

MICHAEL BARNHOLDEN / Winning is Temporary, Friendship is Permanent

Something about ‘The Masses’—an institutional ad high on the wall of Army & Navy. Tony Tryyard phoned up the head office—not sure why—trying to sell them an ad in the Grape?—made some reference to that sign—the guy said, ‘Aw, that was put up years ago’—disclaimed—any connection—to ‘The Masses’
—George Stanley, *Vancouver: A Poem* (New Star Books)

1

The earliest appearance of George Stanley’s byline in the *Georgia Straight* was the week before the Gastown (AKA Grastown) Riot of August 8, 1971. Stanley’s investigative piece on “Operation Dustpan”—a dubious city initiative aimed at clearing the streets of hippies, etc.—was one of many pieces he wrote for the Vancouver weekly in its early years, often using a pseudonym. Stanley appears frequently in the pages of the *Georgia Straight* as Tony Tryyard, intrepid movie reviewer and advertising salesman. The penname or in some cases nom de guerre was an essential piece of journalistic equipment.

The *Straight* was born in an era of conflict in Vancouver in 1967. An oppressive police force was chaired by a mayor known as Tom “Terrific” Campbell, a property developer, who quite simply hated young people. He was quoted as saying: “If these young people get their way, they will destroy Canada. From what I hear across the world, they will destroy the world!” He demanded that the Vancouver Police Department act on his animus. The *Straight* was regularly charged with obscenity; street vendors were arrested for vagrancy; and writers and editors were threatened and occasionally beaten by police.

Poets were well represented among the founders of the *Straight*. I once heard it said that the sale of some of *TISH*’s archive to bookseller William Hoffer paid for the

Information in this article comes from conversations with George Stanley and a founders’ version of how the *Georgia Straight* was created at http://www.rickmcgrath.com/georgia_straight/staffers.html. See also Pierre Coupey’s “*Straight* Beginnings: The Rise & Fall of the Underground Press,” originally published in *The Grape* in 1972, available at this site.

initial publication of the *Straight*. The paper was itself generative of poetry, at least for a while. Poetry was published in virtually every issue. The first issue of the *Straight* contained a centre spread of Michael McClure's poem "poisoned wheat." Poetry books and readings were reviewed. Copies of Robert Creeley's book *Pieces* were used as an inducement to subscribers. At least one of the *Straight*'s many offshoots, New Star Books (Stanley's publisher), is still a vigorous generator of poetry. Many of the founders and original contributors such as Milton Acorn, Dan McLeod, Peter Auxier, Pierre Coupey, Bill Bissett, Stan Persky, Gerry Gilbert, and John Mills were poets. McLeod himself had been an editor of *TISH*. But there was an ideological tension present both among the founders and within the New Left from the beginning. Simply put, there were those who opposed private ownership and favoured a cooperative model arrayed against those who followed Dan McLeod, the putative owner/sole proprietor of the *Georgia Straight* through his formation of the Georgia Straight Publishing Company. The initial rupture was papered over for a time.

2

By 1971, when he moved north, George Stanley had visited Vancouver on a few occasions. Stanley had also served in the US Army, studied under Robert Duncan, and had become associated with Jack Spicer, publishing *Tete Rouge/Pony Express Riders* (White Rabbit 1963), *Flowers* (White Rabbit 1965) and *Beyond Love* (Open Space 1968). Stanley was a newcomer to Vancouver but he arrived well connected. Good friends Stan Persky, editor of *TISH*, which later morphed into *The Georgia Straight Writing Supplement* (GSWS) and GSWS books, and Robin Blaser, editor of the literary magazine *Pacific Nation* and SFU English Professor, preceded him by a couple of years, arriving in Vancouver in 1967. In 1971, Vancouver had a population of 426,256 and a minimum wage of \$1.50 an hour, but a few things were happening.

3

The 1971 protest year began in May with an occupation of the Hudson's Bay Company store at Granville and Georgia, lead by the Vancouver Liberation Front (VLF), protesting their refusal to serve hippies at their lunch counter. Police were called to eject the demonstrators, carting off those arrested for assault and/or

trespass to the City Jail on Main Street. By that night protesters had surrounded the station demanding their release. Police were called in to prevent a feared invasion and occupation of the City Jail, and were immediately pelted with rocks and eggs. Eventually, as the police went into the building two at a time to suit up and return in full riot gear, the riot squad was assembled. It took about three hours before the order was given to clear the streets. No further arrests were reported that night.

The next day many of the same people led by the VLF mounted an invasion of the United States. After penetrating some two and a half miles into American territory and returning along the railroad tracks at Blaine, the protest ended with protestors bombarding a trainload of new cars bound for dealers north of the border with rocks and bottles. They pounded it with fists and clubs as it slowly rolled along: the new corporate reality hauled by the old industrial behemoth.

