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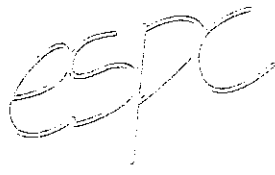
ESPC 111

Challenging the Fifth Estate

In Search of Investigative
Journalism

Social Issues Reporting Gone Astray

Hiding Photos



E D M O N T O N

SOCIAL PLANNING

C O U N C I L

First Reading is published six times a year by the Edmonton Social Planning Council. The Council is an independent, not-for-profit organization, whose activities include social research, policy analysis, and advocacy.

We welcome new members, or the opinions and suggestions of our current members. All membership requests or magazine contributions can be forwarded to:

Edmonton Social Planning Council

Suite 41, 9912-106 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 1C5
403.423.2031 Fax 425.6244

We reserve the right to edit all contributions.

Managing Editor: Jonathan Murphy

Editor: Sheila Hallett-Kushniruk

Graphic Designer: Lesli Thompson

Contributors: Bill Daskach, Tony Fisher, Darren Francey, Mike Gismondi, Heather Harris, Frederick S. Kozak, Sheila Hallett-Kushniruk, Jonathan Murphy, Edmond J. O'Neill, Mary Richardson, Dick Schuler, June Sheppard, Joan Sherman, Gillian Steward

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Mission

"The Edmonton Social Planning Council believes that all people should have the social rights and freedoms to live and work in an environment that enhances individual, family, and community growth without restricting the same rights and freedoms for others. The Council seeks to create, to advocate, and to support changes in policies, attitudes, and actions in order to enhance these social rights and freedoms."

Our Goals

- ▷ To undertake research into the nature and magnitude of social issues in the community.
- ▷ To increase public awareness and understanding of current social issues and to exercise an independent voice in the community.
- ▷ To encourage greater public participation in the development of social policies and in the implementation of programs.

Where's the Real Story?

Since the Klein government initiated its deficit reduction program almost two years ago, a number of people and organizations have expressed frustration and anger over budget cuts and restructuring of education and health care. But there has been little public reaction to changes in Social Services programs. So little resistance that Premier Klein and his cabinet ministers frequently brag about the number of people who have been "removed" from the welfare rolls.

Do most Albertans readily accept this part of the government's agenda? Or has there simply not been adequate coverage of this issue in the mainstream media?

Evidence suggests that while government announcements of changes to social service programs get coverage, there isn't much news about the people, and communities, affected by those changes.

For example, Premier Klein and Social Services Minister Mike Cardinal frequently claim 35,566 files (about 77,000 individuals) were dropped from the welfare caseload between 1993 and 1994. The government also claims that almost 30,000 people were moved from social assistance to training programs, thousands of others found jobs, and the rest didn't deserve assistance. But what about those statistics? How accurate are they? If people are being trained instead of receiving social

assistance, is the government paying for it, or did the person have to take out a student loan to go to school? How many of the people denied assistance are now incurring huge personal debts? How many had to leave the province to find work or financial support? How many now have to apply to a food bank if they want to eat?

There are often articles in the *Edmonton Journal* and the *Calgary Herald* about individuals who have suffered because of reductions to social assistance payments, or outright elimination of programs. Columnists and editorial writers frequently deplore the way the government has penalized the poor in its quest to balance the provincial budget. But there is very little analysis of the big picture—little effort to root out the truth. Instead reporters and commentators use government statistics or press releases as if they were proven fact.

There's no question that digging out the real story can be difficult. People receiving social assistance know that if they complain publicly they risk being cut off altogether. And when people are denied assistance, social workers don't track them to determine how they fared without government help. There is also the confidentiality problem. Social workers are not supposed to reveal the names and circumstances of their clients. And they too know there are dire consequences for airing complaints about the government, or the system, in public. The bureaucrats who run the system are notorious in media circles for withholding information, or making it extremely difficult to obtain. It's part of their job.

But I believe that with a concerted, determined effort the media could have given Albertans more detail about the culture change in the provincial Social Services department in the past two years. In a relatively short time, it's become a department that is more interested in policing, punishing and discouraging people who need social assistance, than in helping them. Social workers and other staff who opposed this strategy have been forced

By Gillian
Steward

out. Those who support this kind of social control have been encouraged to stay.

