

STUDENT NEWSPAPERS CELEBRATE:

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The year 1992 is turning out to be an important one for the University of Ottawa's student newspapers. It's the 60th anniversary of *La Rotonde* and the 50th anniversary of *The Fulcrum*. These two papers have figured prominently in student life, and have undergone fascinating changes over the years. This double anniversary is an opportunity for us to briefly look back at their history.

60TH ANNIVERSARY OF LA ROTONDE (1932-1992)

The first issue of *La Rotonde* was published November 21, 1932 by the Société des débats français (the French debating club). It was the first student newspaper published entirely in French — the previous newspaper, the *V.A.R.*, published between 1926 and 1928, was bilingual. René Ménard was editor-in-chief and Joseph Gravel, OMI, head of the debating club, was the censor. The paper, published twice a month, was only four pages long and a one-year subscription cost 50 cents. In 1936, the paper became a monthly. Starting in the 1950s, it was again published twice a month, and, starting in 1964, weekly during the school year.

In its early years, *La Rotonde* focused on the activities of the debating club and other student associations, as well as events affecting the University, its administration and its professors. The paper was also interested in issues concerning Catholic youth and vigorously condemned communism and atheism. In fact, *La Rotonde* was highly respectful of the established order.

In 1943, *La Rotonde* became the voice of the University's French-language student association. Since 1947, it has been under the direction of the students federation. However, the central administration has continued to keep an eye on its activities.

In 1954, for the first time, *La Rotonde* was named best French-language member paper of the Canadian University Press.

In the paper's initial decades, interference by the University administration did not create problems. However, by the mid-1950s, students were demanding more autonomy. Indeed, the 1956 Canadian University Press conference named the paper the most censored in Canada. Following this, *La Rotonde's* editor began demanding freedom of the press.

These demands led to increasing friction between University and the paper's editors. *La Rotonde* was prevented from publishing several times. Tensions peaked in October 1958, when three members of the paper's editorial team were dismissed for publishing a report that strongly displeased the administration. The

paper stopped publishing. This spectacular dismissal created anger in student circles, where it was considered a violation of freedom of the press.

The students federation formally asked the University administration to reverse its decision. However, the administration rejected this request, which led to the resignation of the federation's president, Marcel Prud'homme. The conflict confirmed University control over the newspaper. *La Rotonde* resumed publication, with a new editorial board, January 30, 1959.

Since the restructuring of the University in 1965, students have fully controlled their newspapers. However, by the end of the 1960s, the papers were no longer managing to attract student interest. In February 1969, the students federation eliminated *La Rotonde* and *The Fulcrum* and replaced them with a bilingual publication, *Id*. The monthly had little success and quickly disappeared. In September 1970, after an absence of several months, *La Rotonde* returned.

In winter 1986, the paper's survival was once again threatened, this time due to financial difficulties. Fortunately, a fundraising campaign in the francophone community and a change in students federation operations saved it. The situation has improved since then and *La Rotonde* currently has a circulation of 6,000. A sign of the times: the paper is now printed on recycled paper. Geneviève Gouin is the editor.

Over the years, and particularly since 1965, *La Rotonde's* content has changed considerably. Of course, the paper continues to look closely at the students federation (now, the SFUO) and bilingualism. But it pays less attention to the University administration and faculty, and to religious matters. *La Rotonde* now deals with all sorts of topics, such as Quebec nationalism, the status of women, homosexuality, the environment, tuition fees and AIDS. Cultural activities on campus and in the National Capital Region, as well as the exploits of University sports teams have greater prominence. As well, in recent years, there have been more articles and editorials on Franco-Ontarian rights.

Finally, recent advertisements for condoms are undeniable proof that the paper, like society, is constantly changing. It would have been unthinkable to imagine these types of ads in *La Rotonde* of 1932.

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF *THE FULCRUM* (1942-1992)

The first anglophone student paper at the University, *The Owl*, was founded in 1888. It was replaced by the *University of Ottawa Review* in 1898. A drop in anglophone student numbers led to its demise in 1915. As we've already seen, a bilingual publication started up in the 1920s, but disappeared quickly.

The idea of establishing a new paper for anglophone students had been brewing since *La Rotonde* was founded. The dream became reality in February 1942,

when *The Fulcrum* was founded by the English Debating Society, led by Lorenzo Danis, OMI. John Beahen became the first editor-in-chief. A one-year subscription cost a dollar.

At first, the English Debating Society published the paper eight times a year. But its financial situation was precarious and the paper only survived thanks to donations from alumni. The situation improved somewhat the following year, when *The Fulcrum* turned to advertising. In 1946, the paper was taken over by the English Students Association, part of the students federation.

In 1951, *The Fulcrum* experienced further financial problems and the editorial board suggested a merger with *La Rotonde* to create the *Ottawa*. This suggestion was rejected but the two papers began to share offices at the students federation house at 611 Cumberland. In 1953, the paper became a bimonthly.

For a half a century, *The Fulcrum* has been distributed without interruption, except from March 1969 to September 1970. As we've seen, during the latter period, university papers were no longer managing to attract student interest. They were eliminated and replaced by the new *Id*. The monthly was not as successful as hoped for and *The Fulcrum* began to publish again in 1970 for the start of the academic year.

Like *La Rotonde*, *The Fulcrum* has undergone many changes over 50 years. When it started, it mostly covered the English Debating Society, the students federation, campus sports and cultural events, and alumni. It provided us with a lot of information on the faculty and University administration. It also dealt with topics in the news, particularly issues of religion and bilingualism in Canada.

In brief, until 1965, *The Fulcrum* could be seen as the medium of anglophone and Catholic students, and its goal was to report on day-to-day campus life. It did not play an advocacy role and, unlike the French-language student paper, it never had a strained relationship with University authorities.

Of course, *The Fulcrum* did not ignore the disagreements between *La Rotonde* and the administration over freedom of the press. However, it took a moderate position and criticized both sides. In the 1960s, though, it became more sensitive to the issue. For example, it disapproved of the removal of a special September 1964 back-to-school edition of *La Rotonde* criticizing the sight of Queen Elizabeth II in Quebec.

Since 1965, *The Fulcrum* has looked at all issues of concern to students, not only on campus but in society. Cultural and sports activities also have an important place. All in all, *The Fulcrum* aims to give voice to the interests and concerns of anglophone students at the University of Ottawa. It currently has a circulation of 10,000, under editor-in-chief Jean Fulton.

All things considered, *The Fulcrum* and *La Rotonde* symbolize the dynamism of University of Ottawa students. The fact that both have now passed the half-century mark is in itself no mean feat, given that student newspapers are often short-lived. *La Rotonde* is actually the oldest and largest French-language university paper in Ontario. Let's hope that both papers continue to serve their readers well and that they meet few obstacles on the road to their respective centennials.