized to fight the cancellation. Staff, especially the fundraiser and volunteer co-ordinator, mobilized quickly, drafting a letter of reply which listed support garnered from various community, ethnic and cultural organizations (whose letters of support were conveniently on hand to support the station's licence renewal). The volunteer co-ordinator took on the job of lobbying each city alderman separately, as well as meeting with the mayor the Monday morning before the Council's decision-making Tuesday meeting. Meanwhile a PSA had been prepared and placed conspicuously in the station's main studio. Programmers over the weekend read out the announcement calling on listeners to call their alderman in support of the \$5000 grant.

On Tuesday Council met and decided to reinstate the grant but at half the level of support, \$2500. Within the week word spread through the station of the outcome. At the next board meeting the fundraiser reported:

Yeah it was a cut, but considering the Social Planning Committee proposed we get no grant we think it's a victory... We have to prove that we are a professional cultural organization. (The council members wanted to know) things like audience statistics, interaction with arts groups. The lesson is, keep in touch with the Social Planning Committee members.

One day early in my observation period I noticed the activity of the program co-ordinator preparing a grant application for "Environment Week '88". He put a considerable amount of effort in the proposal to Environment Canada for funds to support programming during the last week of May. Part of that preparation included discussing his proposal with the funding co-ordinator on the day the application was due. For her part, the funding co-ordinator responded enthusiastically when shown the proposal. "Short and sweet," she said, "that's good. They don't want to read through a lot of crap." Later, once she had

looked at it fully she added, "you're a grant writer!" The conversation continued on these lines with the funding co-ordinator sharing her idea of pursuing Federal monies through the "Challenge" program to enable the station to employ young native programmers over the summer months. The funding co-ordinator wasn't sure whether to pursue Challenge or a provincial employment program called "Job Track". The program co-ordinator said, "It would be better to do it with Challenge '88." The fundraiser agreed, "They (the Challenge people) don't check much and they give \$20 a week (for project-related expenses)." The final reference to expenses is important.

It's understood generally by those applying for grants that while grant money is almost always targeted for specific projects, e.g. the \$2200 eventually received from Environment Canada is for the production of environmental programming, much of the monies are expected to make their way back to the station's general operating budget. Another grant situation provides details on how this process works.

A long-time volunteer (also ex-staff) applied successfully for a grant to participate in National Book Week in April. In his application for funds, the volunteer budgeted for the following items: equipment rental, \$425; studio rental, \$700; and tape supplies, \$300. The first two items would be rented directly from the station, thus being plowed into general revenues, and much of the tape would end up being recycled for general show use.

Other expense money received through grants, like the \$20/week from Challenge is often used to provide equipment for specific projects which is then used in perpetuity by the station, eg. tape decks. The station's second computer was purchased as necessary equipment for six people employed at the station

making documentaries through the provincial government's Job Track program. It's all "above board", and it all adds up in helping the station acquire the extras that other radio stations might take for granted.

Yet for all the effort that goes into procuring grants they still don't add a considerable amount to the money needed to pay rent and salaries, etc. "We don't get much cream from grants," laments the station accountant. The real source for general revenues is the membership itself.

According to the projected budget, the station receives just over half of all income through membership fees and donations -- \$110,000 of \$203,000. The resources devoted at the station to tapping the membership reflect this priority. A majority of the accountant's time goes to handling membership donations, reminding people of pledges made but not yet paid, and issuing tax receipts. All staff are preoccupied during the funding drive periods and shortly before, putting themselves and and volunteers in a situation where they can effectively solicit funds over the air and otherwise.¹¹ The preparatory meetings for these periods are likely to draw programmers rarely seen together at the station. The social atmosphere adds to the contagion of fund-raising.

But as the upper limit of pledges and donations seems to have been reached in recent years, the station has looked increasingly at other possible sources of income. Each time they stray farther from the membership funding base, however, controversy is likely to erupt.

Station staff and volunteers are very conscious of their non-commercial role. While the station is prohibited by the CRTC from:

¹¹ Often volunteers are set up calling lapsed members who might not be listening during the pledge periods.

us(ing) language which attempts to persuade... refer to convenience, durability, desirability or make comparative or competitive references,¹²

station members will also add that they go much further, that station policy is even more strictly non-commercial than prescribed by the CRTC. Sponsorship messages make no mention of price, and are run far less often than the CRTC allowable four minutes per hour. Indeed, almost all the public affairs shows have no commercial messages at all. There is, however, one important exception to this principle.

Examining the proposed budget we see that just over \$63,000 of the station's total budget is expected from sponsorships. "Morning Voice" on its own provides over \$53,000 of that amount -- or approximately one quarter of all station revenues. So that while public affairs sponsorships remain chastely non-commercial, as the following example from Redeye suggests:

We would like to recognise the regular financial support of the CU & C Health Services Society. CU & C offers complete wage indemnity and health benefits service to employee groups. They are located at 8th Avenue and can be reached by phoning 879-5711,

Morning Voice sponsorships ignore station, if not CRTC, guidelines:

The Cake Master is now celebrating its 7th anniversary with fresh cream and fresh strawberry cakes, the eight inch ones are now priced at \$9.99. Cake Master is offering a 20% discount for other sizes as well, including wedding and birthday cakes, etc.

Indeed the Chinese-Canadian student who works part-time selling the station sponsorships, is unaware of the excruciating debates by successive boards over the exact meaning of non-commercialism:

P.S.: Can you give me an example of a sponsorship message?

Salesperson: Yes. Like a grocery has something for sale, "apples are twenty-five cents a pound, the store is located..."

P.S.: Are there any sponsorships like, "This show is brought to you by so and so"?

¹² Abbreviated form of CRTC non-commercial regulations on all copies of sponsorship contracts.

Salesperson: No show sponsorships. It's too commercial. I don't know if it's regulated by the CRTC or the Board of Directors here at the station.

Perhaps it's economic necessity that causes the board to turn a blind eye to this transgression. It may be language barriers -- since the translations of these sponsorships are only available in one file in the accountant's office. Nonetheless, the board expressed satisfaction with the salesperson who managed to minimise Morning Voice's expected revenue shortfall this year. Moreover, when one board member at a meeting of the finance committee raised the danger of increased commercialism at the station, there were plenty to defend the Morning Voice situation. There may be cultural differences, argued the staff accountant, that makes the program's commercialism more acceptable to the Chinese listener. The concerned board member replied, "Go and listen to Vera (a local Chinese-Canadian) of DERA (the Downtown Eastside Residents' Association). She quit listening because it is too commercial." The fund-raiser headed off confrontation by reminding the board member that the station is still more strict on its anti-commercial guidelines than required, adding: "it's a question of how the station is to make money in times of financial difficulty." The same argument seems to lay to rest the other current area of controversy: Casinos.

At a point early in my observation the funding co-ordinator learned that the province had lifted its freeze on casino licenses and was calling on non-profit groups to register if they wished to make money through this means. Casinos quickly became a hot topic of discussion among staff, volunteers and the board. People seemed evenly split on the issue with those opposed arguing that casinos made their money off the poor in an unjust manner and that the station should not lend itself to such money-raising practices. Those in favour argued, as the fund-raiser did at one board meeting:

In a perfect world it would be nice not to have to do it. But in B.C. as it is now we have little choice. We have to have recommendations for how to make money. I find as a fund-raiser it's very difficult. We fall between the cracks.

Eventually the board decided in favour of pursuing the option in the short term.

The money crunch also has an interesting effect on audience relations in a direct way. In an effort to trim expenses, for instance, a proposal was made by staff to cut down on the frequency of "Radio Waves", the station's program guide, from monthly to bi-monthly. Although some people raised concerns about cutting back on one of the direct means of communication with members, the money argument carried the day. This is not surprising perhaps given the \$2000 subsidy per issue that Radio Waves costs to produce and mail out.

If, however, a lessening of Radio Wave's frequency suggests a lessening commitment to serving the audience/membership, another proposal to upgrade the third floor studios seems to represent a commitment to sound quality and the listener. An extra-ordinary meeting of the board was called to discuss the proposal which involved \$5600 to renovate two existing studios and build a third.

Intra-station Communication

It would only be a small exaggeration to claim that more time, effort and money go directly into maintaining communication within the station, than go into enhancing the station as a mass medium. Certainly co-ordinating communication among station personnel is one of the key if not single most important roles for staff at the station. There is a small cottage industry of sorts within the station producing documents, memos, pamphlets, hand-outs, etc.

No new volunteer at the station could complain that he or she suffers from a lack of written introductory material. As well as "Behind the Mike" and other

station publications I've discussed above, the new volunteer has pressed upon him or her over a dozen one or two page photocopied pamphlets separately explain details of station life from answering phones ("Answering the Call"), to the importance of identifying your taped pieces ("Tape Labelling"), to station cleaning ("The Big Sweep, Station Clean-up"). These introductory pamphlets are important enough to the station to have hired a student over the summer of 1986 to complete them.

Were the volunteer to read all this material, as well as the material put out by some shows on their own methods, eg. Redeye's introduction to script-writing, she might be two or three months before she even approached a show. As it turns out, few volunteers read much of the material. They learn to conduct an interview at a basic skills course or by actually doing it once or twice for a program. A volunteer may be given "Answering the Call" by the volunteer instructor but is unlikely to get through the three pages of text before he starts actually answering the calls. He's likely to ask a staff person to explain the 'hold' button long before he gets to page two. A similar situation exists with memoranda.

Memos appear around the station on almost a daily basis -- memos warning people of the approaching deadline for Radio Waves copy; memos asking for programmers' co-operation for special programming (IWD, Africa Day, Environment Week, etc.); memos warning volunteers about new equipment. These pieces of paper appear in show mail boxes on the third floor, on bulletin boards, or in stairwells. Most are ignored.

There is little time for the volunteer collecting Union Made's mail, for example, to convey all the announcements to the various volunteers with the

show. The long-time volunteer who organized the station's participation in

"National Book Week" says:

The problem with memos and posters (are that they) also require the ability to read. For my work on the Book Week I know that memos would be useless. One to one personal contact is essential here.

Others argue that posters should not be dismissed entirely. "I just made a sign for the (field-recording) workshop and fifty people signed up," says the volunteer co-ordinator, adding, "but I still believe the most effective tool is still personal contact on the phone."

Indeed a surprising number of people rarely attend meetings or other events at the station unless they are personally contacted by the staff person or volunteer organizing the event. Throughout the day at the station one hears conversations between staff and volunteers peppered with, "By the way, did you know about the meeting on Friday?"

The volunteer newsletter, published sporadically throughout the year, constitutes a major part of the sub-industry of written communications at the station. The newsletter is produced by members of the volunteer committee, consisting largely of a round-up of station news, committee reports, policy updates and helpful hints. Most of the material is gathered by staff, although occasionally volunteers use it as forum for feedback on issues of concern. One case of this occurred in relation to the station's new smoking policy. A programmer with the "Armenian Variety Show" wrote in the February 1988 edition: "Could you revise the notice entitled 'Smoking Policy' and include a description of where those two (permitted smoking) areas actually are?"

The communication sub-industry goes into high gear come marathon and autumn airlift. Weeks before the start of Marathon a sheet of "Helpful Pitching

Hints" was produced and distributed to programmers. Staff took it upon themselves to re-vamp the old pitching sheets into a new, colourful "Pitching Booklet" of over twenty pages. The funding co-ordinator set herself up at producing a daily bulletin "Hotwire" for the duration of the Marathon itself. The bulletin consisted of a mixture of pep talk and pitching hints. For example, an item from the "Hotwire" for the fourth day reported:

Women Do This Everyday, Monday evening's women's public affairs program raised about \$1000 (that's 40 pledges). When asked how they did it, Eileen, one of the show's programmers, told us: "We all worked really hard at getting pre-pledges, which gave us the encouragement to try for another 10. Our pitching strategy; short, frequent pitches over continuous music. We broke the \$17,000 mark during our show, we were ecstatic."

Often though, individuals and groups at the station --especially those outside the core group -- remain uninformed about important station activities. These are likely to be the people with little personal contact with staff. Fast-developing crises within the station, as in the following case involving a piece of stolen equipment, seem particularly outside most people's awareness:

Nick, the Redeye operator, goes into the program co-ordinator's office. They start to discuss an upcoming engineering committee meeting. Nick then mentions that the tape deck is missing from the dub mix closet. The program co-ordinator explains that it'll take a while to replace it, "well the first thing we're waiting for is the insurance company." Until that time, he says, people wanting to dub tapes will have to take a deck from one of the control rooms, "this will work for the people who know (that they can do this)." To which Nick replies, "well, how many people know?" The program co-ordinator says, "as many as well..." Nick interrupts, "five or ten?" and laughs ironically.

Extra-station Communication

Extra-station communication, like communication within the station, creates its own cottage industry among staff and volunteers.¹³ There are three main

¹³ In this section I'm excluding the actual broadcasts from extra-station communication.

aspects of extra-station communication: 1) non-broadcast communication with members; 2) non-broadcast direct communication with specific communities; and 3) the leadership role of the station in community radio lobbying organizations.

Each day staff and volunteers received numerous general inquiries from people calling the station. Rather than devote large chunks of staff or volunteer programmers' time to dealing with all these enquires over the telephone, people reached for the pads of "Programme Guide Request Forms" found by the station's phones and filled out the caller's name and address -- giving these sheets to the accountant who entered them into a computer stored mailing list. Callers receive a free copy of Radio Waves the following month.

The guide is also used in matters of governance or recruitment. Committees or programs looking for new volunteers frequently rely on Radio Waves when time didn't allow for more direct volunteer recruitment. I attended a number of meetings where committees looking for members but restricted in their energies recruited through the pages of the program guide.¹⁴

And of course Radio Waves serves its main purpose: to guide programmers through the array of programs available. Many of the volunteers and staff I spoke to assumed listeners listen to the station as they do; program guide in hand so as to avoid the shows of little interest or tune in for particular programs of interest.

In the area of programming information, Radio Waves is supplemented at particular times of special events programming. During the Marathon and Autumn Airlift special flyers may be produced and distributed detailing special

¹⁴The success using the guide is lower. Like intra-station communication, most people recognise personal contact as most effective.

programming like "Africa Day" for example. Similarly with Environment Week, IWD or National Book Week special publicity may be aimed at special communities of activists, women or artists around the city, which leads us into the second feature of extra-station communication.

Particular programs maintain direct non-broadcast communication with their community of interest. The "Coming Out Show", for instance, makes use of one of the collective member's MacIntosh computer to "produce a little poster for central points, like gay clubs." The poster is up-dated and distributed monthly.

During funding drives direct extra-station communication becomes an important factor. At one Marathon planning meeting someone suggested sending out a station-wide press release to community newspapers telling them of special programming during the funding week. The idea was turned down in favour of individual programs taking on the responsibility. Around the same time staff discussed a station-wide appeal for group memberships to "friendly" organizations. Special consideration was given, however, to Union Made programmers who were sending out their own letter seeking support from members of the Vancouver and District Labour Council.

On occasions of special programming extra-station communication conveys a sense of station which may vary slightly depending on the perceived audience.

In the station's "Letter to B.C. Women and Women's Groups" as part of pre-IWD planning, the station's role as media alternative in a political sense was stressed:

We are a listener-supported community radio station broadcasting a variety of programs designed to appeal to particular communities not generally served by any other media.

Whereas in the proposal to the National Book Festival organizers, the station's

artistic role got a higher billing: "We broadcast in Vancouver from our studios at Carroll and Hastings, the heart of the arts community."

In a letter to City Council protesting the termination of a grant, the emphasis was again slightly different: "the *unique* contribution Vancouver Co-operative Radio makes to the arts/cultural and multi-cultural community."

On the whole, the letters represent a concern voiced by one long-time programmer about the need for the station to continually re-communicate its distinctive role in the radio environment so that the general public doesn't confuse its role with that of commercial or publicly-funded radio.

The final aspect of extra-communication is the leadership role the station takes on behalf of the entire community radio movement both in Canada and abroad. The station is a long-time and leading member in the National Campus and Community Radio Association (NCRA). During my observation period, the station's funding co-ordinator was the active president of NCRA -- spending a good deal of time on the telephone with member campus stations across the country. In the Association's February newsletter, the station itself was more highly featured than any other station. In an article called, "The letter from the prez" the station's upcoming license renewal hearing was featured as was a recent federal Department of Communications report written by two ex-station staffers. In "Station to station", news of on-going Co-op activities is shared along with the happenings of nine others community stations.