There hasn't been much reporting about the massive changes proposed for Child Welfare Services either. There was widespread media coverage when the government announced in November that it was going to turn over delivery of service for children at risk to community groups. The *Edmonton Journal* devoted a considerable amount of space to explaining the proposal and getting response from various interest groups such as the Alberta Union of Public Employees (AUPE) and community social service agencies. The *Calgary Herald* also played the story prominently, and sought reaction. But it didn't devote much space or effort to a thorough explanation of the proposal.

Since then the story has virtually disappeared. But the ramifications of that announcement are being felt all over the province. Local authorities have no idea what the government wants them to do about Child Welfare Services, or how to do it. No one knows who will be appointed to the regional boards that will oversee delivery of service. Will they simply be government toadies or will they truly represent the community? Child Welfare workers have already been told they won't have a job in three years. Staff are demoralized about the value of their work, and unsure about future job prospects. It's hard to imagine that children in care, or at risk, have not been affected by the chaos in the department. But there has been no coverage of this aspect of the story.

The speed and scale of the changes introduced by the Klein government has made it difficult for the media to keep up. Even well-resourced news gathering operations like *The Herald* and *The Journal* can't afford to cover everything. And it's much easier, and cheaper, to produce stories about people who are well-organized, articulate and available than it is to assign a reporter to spend weeks, or perhaps months, ferreting out more elusive stories. That's why there has been more coverage of the ramifications of changes to Health and Education, than Social Services. Most people adversely affected by cut-backs to hospitals and schools aren't dependent on government cheques, so they are more likely to speak out. They also have the resources to organize lobby groups and public meetings. People who need social assistance, and children who need the protec-

tion of Child Welfare Services don't have the same freedom, or resources.

It's possible the media, or other Albertans, will eventually get at the truth about the changes in Social Services through the new Freedom of Information legislation. But the staff and procedures that would make the legislation a reality have yet to be put in place. In the meantime, Premier Klein and his ministers will likely continue to boast about the number of people they have "removed" from the welfare rolls. ☺

Gillian Steward has been a journalist in Alberta for 20 years. She was managing editor at The Calgary Herald between 1987 and 1990. She frequently comments on the media for CBC Radio and recently completed a two-hour documentary for CBC Radio's Ideas Series called the Decline of Democracy.

FINALLY IT'S HERE

The following text is mostly illegible due to blurring and low contrast in the original image. It appears to be a paragraph of text, possibly a quote or a description, located below the main headline.

Where has all the investigative journalism gone?

A book in my collection of journalistic works seems quaint now: *The Investigative Journalist: Folk Heroes (sic) of a New Era*.

That book was written in 1976, and was intended to chronicle the unsung heroes of investigative reporting in the United States of that era, the spiritual heirs of the original "muckrakers" whose work provided the impetus for many important social reforms in that nation at the turn of the century.

It was groups like Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) that provided the model for a Canadian version, the Centre for Investigative Journalism (CIJ, now the Canadian Association of Journalists or CAJ).

But now, in both countries, investigative reporting appears to be on the wane.

In the CAJ's awards for investigative reporting, the focus seems to have gone from the hard-hitting political stories of the mid-1980s to true crime stories today.

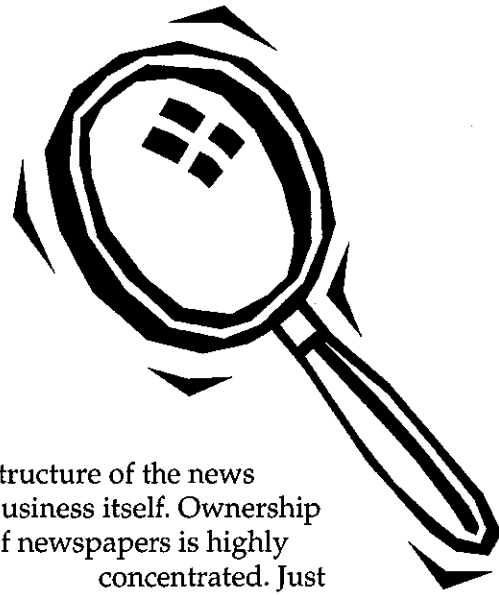
Gene Roberts, now the managing editor of the *New York Times*, wrote in a December 1993 *American Journalism Review* article that a Japanese student who came to the U.S. in 1992 to study investigative reporting wound up calling his paper *The Demise of Investigative Journalism in American Newspapers*.

