

Libération: The Art of Everyday Rebellion

Libération is an iconic newspaper launched in 1973 by a group inspired by the revolutionary spirit of Paris '68. The vision of its founders, which included Jean-Paul Sartre, was of a newspaper owned by its workers and committed to journalistic integrity. Taking its name from a 1941 French Resistance newspaper with ties to the Communist Party, which closed in 1964, the new daily maintained independence from any party while espousing its leftist, socially progressive position.

For the first eight years the paper did not sell any advertising space, making its money solely from newsstand and subscription sales, and the entire staff received the same salary. This created an in-built financial fragility that, when later combined with the digital disruption of journalism as a whole, nearly caused the paper to close in 2014. But, for now, *Libération* lives on.

"News is a battle," read a 2009 ad campaign for the paper, reflecting its innovative and provocative tactics. According to editor Laurent Joffrin, a veteran of the early days, "*Libération* is, above all, a way of living audaciously." This attitude has helped the paper build a small yet devoted core of readers, but its survival over three decades has been possible thanks to a team of journalists who defended editorial control against external interests, despite the fact that doing otherwise would provide financial oxygen: their commitment to integrity has always come before profitability.

It is a newspaper known for promoting social causes such as sexual freedom, the equality of women, and secularism and for defending the French public sector. Also, of all the world's newspapers, *Libération* is possibly the one that gives the greatest amount of



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Basic Facts

Headquarters: Paris, France
Type: National daily
Days of circulation: Monday to Saturday
Format: Tabloid
Year of foundation: 1973
Founders: Jean-Paul Sartre, Serge July
Shareholders / Owners: Bruno Ledoux, Édouard de Rothschild, SFR / Alice, Ersel

coverage to culture and lifestyle trends: at least 20 percent of the lead stories on the front page are cultural, and its criticism of music, film, and books is among the most respected in Europe.

Long before other daily papers in its market, *Libé*, as it is affectionately called, experimented with typography, prolific use of illustrations and comics, and putting photography at the same level of importance as text.

1. Emmanuel Macron, elected president of France in 2017, frequently appears on the front pages of *Libé*. This example includes several of the common hallmarks of the paper, which comes to resemble a poster: the powerful use of red, the extra-condensed headline font, and the use of black-and-white photography.

2. February 5, 1973: the first special issue of *Libération* is published with the goal of raising funds to ensure a smooth launch of the newspaper. Note the eye-catching logo and use of green—two elements that would not be retained. The subsequent issue, considered to be the paper's inaugural edition, is printed on April 18 of that year, sporting a distinctive red logo.

3. April 1980. Philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, one of the founders of *Libération* and an indispensable reference in modern thought, dies. The front page of the newspaper, still using the original Windsor font logo, is devoid of any headline, featuring only a superbly chosen photograph of Sartre walking away.