A number of Co-op's staff and volunteers are also involved in the international association of community broadcasters known by its French acronym, AMARC.¹⁵ In 1986 the station hosted AMARC II, the association's second world

¹⁵ Association mondiale des radiodiffuseurs communautaires.

conference. During my observation period the former program co-ordinator at the station travelled to Managua, Nicaragua -- site of AMARC III -- to play the role of main organizer there. At the station itself the offices and some volunteers of Radio Waves were used to create much of the promotional material for the conference including the conference magazine, "InterRadio."

CHAPTER IV

CMRL: ETHNOGRAPHY OF A PRIVATELY-OWNED RADIO STATION

The big misconception people have about the job is that they think reporters are high profile -- big money and no work. It's not true.¹

News Reporters

In the newsroom, reporters see themselves as set apart from other CMRL workers even though there is little outward sign of any organization among themselves in an occupational or even social sense. Reporters at CMRL exercise very little control over their working conditions.

Salaries

Pay for reporters at CMRL is not high. Full-time reporters start at \$12,000.00 per year, or about \$7.00 per hour. One of the most experienced reporters, with a long connection with CMRL gets \$27,000 per year, "probably close to the top salary in the newsroom, except for the news director." I received in interviews information on six of the reporters at the station. They distribute as illustrated in the following table.

¹CMRL reporter.

TABLE 1
CMRL REPORTERS: TYPICAL RATES OF PAY

<u>Reporter</u>	<u>Status</u>	<u>Gross Earnings</u>
A	Beat; Starting full-time	\$12,000/yr
B	Desk; One year experience	\$13,500/yr
C	Desk; Sports experience	\$15,000/yr
D	Beat; Two and half years	\$19,200/yr
E	Desk; Over five years	\$20,400/yr
F	Desk; Senior reporter	\$27,000/yr

Reporters themselves have little say over pay and seniority. One of the junior reporters explained how she worked for almost a year at the base rate of \$12,000.² When she could see no raise being offered, she approached the news director who said he'd 'go to bat' for her. When still nothing happened she went directly to the general manager herself and said simply, "I want a raise." Even with the raise, and a husband who works, she continues to work part time at a drug store (at a much higher rate of pay) in order to supplement her income.

A reporter's pay has a lot to do with his or her ability to "market" him or herself. Another young reporter represents a common form of job entry. She had been working part time with CMRL and then over the summer on a federal employment grant. When the grant ran out it seemed that so too would the job. Then a competing station offered her a job. As the reporter put it, "it worked to my favour... so much of it is being in the right place at the right time."

CMRL reporters are also engaged in piece work to a degree. As a part of the arrangement with the newsroom's main wire service, Broadcast News, reporters are paid \$5 for each story they phone in to the service. In October 1987 there were 107 stories filed.³ Reporters keep copies of their stories and then are paid through the news director at the end of the month.

Although reporters tend to treat the BN arrangement jovially there are indications that the extra money is significant to individuals. One evening a student reporter was helping to fill in during a busy period. She filed a story over the phone on developments in the postal strike. Because she was unfamiliar

²This rate is not set in stone. Another reporter started around the same time at \$14,000.

³Slightly higher than average due to the Commonwealth Conference in B.C. that month.

with the BN arrangement one of the desk reporters phoned the local BN office to pass the story along. Before the call he checked with the other 'desker', asking whether he should credit it to the student or take the \$5 himself. "Steal it!" the desker half jokingly calls across the newsroom. After which they both looked sheepishly at me.

The news director himself engages in a form of extra piece work. Each day before 1 p.m. he prepares a summary of local news and weather which he then voices on tape, and then sends over a long distance phone line to a Palm Springs radio station (to serve the large community of Canadians enjoying the milder weather there). For this service the news director is paid directly. The benefit to the station, apparently, is the publicity for CMRL.

Deskiers

The desk reporters or deskiers (they are hardly ever referred to as "news editors", their official title at CMRL) spend most of their time preparing newscasts which they themselves read over the air (usually on the hour). A large part of the time consists of "carting the feed". This job involves recording short news reports or segments of interviews from regularly scheduled reports over the audio component of the wire service for use on CMRL's own newscasts. About the same amount of time is spent re-writing stories ripped from the wire service or re-writing introductions to the carts. Just about every hour during the day, less often at night, deskiers will get a phone call from one of the beat reporters out in the field. The desker records the report on cart in the same manner as the wire clips. The beat reporter then dictates an introduction which the desker types up.

Desking involves mastery of the recording techniques. This is quite easily learned in a few hours; it does not involve much craftsmanship after that. Re-writing the wire stories requires more skill.

Some reporters take great pride in re-writing the stories so that they bear a personal flair. For the most part, however, re-writing is fairly routine. In some cases it is not even done. For instance, one evening during the postal strike, I noticed the deskier prepare to read the newscast with all the stories re-written save for the wire copy story on the strike. When the reporter saw my eye dwelling on that story, she explained, unsolicited, "I'm sick of it."

Most deskiers make no attempt to re-write sports stories which come over the wire. During the evening there isn't a separate sportscast, the deskier reads the sports directly from the wire at the end of her or his newscast. Often what they will do is improvise a somewhat personalised or "colloquialized" version of the wire copy.

Some of the reporters take great pride in their reading skills. One of the senior reporters listed reading as one of the characteristics of a professional news presenter: "due regard for matters of proper English." Many of the reporters are quick to correct other station workers on their mispronunciation of newsmakers' names.

Apart from ripping, writing, recording and reading, the deskier's eight hour shift is filled with a series of "house-keeping" tasks. Changing ribbons on the printer as well as stocking it with new rolls of canary yellow paper; cutting clippings from local newspapers, which are kept in "background files"; updating these files which most often involves phone calls to places like the law courts to see if trial dates are upcoming; and general tidying up -- throwing out old

wire copy that has a way of accumulating under one's feet, bulk erasing carts, putting them back in their place -- all these constitute some of the mundane but necessary tasks in the newsroom. Handling phone calls is another task common to the shift, especially to those on the evening and weekend shifts, once the receptionist has gone home. A good example of the latter is reading out the winning numbers for lotteries to interested callers.

Beat Reporters

About half the CMRL reporters work the beat or some combination of beat and desk. One reporter, for example works Wednesday, Thursday and Friday on the beat and does two desk shifts on the weekend.

Actually, to describe the work done by reporters in shifts outside the station as a beat is a misnomer. There are no individual areas of specialized reporting. Except for one reporter who devotes a small amount of her time to entertainment industry issues, beat reporters are as highly interchangeable as the deskers. All reporters do all beats, which at CMRL consists mainly of: the law courts; police briefings; municipal councils, boards and committees; and various press conferences and political conventions.

Working Conditions: Deskers and Beat Reporters

The physical conditions of the desker's work does not allow for much privacy. Work stations are not separated by walls or partitions. All five are easily visible by the news director, whose office is located behind a glass wall at the far end of the newsroom. The newsroom is located between the on-air studios of CMRL; it is home to a lot of traffic by almost all station personnel.

In the evening and on weekends when most of the personnel have gone home and the news director's office is dark, the newsroom takes on a more light-hearted, casual atmosphere. The TV, usually tuned to the Cable News Network (CNN) channel, is switched irreverently to an American situation comedy or the video channel. Various non-news personnel -- producers working late, or a sports announcer -- stop by for lengthy chats.

Generally though, the newsroom has a tense, hectic feel compounded by the noise of wire service printers, feeds being taped, and the police and fire radio monitor. This last source of noise, referred to as the "scanner", consists of a radio component the size of a record turntable. Its front is covered with two rows of buttons which light up as different frequencies are used by the police or fire departments in their communications. As the scanner locks on to a frequency it gives a burst of static and then the message. Sometimes the messages are preceded by a loud tone (to indicate importance).

Although in conversation the deskers refer to the scanner as an important source for fast-breaking news, there is little evidence of its use. At a practical level, reporters seem to ignore it as a noisy backdrop. One afternoon as the young beat reporter prepared to cover an event he heard something of interest on the scanner. Immediately he brought it to the attention of one of the deskers who replied, "Huh?" listened for a moment, and then dismissed it saying, "I tend to tune that thing out, I don't hear it."

At the station, beat reporters share the same working conditions as deskers. They don't have individual, permanent desks; they stake out whatever work station they need on a daily basis. They tend to spend more time in the "news booth", a small 1.5 by 4 metres room adjacent to the newsroom itself. There

they edit voice clips and voice their reports. On occasions the booth will get quite hot. It's not uncommon to see the door jarred open with a nearby potted plant, thus reducing any respite from the newsroom noise that it may have previously afforded. Still it provides a degree of privacy not available in the newsroom itself.

On the beat, CMRL reporters generally share the working conditions of other local print and broadcast journalists. In central news locations, like city hall or the law courts, press rooms are provided. Depending on the size of the room, there may be a separate desk allocated on a permanent basis for CMRL reporters. In other situations there may be a shared desk for half the local radio reporters.

When a CMRL reporter works the beat s/he takes one of the four station cars. They are automatic-drive, early 1980's four-door Pontiacs. Each is equipped with a cellular telephone, allowing reporters to check in with the station while on the move between events, or if the news site is remote, to file their stories by car phone.

While on the beat, reporters take coffee breaks and may exchange gossip for short periods of time with competitors. There is no limit on this so long as an adequate number of events are covered and stories filed in the shift.

Sources

An initial glance at the news room seems to reveal a fairly wide variety of sources upon which CMRL reporters can potentially draw. In terms of wire services: Broadcast News (BN) print, BN voice, News Radio print, News Radio voice, and CNWL (the Canadian News Wire Ltd.) in print. In actual practice, BN

provides the vast majority of print copy and voice material. CNWL is rarely used for actual news copy. Unlike BN and News Radio which CMRL must pay for, the station gets the CNWL service free. CNWL supports itself as a glorified, press-release clearing house; businesses, political parties and other organizations pay CNWL to have their information carried to media outlets like CMRL. The deskers use it for background material, e.g. when it provided a list of dates for John Turner's sweep through British Columbia.

During my period at CMRL the station was in the process of phasing out News Radio, switching over entirely to Broadcast News.⁴ But for about three months, due to overlapping contracts, CMRL reporters could exercise a certain amount of choice for stories. The reporters were well aware of the temporary nature of the arrangement and were already relying more heavily on BN material.

The news director explained that CMRL is dropping News Radio because their main competitor had signed on with News Radio. Due to the competitor's larger size, they had gained control over the network regionally; "we were also at one point not getting cuts (audio material).. and our guys weren't able to file their material (with News Radio)." When the transition is complete CMRL will be the only major news station in the area with BN.

While the news director invokes notions of independence and journalistic integrity in the decision to drop News Radio, it is clear that cost is a predominant factor. A decision based on journalistic concerns alone would be to keep the diversity of two major news sources. I was not able to determine how much it costs CMRL to subscribe to BN or News Radio, however, it is known to

⁴Broadcast News is the largest supplier of wire print and voice to radio in Canada. It is the broadcast arm of the Canadian Press News Service, the major clearing house for news among Canadian daily newspapers. See Seigal, 1983:191.

be a major part of the newsroom budget. Certainly the services to which CMRL subscribes are used to their fullest. Additional daily and weekly features on science, business, sports, etc. are dutifully recorded off the wire to fill gaps in weekly programming.

Other possible sources for news are seldom used by the deskers. The scanner, discussed above, didn't seem to play a large role. Also, there is a procedure set up by which listeners can call up with "news tips". Callers receive \$8.20 for each tip that makes its way to the news. At the end of the year the best tip is chosen and that caller receives \$820.00.⁵ I never once saw it used while I was in the newsroom. The system seems more geared towards good public relations and a contingency against missing exceptional stories of local interest. It does not provide a consistent source of news by any means.

Deskers often listen to competitors' newscasts or watch the Cable News Network (CNN) on the newsroom TV. They also spend time reading newspapers; most commonly the two local daily newspapers, *The Sun* and *The Province*, as well as *The Globe & Mail* and *USA Today*. Stories from these are seldom lifted directly for newscasts.⁶ Rather they serve as barometers of news importance by which deskers can measure their own news selections. In the case of fast breaking local events, it is common for a deskier to set his or her sound equipment up to record the competitor's hourly newscast as s/he reads the news. After delivering their newscast they return to compare the competitor's version.

⁵The \$8.20 corresponds to CMRL's frequency, 820AM (fictitious).

⁶The news director related one incident, the crash of the Challenger space shuttle, in which the deskier related up to date developments directly from the CNN broadcast over the air.

By the nature of the CMRL beat, reporters in the field have few well developed personal contacts upon which to draw. This is due to a combination of the lack of beat specialization (outlined above) and lack of long-term experience. In a place like the law courts it was more common to see CMRL reporters questioning other reporters, rather than talking to "insiders" like lawyers or police officers.

At 9:51 a.m. Pat enters the Provincial Court Building and checks with Chuck the security guard. He says, "I haven't seen you for a while." Pat and Chuck chat for a minute and then Pat asks, "Do you know the name of the Delta guys (men on charge for drug trafficking)?" He says no but points out a tall female sheriff who might help her. He automatically hands her the key to the press room. Pat follows the sheriff into court room #102 and talks with her and a lawyer in the corner. Pat gets a list of trials from them which indicates that all the men but one will appear in court later in the week. One of the men is scheduled to appear at 2 p.m. this afternoon.

Pat leaves the court room and goes down the hall. There she checks through a list tacked to one of the dividers in the corridor. Pat explains that it's important to know someone like Chuck, "he'll tell you something's hot in #102 when you enter." She makes note of another suspect on the list and goes over to Chuck and asks for a copy of today's trial list.

At 10:07 Pat enters the press room on the third floor and greets *Sun* reporter, Barney, who is sitting at a desk in a small office to the back. Barney asks Pat if she's following the counterfeit story. When she says yes he explains, "Yeah, I've got a break." But after discussing it for a while it becomes apparent that he has no information new to Pat. Pat then goes to a desk assigned to radio reporters and starts making notes in her pad. She phones one of the deskers back at the newsroom and discusses what she has on the Delta drug story, "the boat owner will be back at two to speak to bail. But who cares, right?... OK, bye." Pat sorts through papers a bit more and then says, "So we've got them all done except for the counterfeit one, which I guess we'll sit in on for a while. See if anything..." Before leaving though Pat looks over the court list with Barney. "What's this charge here?" she asks. Barney replies, "It's a term I've never come across." Pat: "Is Lou-anne still on the beat?" Barney has difficulty replying, explaining his newness to covering the court scene. Pat explains her relative newness too. Then Pat asks, "Did you go to the police briefing (at 9:30 a.m.)?" and starts talking about a woman who died last night on the Sky-train track, "Did she jump? They (the police) said major crime was involved with it." Barney: "Maybe somebody pushed her?"

Pat goes to court room #308. Sitting down in the public gallery as various individuals are brought before the judge, she looks over a *Sun* clipping, "Trio in court on bogus bill counts". For the next hour Pat watches the proceedings and takes notes. Barney has joined her and they talk in whispers. Pat: "These cases are meaningless to most people... irrelevant." She yawns and rubs her face, continuing, "She (the judge) will probably come back at two with her decision. So this is probably a waste of time... but you never know."

At about 11:45 Pat leaves, saying, "I've got to phone the newsroom and tell them I won't file anything for noon." At 11:53 Pat returns and goes back to taking notes. At 12:30 the judge begins to speak and Pat copies her words. Judge gives the time, place and date when the decision to the case will be made. Pat notes in her pad and also on a yellow sheet of paper. Pat compares her notes with Barney's. Pat asks, "Is it conspiracy or possession? I'm going to check," and approaches the crown prosecutor. "Hi, I'm with CMRL and I want to clarify the charges." They talk briefly and then Pat returns to the car for the trip back to the newsroom.

The assignment sheet from a September day is representative of the sort of areas consistently covered by the CMRL beat reporters.

TABLE 2
CMRL ASSIGNMENT SHEET: TYPICAL DAY

1.	9:15 a.m. Police Briefing	John
2.	10:00 a.m. Meet Hospital Patient Woehanson St. Paul's Hospital (Weekend Ft'r)	Henry
3.	(n/a) Provincial Court West Vancouver, Check out West Van teacher Alan Homma on Sex Charges	Pat
4.	(n/a) Provincial Court Vancouver, Counterfeit Money Fix date for P.Derman killer Possible others in drug seizure	Pat
5.	(n/a) B.C. Supreme Court Manduza (No file here, check this -- Supreme) Estrada (County) Fritz Hosli (County)	John/ Pat
6.	(n/a) Fringe Festival	Adam
7.	8:00 p.m. Robson Square AIDS Panel	Adam

Little preparation is done by beat reporters prior to covering a particular event. Reporters may leaf through the "background file" -- if one exists on the event they're covering -- consisting of little more than a newspaper clipping or press release. Usually the reporter finds this adequate, as in the following instance.