Roberts blamed the phenomenon on news executives who believe newspapers can be sold with better packaging instead of, not in addition to, substantive news content.

What happens down there eventually comes to pass up here, and journalism is no different in this case.

Why is this happening is the obvious question. The answer, however, is not so clear-cut.

In Canada, part of the answer lies in the



structure of the news business itself. Ownership of newspapers is highly concentrated. Just

two chains, Southam and Thomson, account for almost 60 per cent of the newspapers sold in Canada.

Southam is considered to be the quality chain, and Thomson the 19th Century-Robber-Baron-Profiteer. Generally speaking, only its biggest, highest-profile papers (the *Globe and Mail*, *Winnipeg Free Press*, *Victoria Times Colonist*) do any amount of investigative reporting.

But by the mid-1980s, Southam was showing signs of trouble.

Thomson's papers routinely racked up operating profit margins of 29 per cent or better in this period. One year Southam managed to get up to 15 per cent, but generally speaking, the market saw Southam as vastly underperforming its profit-making potential, thus making it ripe for a takeover bid.

The sharks gathered, and two of the biggest ones—Conrad Black and Paul Desmarais—took effective control of Southam in 1993.

Southam had already launched a cost-cutting program to boost its share price, but Black and Desmarais made it clear they wanted a much more profitable company. Over 1,400 jobs have been eliminated as Southam moves towards that goal.

By Bill
Doskoch

What does this have to do with investigative journalism?

Because it is very expensive, for one thing. Reporters can work on stories for months and then have nothing to show for it. Obtaining documents, travel and other research expenses can quickly add up.

Lawyers have to be intimately involved in the final drafting of the story—at \$200 and \$300 per hour.

And if the subject is a powerful or well-heeled individual or institution, it may file suit as a form of financial harassment, regardless of whether it has a case. This can add thousands of more dollars to the cost of producing a single story.

Threatening to pull advertising has also been known to catch the attention of some publishers.

Combine the push to cut costs and increase profits with the declining sense of *noblesse oblige* in the newspaper business and it becomes easy to see why there is less investigative reporting going on. Even those corporate editors who are still idealistic about the craft, and they do exist, must operate within those constraints and pick their spots carefully.

Unfortunately, reporters can't be left off the hook.

Investigative reporting has always been seen as a specialty in journalism.

That's because many reporters don't have the temperament or skills to follow a complicated story for months on end. This is particularly true for broadcast reporters, who are used to banging out three or four superficial stories per day.

So there you have it: Shrinking resources. A lack of support from management. A limited number of reporters with the talent and the passion for investigative work. Those are the factors on the supply side.

But there's also the demand side.

In an era where people are transfixed by the soap operas of our time, substantive reporting on public policy issues has a hard time capturing the public's interest. An aphorism is that there are no dull stories, only dull reporters, but the fact remains that unless you're an active and involved citizen, most stories on

public policy issues will likely bore you and you'll go off to the sports section or Dear Abby or whatever else you can find to amuse you.

That encapsulates some of the answers as to why investigative reporting is in decline.

Now here's another: what can you do to help revive it?

First of all, if you know something that should be brought to the public's attention, bring it to the media's attention. Don't assume they know about it.

Identify reporters who you think might give a fair hearing to your issues and concerns, cultivate a relationship with them and tip them off to good stories. Understand the constraints they are working under. Many activists tend to be monomaniacal about their concerns, but a mainstream reporter has to decide whether the story has widespread appeal, among other things. And ultimately, they don't make the decisions about headlines, story placement and so forth—their editors do.

As a news consumer, be assertive. Phone editors and tell them you'd like to know more about a given issue that concerns you.

And if you do see a substantial, well-researched piece of journalism in the paper or on the TV, maybe drop a line to the outlet and tell them. That would help to convince editors that somebody is reading this expensive-to-produce stuff, and it's also good for the morale of the reporters. They're human beings too. However, don't go praising them to their competitors, or nasty rumors will get started about them being your stooges. That can be a one-way ticket to covering something else.

Remember, the news media are a business. Convince them there is a market for investigative stories, and maybe this current dismal trend will get turned around. ®

Bill Doskoch is a Saskatchewan journalist.