In June 1971, the Riot Squad was called upon to clear the Four Seasons property, a waterfront redevelopment site at the entrance to Stanley Park that had been claimed as a people's park and camp. It reopened a year later when people scaled the walls and tore down the barricades and renamed it All Seasons Park. In July, there was a week of pitched battles between young people and police after the Sea Festival Riot. In October, the "Battle of Jericho" was fought on the beaches of Kitsilano between police and the occupiers of the Jericho Youth Hostel, who refused to leave when evicted. Also in October, the War Measures Act was declared by Pierre Elliot Trudeau. Seven people were arrested in Vancouver for distributing Front de Liberation du Quebec (FLQ) literature. Mayor Tom Terrific celebrated by launching a roundup of hippies and others that offended him. In 1971 the drinking age was lowered from twenty-one to nineteen, and marijuana and hash busts surpassed heroin arrests.

4

1971 was also the year police decided to get out of their cars. By January, the first steps toward "Community Policing" were underway. The year was shaping up to be a busy one. As Joe Swan summarizes it, "there were over seventy street demonstrations to police, men were continually being taken from their regular patrol duties. Riot equipment became almost standard uniform." If this doesn't sound much like community policing, it's because there was another policing strategy

called “Saturation Patrolling” very much at odds with the stated goals of community policing. In the Gastown area the strategy was known as “Operation Dustpan,” implying that human filth would be simply swept from the streets. A large number of police would occupy an identified trouble area, closing off all exits and detaining and searching everyone within the confines, violating civil rights and employing often-brutal methods of enforcement. According to some observers, Gastown was like a police state that summer. North Shore Investigations and Security Company, a private security firm, offered local merchants a private sector solution to rid the area of the “immediate drug problem,” which included as the third and final step: “start walking all over people.” According to Stanley’s article on “Operation Dustpan” in the *Straight*, this “final solution” for Gastown was approved and supported by Mayor Tom Campbell and his unceasing need for publicity, fuelled by his “indifference to the needs of the community and even to the possibility of violence.”

5

In 1971, the cooperative impulse again took hold at the *Straight*. A group of women objecting to rampant sexism in its pages seized the offices and published the *Women’s Liberated Georgia Straight* on April 8, 1971. All men were excluded from the paper’s offices for the weeklong duration of the occupation. Although the staff working on the paper thought of themselves as a cooperative, McLeod exercised total editorial control at least until January 1972 when, during a two-week occupation of the *Georgia Straight* office at 56A Powell Street, a group of dissident staffers began publishing an alternative newspaper: the *Georgia Grape*. College Printers, the *Straight*’s regular printers, refused to print the paper as long as the name “Georgia” appeared in its masthead. The one and only issue of the *Georgia Grape* had to be printed at Horizon Printers. After the first edition, McLeod obtained an injunction prohibiting the use of the name Georgia, giving birth to *The Grape*, a community paper run and edited by a cooperative.

When they split, Stanley went with the *Grape* faction. *The Grape* wanted to be more than an entertainment weekly; it would cover issues like gay liberation, politics, art, economics and ecology. Besides *The Grape*, the *Terminal City Express* (not the one in the ‘90s) came out of the *Georgia Straight* split. Later *The Grape* became *The Western Organizer*, then the *Western Voice*. Meanwhile, according to *Straight* editor

Rowland Morgan, the *Straight* was subsidized by *The Vancouver Star*,

a sex newspaper in the days when sex was still controversial, i.e. gays and other minorities needed an outlet for their sexy classified adverts. We sold these classifieds for good money, in addition to which the massage parlours all advertised, and the paper's street sales were brisk. *The Vancouver Star* made a tidy profit, and McLeod used its revenues to keep the *Georgia Straight* afloat until he could succeed in switching it to a freebie listings rag.

Around the same time, the Vancouver Writing Series, an offshoot of the GSWs, published eight books and then became the Vancouver Community Press for the last six titles. The initials NSB (for New Star Books) alongside a black 5-point star appear on one of the fourteen books, David Bromige's *Ten Years in the Making*. In his introduction/dedication, Bromige mentions the Vancouver Poetry Commune AKA the York Street Commune at 2504 York and Larch, donating all royalties to the cause. After the publication of Al Neil's *West Coast Lokas*, the changeover to New Star Books was complete; the press would for a time be run by a collective and edited by George Stanley. Another cooperative venture, at least in the beginning, New Star published Stanley's first Vancouver book *You* in 1973. George told me recently that he was informed by one of the collective members, when he took copies of his book in lieu of pay, that the "books were the property of the Canadian working class." Once again the masses were fighting against the masses.

6

1972 was a better year: British Columbia would become a "worker's paradise," at least briefly. George Stanley, at the time neither a Canadian citizen nor member of the left-leaning New Democratic Party, voted to nominate Rosemary Brown in the Vancouver Burrard riding which she won in the September election that made New Democrat David Barrett the Premier of "Chile of the North," as *Barron's* magazine referred to BC in April of 1973. The day after the election the "Majority Movement" was formed in Kamloops to "unite the right" and ensure that the "godless socialists," as W.A.C. Bennett insisted on calling anyone to the left of Genghis Khan, would never be elected again in BC.