The evening beat reporter enters the newsroom at 2:30 and sits at work station number four. He checks a copy of the assignment sheet prepared by the news director early that morning. He looks through a file folder full of background material that the deskier left on top of the typewriter. When I ask him if there's enough background for the events he's slated to cover, he replies, "theoretically" and points to a press release on a health fair. I ask him if the lack of information bothers him. He replies, "all I have to know is that it's at the Hyatt (Hotel) at five."

Beat reporters may check with other reporters at the station or, on the beat, with competitors for background to an event. Witness this exchange between a reporter and one of the CMRL talk producers about how to cover a speech to be given by the federal Liberal leader, John Turner, that evening.

The producer tries to convince the reporter about using an "angle" based on a recent biography of Turner. The reporter says, "It takes too much explaining. X (names deskier) and I were figuring something on Asian youth gangs." The producer says, "I think the real question is Turner's leadership." Reporter: "I can't think of anything the national reporters haven't already... I want my own angle." To which the producer jokingly replies, "How about 'John, when did you stop beating your wife?'" They all laugh and then a bit later the producer continues, "you know what Webster would do? He'd call someone back east to get a question." Reporter: "that's a good idea." The producer then suggests some people including, CBC TV's chief political correspondent, David Halton. Reporter: "David Halton? No they're competitors..." The conversation turns to talk of a pizza that was just delivered to the news room. Eventually the reporter says, "Well, back to the question of John Turner... Let's simplify it." He discusses Free Trade as an angle. They both pause and then the producer wonders out loud, "how can you come up with something fresh?" The reporter packs up his tape deck and note pad, "Maybe I'll go leech off the other reporters... Or maybe I will use the free trade angle. It's kind of been done but I think that'll have to be the angle."

Deadlines

The deadline, in theory, for filing news reports is on the hour. Deskers complain though if stories are filed too close to the deadline. They like to have at least five minutes to fit the story into their newscast. Unless the story is truly exceptional, a beat reporter would do better to wait a few minutes and file the next hour rather than incur his colleagues' wrath and file a few minutes before the hour. Such a situation is frustrating to some of the beat reporters, such as the younger reporter who covered city council one afternoon.

It's 3:45 p.m. in the City Hall press room. Most of the reporters have left the council chambers after checking the agenda and deciding like the CMRL reporter, "there's nothing really important coming up right away, which gives me time to bugger around with this." He takes his place at a carrel with the CMRL logo, and begins typing up a story based on the notes of the council debate on a False Creek Boardwalk proposal. By 3:55 two other radio reporters have filed their stories by phone. At 3:58 the reporter looks over his copy once again. He says to me, "I'd be really sweating it if I had to get this in by four. But they don't want it. They can't fit it in in only two minutes... If you ask me it kind of defeats the purpose."

At 4:05 the CMRL reporter phones up the radio station. "Ok, I've got a council story for you; it's 35 seconds. I know Peter (senior desk in charge of the newscast) doesn't like it at five... If you want to play it?!"

I ask him why the desk in charge might not want to include it in the newscast. "Well, he wants to get more national and international stories in there... (angrily) If they don't want to use it just re-write the fucking story! I mean, that's the whole idea."

Most CMRL reporters don't struggle with the deadline. Rather, the hourly newscasts set a pace to their day. There is no supervision of reporters when they are on the beat. They do wear "pagers" (they seldom seem to be paged) but generally they are on their own.

When covering the morning police briefing and courts (a typical beat carried out by all CMRL beat reporters), the reporter will generally file a story based on

police information before 10am and then head to the courts to file another story before noon. If the reporter is assigned to cover a municipal meeting that starts at 7 p.m., it's quite common to file a report by phone for the 9:00 news before the meeting is over. When the meeting ends the reporter returns to CMRL to do a re-write for the 10:00 or 11:00 newscast and then may work on a different angle on the same story for the morning newscasts.

Boredom

There is a lot of boredom both at the desk and on the beat for the CMRL reporters. The deskers' schedule seems to suffer more in this area, although court reporting is known to be particularly excruciating for some of those on the beat. This is reflected in the preference of many of the CMRL reporters to mix beat and desk work in their weekly pattern of shifts; change is as good as a break, from either job.

Deskers in particular grumble about the slowness of the day. This is often expressed in the refrain: "there's no real news happening out there." Reporters look forward with eager anticipation to days or weeks when there is likely to be a lot going on. The news director shares this concern. When I first approached him in September of 1987 about observing the news room he was almost apologetic about how slow the pace was. This period, he explained, was traditionally slow but things *would* be picking up as fall progressed. There promised to be many exciting things. He named: the Commonwealth Conference, the provincial Liberal leadership convention, Social Credit convention, and municipal elections. A week later as I tried to persuade a reporter to let me follow his day on the court beat, he argued that it would be a waste of time: things were still not warmed up from the Labour Day weekend and today

promised to be another slow day.

On the first full day of the Commonwealth Conference in October, however, there was a sense of anti-climax in the newsroom. At 9:30 in the morning, half an hour before the conference was to open, the senior deskier was complaining; "you'd think a day that starts out with a hurricane and the Commonwealth Conference would have something good, but no!"; as he dramatically seizes the copy off the BN printer, scans it and then throws it in the garbage. A few minutes later when one of the other reporters rips some copy off the printer and jokes, "Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi has been shot dead," the senior reporter replies, "don't tease me." As they survey stories coming from the conference the younger reporter says to the senior, "If all they do is yak about South Africa for the next five days, this is going to get pretty damn boring." "What do you mean," replies the senior reporter, "*going* to get boring!"

Other Media

Coming out of a downtown court room one morning, the CMRL beat reporter approaches the crown lawyer along with a reporter from the competition. The CMRL reporter asks about the location of some of the suspects. A plain clothes RCMP officer is called over by the lawyer, he starts giving more details to the reporters. The lawyer is impatient and leaves. Just after the lawyer leaves a reporter with *The Sun* newspaper approaches and seeks the same information. The CMRL reporter joins the other radio reporter in filling in the newspaper reporter. Eventually the CMRL reporter heads up to the press room to write out and file his story. There he runs into a reporter from another radio competitor. As the CMRL reporter starts to work on his report the other reporter asks, "Who could tell me what they (the suspects) are doing here?" The CMRL reporter tells him. After a moment the other reporter half-talking to himself and rather apologetically says, "Fuck, I wasn't working on this (the story involving the case) yesterday. (Pause.) I don't even have the file. (Pause, then tentatively,) So who will be appearing?" He lists a number of possible names, the CMRL reporter confirms or corrects these.

A few moments later a reporter for *The Province* newspaper appears. "Did I miss those crazy kids?" he asks the two, referring to the suspects. The CMRL reporter quickly fills him in on the events and names of the court scene. In contrast to his non-co-operative manner

with the radio reporter, he even provides a quote from one of the rebellious suspects. The newspaper reporter asks, "all of them remaindered for short causes?" CMRL: "The whole shit load of 'em."

After he files his story with the station, the CMRL reporter leaves the press room. On his way out of the building he remarks on the disappearance of *The Sun* reporter with whom he's been talking earlier, "there's probably something going on in New West (New Westminster, where the other provincial law courts are located). She probably got a tip from the paper."

The CMRL reporters interviewed showed an awareness of the importance of personal sources on the beat, but were resigned to the fact that CMRL's operation doesn't allow for such depth in reporting. As one experienced reporter who had worked both beat and desk put it, "I used to have lots (of personal sources) at one time but I haven't been on the beat for a while. The beat reporter's sources are very important... An established reporter like, well we haven't got any here, well there's Joe over at (names main competitor station). He's a well-respected guy, been at (the station) for over thirty years. He generally beats everyone for the local stories." Only one reporter has been at CMRL longer than three years.

Standards

CMRL reporters generally lack group control over their working conditions. Not that personal standards of journalism are not high among some of the reporters. Some have very high standards for the job they do. However the concern is almost always expressed on an individual basis. Specific notions of responsible journalism are not shared by the CMRL reporters as a group, nor is there an attempt by the more experienced reporters to inculcate high standards among younger reporters.

Asked what constitutes a professional, CMRL reporters range in their responses from the reporter who sees his main role as telling his listeners about what he suspects will interest them based on audience demographics, to those who argue that they have an innate sense of what should be significant to the listener. Only a few reporters talk about their skill at making 'objective' decisions about what is news. Some talk in terms of experience. Others refer to a depth of knowledge. At least two talked about an ability to keep an even temper, while the news director stressed the importance of good attitude ("giving 110%") and putting thought and care into one's work.

Socializing

A lack of collegiality among CMRL workers stems partially from the lack of social interaction. When reporters go out for a drink after work or play a game of golf on the weekend they show little preference for "their own kind". One of the senior reporters talks of occasionally sharing a drink with a younger reporter, but another is just as likely to spend the evening talking gossip with the station's production manager. The news director seems to mix socially more with other managers than with the reporters. None of the reporters indicated close friendship with other CMRL reporters outside the station.

When I asked reporters to whom they felt more loyalty, the journalistic profession or the station, only one senior reporter categorically chose the profession.⁷ Others either chose the station or explained that their success in reporting was intrinsically related to the station's success. The news director clearly chose the station.

⁷This reporter headed a local reporters' guild when he worked for CBC radio for a few years.

Training

Most of the reporters at CMRL, indeed, all the younger ones (about three quarters of the total), received their training at BCIT. There they took courses like "Broadcast Journalism Introduction" and "Broadcast Newsroom Operations" for two years before receiving a diploma in broadcast journalism. It's hard to determine the degree to which this program fosters professional norms among the reporters. Two points are important to consider. First, students do not mix, as in some other Canadian journalism programs, with print journalists. Secondly, the program seems to be by all accounts very market-oriented. Students, as we have seen, are often placed in work situations as part of their training prior to completing their studies. Commonly these become their full time job sites. This second point relates to a controversy surrounding the BCIT program that was much discussed both in the press and around the station while I was at CMRL.

Allegations were made by a local TV reporter that one of the BCIT instructors was fostering anti-union sentiment in the classroom. The possibility of a legal proceeding against the instructor had been raised and this had at least one of the recent BCIT graduates at CMRL worried. The TV reporter had contacted him about testifying in the case since he had been in the classroom when the remarks were made. I overheard this reporter explain to another reporter, "I'm not going to testify unless I'm subpoenaed... I'm not going to put my head on the chopping block!"

Standards of Journalism

While individual reporters indicated the desirability of adopting station-wide standards, no attempt has been made on a group basis to start such a move. Instead reporters seem to opt for an informal approach by which reporters seen

to be doing a particularly poor job are shunned or ridiculed.

One deskers, in particular, is viewed as incompetent by CMRL reporters. Few of the others laugh at his jokes -- a significant slap in the face given that the newsroom's functioning throughout the day is greased by a sort of jocular banter. This reporter's contact with the other deskers during his shift occurs only when necessary or he himself initiates it. He even situates himself at the work station farthest away from the news director's office and the usual cluster of deskers.

It's a morning during the Commonwealth Conference. Harvey, the unpopular desk, dubs a report from one of the CMRL beat reporters at the conference. He forgets, however, to tell the other deskers before they go to read the hourly newscast. When one of them returns from his newscast he wanders over to the far station to look casually at the recorded carts. Noticing the conference report he gets angry, saying in a tense and restrained voice to this man, "you *must* let me know when anything is fed (over the wire)!"

Such a publicly expressed rebuke is very uncommon in the newsroom.

Later in the morning the angry reporter told Harvey to check with the fire department on a piece of information -- another rarity since such requests are usually made in a casual, off-hand manner, "say, if you've got the time, you think you could..." After a few minutes, when Harvey has forgotten to call, the angry reporter says to Harvey in front of the news director, "Did you make a call on that fire yet?"

Experience

There is a genuine respect among most of the reporters for the professionalism of an experienced reporter.

One morning at the law courts the CMRL beat reporter enters the wrong building by mistake, where she accidentally runs into a senior reporter from a competitor station. She greets him affectionately with a smile. They chat warmly about shifts. He explains that he hasn't

worked desk for years, saying he doubts that he could take it. She relates her problem with doing the CMRL desk alone on the weekend. When he's gone she turns to me and says with real respect in her voice, "He's a roving reporter with *thirty* years experience. He does what he wants to do."

This sort of contact is rare on the beat. For the most part, radio reporters are young, in their mid or late twenties. If they wish to consult with an experienced journalist they'll often end up conferring with print journalists who aren't likely to be much older than themselves.

Job Entry

Reporters have no control over job entry at CMRL. Indeed, the newsroom has a practice of utilizing student reporters, especially those from the BCIT Broadcast Journalism Program. The students' low wages are an uncomfortable reminder to each reporter of his or her replaceability.

During the Commonwealth conference when CMRL had most of its regular beat reporters assigned to cover the conference, at least two BCIT students were used through the week to make up the difference in the newsroom. One student reporter appeared in the newsroom on the Tuesday, the opening day of the conference. The news director explained to the regular deskers, "he's going to be here from nine to five for the rest of the week. He's going to take care of the feeds and that sort of stuff." This particular student had some previous experience at CMRL. He had worked the previous summer at the station on a Challenge grant, receiving \$3 an hour from the federal government and \$3 an hour from CMRL.

The next evening one of the regular deskers described CMRL's use of students as "unprofessional". According to her, CMRL is too cost conscious, "but

if you don't pay the bucks how are you going to cover things." She described the extra she had to spend to coax a story out of the BCIT student, "everything she got was unusable." When I point out a report by the student that she has just used on the newscast she says, "that time I had to sit with her and work out the story. It was lucky I was familiar with the issues and people involved... how can we call ourselves news-talk radio if they don't want to spend the money!"

My own presence at CMRL was interpreted by some reporters and other workers as an attempt to get a foot in the door. As reporters became acquainted with me they would often ask if once my research was done I would return looking for a job.⁸

Although I did not do a lot of active participation in the reporting work per se, there were occasions, especially on the beat, when I was mistaken for a reporter. Perhaps this is not too surprising given my appearance -- young, middle-class and white, and my activity -- recording surrounding events in a steno pad. Once this occurred while I was watching a reporter covering a court. The CMRL reporter left to file a story leaving me with a clipping file on the next case. An older reporter from another radio station sitting behind me leaned forward after a few moments to ask me for clarification on a trial date. On other occasions I had press kits forced upon me by public relations officers who were unhappy to see a reporter in attendance without one of their packages in hand.⁹

⁸I assured them that was not my strategy.

⁹This sort of situation is are also indicative of the high turnover rate among reporters -- no one recognises new reporters on the job.

Frustration

Frustration with the job is common among deskers and beat reporters at CMRL. The most common frustration is expressed in terms of the general "cheapness" of the station. With the station being owned by a prominent local businessman, the ridicule is often directed at him personally:

One evening in the newsroom a reporter trying to decide how to cover a story wonders out loud, "what do people care about out there?!" "What about a raise?" quips one of the deskers, which leads the first reporter to seize a glossy sheet with the owner's face from his mail box above the work stations. A large colour picture is on the sheet, publicity for an autobiography. "Did you see this?" he asks of the reporters who then joke about the owner's generosity in offering his book at a 30% discount to his CMRL employees.

There is a constant stream of disparaging remarks made about the reporting job itself. Reporters will jokingly call themselves "hacks", "not needing a brain to do this job" or, as one of the beat reporters put it in relation to the lack of skill thought required in assigning reporters to beats, "in radio, if there's a warm body, fill it."

Part of the manifestation of frustration are drinking problems at CMRL. One reporter confided that he saw himself heading toward serious problems with his drinking. A senior reporter had recently overcome a major drinking problem. The degree to which drinking is a severe problem among the reporters as a group is hard to determine. Certainly it is a problem with other employees at the station, as well. A serious examination of the problem awaits a future study.

Talk Programmers: Producers and Hosts

Producers

There are about half a dozen men and women at CMRL whose sole job is to line up guests and story items for the main weekday talk shows.¹⁰ Producers are the "reporters" of talk, except that their main vehicle for coverage is the telephone. They are a significant factor in the type of information that comes over the CMRL airwaves. Some work closely with their host to line up interviews. Others are almost totally in control of the talk show's content, with the host rushing in at the final moment to broadcast the show itself. On a daily basis their work conditions are poor and their professionalism underdeveloped. Let's examine one producer's daily routine.

Frank produces the afternoon drive show -- so called because its main audience are people in cars driving home from work. Frank usually arrives at the station before 7 am. This particular day he confesses to sleeping in, arriving shortly after eight. The late arrival puts an extra panic edge to his attempts to book guests for the day's show.