Picture This



A provincial magazine runs a photograph of MP Svend Robinson, so that the border of the photo is touching that of a convicted murderer, Robert Latimer. The caption reinforces the magazine's bias: Mr. Robinson's opinions on euthanasia are as dangerous as the act itself.

The editor of a small daily requires a photo to illustrate a story on homeless teenagers. Teens in the story do not wish to be photographed, so the photographer arranges a "setup." A reporter dresses up in what he deems to be street clothes and huddles morosely on a fire escape. The photo runs the next day, with the caption and headline implying that this teen (who is not a teen) spends his nights on the street. Does it matter that the photo doesn't accurately represent facts in the story, or that readers are deceived?

Jim Keegstra is charged, again, with promoting hatred, and the media, again, head out to his Eckville garage for reaction. A photographer comes back with several photos, and one stands out: An enraged Mr. Keegstra, eyes wide and chin thrust forward, is jabbing a finger at someone out of camera range. He is the picture of hatred. The editors choose this picture over several other less dramatic shots of a much more rational Mr. Keegstra. The photo is carried by *Canadian Press*, and picked up by the *Globe and Mail*, where it is digitally edited so that Mr. Keegstra's hand is removed in order to fit the composition. Fair to Mr. Keegstra? Fair to readers who have again been deceived?

People looking for a common bias in news rooms today may be disappointed to discover that nothing so sinister exists. That's not to say there is no bias or manipulation of stories or photographs; the above samples show several ways photographs can be misused. Today, bias in newspapers and photography in particular is determined by

a trend towards populism and away from advocacy, and that's bad news for social causes. If indeed the media is a gatekeeper for local opinion, the gate has been locked to any view that constitutes a threat to conservative values and middle class security.

By Darren
Francey

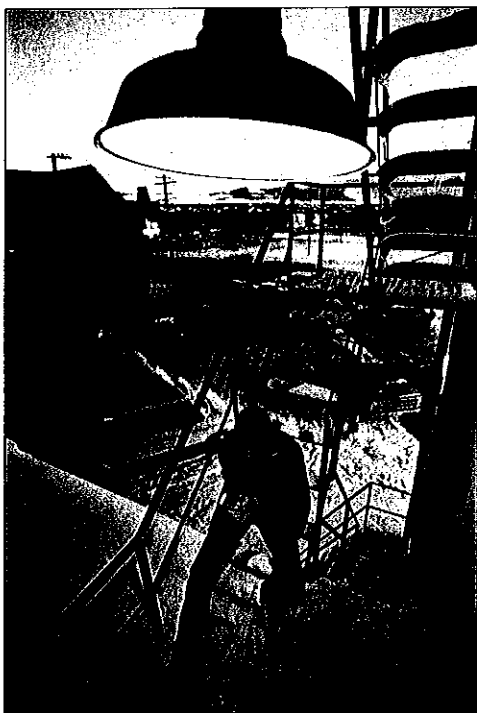
News photographs contribute to this myth of "well-being" in two ways: by perpetuating traditional values and by marginalizing anyone who poses a threat to those values. In photography, this is accomplished through stereotypes. The shallow treatment of homosexual issues is a prime example. When *Alberta Report* runs a photograph of homosexuals, sex is the focus. Usually two men are kissing and groping, and the photograph is tightly cropped to excise any information which may have added context to the subject. The magazine revelled in homophobia in its August 16, 1993, issue when it featured a scantily-clad celebrant at Vancouver's gay pride parade, with the headline Can Gays Be Cured?, the obvious inference being that homosexuality is a disease. *Alberta Report's* photographs belittle homosexuals, thereby reaffirming "traditional" values promoted by the magazine.

But spotting bias in *Alberta Report* is a little like shooting fish in a barrel. The magazine makes no bones about its rightist leanings, and it manipulates photos to fit that doctrine.

What of the mainstream media, which proclaims to be objective? Although editors and photographers strive for objectivity, bias creeps in, often in the form of stereotypes promoting the myth of well-being. On any given day, prominent news pages feature photographs of cute children at play and people being productive (working or volunteering). The virtues of family, hard work and the entrepreneurial spirit are awarded prominent space. Although stories on unemployment, welfare, labor issues and the underprivileged are well-placed, illustration is practically non-existent, beyond the usual

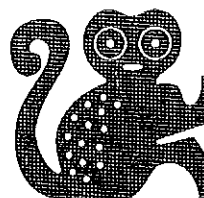
"head shots" of the combatants.

