

# MOVING ON

## SOME LAST WORDS BY FRED NELSON

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*Newspapers are unable, seemingly, to discriminate between a bicycle accident and the collapse of civilization.*

- George Bernard Shaw

On May 7 I resigned after slightly more than two years as editor of the *Free You*, and one of my successors' first acts was to tell me that I have only a few moments to prepare this article explaining why; which is something, after two years of berating people to meet deadlines, like being unexpectedly handed my own ass.

Yeah, I quit, and I'm still not sure whether I've pulled off some grand act of self-liberation or simply pulled the emotional roof down on myself. I've poured two years of my life into this magazine (I'm not sure what format this article will be appearing in, now - magazine, tabloid, newsletter, perforated roll) and sacrificed income, a stunning woman and a faint measure of professional respectability to do it. I knew that this maniacal devotion would have to end sometime, and that its end would have to be accompanied by some sort of long, nostalgic soliloquy about how neat and important it had all been. Well, it was neat, important, groovy, great, far fucking out and all the usual, but the written proof of what I've been up to speaks more for itself, for better or worse, than I presently care to. I couldn't have done anything without the help and concern of scores of good people, most particularly Ed McClanahan, Nina and Morton Wolf, Jenny Deupree, Bob Cullenbine and Lee Reeves, without whose effort and love I wouldn't have touched this thing with lead gloves.

While I have little to say about glories past, I have a number of thoughts about current affairs in the Midpeninsula Free University that helped grease my skid into retirement. I did not quit in protest, however, stalking off in an editorial snit. I've more, like, become a charter member of the Free University alumni association, and like any true alumnus, I'm preeminently pissed off at how poorly the Free U football team did last fall (the humiliation in the Big Game with the Plowshare Community Booksellers was too much to bear.) I think the Coordinator is being pushed around by his own students, the Dean of Students is a sellout, the faculty should spend more time teaching and less time rabbleroxing, for the life of me I don't understand what those kids are up to these days on our campus and my friends and I aren't gonna endow any more research facilities until traditional values are reestablished in their proper place in the curriculum.

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But more to the point, the *Free You* has been changed into a weekly newspaper, the better to cover immediate news, consolidate activities and the various voices of the movement and haul the movement itself together. These changes grew out of the strike at Stanford, and the hope behind them was to give local radicals a better voice and to get the Free University more deeply involved in political activities.

There's nothing there to argue with; and with the change in format excepted, these are all things I've directly argued and worked for since I've been in the Free University. The *Free You* needs the added content and political weight these changes will bring. But these changes were proposed and effected over an undercurrent of enthusiasm about prospects of editing other things out of the magazine that somehow didn't seem to have political content, and I can't participate in a *Free You* that has that sort of censorial bent. *Everyone* around here has his preferences, and these preferences have nearly always included the corollary preference to exclude contrary opinions and material. Ed McClanahan, myself and others have argued endlessly that as an open and diverse organization, the Free University should be represented by an open and diverse newsletter; the special uniqueness of the *Free You* has been its willingness *not* gradually narrow itself as all other publications eventually do. I've determinedly kept myself from throwing out contributions I didn't agree with, or that I thought were junk, and I've expected others to similarly keep their own tastes from being tools of control.



During the past four months, however, the *Free You* editorial group has spent more and more time passing on other people's contributions, however, and less time generating material of its own. And the most recent changes, have been made with several Free University officers saying that the Free U., and its magazine, bear some sort of "stigma" within the movement and ought to be somehow purified. Purification by adding heavier political material is fine. But in a voluntary organization, purification by weeding out contrary opinions; or seemingly non-political material, just ain't right; not, at least, until the Free University itself somehow decides to work the same changes in its membership at large.