The morning starts with the mundane task of phoning up ticket and prize winners from yesterday's show and setting aside their winnings in envelopes which he leaves at the receptionist's desk for callers to pick up.

He works in his own small office (shared with a part-time assistant) near the reception area and across from the office for the morning show. He sits at his own large desk. There's a smaller desk for his assistant near the door, above which a chalk board hangs divided into the ten or so slots for two weeks worth of shows. Filing cabinets are lined along one wall. Behind the door is a rumpled sleeping bag and pillow (Frank sleeps at CMRL on Sunday nights after working late on another show). All available level space -- desks, filing cabinets and even some of the floor -- is piled with books, magazines, and newspaper clippings. The radio in the corner plays at a low volume, tuned to CMRL. The office is poorly ventilated, with a constant haze of cigarette smoke in the air.

¹⁰One producer occasionally hosts the show when the main host is sick or on vacation.

Frank passes most of the day on the phone, sometimes two phones, since he has two separate telephones on the desk. At busy moments he uses both simultaneously. When I comment on this he refers to himself ironically as a "glorified receptionist". Frank uses the phone to hunt down and then book guests to fill the ten slots per day on the board. When he gets an interview lined up he jots down the name and phone number on the blackboard. Just before the show he types up background sheets based on the blackboard information with a list of possible questions for his host to use.

Sources

A producer like Frank often starts the morning looking through newspapers: *The Globe & Mail*, the local morning tabloid, *The Province*, the other local paper, *The Vancouver Sun*, and some American weekly tabloids like *The National Enquirer*. He clips all the articles that he hopes to follow up on and arrange guests for the show.

Coming to a story in *The Sun* about a B.C. government proposal for a school voucher system he clips the article, saying, "I like school stories," explaining that such stories are interesting to his "target audience": women and men in their 30's and 40's with children in school.

Along with the voucher article the producer clips the following:

- Chicago Woman trading her baby for Cocaine (*The Province*)
- Immigrant official blows whistle on his boss (*The Globe & Mail*)
- Fat man banned from all-you-can-eat restaurants (*National Enquirer*)
- World-record pogo stick jumper inspired by God (*National Enquirer*)
- Live grenade found in local man's junk pile (*The Province*)

After listening to the CMRL 10am news, the producer phones up the B.C. Schools Trustees' Association for background on the voucher story. He points out that he'd rather get someone from the Trustees Association on air rather than BC Teachers Association president Elsie McMurphy because she's "too shrill."

Much of the morning's work is made trying to track down the "whistle-blower" in the immigration story. The producer calls the source at work and at home with no success. In the meantime he makes a continuous string of

calls with individuals involved in the other stories. He lines up a second interview on the voucher story -- an interview with an American college professor he's had on the show before. He calls direct to Washington to get the professor's number at home.

In the early afternoon the pace picks up when the producer looks up at the board and realizes that he still has three interview slots to fill. He once again sorts through his pile of clippings, setting aside an entertaining news story from one of the tabloids, saying, "Perry (the host) will tell the story for three minutes and then tell a few jokes." Then he exclaims, "Whew!" then "Fuck!" and throwing down his pen on the desk in frustration as he realizes time is running out.

Other Media

Producers use mass media not just as source but as a guide to what might be popular with audiences. Each night Frank watches the BCTV supper hour news -- the leading TV newscast in the area. Often he does this in the newsroom while the evening shift of reporters work around him. One night in October is typical:

The producer chats informally with the reporters, deskers and one beat reporter preparing to go cover a political event. When the BCTV news starts the producer turns up the volume on the monitor. He sits about three feet from the screen, with a yellow pad on his knees, taking notes. He comments on the stories to whomever might listen. When an interviewee in one of the reports, for instance, is silhouetted to guard his identity, the producer says: "CBC can't do this stuff," explaining to the female deskier that the local CBC outlet needs clearance for this sort of risky journalism.

When asked why he's watching so intently, the producer replies: "I'm getting story ideas for tomorrow's show... (BCTV news) is a barometer of what people are talking about -- it sets the trend in the province."

Other talk hosts and producers use mass media similarly. In the office of the

early afternoon talk show, a small TV monitor on the producer's desk is constantly tuned to commercial American talk shows. Often the volume is turned down low or off altogether. But when something of interest appears on the screen or during a lull in her morning calls, the producer turns up the volume and watches.

Program Role

The producers of talk and some of the hosts seem to face a dilemma when it comes to the role of their programs. The best way to describe their ambivalence in producing largely entertainment information for a mass audience is in the expression, "fun for them and information for me." In other words, they see their audience as preferring light information while they feel personally obliged to provide at least some useful and informative programming.

One morning Frank was trying to balance guests he had arranged to talk about conflict in the Persian Gulf and the Canadian Postal Strike, with someone connected with American TV personality Johnny Carson. As he tried to track down a number for Carson he told me: "Mike (the host) likes Johnny Carson, so I'm going to try and get Ed MacMahon. Johnny is unavailable." When he gets on the line with Ed MacMahon's secretary he says into the phone:

Oh, that would be phenomenal... Oh that would be fine... (Son on the day of the interview) I should call and ask for Madelaine... Ok, it would only be about ten minutes... Mike's a real fan... No surprises, don't worry... Is it possible to do it live?... and that's Wednesday October 7th at 3:30. I want to thank you very much!"

After hanging up he wearily says to me, "It's just star shit!"

A disproportionate amount of money, time and publicity at CMRL are devoted to the talk hosts as "personalities". The big name hosts commonly make over \$100,000 per year.¹¹

But hosts defend large salaries, arguing that their attractiveness as personalities attract audience and advertisers. One highly paid sports announcer said:

We had top ratings anywhere I was located... so that (has) to be a consideration. The ratings, that's the name of the game. Already I've brought over (from the station I worked before) three advertising contracts, including McDonald's.

The same announcer pointed out that when famous retired B.C. broadcaster Jack Webster was snatched from the competing station and signed up at CMRL fifteen years ago the salary offer was \$100,000. According to the announcer, the competing station, "figured the move cost them \$12 million dollars (in lost ratings and advertising). So it's all based on finances." The general manager candidly revealed the same perspective: "It's a personality business. There are certain people who are going to make a lot of money."

Personalities are used for program identification. The early morning drive show is named after the two hosts, "The McGary and Slater Show". The same occurs with all the talk and open line shows. Even the 6 to 6:30 p.m. financial feature is named after the stockbroker who presents it.

Hosts are encouraged to increase their visibility through media events and jobs with other media outlets. During the observation period, one of the early morning co-hosts took part in an annual telethon on CBC TV. The mid-morning

¹¹Most of the hosts are reluctant to reveal the size of their salaries. Their poorer colleagues -- producers, reporters and technicians -- are more open.

talk host is also employed as em-cee for a game show on the local independent TV station "VU-13".

Some of the best-known personalities put their talents -- and names -- to work for the station's sales department. A common technique is the on-air product endorsement. The host of a weekend "fix-it" program regularly advertises home repair products. The gravelly-voiced, open-line host breaks from his evening hosting role to endorse live a local optical company.

Sales also likes to use the personalities for the crowds they draw at "remotes" -- live broadcasts from a commercial site. One morning as the early afternoon talk host was putting the finishing touches to her show a salesman popped his head into her door:

"How are your weekends?" he asks. The host is immediately on guard as the salesman continues, "I want you to do some remotes. It could lead to major endorsements." He edges further into her office and leans against the filing cabinet, "We're looking at a double remote." The host barely looks up from her typewriter, replying, "I've got three weeks vacation between then and now. I just hate to do things on weekends." She then jokingly asks about pay. He responds that "of course" she'll be paid. She tells him to send the information on it to her and she'll think about it.

The Station as a Whole

News and Talk Crossover

The station's news reporters generally argue that their newscasts have little to do with the "show-biz" oriented talk programming. However, the line between the two is not always clear. Format changes brought about by a new general manager in the attempt to attract a more "lucrative audience" further blurred the line.

Format changes meant cutting back on the total time allotted to newscasts. This was especially so during the late afternoon, "drive" period. Half hour news updates were cancelled and the newscasts on the hour during the late afternoon were cut to two or three minutes. Reporters were told in staff meetings and through memos that the General Manager was looking for "a lighter, more entertaining, more informal format of newscasts." The reporters expressed no dissatisfaction with these moves -- at least not openly. One change the reporters did grumble about away from the station was the new practice of having desk reporters read news headlines in a chatty fashion with talk hosts every half hour during the morning.

One deskier who prepares newscasts wholly accepts an entertainment role for news, causing some of the CMRL reporters to bristle. Dave has a very personal style of news writing and delivers his newscasts with an intentionally chatty sound: "I'm talking to the guy at home or in his car," he explains. One of his most common approaches is to make outrageous statements at the beginning of his newscast in order to keep the listener alert through two commercial breaks before the main body of the newscast continues.

On the morning of the start of the Commonwealth Conference Dave started his 10 a.m. news: "It's sunny and ten degrees. Word that the big show is about to go!" More common writing techniques involve using a colloquial presentation. Here are some of the phrases used in different newscasts:

"Look in the sky! Is it a bird? A plane? Berton Cummings? Or maybe a Soviet rocket..." (intro to story on Soviet satellite falling over Canada).

"Heck of a drug bust down in Texas!"

"What's new? How about windows that darken automatically?"

Even CMRL's news director does not resist management's attempt to "lighten up" the news.

Each morning from 5 a.m. to 9 a.m. the news director teamed up with a talk host for the morning drive program. Much of the program involves informal chit chat between the two. The news director reads news on the hour and headlines every half hour. They both share interviewing functions. And like all the other hosts, the news director as co-host is required to make public appearances on behalf of the station. He is used as a personality in other promotional gimmicks such as a morning coffee cup featuring a caricature of him and the other co-host. And other reporters are also involved in non-news programming at the station.

Audience

Workers at CMRL, especially those directly involved with on-air programming -- reporters, producers and hosts, display a detailed knowledge of their audience. Many discuss their listeners in terms of "demographics", that is, the composition of audiences by sex, age, income and other characteristics. I asked one reporter as he was stepping out of the news booth how he knew his audience. He replied: "Ratings. Ratings. They are plus twenty-five, under sixty. They listen for between three and a half and five and a half hours. Split between women and men. They are highly educated, most have at least first year university... Their income as a family is over thirty thousand."

Sometimes this sort of detailed knowledge is called upon in making programming decisions. One day producers of the mid-morning and late afternoon talk shows met with a programming consultant brought in by management to assess the station's performance. Talking about the previous day's programming,

the consultant complained that he had heard only two issues being discussed -- stocks and health, "both of which are boring!" The consultant argued "stocks rank below labour law in terms of audience interest." The afternoon producer, who was in the middle of booking another stock expert for that day's show, argued "over 20% of Canadians over 18 own stocks, another 10%, if you include mutual funds."

The senior reporter in the CMRL newsroom shows the least concern among all the reporters of writing a newscast to fit the demographics. Yet even he admitted in an interview,

we all learn immediately after (the audience ratings are published quarterly). Sometimes in memo form. Sometimes a meeting is called. Sometimes I walk in the day they are released and walk into the news director's office (to see the results). We have access to the books and we can go to the sales department and see them there.

Workers refer to the pressure they feel to perform especially when audience members might be "filling in the cards." The "cards" are the listener diaries distributed to randomly selected Vancouver area households by the Bureau of Broadcast Measurement (BBM). CMRL personnel are well aware of the beginning and end of the five week period in which listeners might be filling in the diaries. BBM instructs the listeners to fill in the diaries for one of the five weeks. Eventually BBM only uses three of the five weeks for its data. These three weeks are referred to as the "hot" weeks.

Shortly before the fall ratings period started during my observation at the station, memos started appearing around CMRL warning personnel to be prepared. On the wall beside the news production booth -- a very busy area between the studios and the newsroom -- a photocopied memo signed by the station manager appeared. Titled, "Call Letter and Name Mentions", the memo explained

that because the BBM measurements are the "bottom line" and because when listeners remember the station's call numbers ratings can increase "a full point", programmers are reminded to repeat on-air the call numbers of the station as often as possible.

One example of the means resorted to in order to increase listenership during the "hot weeks" is strictly illegal. It occurred shortly after a popular sports announcer was "stolen" from the competing station -- timed specifically for increased publicity during ratings weeks. On the day of his arrival at the station the sports announcer suggested over-the-air that listeners fill out their BBM diaries for CMRL rather than the station from which he had just been fired.

The station uses a series of promotional gimmicks to attract and then hold listener attention. The most spectacular (and expensive) of these are reserved for ratings weeks. The news director told me in a discussion about remotes for the show he co-hosts that there were plans to do the show live from Whistler during the ratings period. They were also floating the idea of doing the show for a week from Brisbane, Australia in conjunction with the opening of EXPO '88 and, not coincidentally, the spring ratings weeks.

The Open Line

The main host of the evening open line program is introduced each night as "the original radio hotliner". During his three and a half hour program he invites callers to call in "with whatever's on your mind". Many callers take advantage of the invitation and express points of view on a variety of issues. There are real advantages to the format from the station's point of view. Callers provide a wealth of information and opinion often in a heart-felt and dramatic fashion. Generally the information is up to date and is always free. There's no

need to hire a producer to book guests.

The late night sports show devotes a large part of its time each night to taking listeners' calls. On Monday night the entire three hours is devoted to callers.

There are measures to prevent callers from taking advantage of the airwaves, however. The talk host in the early afternoon -- a veteran broadcaster -- has worked out a system whereby certain of the regulars are screened. "As a rule," she says, "these types are a turn off for the audience." She doesn't go as far as her predecessor in the time slot who had what is well known around the station at the "three per week" rule. Under the rule, regular callers were limited to calling in no more than three times a week. After that they would be not be allowed on the air.

The three per week rule has some detractors at the station, including one producer who disagrees with such limits. He stresses the importance of developing "that 'personal bond' with listeners" whenever possible. The producer, however, admits that he is less concerned with a listener's access to the airwaves than with not angering any long-time audience members given the station's low position in the ratings. But even from the producer's point of view there need to be limits on how callers' make use of their time on air.

One morning a host invited listeners to call in with questions for his guest, a local home, fix-it expert.

The host gives the number to call and immediately the operator in the control room starts receiving calls. There are about ten which the operator handles by putting on hold and then replying to in a standardized manner: "What is your first name please? Thank you for calling would you like to speak with Chris (the host) or Stan (Mr Fix-it)? Please turn your radio down and stay by the phone."

The operator types the information on a keyboard to her left. The name, phone line and comments about the caller appear on the monitor.

When the host is prepared to take calls, he checks the monitor and says over the air, "Alex on line one, go ahead."

During one of the Monday night sports shows, the operator took a call from a woman and typed "bitch" in the comments section because she had given him a hard time about giving her first name. The host eventually got to her call and treated her brusquely. Usually, however, "trouble-makers" are left to wait on hold indefinitely. On other occasions a real bond can develop between a host and caller.

One morning during the drive show the news director as co-host invited people to call in -- as he does regularly -- to explain what they are doing up so early (this occurs just before 6 a.m.). On one occasion the news director chatted in a friendly manner with a caller he obviously remembered from previous on-air calls. The news-director asked the caller how his map-making work is progressing. And, later in the same show:

the hosts initiate a contest for children who are invited to call in and explain why they would like to go to the Vancouver Aquarium. A little girl calls in before the lines are officially opened for the contest. Later when they do open the lines the news director says to his co-host off-air: "I hope she's the one who gets through, it'd be a shame if she didn't." The co-host "umh"s in agreement. The news director then instructs the operator over the intercom to take only one call for the contest, adding to his co-host, "hopefully it'll be that little girl." When he sees a boy's name on the screen he says dissapointedly, "oh, it isn't her."

Even the news director's personal concern in this case, however, is tempered by commercial concerns. When the co-host returned to the studio after the news director has read the news he said: "Paul (the station manager) said to me during the news that the kid sounded good... it's a long time since we've done something with kids."

Audience Feedback

Feedback from audience members is often used by reporters, hosts or producers to justify their approach to programming. One morning, for instance, the reporter who does a short radio golfing feature, received a letter from a golf pro in Washington State thanking him for an interview. Over the next few minutes the reporter pointed out the card and even read from it to most of the other reporters in the room. He even stopped the news director to say, "that's the sort of reply I'm getting from a lot of people (about my golf feature)." Later the reporter explained that while he doesn't currently get paid any extra for the golf feature, "that will change."

Often hosts will use the audience feedback to counter poor ratings in order to convince other personnel at the station that they are providing programming that listeners "really want."