When a newspaper does publish photos illustrating unemployment, or welfare, sometimes this only serves to harden attitudes against the underprivileged. A photo, for example, of a single mother in a messy apartment or an unemployed person in a bar gives the impression of habitual laziness. In this country, most working people already believe that the unemployed or people on welfare are inherently lazy. D.J.B. Overton writes in *Mass Media and Unemployment in Canada—Critical Studies of Canadian Mass Media*: "By and large, the image of the unemployed we find in the media is a negative one. Although the unemployed can be presented as victims and as the worthy objects of our concern and charity, most often they are presented in a less favorable light."



Certainly, news photos can be manipulated and manipulative. Whether this is a result of bias, poor planning or misplaced priorities, it's hard to say. At the very least, newspapers fail to put a realistic human face on a community's social ills and that sin of omission reduces these important issues to abstractions, which are easily ignored. At the worst, profit-driven newspapers give in to populism, building up the myth of well-being rather than holding a much-needed mirror to the community. ©

Darren Francey works as a layout editor at the Red Deer Advocate.



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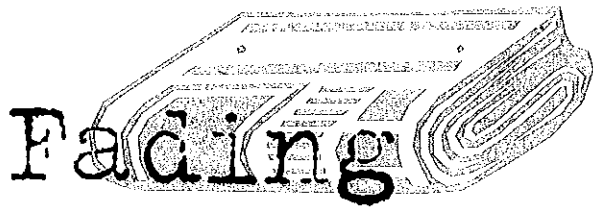
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NEWSPAPERS:

The



Medium?

The other day I ran into a familiar face I hadn't seen for several years—George, the chemical engineer from Esso.

"I lost my job ten months ago," he said after the usual how-do-you-do exchange, "they gave me a severance package; but I'm only 52 and far too young to retire. So I'm out job hunting every day. And are you still at the (Calgary) *Herald*?"

"No, I left when they handed out packages in '93 to down-size the operation by about 100 people," I told him. "Not enough advertising, shrinking circulation, a lot of people just don't want to read anymore."

"Yeah," he retorted with a cheerful grin, "I cancelled my *Herald* subscription years ago. Just couldn't stand that Catherine Ford (former associate editor of the paper, and now its national columnist). She's far too left for me."

"But don't you want to read all the other stuff that's in the paper, such as the career ads, particularly now that you're unemployed?," I wondered aloud.

"Hell no, I get all my news from radio and TV. And those job ads are a total waste. Most companies don't advertise their job openings in the paper any longer. They get enough

applications by informally spreading the word around. It's all networking nowadays, you see."

That's the kind of depressing message I am forced to hear with increasing frequency in Calgary and Edmonton these days. Doctors, architects, teachers—professional people who should have an intellectual curiosity about the news—have tossed away their newspapers and tuned to the mostly glib quick news fix on radio and television. They, along with today's 20-30 generation, prefer the 60-second clip and quick off-the-hip analysis.

And that's bad news for people who rely on newspapers for intelligent, in-depth discussion of the social and political issues. Because many desperate newspaper editors believe the only answer to their heavy circulation losses is to throw out their serious news columns, lay off journalists, and produce more canned fluff rather than real thinking stuff.

Look at the numbers: Between 1985 and 1994, Edmonton's metropolitan population grew by more than 186,000, or 27 per cent, to 874,000 residents, while the *Edmonton Journal* lost 18,000 customers, or 10.5 per cent. Just to keep pace with the population growth, the paper should have been gaining 47,000 in circulation.

In Calgary, the situation is much worse, with the *Herald* losing 23,000 readers while the metropolitan area gained 169,000 residents, also 27 per cent, during the same nine-year period. And the *Sun* papers in both cities aren't doing much better, except for their Sunday editions.

The real crux of the problem is definitely not the recession and high unemployment. Canadians are losing their daily reading habit and succumbing to radio and the boob tube as their source of information. The three supper hour TV news shows in both cities pull combined audiences that are 1.5 times larger than daily newspapers sold. When asked about this in newspaper readership surveys, people

By Dick
Schuler

mostly reply: "No time to read." It seems Marshall McLuhan's prophecy of the death of print is coming true.