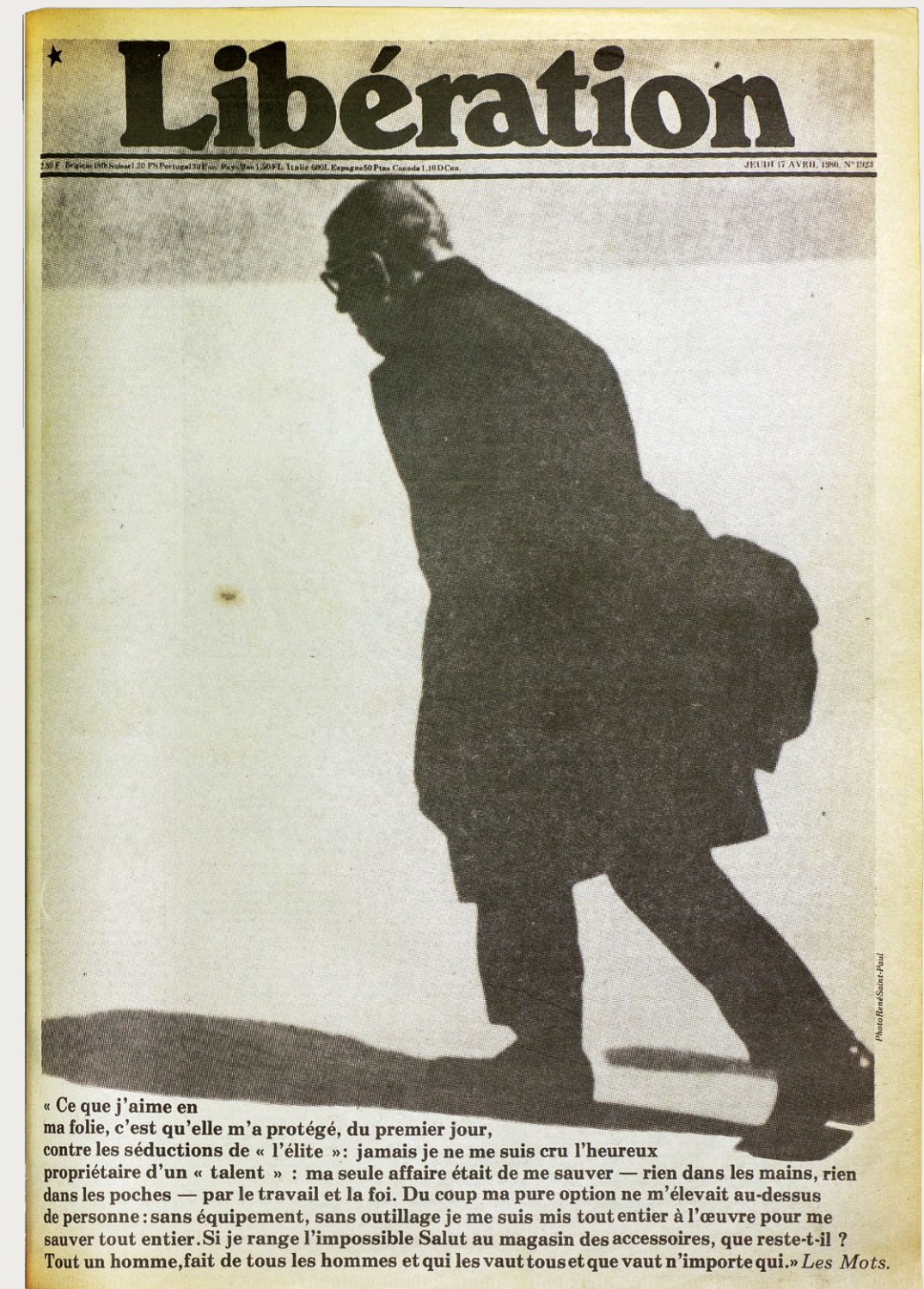
4. The front page of the February 9, 2014 issue. Here, the newsroom vehemently protests the new owner's plans of converting the newspaper into a cultural space and start-up incubator. The editorial independence of *Libération* has always been a hallmark of the newspaper's identity.



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"It is a form of writing," states Christian Caujolle, an early photographic editor at *Libé* who later, with the paper's cooperation, launched VU, a prestigious photo agency. However, the paper has never had staff photographers, relying instead on a dynamic team of photo editors who enjoy a high degree of control in the newsroom, with an incomparable range of external talent on call: Henri Cartier-Bresson, William Klein, Sebastião Salgado, and many other leading photographers have been contributors. Photographers around the world dream of being published in *Libé*, often accepting less than their usual rates for the privilege.

Because there were no hierarchies, all decisions were made as a group—a situation that became unsustainable. From February to May 1981, *Libé* disappeared for a few months while Serge July, its legendary editor and one of the founders, tried desperately to save it. The plan known as "*Libé 2*," which was unveiled later that year, signified the end of the paper's foundational phase and introduced a certain degree of normalization as a business. Little by little, the first advertisements began to appear and capital was raised from investors unconnected to the newsroom (where the staff still held majority shareholder control).