The host of the early afternoon talk host says she gets a better feeling of her audience through informal contacts with people who she sees at parties or "remotes". She adds, "people who listen to our show wouldn't fill out a BBM ballot... our audience is not necessarily reflected in our (ratings) numbers."

Feedback can also be used on a purely personal level; as a sort of encouragement to morale. The promotions co-ordinator at the station featured prominently on her desk a "thank you" card from a group of senior citizens who took part in a trip organized by the station.

Ownership and Governance

CMRL is owned by a private individual. According to information filed with the CRTC, this man owns 100% of the 9,705,000 common voting shares of the conglomerate. No other financial data on the station itself is made available to the public. Nor does CMRL publish an annual report which publicly traded companies are required to do.

The owner is known to prefer that the separate components of the conglomerate, including CMRL, operate on an independent basis. The general manager (and president) of CMRL is solely responsible for the station's success or failure. He cannot call on the owner to inject cash from other more profitable components into the operation. He may borrow money from the conglomerate but at 1% above the current bank rate!

There is a sense shared by almost all personnel at CMRL that the station is losing money, and has been since the recession in the early 1980's. There is a constant sense of belt-tightening. Money, employees are told, cannot be spent freely on salaries, promotion or offices supplies. There is a sense that the conglomerate is not interested in investing much in this losing proposition.

The owner of the conglomerate of which CMRL is just one small part has considerable non-media holdings in British Columbia. There are over twenty different companies in the group with revenues surpassing one billion dollars in 1984. These other interests include a signage company, an airline, automobile dealerships and supermarket chains.

Although each group in the conglomerate operates largely on its own, CMRL does receive some help from a policy of "keeping things in the family" when it

comes to advertising and promotions. There is an abundance of advertising on the station by conglomerate sister companies including car-leasing, cellular phones, supermarkets and travel agencies. Similarly much of the advertising for the station itself occurs on billboards, buses and other signs leased to CMRL by its sister signage company.

CMRL profits from its conglomerate position when it comes to certain sales gimmicks. Incentives for clients with large advertising contracts with the station commonly involve sister operations. If a client, for instance, buys \$1500 worth of advertising in a certain time period, the individual signing the contract receives a voucher for \$150 worth of groceries at the owner's chain of supermarkets. Other perks include travel.

CHAPTER V

THEORY AND ANALYSIS

The station holds together because of a many layered and complex set of power relations between various programs, committees, staff and volunteers. I consider myself fairly adept at political analysis and I couldn't begin to analyze it.¹

Audience-commodity and Audience-community

In an article assessing the state of political communications in British Columbia in the mid-1980's, Robert Hackett and his co-authors describe the dominant relationship of audience to mass media in terms of their status as commodity:

Perhaps the most obvious point is that the dominant media (except for the CBC) are privately owned, profit-oriented corporations. This means that the editorial content provided by these media is regarded by their management not as a public service, but as a business cost to be met as inexpensively as possible...

The main product of the commercial mass media -- what they sell in the marketplace in order to make money -- is not the programming or editorial content... The main product of the media is audience, whose willingness to pay attention is sold to advertisers, who pay on the basis of audience size and demographics (Hackett et al., 1986: 268).

The analysis is simple, almost blunt. The reality at the commercial station is equally so. From the station manager and advertising sales people through to the producer of a daily talk show who told me: "my job is to put numbers (audience ratings) on the board," the message is clear. Commercial radio must attract an audience -- indeed, the right kind of audience -- that will make it attractive to advertisers.

¹Long-time Co-op Radio volunteer programmer.

Hackett et al. pose an alternative to the audience-commodity relation: audience as community. This involves a media outlet providing input by local audience members into the medium's actual functioning. Such an operation would be: "co-operative and democratic rather than organized into a rigid and hierarchical division of labour" and there would be greater attention paid to the "response of ordinary people" (1986: 282). In other words, a mass medium intent on a relation with its audience as community would make its operations more accessible to local individuals and groups. In fact Hackett et al. point to Vancouver Co-op Radio as an "illustrative example" of audience-community mass media. Yet the means by which Vancouver Co-op maintains its access to the community is at best sketchily described in less than one paragraph. Through the structure of Co-op Radio audience members somehow magically become programmers, or in the language of the article, "listeners become speakers" (1986: 283). And while this is essentially the truth of the matter, the "how it occurs" needs more elaboration and specification.

Briefly, before sketching the model of cultural production, a more precise definition for community as it is used in this thesis is required. Community usually refers to a collection of people sharing common geographic traits: "a group of people living together in one locality... the district or area in which they live." ² Given this standard use of the term there would be little to distinguish the two types of radio stations: both commercial and community radio have limited wattage and broadcast to particular geographic regions. Indeed CMRL workers commonly, and indeed correctly, make reference to their attempts at community programming in terms of the emphasis on local news events.

²Funk & Wagnalls, 1982, page 174.

When community radio volunteers and staff place the community adjective before radio they are referring to the emphasis in all programming that is placed on reaching specific groups within the geographic community who share particular interests, whether they be cultural, social or political. These interest groups may correspond to particular neighbourhoods within the region, e.g. Chinese-Canadians concentrated in Chinatown. More likely they refer to a community of interest throughout the city or province, e.g. gay men. In this thesis, I use "community" largely in the same manner as members of Co-op Radio. As such, attention is drawn to the role of self-conception in the definition of communities. In effect, people are members of communities to the extent that they consider themselves in such terms. This use leaves aside questions as to whether "communities" actually reflect common geographic and other material characteristics.

The historical use of community as it applies to radio in Canada is further explored below.

Cultural Production: A Model

We have begun to examine the practices and forms of community radio in the comparative light of a commercial radio station. These practices are the result of the dynamics inherent in each station's organization. Yet it remains to be shown how formational tendencies of volunteers and paid personnel at both stations shape the practices of radio within each setting. In other words, we must add a further level of theoretical analysis, one that accounts for concepts like professionalism and accessibility. The following sketch helps to explain this process through a visual model.

DIAGRAM 1
CULTURAL PRODUCTION MODEL

<u>Theoretical Concept</u>	<u>Co-op Radio</u>	<u>CMRL Radio</u>
Institutional Dynamic:	Community of Communities	Commercialism
Formational Approaches:	Collegial Control in Program Collectives	Mediated Control by Management
Formational Practices:	E.g. Use of Personal Sources	E.g. Use of "Beat" Sources
Cultural Forms:	E.g. Weekly Advocacy programs	E.g. Hourly Newscasts

The model is based on the the work late British scholar, Raymond Williams, and his approach to understanding cultural production. Williams started to develop a "sociology of culture" by examining how artists and other cultural producers organize themselves into "formations" in relation to "institutions" and the resultant cultural "forms". While Williams is renowned for defining terms in a most vague manner, one can infer from his work *Culture* (1979), that institutions can be thought of as organizations with variable social relations to cultural producers. Formations are the set of relations through which cultural producers are organized. Forms are the standardized means of cultural expression through which content is conveyed. Fortunately, Williams provides some examples. A broadcasting organization such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), or a theatre company are institutions. Historical examples of formations include guilds and academies. A more contemporary and widespread example is a professional association. Williams uses dramatic examples for forms, like particular types of dramatic presentation such as tragedy or comedy, or within the play itself, a device like soliloquy.

Within the two radio institutions under examination, one might expect to find elements of one of the key formational relationships in modern society: professionalism. Similarly, within the brief history of community media institutions, formational relationships in terms of accessibility have been much discussed. It is arguable, in fact that professionalism and accessibility are two sides of the same coin -- two different ways of looking at the nature of control organized by programmers vis-a-vis their audience and their management. Each formational tendency is, in turn, key to certain approaches and practices and, ultimately the forms and content of radio programming.

In the next two sections the theory underlying these terms will be explored. Then an analysis of the "how" will be conducted for each station, working out from the specific forms of radio to the formational approaches and practices inherent to each setting.

Theory: Professionalism in General and Media Professionalism

British sociologist Terence Johnson defines professionalism in terms of the degree of control held by different occupations over the production process. Johnson starts with the premise that a basic social division of labour exists in all societies, a division in which some occupational groups have more highly developed skills associated with their labour than others. Given this division, situations occur where others become dependent upon the occupational group, both socially and economically. The occupation in turn develops greater autonomy in carrying out its work. This increases what Johnson calls the "social distance" between the occupation and the rest of the population (Johnson, 1972).

One way to determine the significance of social distance is to examine the relation an occupation, as producer, holds vis-a-vis consumers of the goods or services it provides. If the consumer holds greater power in the relationship the occupational grouping is weakened and so are its claims for professionalism. If the occupation controls the producer-consumer relationship, social distance is increased.

In the history of occupational groupings, including today's, Johnson observes three general variations in the producer-consumer relationship: (1) collegial, in which the occupation as producer defines the consumers' needs; (2) mediative, in which a third party negotiates the power between between producer and

consumer, whether that third party be the state or corporations; and (3) patronage, in which the consumer defines his own needs (Johnson, 1972).

Obviously, real professionalism suggests a strong collegial relationship. Its absence from the commercial radio setting is striking. CMRL falls clearly within the second category. And while these "professional" information workers argue that they produce directly for the listening public, it is clear that, in the case of CMRL, their mass media employer has an important, if not dominant mediative role. Certainly it is highly questionable as to whether members of the public have much real power over the work practices of information workers at CMRL.

Ironically, Vancouver Co-op Radio volunteers exhibit a much higher degree of collegiality to the extent that they are organized along consensus decision-making practices within the station's program collectives. Yet an individual's sense of collegiality does not extend equally to all programmers at the station. Their control over programming is dependent, especially on a long-term basis, upon the direct patronage of the community of interest within the city they hope to represent. This dependency is in terms of the community as a source of volunteer labour and other resources, sources, and the financial support to maintain the station as a whole. Indeed, the station as a whole -- its staff and governing bodies -- plays a minimal mediative role in each program's relationship with its community.

But what is the impact of this type of non-professionalism on the forms of radio in the Co-op setting and at CMRL? To understand this one needs to explore the concept of professionalism as it applies to media institutions.

American media sociologist, Gaye Tuchman, argues that contrary to the accepted conception of media information as an objective picture of reality,

television and newspaper news, just like any other human construction, involves human beings in creating meaning out of chaos. The labour of news workers involves framing idiosyncratic and unconnected events into a coherent picture of reality (1981:12).

In light of the ethnographies of two stations presented in this thesis, Tuchman's work is especially useful because she combines this understanding of news with an analysis of the actual work practices of information creators, purporting that in the commercial setting: "professionalism serves organizational interests by re-affirming the institutional process in which news work is embedded" (1981: 12). Tuchman systematically explores the routinized aspects of news workers' daily pattern of work including: the beat system, news categorization (e.g. "hard" versus "soft" news); and, the elaborate procedures for validating facts. Each of these practices contributes to the "news frame", an efficient and cost-effective way of transforming a jumble of events into news. Tuchman contends that what are considered professional news work methods do not necessarily constitute a more accurate presentation of events. Rather they serve the interests of the mass media institutions for which journalists work by providing bureaucratic stability and flexibility within newspaper companies and TV stations, and by allowing for the profitable processing of news material with a minimum of direct supervision. In other words, professionalism is subsumed within the audience-commodity relationship of commercial media and their audiences.

Tuchman's description of media professionalism is disturbing. Contrary to a notion of information workers sharing objective ideals that preserve the integrity of their reporting, their practices seem to involve structural complicity with mass media institutions' view of the world; a view which Tuchman describes as

uncritical. Mass media and their employees tend to accept the status quo and suppress the voice of the marginal and powerless.

Canadian communication scholar, Debra Clark, sets out to measure the *degree* to which institutions exercise control over workers. In the article "Second-hand News", Clark relates her observations of news production practices at a large Ontario television station. Like Tuchman, Clark starts with the model of news as socially constructed; what the viewer see as a finished product is actually the result of a complex production process in which raw materials (news happenings) are transformed into commodity (news items). News workers face a number of constraints on their ability to transform events into news, the main ones being time, money and available technology. However, independent of these physical constraints, Clark observes that news workers at the Ontario TV station exercise almost no control over the standards by which they perform their work. Using a measure of social control developed by M. Patricia Marchak,³ Clark points to the relatively small degree of control exercised by TV news workers in terms of task pacing, sequencing of tasks, quantity and quality of daily product, etc. Clark concludes that if professionalism is defined in terms of social control, Canadian mass media information workers are not very professional.

Professionalism: Forms, Practices and Approaches

The main form of public affairs presentation at Vancouver Co-op Radio is the half hour or hour long public affairs program. A few programs run an hour and a half and at least one, "Redeye", runs three hours. All of these programs have three basic components: "billboards", the introductory segment of two to

³"The Canadian Labour Farce: Jobs for Women" in *Women in Canada* (rev. ed.) edited by Marylee Stephenson (Don Mills: General Publishing, 1977) p.149.

five minutes; "interviews", comprising the bulk of the time and usually separated by musical selections; and "calendar", concluding the broadcast with community announcements and in some cases a brief phone-in segment. Three other components -- news, commentary, and unstructured chat -- may be included depending on the program.

Among these basic components there may also be variation. Interviews, for instance, can be live-in-studio, live-by-phone (local or long distance), taped-in-studio, taped-over-the-phone, taped-on-location, or a combination of the above mixing a number of interviews into a mini-documentary or "clip-and-script", as the programmers call it.

The basic format and specific combinations of particular forms provide a flexibility in programming that is also helped by the fact that all programming is scheduled on a weekly basis (occasionally bi-weekly). Weekly broadcasts facilitate, and are the result of, the manner in which program collectives arrange themselves with regard to time.

The weekly story meeting is the main formational practice through which volunteers in their program collectives organize their labour. Each week, after the program's broadcast, all collective members meet to decide the issues and events they will cover for next week's program. Thus, deadlines are created on a weekly basis as opposed to the commercial setting where deadlines reflect two major forms of information presentation; newscasts of three to five minutes presented on an hourly basis, and talk shows of two to three hours prepared daily.

Vancouver Co-op Radio's weekly scheduling of shows also provides individuals with the ability to vary their commitment from week to week.

Program preparation involves a range of roles that are interchanged and/or shared among different collective members over time. The main role is that of the "producer". This person is chosen, usually at the story meeting, as the overall co-ordinator of the group's program preparation throughout the week. The production role involves the maximum time commitment, including the ability to be available for consultation at just about any time throughout the week. An "operator" is also chosen. This person manages the technical side of the broadcast itself, sitting at the technical operating board in the control room and cuing hosts and speakers, setting up musical recordings, etc. Operators usually are excused from a great deal of preparation work during the week. While some program collectives, especially the larger ones, assign individuals to other specific roles (e.g. studio director, script-writer, music selector, host), the third major role for most shows is that of general "contributor".

As a contributor a volunteer takes responsibility for preparing a particular section of the show. This usually means lining up a guest and preparing questions for that interview. Other contributors may take responsibility for compiling and typing up announcements for the show's calendar portion; preparing and reading news items; etc.

In many cases the same sort of roles fall upon the same shoulders over time. This is especially true for the operating role, given the degree of technical skills required and the limited number of volunteers with these skills. In other positions though a circulation occurs, especially as newer members gain the confidence and skills to take on the producer role. Some program collectives force a circulation every three months in order to allow everyone a chance at more prestigious jobs such as hosting.

The strong sense of collegiality among most program collectives is directly related to the programming forms and preparation practices described above and their inherent flexibility. In the commercial context, forms and roles are more clearly defined and differentiated. Producers line up guests for hosts to interview. Although over time some producers might be given their own hosting duties, such hosting will occur at other times in the schedule position. Reporters tasks are unvarying and routinized on an hourly basis. Tasks are clearly set out by superiors and are carried out over short time periods by individuals through their own effort.

The different forms of information presentation at Vancouver Co-op Radio are also related to the financial commitment inherent in the collegial formations of program collectives. Story meetings either formally or informally include a short period in which costs are reported on and discussed. Each member of the collective is invited to reach into his or her wallet (purse, knapsack, etc.) to pay for: long distance charges incurred for interviews and lining up interviews; equipment necessary for taping interviews, either tape recorders or the cassette and reel to reel tape itself; and miscellaneous costs such as childcare. The station itself allots a minimal budget on a monthly basis to help defray these costs. No program collective, however, expects that money to cover most of their costs. "Redeye" for instance gets \$20/month and spends it all on one or two long distance calls within the first week.

When certain costs -- usually long distance phone calls -- reach proportions that defy the "digging in" solution, the collective may take on the role of fund-raisers. One team of "Rational" contributors organized a number of coffee houses to defray their mounting long distance bill.