This has grave implications for all organizations, such as the ESPC, that still consider the print medium an important messenger to help educate the public about complex social issues. The sad truth is: fewer and fewer Albertans are listening to intelligent discussion in print.

In desperation, the *Calgary Herald* has already gone "down-market," or copied the *Suns*. It recently terminated three women columnists and replaced Spectrum—it's Sunday "think section" of background articles and in-depth analysis—with living, a collection of fluffy lifestyle pieces and a social page (showing the city's glitterati standing around at charity dinners, with cocktail glass in hand), stolen straight from the *Calgary Sun*. (Specifically, Susan Booker, who packaged this page at the *Sun*, was brought over to the *Herald*.)

At the *Journal*, meanwhile, the insight sections on Saturday and Sunday remain still intact. But the editors there are also constantly tinkering with new ideas to boost readership. And one such idea is that the paper doesn't need any longer beat reporters devoted full-time to social services or labor and employment news. Gender issues is the latest cry.

And at the legislature, Rod Love—Premier Ralph Klein's executive assistant—likes to brand the *Journal* and *Herald* as the "Southamista" opposition to the government's agenda (in a slightly overwrought twist on the Sandanista guerrillas who held power in Nicaragua in the 1980s. The two papers are owned by the Southam chain). Particularly *Journal* editorial writer Linda Goyette seems to be a nasty "socialist thorn" in Love's side—and of other *Journal* readers, judging by the letters page.

It seems some Albertans actually mean it when—as I've noticed recently—they start walking around sporting message buttons on their lapels that read: "I respect your opinion. I just don't want to hear it." ©

Dick Schuler is a Calgary freelancer.

Top 10 List of under-reported stories for 1993

(as listed in the 1994 Yearbook of Project Censored
Canada—see story p. 11)

- 1 Did oil prospects fuel the humanitarian efforts in Somalia?
- 2 Tories 'revamp' 21-year rule and forgive the wealthy millions in taxes
- 3 Canada's cozy relationship with Indonesia's human rights-violating regime
- 4 Business grabs the environmental agenda
- 5 NAFTA: a new economic constitution for North America
- 6 NAFTA: an agreement forged in secrecy
- 7 Corporate, media ties to political power
- 8 Forestry in BC: the government giveaway to industry continues
- 9 Canadian mismanagement and the cod fisheries collapse
- 10 Questioning Canada's peace-keeping image: arms exports outpace peacekeeping spending

Story continued on p. 11

Project Censored... stories that got away

A number of important stories go unreported or get little attention yearly. Some of these stories are national or international stories which affect or have relevance to a large number of people. So why aren't they getting more attention in the media? It's a question that was asked in the United States back in 1976 and hence Project Censored was created. A list of the top 25 under-reported stories has been produced every year since the project began. A similar project developed in Canada in 1993 through Simon Fraser University; the University of Windsor and the Canadian Association of Journalists.

Nominations for under-reported stories were solicited from across the country by Project Censored Canada (PCC). The only criteria: the story must be national or international in scope; it must affect, or have relevance to, a large number of people rather than just a few (or intensely affect a few people); the story must have received minimal coverage in the mainstream news media; and the story must have appeared in print or on air during the year and it must be well documented.

An upper-level undergraduate communication seminar at Simon Fraser University research the stories and select the top 20. To narrow it down to 20 the seminar students use the above criteria as well as the following: the story should be timely, contemporary and ongoing—as opposed to historic; the exposure of the story through PCC should potentially help persuade serious journalists to further explore and publicize the subject of the story and should encourage the general public to seek out more information about the subject.

The short list is then handed over to PCC's national panel of judges which select the top ten. Stories nominated for 1994 are currently being shortlisted and researched, before they can be narrowed to 20 and passed to judges.

Project Censored Canada addresses the possibility that Canadians are not receiving

the information they need about significant events and issues through Canada's national media.

The word censored is used not in its traditional context where government either prohibits stories or punishes journalists/editors/publishers who publish certain stories. Instead censorship refers to other factors which, when combined, may distort the picture of society that most Canadians receive. In their 1994 Yearbook project staff argue there is structural or systemic censorship and they outline some of the filters which may screen out significant news such as: shrinking newsroom budgets; concentrated ownership; journalistic self-censorship; influence of advertisers; infotainment; reliance on official and institution sources; threats of legal action; pack journalism; the culture of journalism; technology; and conventional definitions of news.

