

world of money in state politics, something previous generations could only dream of.” *The Indianapolis Star and News*, owned by former vice president Dan Quayle’s family, have led the way, showing in hard-hitting series how the Indiana legislature had been “hijacked” and “plundered” by “an extraordinary coalition

of about 40 big-business interests, led by the Indiana Chamber of Commerce.” “As editors seek alternatives to ‘boring’ governmental process stories,” say Layton and Walton, “database journalism (despite a name that suggests geeks-at-work) has the power to rivet readers with accounts of how democracy operates.”

## Consider the Alternatives

“Chaining the Alternatives” by Eric Bates, in *The Nation* (June 29, 1998),  
33 Irving Pl., New York, N.Y. 10003.

In the good old antiwar days, “underground” weeklies such as the *Phoenix New Times* were the proud “alternative” to the tame “establishment” press, and their mission was clear: not just to write about the world, but to change it. No longer, observes Bates, a staff writer for *The Independent*, a locally owned alternative weekly in Durham, North Carolina. Grown so prosperous that corporate chains now compete fiercely to buy them, many alternative papers have put their radicalism behind them. Instead of fighting capitalism, they are embracing it.

Founded by college students and dropouts in 1970 as a vehicle of antiwar protest, *New Times* has evolved into a national chain, New Times Inc. It owns eight alternative weeklies, from Miami to San Francisco, as well as an advertising group that represents six other papers. In the early years, *New Times* was put out by a nonhierarchical collective, whose members each made \$55 a week. Today, writers for the chain’s papers get annual salaries of \$35,000 or more, while in 1995 cofounders Michael Lacey and Jim Larkin, according to an internal memo, each pulled down \$300,000.

New Times Inc. “still takes on everyone from corporate polluters to corrupt politicians,” Bates reports, “but it also takes pains to distance itself from its radical past.” Not all alternative papers had any radical past to shed, Bates notes. “Many evolved from free shoppers, campus entertainment listings and record store promotions, devoted to cashing in on the young, hip,

urban demographic that movement papers had helped forge.”

In the last four years, *New Times*, *Stern Publishing* (which owns seven papers, including New York’s *Village Voice*), and other corporate chains “have snapped up alternative weeklies in major markets like Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Minneapolis and Montreal, and have begun expanding into mid-size cities,” Bates says. Of the 17 million “alternative” readers, more than half are now served by chain-owned weeklies.

The trend, Bates says, “is being driven largely” by the prospect of advertising revenues, which since 1992 have nearly doubled, to \$345 million. With publications in multiple markets, chains are able to attract national advertisers, notably cigarette and alcohol advertisers. “They understand how to reach 18- to 34-year-olds efficiently,” notes Richard Karpel, executive director of the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies (AAN). Over the last two years, national ad revenues for the 109 AAN members have almost tripled, with nearly 70 percent of the money coming from the tobacco industry. (Another major source of revenue for alternative papers is graphic sex ads.)

In *Advertising Age* two years ago, AAN assured potential advertisers that the alternatives’ “primary mission is journalistic, not political, and they are all in business to make a profit.” If that is so, asks Bates, “then what makes them alternative?”

## RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

### Kantian Christianity

“The Christian Democracy of Glenn Tinder and Jacques Maritain,” by Robert P. Kraynak, in *Perspectives on Political Science* (Spring 1998), 1319 18th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036–1802.

For much of its 2,000-year history, Christianity was indifferent or hostile to democ-

racy. Today, however, virtually all churches and Christian theologians are its champi-