It is also clearly understood that many of the tasks associated with the various roles, rely upon individuals making use of resources they have at home. The script-writing role is almost always assumed by the collective member with a home computer and printer. And because the working conditions of the station itself are often too cramped and noisy to be conducive to work, individuals tend to do most of their preparation in their own homes. Commonly, individuals who live near the station donate their apartment or house as a meeting place for either the collective's story meeting or for preparation meetings prior to broadcast.

In contrast, CMRL provides its workers with the minimum necessary resources to accomplish the job at the station. This also means that they need not organize themselves collegially. Indeed, while the business-like office conditions of their work environment may add to workers' physical comfort at the station, the actual layout of offices, especially the newsroom keeps them open to continual observation by management. In the newsroom no reporter has his or her own desk. Instead they set out their work at a series of interchangeable cubicles directly visible from the news director's glassed-in office. The physical layout of deskers' offices and the solitary nature of the beat system itself inhibits the possibility for collegial interaction outside the gaze of management.

The main resource at CMRL is paid labour, at least that is the item which takes most of the station's budget, according to management.⁴ Yet management also provides very meagre rates of pay. According to staff, salaries are vary

⁴In an interview, the station manager refused to provide any indication of actual budget allocations. While required to provide financial data to the CRTC on an annual basis, that information is not made public. And since the station is privately owned it provides no data to shareholders.

low in comparison to other local commercial stations.

Furthermore, CMRL provides staff with the minimum equipment necessary to carry out information-gathering. As a result, poorly paid employees are spread thinly over a narrow range of information sites with a minimum amount of time to do their job.

Story selection and treatment at Vancouver Co-op Radio is carried out in a collegial setting, again through the practices associated with the weekly story meeting. While there are no articulated guidelines at the station or within program collectives about how to cover issues and events, the patterns laid down in story meetings are crucial in shaping approaches.

Most story meetings begin with a "brain-storming" session in which individual collective members present ideas without comment by their colleagues. A selection process then occurs in which participants defend their suggestions and the collective agrees on a number of stories to cover. The individual proposing the particular story will also suggest an "angle" for coverage and the most appropriate source for an interview. Sometimes the angle is debated or others suggest more appropriate interview sources. It is a general principle, however, that an individual's input is valued much greater if one is willing to take on the responsibility of actually doing the leg work to prepare the item. Once the areas of coverage are chosen and individuals assigned to cover them, changes to the item during the week must be negotiated between the contributor and the producer. Most individuals, especially long-time volunteers, are trusted to work independently to prepare an item to which other collective members will not object.

Informal discussion about story coverage, station activities, and personal concerns occur informally throughout the week among many collective members. Story meetings themselves often merge into social activities like going for a drink and a chat at the local bar. Some collectives organize parties for their group on an annual or semi-annual basis. About half the members of the "Redeye" collective, for instance, regularly brunch together after their three hour, Saturday morning broadcast.

CMRL's rigid work structures do not encourage the same sort of social interaction. The majority of information workers do their rigidly prescribed tasks for eight hours and return to their own personal lives. The CMRL forms of radio do not seem to require story meetings, and management does not encourage staff interaction that does not address specific tasks. In the newsroom the news director prepares a story sheet on a daily basis and assigns the various beat reporters to two or three of these stories per day. Negotiation over these assignments occurs on a one-to-one basis between each reporter and the news director. There is rarely any debate about angles and methods of presentation since most reporters are familiar with the bulk of stories and the type of coverage such stories were given in the past. Once reporters are out on the beat they are unlikely to encounter other CMRL reporters. If they have a chance to discuss assignments with reporters before they leave the newsroom, they often find their suggestions met with a lack of interest.

Similarly, there is almost no consultation among the deskers over coverage during their shifts. Any conversation tends to deal with trivial, non-news related items, often in a jocular fashion. During day shifts, two deskers are assigned to produce newscasts for CMRL. Usually the veteran reporter works on his own news stories with little consultation with the junior reporter who prepares her

own stories and then submits them to the veteran for on-air reading.

About half the talk producers work entirely on their own for the better part of the day. Half an hour or an hour before broadcast, the host arrives and they consult about the line-up for that day's show. Then after the broadcast they go over their ideas for future shows with the host. Hosts have absolute veto power in these situations and often assert their preference for entertainment-oriented, sensationalist stories. Occasionally a producer of one talk show will attempt to co-ordinate his material with the work being done by other producers. Generally this fails, however. Producers always seem to bow out of station-wide producers' meetings on the excuse that the daily pressures to fill their own shows leaves them no time.

Outside the work routine of CMRL there is even less interaction among workers. When socializing occurs, it tends to not involve collegial groupings. Few of the reporters or producers "hang out" together in their off-hours. Some of the reporters do occasionally share a drink with other CMRL employees, but the interaction tends to be with non-reporting staff like technical operators or the station engineer.

Program collectives at Vancouver Co-op Radio draw from a wide-range of sources in both developing ideas and actual interview subjects. These include: press releases and public service announcements (PSA's); other mass media, both "mainstream" and "alternative"; some newswire services; beats; and most significantly, personal community contacts.

Announcements arrive at the station addressed to the paid program co-ordinator who, in turn, distributes them to the appropriate program collectives by way of a mailbox on the third floor. A lot of PSA's are delivered directly

to individuals at their homes. Since programs are not organized to respond to events on an hourly or daily basis, many of these are ignored. Many program collectives argue that such issues and events are fully enough covered in the mainstream media. Instead, they concentrate on more specific issues effecting a particular constituency.

Mainstream media, especially the major local daily newspaper *The Vancouver Sun*, provide a much-used source for story ideas. Even more story ideas come from alternative print media, e.g. the publication of the local gay community *Angles* is a valuable source for "The Coming Out Show."

While the station itself does not subscribe to a newswire service -- for cost reasons and because most of its coverage is deemed inappropriate to weekly shows -- a few programs have access to specific wire services. News items, for example, from the Palestine Press Service (PPS) out of Jerusalem are wired to the Canadian Palestine Information Office on a daily basis. The Ottawa office then "faxes" a collection of these stories to a member of "The Voice of Palestine" program collective on a weekly basis. From time to time alternative wire services are directly subscribed to by individual programs. "Latin America Al Dia", the bilingual English/Spanish program covering Latin American affairs, has at times received news items through a network of U.S. campus stations following Latin American news. Individual programs also sometimes exchange news reports or interviews with other non-profit radio stations and networks across Canada and in the United States.

Few volunteers at Co-op follow a news beat. This is due, again, to the lack of daily news reporting structured into the major forms of radio presentation. One individual who avoids identifying himself closely with any one

program collective, spends a lot of time at Vancouver City Hall and uses that self-initiated "beat" to provide a weekly City Hall Report for the Tuesday "Rational". Another "Rational" contributor produces a bi-weekly round-up of events in rural B.C. called "Mainstreet B.C." Again the initiative for this extra work comes from an individual.

Many of the story ideas, and certainly most of the actual interview subjects, are drawn from the marginal communities which programs attempt to represent. Most programmers are themselves activists to a degree in local movements such as labour, peace, environmental, gay, and Palestinian. They have personal contacts with the people who raise issues and create events in those communities. Veteran "Radio Peace" programmers, for instance, not only interview a major contact in the "Save the Seas" campaign, but have personally accompanied him in rubber dinghies used to block U.S. nuclear warships. Similarly, when contributors to the "Rational" are looking for a pro-choice spokesperson on the abortion issue, one of the contributors suggests a friend from Vancouver Island whom she has accompanied on political demonstrations.

Within any group of half a dozen or so collective members at most story meetings, at least one contributor is likely to suggest people whom s/he is personally acquainted with as contacts. In fact, seeking out these personal connections is one of the main roles of the story meeting.

An interesting practice common to many programs is the means by which community activists are drawn into the membership of a collective. These people inevitably start out as community contacts and occasional contributors to a program. The producer of "The Coming Out Show" pointed out how a local researcher of the Vancouver gay community has gone from being a guest on the

show to contributing a regular column on gay issues. The same producer conscientiously seeks out contacts within the community and tries to involve them through a similar process.

The close personal, social and political involvement of programmers with their sources goes contrary to certain conventional views of the proper formational -- that is to say, professional -- approaches to information gathering, characterized by objectivity, detachment and balance. Yet it is important to realize that the personal involvement of programmers with sources is as much a structural necessity as it is a philosophical choice.

The philosophy is clearly outlined by volunteers and the station's publications. The station is partisan to the extent that it provides access to the airwaves by groups with limited access to other mass media. Volunteers and staff, thus, take a wider view of balance than is common among most broadcasters. They purport that their programming provides a balance to the imbalance of other broadcast media which exclude marginal voices. Marginal groups in the Vancouver area are encouraged to use the station and its programs to present information from their own perspective. One can agree or disagree with this philosophy, but the structural imperatives underlying it are not so easily denied.

The involvement of local communities as source for labour, resources, and sources means that program collectives, even if they wished to could not continue without their active support. "The Voice of Palestine" schedules interviews with knowledgeable people with a pro-Palestinian outlook less because of a philosophical disregard for detached, objective programming, but because these people are the people whom they know and can phone up to do

interviews. Similarly, when the contributors to the eclectic, bi-weekly "Main and Hastings" produce week after week of vicious, rude satire of Social Credit politicians, they are reflecting the violent cynicism expressed by the poor with whom they live in the Downtown Eastside community.

In fact, whenever a program drifts away from its advocacy role it encounters problems. Thus, programs like "Redeye" and, in particular, the various weekday versions of the "Rational", which attempt to address a broader audience with more general programming, find themselves estranged from one specific source of support. Many of the "Rational" program collectives, as a result, suffer a chronic decline in volunteers and a general lack of vitality. Many individuals working with the "Rational" attempt to overcome this through personal commitments to "critical" journalism. Most fail to maintain the energy and level of resources required to present such programming week after week. A critical stance is also rare among the program collectives of advocacy shows.

"Union Made" is much noted at the station for its cyclical drift between a critical and supportive role in relationship to the audience it purports to speak to and about. When the show becomes critical of the labour movement it finds itself struggling to survive -- volunteers from the labour movement stop coming forward to carry on the program, and without the co-operative input of labour spokespeople as sources, pressure grows on the remaining volunteers to drop the critical disposition. When, recently, newer members to the show -- themselves activists in the labour movement -- reversed the approach to one of general support, the show once again gained momentum. These people quite consciously realized that given the lack of time, energy and resources that they can commit as individuals, they cannot maintain a critical point of view. This also explains the ambivalence of station volunteers to newscasts.

A debate continues at Vancouver Co-op Radio about whether newscasts, even of a weekly nature, can be supported. There is a sense that the station simply cannot compete in this form of programming with the commercial stations and CBC. The solution adopted by many programs is to air a brief newscast drawing on alternative media items and mainstream news stories written from a community perspective. In many cases newscasts continue because they provide a useful training ground for new volunteers. In other cases, the commitment of certain individuals to preparing news items is another factor.

CMRL, in contrast, makes use of a fairly narrow range of sources in a detached manner that facilitates a fairly non-controversial, balanced approach. Limits on resources, however, also have their effects in the commercial setting, disallowing reporters, producers and hosts from maintaining a critical perspective on the highly legitimized spokespeople from whom and about whom they collect information.

There are three main information-gathering activities at CMRL, corresponding to the three main information sources. First, deskers rely almost exclusively on a single newswire service in their writing of newscasts. The wire is the main source for regional, national and international stories, most of the latter of which are supplied to the Canadian wire service, News Radio, by American broadcast news agencies. Local news stories are filed by the beat reporters on staff.

Secondly, beat reporters rely on a very limited number of story locations and institutional spokespeople for local news coverage. Most of the events they cover are planned and made public through press releases and telephone calls channeled through CMRL's news director. None of the reporters develop their own contacts through whom they originate new and original stories. Newspapers are

used to provide background information to some of the beat reporters' assignments, although deskers almost never refer to them to corroborate information in writing their own stories. Alternative media are not even thought of as a source.

Finally, producers tend to read through a broad range of mainstream news and information-oriented media for story ideas. A large percentage of this is American in origin, especially for entertainment information.

The use of sources at CMRL is governed by notions of detachment and balance, although certain key hosts seem to find little problem with their publicly advocated right-wing points of view and institutional affiliations, e.g. one host was brother to and campaign manager of the politically right of centre Vancouver mayor; another host declared his Social Credit candidacy in a provincial by-election. But even the veneer of balance which reporters and many producers do quite consciously attempt to uphold is less the result of collegial standards than it is the structural manner in which they are organized in time and space by management intent on maximizing limited resources with limited risk. For both deskers' reliance on one newswire service and limited story locations of beat reporters are organized to allow access to a narrow range of widely recognised spokespeople for non-controversial institutions.

Beats, in particular, do not really provide reporters with an opportunity to develop an expertise on certain issues and contacts with key players. Rather they are a means by which reporters can be distributed in an interchangeable manner to a small range of public sites -- city hall, police headquarters, political and business events, and the occasional public confrontation, eg. a picket line. Coverage is thus provided in brief news reports of thirty seconds to "both"

sides of a small number of publicly organized events -- indeed only those events with two sides or a single non-controversial point of view. Balance is thus risk-free and cost-effective.

On the other hand, investigative journalism is expensive, risky and pretty well non-existent at CMRL. Few if any stories are originated by staff and any coverage beyond the usual time allotted to reporting a news story or a talk interview must be accomplished in the reporter or producer's off-time.

Concern with the high quality of on-air presentation at Vancouver Co-op Radio varies among the program collectives. Those most concerned place a great emphasis on using an experienced operator who is comfortable with the old and temperamental equipment of the main broadcast studio. In order to lower the pressure for technical perfection on operators, some collectives appoint a studio director to monitor the running of each broadcast. His or her job is to co-ordinate hosts, guests, music, and any other aspect of the broadcast. "Redeye" often has, for instance, two long time collective members work closely in the two positions, using techniques like hand signals which they have developed after working with each other for many years.

Some collectives also develop their own program guidelines for contributing, set out in photo-copied hand-outs given to new volunteers describing scripting or studio direction. Occasionally the members of different collectives get together to run their own skill improvement workshops. The best example of this is the news-writing workshop organized by individuals from public affairs programs with newscasts. The two co-ordinators of the workshop -- one from the "Rational" and one from "America Latina Al Dia" -- drew up guidelines for a high standard in news writing and news reading, based on the published work

of professional news writers. These guidelines, however, were carefully packaged with a discussion of the unique nature of information presentation at Co-op and its fundamental partisanship vis a vis marginal communities.

Certain individuals at the station take it upon themselves to monitor and correct the general mistakes of on-air programmers. One long time "Redeye" contributor thus produces a monthly "pronunciation guide" which he prints in the Volunteer Newsletter.

Nonetheless, most volunteers at Co-op are tolerant of technical mistakes that occur throughout the program schedule. In both formal "post-mortem" discussions and informal talk, few are likely to condemn others for mistakes that they have all made at one time or another.

Standards for on-air performance at CMRL also vary, although there is a bottom floor, below which mistakes are not tolerated. Due to the lack of collegial means for setting group standards, individuals tend to develop their own ideas about the correct approach to on-air presentation. Among deskers who read newscasts, for instance, there is a difference between some of the veteran reporters who like to sound authoritative over the air and the younger reporters who often prefer a more "chatty" style.

The basis for on air performance at both stations is training. At Vancouver Co-op Radio training is one of the few activities that is co-ordinated on a station-wide basis. The volunteer co-ordinator and certain long-time programmers that she recruits are responsible for running "orientation sessions" as well as "basic skills" and "operators" courses. In the first of these, the general approaches and practices of the station are introduced to new volunteers. In the latter two, volunteers are provided with the basic techniques of radio:

interviewing, scripting, and tape recording/editing.

Throughout orientation and training the new volunteer is infused with both a desire and certain abilities to do good radio, but more importantly a sense of how to do so within the limits of the station's resources and the resulting organizational practices. New volunteers are strongly dissuaded from trying to use their Co-op experience as "d.j. training". They are told that their ability to contribute largely depends on their willingness to develop a niche in the existing programming and work co-operatively with an existing program collective.