What's being proposed, in effect, is a weekly paper of, by and for radical political activists, along the lines, of say, the *Berkeley Tribe* or the San Jose *Maverick*, a local need that these two papers partially meet but which has gone largely unfilled since the demise of the *Peninsula Observer*. But I think this sort of paper will hit the wrong audience, people who need political news least. I've devoted my time to building an attractive, entertaining magazine of *general* appeal, containing, at the same time, enough serious political content to educate and begin to change the people we've attracted. I think the new *Free You* will leave these people behind or simply alienate them when we most need to educate them. Large hunks of radical logic are unassailable, most radical imperatives are indisputable, but radical rhetoric is generally indigestible, coming across as static to the untuned ear of the public we all want to reach.

Verbal barrages laid down by the left on the government and its controlling classes on the far end of the social spectrum, *don't* dent their armor (would you, in turn, be moved by Nixon's rhetoric?) They fall, instead, on the people in the middle, the people we need, in whose name we propose to act: lower-middle-class small businessmen, cops, hostile blue-collar workers, millions of faint liberals and silent majority members who stay silent because, above all, they rarely know *what* in hell is going on. These people must join the revolution, but the American dream, while it's failed them, still deludes them: they fear any change as a personal threat, and when our rhetorical barrages fall on them, all they see are bullets. They'll come over to us only on their own terms. . . in answer to invitations they understand, that turn them on, something our own orgies of political self-congratulation have never accomplished. My friend Dean

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Latimer has written in the East Village *Other*, "most of the hostility which the Big Middle focuses on us radical types is actually just redirected paranoia. They feel trapped in the system and indeed they are, so when the system tells them to vent their fear and hate on us, they do." Driving a useful wedge into these people should be our first goal, and we aren't going to do it by hardening our own published line, papering over our pages with corny slogans like "Seize the Time" and the like.

I am *not* advocating the particularly weak kind of "rational dialogue" that sponges up the tide of change, I'm talking about opening up people and moving them, not by the sort of polarization that gains more enemies than recruits. I'm talking about the process that radicalized *me*, to the extent that that term fits me, and the proposed political exclusivity of the new *Free You* wouldn't have moved me a foot. Our most serious need is to bring people to the brink of serious political commitment, and this is a brink that people can't simply be kicked over.

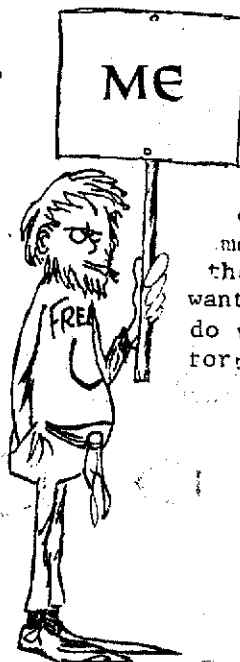
The new version of the *Free You* will speak, as most publications from the *Oakland Tribune* to the *Berkeley Tribe* already do, to the already-committed, and this prospect bores me. This might give its editors the thrill of participation, strong reinforcement of their own new-found political convictions and a feeling of solidarity with, and possible importance among, the committed. God knows that's a good feeling, but it'll stop any meaningful revolution cold in its tracks. It will turn meaningful response to a crisis into a simple crisis mentality.

Time spent talking to political or social allies is time largely wasted. I care more about changing people from my own middle-class background than worshipping my own, obvious political rightness. We're sitting on the San Andreas fault of the American social system. The slippage has sped along for generations, the stress is enormous. A social and political earthquake is inevitable, proper and imperative, it's simply nature's way. In the long run, more good is done by accelerating the inevitable--politically greasing the fault--than by retarding it, but when we pass out of the heat of what, granted, is a very exciting moment in this area, what's being proposed for the *Free You* is retardative.