For more information about the project or to obtain a yearbook which details the top 20 stories for 1993 you can send \$7, payable to

Simon Fraser University:

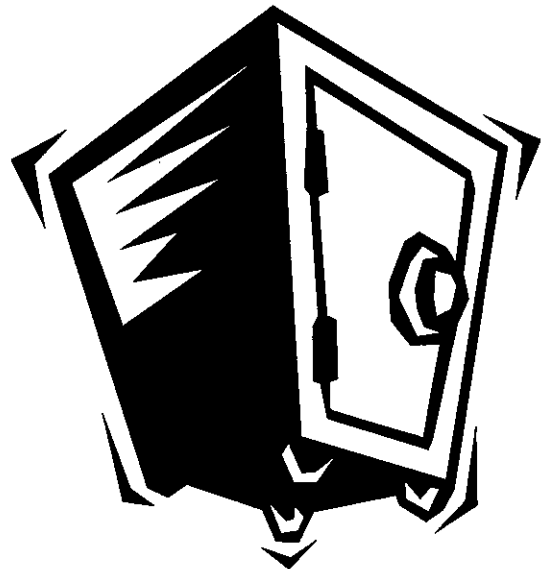
Project Censored Canada

School of Communication

Simon Fraser University

Burnaby, BC

V5A 1S6



MEDIA

By
Jonathan
Murphy

AND THE KLEIN REVOLUTION

Successful Alberta premiers have always had a cosy relationship with the media. William Aberhart started off not as a politician but as a broadcaster. Ernest Manning followed Aberhart onto the radio and into the Premier's chair. Lougheed, although never a journalist or broadcaster, was a master of the media, the first Alberta politician to enlist television to project a modern image of himself and his party.

When the former TV newsman Ralph Klein assumed office in 1992, his facility with the news media posed a challenge to journalists. Would they discount the carefully tailored Uncle Ralph image and provide the public a sense of the reality behind the accompanying policy revolution? Or would questions of personality win out over substance? Much of the media has chosen the latter, easier path.

At times, Klein's avuncular image has even become part of the media's own sales pitch.

Can a newspaper (*The Edmonton Sun*) which fills its first Saturday front page with an image of the Premier wearing its advertising sweatshirt really claim to be independent of government?

The choice of style over substance, of gossip over policy is certainly not restricted to Alberta. Given a choice in a quiz show, would we answer the question about Warren Christopher's role in the Clinton administration, or the one about Gennifer Flowers?

By dwelling on the personal, the media robs the public of the ability to judge the merits of a government. After all, if an effectively managed public image was the determining factor, Ronald Reagan was a great president, and Hitler must have been a pretty good Fuhrer.

The public needs coverage sufficiently substantial to allow informed judgements about government actions. But most outlets never have the time or even maybe the inclination to step beyond the superficiality of Question Period and the manufactured truth of the press flaks. Outside the legislature, vivid images of a filthy hospital ward or a patient being forced to drive all over Alberta to get a liver transplant tell us that the Medicare system isn't perfect, but they don't really help us decide if the Klein cuts are making things worse, let alone whether private medicine is a better alternative to a publicly funded system. A snapshot image, whether visual or verbal, without accompanying explanation and analysis, is basically nothing but an emotional manipulation of the audience.

Even supposedly investigative analyses of the Klein revolution are frequently superficial and unhelpful in judging the merits of a policy shift. To illustrate, I looked carefully at one article on the proposed privatization of jails, which appeared in the *Journal* on October 29th last year. It appears to be 'objective'

in that it presents people who say private jails are good, and others who say they are bad. But nowhere are the real ethical issues addressed. Should private companies be paid to jail prisoners of society, administer punishment when they don't obey the corporation's rules, and presumably shoot them if they try to escape? And what of the interests a corporation has in ensuring that its business, incarceration, remains as profitable as possible, by having more people incarcerated and sentences lengthened? Presumably these companies can and will make political donations to political parties which support imprisonment as a solution to social problems. These are important issues, maybe more important than whether the food is better in McJails.

When we talk of fairness we usually are speaking of *how* a story is presented. Just as important is *which* stories are written or broadcast. The social backgrounds and mores of reporters and editors are powerful and subtle influences on story selection. While the budget cuts have obviously affected the poor more than others in society, the average journalist's complete unfamiliarity with the underclass severely hampers adequate reporting. If I was paid a dollar for every time a journalist has called me up over the past fifteen years and asked me to "find a poor family", I wouldn't be driving a beat up truck. Stories on the lives of the poor are often superficial, more often non-existent.