CMRL takes no responsibility for training. Reporters and producers are expected to have received the requisite training through broadcast journalism courses taken at college. For many of these, especially the younger, a gap is experienced between the high ideals of their training and the sort of routinized, non-investigative reporting they do on the job. Thus, many reporters and producers look on their work with CMRL as a stage through which they must pass on their way to jobs at which they can actually apply professional news judgement, e.g. with a daily newspaper or TV reporting for a national network.⁵

Vancouver Co-op radio volunteers generally do not set their standards in terms of the performance of comparisons with other media, and definitely not in comparison to commercial radio information programming. As we've seen, a sense of collegial belonging results from membership in program collectives which in turn are actively connections with local community groups. As a result, volunteers pattern their work not on what other media say about social happenings but what their activist interests suggest are under-represented in the

⁵A study by George Pollard of commercial radio careers backs up this observation on a national scale: "practitioners emerged as young, mobile males for whom radio was a career stage rather than a career in itself" (1982:31).

media in general. There is one exception to this. Since most of the programmers are devoted CBC radio listeners, many of their specific standards and practices are compared with the national public broadcaster. At the same time, comparisons are not drawn uniformly; programmers sense that their low level of resources makes certain types of comparison useless.

CMRL reporters and producers, however, make a good deal of reference to their commercial competitors. They do not do this out of a competitive desire to "scoop" the competition, rather, keeping an ear on the competition is part of their justification to management that they are not themselves being scooped. This is understood to be crucial to the station maintaining a certain level of audience support through ratings.

In terms of audience, certain individuals at the Vancouver Co-op Radio have a highly developed sense of their audience, largely through their political and social contacts within the community for whom they program. Still, most programmers have little direct contact with or knowledge of their audience. As a result, there is a great deal of emphasis placed by program collectives and individuals on the small amount of feedback received in telephone calls, letters or personal comments. Yet contradicting this concern is a relatively low level of commitment to dealing with specific needs of the audience whether it be in terms of returning calls or scheduling ticket give-aways. This may partially be explained in terms of the nature of immediate pressures surrounding the production of a show. Nonetheless, audience concerns are kept uppermost in mind of programmers and staff at the time of fund-raising. When money enters the audience equation programmers are often quite committed to specific audience needs. This somewhat contradictory approach has a lot to do with the limits of accessibility at the station which we'll explore in the next section.

At the commercial station money is almost always part of the audience equation. Some programmers justify the high degree of attention they give to individual queries at the station in terms of creating audience loyalty that will pay off in the long run in higher ratings. Nonetheless, at a personal level many individual programmers are quite concerned about the direct feedback they receive through telephone calls, letters and personal comments. As with community radio programmers, this sort of direct feedback takes on an inappropriately large significance in programmers' minds, especially when they wish to justify an approach which doesn't seem to be working as far as ratings are concerned. Yet programmers know that they and their programs ultimately live and die at the station on the basis of audience ratings. No individual worker is fool enough to ignore their significance. This leads to a certain increase in accessibility at certain levels of CMRL's station activity.

Theory: Two Canadian Approaches to Accessibility

Access is *not* like pregnancy: one can be a *little* accessible. The literature on community media has tended to portray community media outlets, in relation to their commercial and publicly-run counterparts, in terms of a simplistic polarity: these stations are accessible while commercial and public models are not.⁶ Two Canadian masters students have helped to dispel such either/or thinking. Both describe community access media in terms of a range of possibilities. The first does so historically, the second by operationalizing notions of access into an "audience-relation continuum".

⁶This approach may have to do with the relative newness of community access as a media form. Also many of the writers in the area have often been involved personally in actual community media operations.

Jean Ogilvie in her 1983 MA thesis on community radio explores the relationship between the concept of community held by various people involved in community radio, and the actual carrying out of a community radio project.⁷ In setting up her case study of Radio Pontiac, a community station in the Outaouais region of Quebec, Ogilvie sketches the history of community radio in that province and all Canada.

From the earliest days of radio broadcasting in Canada, attempts were made to overcome the monopoly of highly-trained professionals who planned and carried-out radio projects. Ogilvie describes the history of community-access radio innovation in Canada in terms of its evolution from "community service" to "community based" to "community managed". The country's national public broadcaster was responsible for much of the early experimentation in all these models. The community service phase for example, was marked by CBC's "Farm Radio Forum".

CBC employees carried out all programming for the Farm Radio Forum from a central Toronto office. However, they made significant use of feedback from the nation-wide community of farmers that the programme served.

The CBC also experimented with community based radio, first in the 1940's in Yorkton, Saskatchewan, and then in the Northern Ontario town of Espanola in the 1970's. The idea was to let small geographically-remote communities program their own radio, by providing community groups access to the local CBC transmitter for a portion of the broadcast day. "CBC Access", as it has come to

⁷"Community Radio in Quebec" (unpublished M.A. thesis, McGill University, Montreal, 1983). Ogilvie provides a fairly up to date description of the community radio situation as it exists across Canada, though her emphasis is on the network of over twenty-five provincial government assisted stations in Quebec.

be called, still operates in a number of Northern and remote communities. It requires an overall co-ordination by CBC staff, both in terms of animation and technical service.

Community-managed radio grew up in the late 1960's and 1970's. It also attempted to serve geographically local communities, but in the case of community management there is no reliance on CBC animators or technicians. The stations are almost entirely the initiative of local groups with an interest in alternative forms of mass media. A community board operates the hardware and day-to-day operations of a station on a not-for-profit basis. While not associated with paid employees of the CBC or commercial stations, community-managed radio stations may employ people trained in radio work, or may recruit professionals from the public or commercial sector. And certainly community managed radio may emulate certain radio practices common to either public or commercial radio.

In his 1985 M.A. thesis Thomas Balke examines the relation between producers and audiences in the setting of Bolivian educational radio. Balke wants to know the nature of local people's access to the functioning of community stations. Balke constructs a definition of access drawing heavily on the work of Peter M. Lewis who edited a 1984 UNESCO report, "Media for People in Cities".

According to Lewis -- and Balke draws directly from him -- access most simply refers to local people's ability to "come closer to communication systems" (Lewis, 1984: 1). Proximity is measured on three levels: (1) choice in listening and listener feedback; (2) participation in producing radio; and (3) self-management of the radio operation itself. Balke operationalizes the three levels and creates an "audience-relation continuum" involving nine levels of

community involvement ranging from the most basic aspect of listener access -- "clear signal reception; occasional listening" -- to the highest level of community self-management -- "indigenous ownership, financing, and technical upkeep; autonomous infrastructure" (Balke, 1985: 31).

Directly applying Balke's continuum to the Canadian setting would not be very helpful. Balke readily admits that the model is really only suitable to the Latin American environment of radio, characterized by distinct factors like peasant-based audiences, low levels of formal education, and a high level of political violence. Nonetheless, the continuum idea drawn from Lewis' work allows us to assess both commercial and community radio without starting with the absolute accessibility of community radio as a given.

Accessibility: Forms, Practices and Approaches

At the lower level of the access continuum, there is little doubt that CMRL provides a significant level of listener access and over-the-air feedback. Lewis describes access in these terms as "direct participation by the audience during the transmission of programmes" (Lewis, 1984: 2).

The majority of daytime and evening programs at the commercial station provides phone-in segments for listener feedback. In some cases the show simply takes the form of one long, continuous "hot-line"; listeners are invited to talk about "whatever's on your mind" with breaks only for advertising. More commonly callers are asked to address a particular topic or question chosen by the radio host, or to provide questions to a studio guest introduced by the host. Undoubtedly, information producers and hosts are highly skilled in both developing questions that pique listener interest and, while on the air, drawing

out ideas and emotions from listeners in a manner that is both exciting and interesting for other listeners. There are, however, major limitations on audience access in the open-line situation, that is to say, limitations on listeners' control over the communication experience.

One of the most serious limitations is the screening practice by which operators use computers to communicate the nature of the caller and his or her concern to the host prior to the on-air conversation. Calls with responses outside the usual bounds of propriety are ignored by the host who does not open the caller's particular phone line to the air. Also, since listeners are chosen by the host, they have little choice over what issues are scheduled for particular programs and how those issues will be framed. Finally, hosts and operators have the ultimate power to cut off the caller at any time.

Audience phone-in's are used considerably less in Vancouver Co-op Radio's public affairs programming. Volunteers and staff at the station argue that listeners have control over all aspects of programming anyway since they can become actual members of collectives which make decisions about what is to be covered in the first place. Nonetheless, a few program collectives do concede some importance to the role of less active listeners who enjoy the phone-in format. These listeners are accommodated through the calendar portion of programs.

While in quantitative terms audience call-in access is more limited at Co-op, within the situations themselves Co-op listeners do tend to exercise more control. While callers are screened before going on air -- usually by the operator or studio director -- they are encouraged to provide their own announcements of upcoming events or issues of importance to them in addition

to addressing the question posed each week.

The ethnographies deal in more detail with the exact nature of how phone-ins work at the two stations. Overall, this form of audience interaction requires much greater examination.⁸ Although it could be argued that phone-in segments fit readily into the audience-commodity model of commercial radio -- phone-ins provide a lively form of inexpensive programming that cements listener loyalty -- the participation of listeners even at this basic level does provide a significant area of potential audience power in the largely, one-way mass medium of radio.

Vancouver Co-op Radio exhibits a much greater proximity to its audience if one considers the secondary and tertiary elements of access -- participation and self-management.

According to Lewis, participation itself can be divided into three elements: production, decision-making and planning. Participation in production entails "unrestricted opportunities for the public (individuals or groups) to produce programmes" (1984: 2). This involves structures at the station providing the training necessary to allow participants to have real control over production and providing suitable "public technical facilities and production resources" (1984: 2).

Most decision-making made on a daily basis at Vancouver Co-op Radio involves programming decisions made by program collectives. As we've seen from the discussion above, the story meeting and informal discussion among collective members constitute the main site for Co-op's programming democracy. Yet the decision-making of the station as a whole is also significant: decisions

⁸Turow (1979) and Moss and Higgins (1984) have made an important start along these directions.

at this level set the parameters for the power of program collectives. One of the most striking characteristics of that station-wide process is the way in which particular program collectives dominate through an informally constituted but crucial core group.

The main formal governing body at Co-op is the station's nine member board of directors. The board makes all the final decisions at the station and most of the long term planning decisions. It also, in a general fashion, sets out tasks for the other two formally constituted groups: staff and committees. On paper, there is a fourth decision-making body, the volunteer assembly. It, however, seems to have ceased functioning in recent years.

All of these formally constituted bodies, with the exception of staff, are open to all members of the co-operative both in terms of membership and observation of their activities.

On a day to day basis, the board and committees possess limited power. Effective control instead lies with a core group comprised of staff and certain volunteers who take action in specific circumstances. Members of the core group tend to share a strong political-activist background. Most are long-time members of the station who are programmers with the generalized public affairs programs "Redeye" and the "Rational". The group is small and by its nature exclusive. The exclusion is not purposeful. Most of the people are individuals who simply love to be at the centre of activities and do not object to putting in long hours and engaging in fierce debates. The four staff (excluding the half time engineer), who are usually themselves long-time ex-programmers, play a central role within the group. The existence of such a group is the main barrier to total accessibility of all community people to power at the station, yet it seems to be the most

workable and, in a sense, acceptable solution to the crises arising from the main concern of the station: money.

Co-op is almost continuously in a state of financial crisis. Its miniscule budget and shaky revenue base leaves it open to financial upheavals that occur with weekly and, sometimes, daily frequency. Cutbacks in money from the City, a drop in advertising on one of the ethnic programs, and other events force the station scrambling for solutions. The board and committees meet to discuss the problem, but action tends to be handled by the core group. Ironically, the financial pressures themselves provide much of the impetus for the co-ordination of activity on a station-wide basis, acting as a balance to the "community of communities" dynamic based in the program collectives.

Semi-annual, over-the-air, week-long funding drives -- "Marathon" in the spring and six months later, "Autumn Airlift" -- provide a station-wide focus in which all programmers work together to develop and carry out effective fund-raising. During the drives themselves volunteers from different collectives meet in the "phone rooms", often for the first time.

Another practice that is a direct result of the station-wide sense of financial crisis is the flexibility offered to different groups in overcoming low revenues. For instance, while Co-op has developed a sponsorship policy that flatly rejects a high level of commercialism, rules are bent or studiously ignored when the show that provides five-sixths of sponsorship revenue and one quarter of total revenue, "Chinese Morning Voice" breaks them.

Another facet of accommodation -- and here it is linked to a genuine station-wide desire to increase community participation -- involves efforts both formal and informal to maintain a high level of intra-station communication.

Written materials like pamphlets, manuals and newsletters are produced and distributed in relatively great abundance at the station. These take a significant chunk of the station's budget and are directed especially at both new volunteers and programmers who spend little time at the station outside producing their own shows. Staff and co-ordinators of specific projects at the station also make a considerable effort to keep volunteers informed of station events through telephone and face to face conversations. The level of intra-station communication is especially high during funding drives.

Aside from strongly bracketed power as the suppliers of phone-in comments, listeners to CMRL are clearly excluded from decisions about programming, planning and management. While a few individual reporters and producers are open to ideas on coverage from particular listeners, there is a clear line over which it is expected listeners will not cross.

There are no mechanisms to ensure accountability by programmers to their audience. Listeners have no direct vote on the type of programming provided. Indeed the whole structure of responsibility is clearly defined in an hierarchical manner. Reporters are responsible to a news director, producers to their host. The news director and hosts are responsible to management, ultimately the station manager, and he to the individual private owner. And while we have seen that reporters and producers have limited input to planning and decision-making at the program level, they are clearly excluded from all management decision-making. The lack of worker organization through unions accentuates this.

In the final analysis self-management, according to Lewis, really involves institutionalizing the elements of audience feedback and station participation discussed above. For a station to be truly community-managed the nature of

people's involvement must be more than simply representation or consultation. Local people from a variety of groups must be actively involved in the overall shaping of the communication enterprise.

Perspectives in Conflict

In the late 1970's Canadian Communication scholar, Liora Salter, discussed the dynamics of community radio, with particular attention given to Vancouver Co-op Radio, in terms of "perspectives-in-conflict" within the radio operations themselves. The competing ideas about the role of community radio could come dangerously close to political disintegration within the organization. Yet she identified the perspectives-in-conflict at Co-op Radio as a largely positive force providing a sort of healthy debate among groups and individuals at the station. Salter identified three main conflicting perspectives.

First, a "class perspective" put forth by those who advocated the role of radical journalism. They hoped to use the legitimated role of a CRTC-licensed station, "to ask questions to those who hold power" (Salter, 1980: 107). Co-op would provide an opening for a class critique of society by committed political activists with a non-professional, non-aligned media stance. These people saw, "little value in Co-op Radio functioning as a public relations service for labour or community groups" (1980: 107).

The second perspective is "participation/access". Advocates of this view are unapologetic about the station's primary role as a booster of marginal groups. In their view a community radio station functions to:

offer media production skills, training and access. *What* information groups chose to present is of secondary consideration. The citizen views itself as co-worker to citizen, tenant and other groups. *What*

station personnel contribute is their own skill in production and access to air time (1980: 108).

A third group takes a "process perspective", viewing the radio station as an experiment in organization. For them the importance of the station is that it "functions as an alternative form of social organization, as a media form, or as a centre for new forms of personal relationships" (1980: 108).

Jean Ogilvie applied Salter's notion of perspectives-in-conflict and tested it at the Quebec community radio station, Radio-Pontiac. Ogilvie isolated two major perspectives at Radio Pontiac: an access perspective similar to Salter's participation/access perspective; and an animation perspective similar to the class perspective, but with an important variation -- Quebec nationalism.

The Quebec government under the Parti Quebecois and through its Ministere de communications du Quebec (MCQ) began in the late seventies providing technical and budgetary resources to a string of community radio stations throughout the province. Ogilvie reviews the various reports on this process and concludes that the main motivation was explicitly political: the government was attempting to crystalize local community activism around organized goals of cultural nationalism. When local people failed to mobilize around the community stations the MCQ became increasingly involved in the use of professional "animateurs" whose job it was to increase both the efficiency and popularity of local operations. In many cases, including the Radio Pontiac situation, a conflict emerged between access and animation perspectives. The conflict provided a sort of destructive dynamic, as compared to the motivating factor in the Vancouver situation. As radio participants tried to manage the impression of no conflict, things continued to deteriorate.⁹

⁹Local factors were a major contributing factor: the language division of

Ogilvie leaves the reader with a particularly wary view of the contradictions involved in the animation role put forward by the Quebec government in terms of its support for community radio. Animation along these lines, she argues, leads the station toward professional models of communication. This takes control away from the local population in favour of well-trained, paid personnel. Ogilvie cites the work of others involved in local media in her warning against this approach. Doug Ward of CBC Northern Radio Service, Paul Lumsden with Taqramuit Nipingat (an Inuit communications group), and Heather Hudson, who conducted the Federal Department of Communication Northern Pilot Project, all concluded that, "once a community radio project is in professional hands, it is no longer a project that local people can seriously consider to be their own" (Ogilvie, 1983: 164).