Peripherally, the saddest indication of what may lie in wait for the *Free You* and its readership was the coordinating council's recent purge of office manager Bob Litvak, largely on political grounds, during a discussion which featured a new officer of the Free University referring to former Coordinator Bob Cullenbine as a "dinousaur." Litvak isn't a visibly "political" person; he was forced off the staff, in large part, because of the Free U officers' objections to his lack of political involvement, but his greatest value to the community, a value whose absence will be sore felt, was in gluing the office together, handling the hundreds of small personal problems that come our way daily because this society provides no other means for handling them. Litvak was the one who hung on the phone for hours handling bad acid trips, comforting runaways, doing the shitwork that no number of volunteers or highly-charged activists could find for. A community that doesn't have room for a Bob Litvak will have room for increasingly few people. This isn't what the Free U is about.

While I can't continue with the *Free You*, I've encouraged all my friends to continue caring for it and contributing to it as they see fit, in the hope of making it the best of whatever its editors want it to be. My own role, upholstered as

it is with two years of total commitment to the thing, couldn't be that comfortable. I'm in a decided minority about these changes, so if I stayed on as editor I'd either have to knuckle under and do something I can't agree with, or wage a continuing, internal guerilla fight against the majority voice on my own magazine. I simply can't do the former, and the latter would alienate more and more new people and contribute heavily to the internal destruction of the very magazine I'd be wanting to save. So the only alternative that would do well by me, the new editors and the magazine, is for me to quit, which I've done. Bye.



I suppose that I, more than anyone else in the Free U Liberation Front have taken the time to patiently counter Fred's arguments in the past six months. I see no reason to stop now.

The Free You has had an interesting career so far; I see nothing in the recent developments to indicate that this history is doomed to become a fond memory - it is not yet time to sing Those Were They Days while wallowing in the luxury of bitter/sweet recollections.

The Free You made two interesting decisions in the past. The first was to print everything that was submitted as long as space permitted; and the second was to adopt the magazine format. Basically the first decision was the newsletter's equivalent to the open curriculum policy of the Free U. Space being the only limitation, this policy led to increasingly larger magazines (that put unbearable financial pressure on the Free U) in order not to exclude anyone's copy. The shift to the magazine format was unprecedented; and the guiding intelligence behind it came from Fred Nelson. In the beginning, everything was cool, since the Free U and its income were growing approximately at the same rate as the Free You was, but before long, Fred's vision outdistanced the Free U's ability to pay for it.

The Free You has recently switched to an Editorial Board that collectively makes the decisions necessary to create a newsletter; and that board has decided to return to the original newspaper format. Taking control from one man and giving it to a group can be a painful transition - especially if that man fights; and Fred has fought fiercely.

I am especially disturbed over two points that Fred made in his letter. The first, that he and his friends would not support continued research until certain traditional values are reinstated. I interpret this as an implied threat; and

the recent economic boycott of the Free U by certain members who are older and were active at different times in the organization's history, gives me the impression that there are those in the Free U. who if they cannot have their way, will take their piece of the ball and go home.

I am not happy to see this happen, but it is clear that people will make their own decisions. Fortunately this exodus is being countered by the influx of many new members who are being turned on to the Free U for the first time; and the welcome return to the Free U of several older members who left in the past out of some frustration with the organization's inability to live up to its goals.

The second point that Fred made is that the recent "purge" of Bob Litvak, who, if you go by Fred, is the only person in the Free U who cares about people, and is being cruelly railroaded out of the office because his politics don't pass the current political litmus test. Fred suggests that this "purge" may be indicative of what may "lie in wait" for the Free You and its readership. Frankly, I don't know what the hell that's supposed to mean, but something in the back of my head tells me that it's not nice, and certainly isn't true. It can't mean that we are intending to purge our readership. That doesn't seem to be a very wise tactic for a newspaper that is committed to serving the community, and I can't get into the concept of mass murders in the Free U Coordinating Council.

Very simply, we hope to have a newspaper that comes out weekly, making its own decisions and meeting deadlines, that is relevant to the community and the political/cultural revolution in this country. This would be an economical enterprise that will look to the Free U for less and less support in the future.

Eventually, I hope we will even turn on and encourage the new young blood who will call us dinosaurs and take from there to chase after newer visions.