The ethnographies make it clear that Vancouver Co-op has avoided -- indeed quite consciously avoided -- professional models in both public affairs program production and management. Yet it is worth returning to Salter's consideration of perspectives-in-conflict to determine whether there is potential for negative results of such competing points of view about how community radio should be done. For while Salter's assessment was that perspectives-in-conflict was an overall helpful dynamic, it had some negative consequences and might not always be easily negotiated.

In the internal struggle over approaches, Salter was concerned with programmers' tendency to forget audience. There was the danger she warned of "an anti-ratings consciousness" based on a sort of small is beautiful philosophy. This would occur as a result of community radio personnel defining their role in

?(cont'd) particular importance in the Gatineau area with a large English-speaking population; also the contradiction in funding responsibilities both to the MCQ and local small business advertisers.

negative relation to commercial and public media with their preoccupation with large audience numbers (1980: 111). Similarly, with a large number of different groups using the station for their own programming, there was a danger of the station creating a sort of "revolving door theory of programming" with the result an incoherent sound for most mass media listeners accustomed to program flow. The effect of this would be quite destructive to the station's role of building up community involvement, rather "tend(ing) to splinter the public as producer and audience into distinct groups."

Vancouver Co-op Radio continues to face the problem of a revolving door programming. By the very nature of the overall community of communities dynamic it always will. Show collectives are the main organizing force at the station and they will continue to approach audiences in a fragmented manner. There are, however, serious concerns raised through the station as a whole about means to minimize listeners' alienation if, for instance, they wish to tune in for Lesbian programming and by mistake get heavy metal. The debates over the program guide illustrate the important role of providing a direct guide to listeners on how to listen to the station. There are also moves afoot to bring specific types of programming closer together, with public affairs increasingly found in the station's evening schedule and live and recorded music during the daytime and on weekends.

At the same time, show collectives and individuals are increasingly sensitive to the perceived needs of the audience as a whole. Although shows still do not favour larger audiences for their size alone and do not program for a mass audience by any stretch, they show a real desire to find out about their audience and their needs. Programmers, at a most basic level, are concerned about whether they are listened to especially by the community they hope to

represent. As a result, people have seriously raised the idea of getting involved in scientifically conducted listener surveys. At the same time, most programmers do not advocate a survey based on commercial demographic measures but in terms of the specific cultural, social and political needs and desires of the audience. The steady increase over the past few years in direct listener support for the station as a percentage of the budget suggests that a greater concern with audience is being reciprocated by the audience itself.

A large part of the reason why show collectives and the station as a whole can take a more positive role toward audience is related to the lessening of conflicts within the station about the station's role. By its very nature a community of communities dynamic suggests a plurality of interests and the possibility of increased conflict. Yet the ethnography suggests that although the role of the station continues to undergo constant re-formulation at every level of station activity, there does seem to be a fundamental agreement on the predominance of what Salter identified as the access/participation perspective. People believe that their real strength as an alternative to other mass media lies in the close relations of various program groups to their communities. At times particular shows have tried to take a detached position from their community of interest but a combination of factors -- most significantly a lack of resources -- pulls them back to the non-critical (vis-a-vis their community) role. In this sense Vancouver Co-op Radio has achieved a goal which the early organizers of the station were forced to abandon: producers' radio.

Liora Salter in her M.A. thesis (written as she and other local activists were planning the station's start-up) described the goal of producer's radio as:

[to] build up large community groups to produce for radio in each section of the city... The audience would be based first in the producer group and around them (Salter, 1974: 12)

This plan to make radio accessible directly to community/neighbourhood groups was largely abandoned as the station struggled to establish itself as a viable mass media outlet in the mid to late seventies. With the maturity gained over fifteen years of life, Vancouver Co-op Radio has established itself to the point where it really can offer itself as a practical facilitator for communities of interest. At the same time it increasingly draws strength to the extent that these programmers directly draw from their own communities.

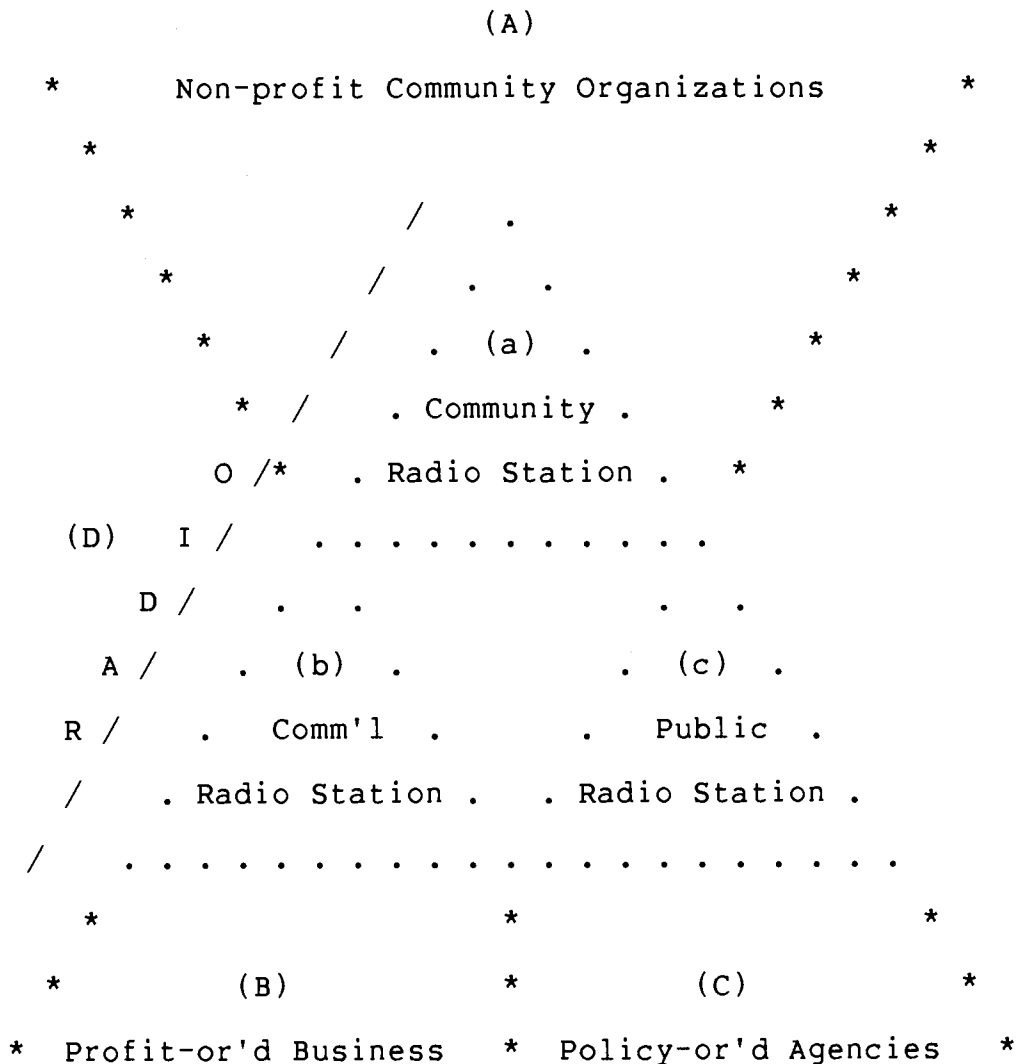
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Doing community radio is significantly different than doing other types of radio, in particular, commercial radio. While some forms and practices are similar, the dynamic that informs the community, not-for-profit setting results in unique formational practices and approaches. In these final remarks, it useful to draw to the reader's attention that the community radio dynamic is really part of a marginal means of social organization within Canadian society as a whole. As the sketch below illustrates, community radio institutions share organizational tendencies that more closely resemble local, non-media, volunteer associations than other mass media institutions.

DIAGRAM 2

COMMUNITY RADIO AND THE RADIO ENVIRONMENT



Although from the general listener's point of view radio might seem to be one whole (D), its three different components can be separated according to the larger organizational interests and impacts in which it is situated. Community Radio (a) exists within the larger framework of a number of similar non-profit, volunteer-based, community groups (A). Commercial Radio (b) operates in a profit-oriented business environment (B). And public radio (c) -- which the author must concede is not a focus of this thesis -- is shaped by a policy-oriented, governmental environment (C). Thus the main influence on how particular organizational approaches, practices and cultural forms are shaped has less to do with their commonality as radio institutions and more to do with the larger societal organizational and social climate in which business, volunteer, and public institutions operate.

The intent is not to deal in great depth with radio institutions of the public sector. It's important to note, however, that although historically and legislatively public broadcasting has priority in this country, in the last thirty or so years the commercial institutions of radio have clearly gained dominance. Whereas the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) in the 1930's and 1940's controlled the majority of stations in Canada, by the late 1960's only 33% of the country's 353 radio stations were publicly owned. By the late 1970's the percentage had further dropped to 30% and is estimated to have declined at a greater rate into the 1980's (Audley, 1983:200).

The community radio sector, at first glance appears to have done well in the last decade and a half. Indeed, in the 1970's the federal government and Quebec government lent a helping hand to the development of this relatively new phenomenon. The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), the federal government's chief broadcasting regulator, put a

special emphasis on licensing community and campus-community radio stations. The Quebec government provided resources and professional help to a network of community stations starting up in that province. Into the 1980's funding by government has been marked by an emphasis on special cultural and language groups. The federal government established the Northern Native Broadcast Access Program (NNBAP) with over \$10 million worth of funding per year to stimulate Native TV and radio production in Canada's northern regions (Canada, 1986:516). In 1987 the federal government announced phase one of an Official Languages Community Radio Program with a proposed \$5.6 million in funding over five years to help start up radio stations in minority official language communities (Kealy Wilkinson and Associates, 1988: 42). And in the last year the Ontario Government has commissioned two major studies on community radio in that province and Quebec which "will be used by the (Ontario) Communications Division to consider appropriate policies and programs which could help Ontario community radio to flourish."¹

Yet despite these hopeful indications of support, there is reason to believe that the various types of community radio service are in danger of being subsumed within the dominant way of doing radio, commercial radio, and that the assumptions made about commercial radio are too readily transferred to expectations about the performance of community radio.

With the change of government in Quebec in 1986, for instance, a supportive Communications minister found himself fighting a defensive battle against the Quebec Treasury Board's decision to cut out community media

¹*Ontario Communications News*, Fall, 1988, p.3. Indeed these two studies as well as Chapter VI, "The Community Sector" in the 1986 *Report of the Task Force on Broadcasting Policy* provide excellent up-to-date analysis of the recent growth of community radio in Canada.

funding in that province entirely. A year earlier, his predecessor -- in a government supposedly supportive of community radio -- had argued before the CRTC that community radio stations "should be treated as small business enterprises occupying a niche in the larger broadcasting market" (with my emphasis as quoted in Stiles and Lachance, 1988:17).

To be fair, the CRTC has attempted to direct radio policy which deals with community and campus-community radio in a somewhat distinct manner. There is some proof of this in the Commission's development of the 1985 "Community Radio Policy". Yet more recent policy initiatives, specifically "Public Notice CRTC 1988-161: Balance in Programming in Community Access Media", suggest limits to the CRTC's willingness to apply its understanding of the unique dynamic of community radio.

The Commission stated in Public Notice 1988-161 that while it recognized a special role for community broadcasters to provide programming "based on community access and... reflect(ing) the interests and special needs of the listeners" (p.7) and "which adds to the diversity and variety of radio services available in their communities" (p.7), community radio must conform to the balance requirements of section 3(d) of the *Broadcasting Act* to "provide reasonable, balanced opportunity for the expression of differing views on matters of public concern" (p.2).

The Commission even went so far as to suggest specific mechanisms by which a station like Vancouver Co-op Radio might achieve balance, the following among them.

Searching out alternative points of view: If an issue is of public concern, it will usually not be difficult to identify groups or individuals who hold views different from those expressed by the

program in question. One method of attempting to provide **balance** would be to offer one or more of them an opportunity to **express** their viewpoint (p.11).

Production of a program: ...it may be necessary for the **licensee** to use its own resources to produce or acquire programming **in order** to satisfy the balance requirement(p.11).

Aside from a patronizing tone used to address community **broadcasters (one** wonders whether it would be acceptable in addressing commercial **broadcasters)**, the proposals overlook the dynamic and organizational structures of **doing** community radio. The resources and volunteer strength of a station like Vancouver Co-op is, as we have seen, in almost all regards based on the **abilites** of its programming groups or collectives. They do not have time, **money** and training -- not to mention inclination -- suitable to seeking out and detachedly presenting opposing points of view. To suggest that the station **itself** take up the task ignores the lack of formational structures in place **at the** station level to accomplish this time and energy-dependent task.

The not-too subtle implication to be drawn from such policy statements is that community radio would do well to adopt certain professional (read commercial) approaches to information programming. Yet as we've seen, the actual application of "balance" in the commercial setting involves commercially-motivated approaches and practices that narrow coverage to the least costly, least risky, and least controversial sites of community happenings. Within the same public notice the Commission tacitly admits that the larger problem is the non-involved nature of commercial radio:

Community stations tend to address a greater number of controversial issues than most conventional **broadcasters** and thus must seek out differing views more frequently even though they operate with limited resources(p.11).

And yet the CRTC's master, as it were, the federal government, tends to avoid

the limited resource problems of community radio except in the particular areas of language and culture groups. And, increasingly, the Quebec government is showing less understanding than it once did. This may be the result of an increased mood of political conservatism throughout Canada which fails to value any dynamic save that of the market as a valid force for change.

The commercial dynamic is a strong force in society and the dominant dynamic in the institutions of radio. In a conservative era, not-for-profit institutions, media and non-media alike, often find themselves fighting a rearguard action of self-justification. At the same time, the commercial dynamic at a radio station is a doubly-powerful force to the extent that it provides a unifying basis for organization: all aspects of the radio experience are subjugated to the money-making goal, audience and programmers. In the short term, without a doubt, this can sometimes even produce some fine radio. But good radio, in particular, good information programming, is only a pleasant by-product.

Fifteen years ago -- about the time Vancouver Co-operative Radio was first licensed -- the late Raymond Williams wrote:

The political fight to achieve local ownership and control (of media) subject to open and democratic local process will be long and bitter, but it is better to face it than to be deluded by the public relations version of 'local community' which major capitalists are already circulating (1974:150).

Today there are fewer delusions about the nature of media institutions -- commercial, public and community -- yet the movement toward true forms of local, democratic control continues.

WEEKEND	WEEKDAYS
(Taped Repeats of Day Programming 12a.m.-5a.m.)	
Weekend Magazine	Morning News, Sports and Interviews
Financial (Saturday) Gardening (Sundays)	Morning Talk Show
Personal Success	Extended News*
Mr Fix-it	Afternoon Talk Show
Afternoon Entertainment	"Drive" News, Sports and Interviews
Sports	Extended News Financial News
Romance Open-line (Saturday) Serialized Comedy (Sunday)	"Hot Line" Talk Show
	Sports Talk Show

* Newscasts of three minutes each hour.

Source: CMRL's "Programming Guide for Advertisers".

APPENDIX: STATION BUDGETS -- VANCOUVER CO-OP RADIO

INCOME (1988 Cdn. \$)

Donations & Memberships		110,000
Sponsorships		
Morning Voice	53,433	
Other	10,000	
Total		63,433
Grants		
City	5,000	
Canada Council	9,000	
Total		14,000
Events		7,000
Miscellaneous		4,000
Raffle		2,000
Special Projects		2,650
Total		203,083

EXPENSES

Bad debts		
Sponsorships	3,800	
Radio Wave Ads	400	
Sales to Programmers	150	
Total		4,350
Building Maintenance		1,300
CAPAC & PRO		3,021
Engineering		5,300
Fundraising (Marathon)		2,720
Fundraising (Airlift)		2,720
Fundraising (Other)		2,075
Hydro		6,069
Insurance		
Slander & Libel	1,428	
General	3,192	
Total		4,620
Interest & bank charges		1,900
NCRA National Office Levy		500
Miscellaneous		480
Office Expenses		
General	5,533	
Copier Maintenance	2,334	
Total		7,867
Postage		7,000
Program Guide Subsidy		16,000
Programming		750
Rent		16,000
Transmitter Rental		1,000
Telephone		8,744
Travel		1,000
Volunteer Newsletter & Misc.		1,300
Salaries & Benefits (for 4 + 1/2 staff)		104,117
TOTAL		198,833

NOTE: CMRL does not make public any budget information.

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