In a less subtle manner, the perceived interests of the readership or audience play a key role in defining what is covered and how. This is a dangerous area, for the media provides the very information the audience needs in order to decide its interests.

This predetermination of the audience's interests has hampered coverage of the Conservative government's cuts to social programs. Neither of the two main newspapers considers social services a priority. The *Journal* lacks a social services beat, even though during a period of much less change in social programs in the early 1980's, the newspaper had a full-time, award-winning beat reporter. The *Sun* simply ignores social service stories, although it does have a penchant for covering welfare fraud. That news emphasis originates, I believe, from an assessment of the *Sun* readership as being

typically blue collar and lower middle class people who resent and fear welfare people.

Only after questions of substance and story selection are addressed does fairness in news presentation really become an issue.

I would like to challenge Edmonton's news outlets and journalists by quoting an article written by Carl Bernstein, who broke the Watergate story with Bob Woodward:

"At the time of the [Watergate] break-in, there were about 2,000 full-time reporters working in Washington D.C. In the first six months afterwards, America's news organizations assigned only 14 of those 2,000 men and women to cover the Watergate story on a full-time basis. And of those 14, only six were assigned to the story in what might be called an 'investigative' way, that is to go beyond daily statements and court proceedings, and try to find out exactly what had happened."

Guardian Weekly, June 14, 1992

This column is part of a presentation made to the Canadian Association of Journalists in November 1994. ®

Jonathan Murphy is executive director at the Edmonton Social Planning Council.



Publication Bans

Are they serving the public?

The right to a fair trial is fundamental and cannot be sacrificed for the freedom of expression of the media.

By Edmond J. O'Neill

Publication bans in criminal proceedings have historically been seen as a clash between freedom of expression for the media and the right to a fair trial for an accused person. The debate over publication bans has once again been rekindled and the question has been raised as to which of these fundamental yet competing rights should prevail.

The historical common law rule governing publication bans was based on a recognition and appreciation of both the right to freedom of expression and the right to a fair trial. In balancing these two rights, the common law provided that where there was a real and substantial risk of interference with the right to a fair trial, a publication ban could be ordered. Effectively, common law provided that where freedom of expression and the right to a fair trial cannot both be simultaneously and fully respected, it is appropriate in our free and democratic society to temporarily curtail the freedom of expression so as to guarantee an accused person a fair trial. This rule, although making the right to a fair trial paramount, did however accord some protection to freedom of expression in so far as it prevented publication bans from being imposed for no reason or in response to merely speculative concerns.

This traditional common law rule, however, has recently been modified. The Supreme Court of Canada in *Dagenais v. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation* (December 1994) re-examined the law in this area and made some significant changes to the present law.

The Supreme Court of Canada has now made it far more onerous on the party seeking the publication ban to justify the limit on the media's right to freedom of expression. The

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Openness allows the public to assess our judicial system and advocate changes.

By Frederick S. Kozak

Canadian courts have consistently emphasized the fundamental importance of open court proceedings in a democratic society. Openness allows the public to assess our judicial system (including lawyers and judges) and advocate changes through public opinion and the political process. A democracy assumes that the electorate has access to accurate and current information on issues which affect it, including the conduct of criminal investigations, pre-trial hearings and criminal trials. The openness principle has been enshrined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which guarantees freedom of expression, including freedom of the press.

In a modern society, the public relies to a great extent on the media to learn about court proceedings. The Supreme Court of Canada recognized the fundamental role of the press in *Edmonton Journal v. The Attorney General for Alberta and the Attorney General for Canada*, where the Court stated:

It is exceedingly difficult for many, if not most, people to attend a court trial... Discussion of court cases and constructive criticism of court proceedings is dependent upon the receipt by the public of information as to what transpired in court. Practically speaking, this information can only be obtained from the newspapers or other media.

In some criminal cases, courts are asked for publication bans to protect the right of an accused to a fair trial. When such a request is made, judges have traditionally attempted to balance the accused's right to a fair trial against the right to free expression, including freedom of the press. Both are given equal protection under the charter.

Until recently, publication bans were imposed by courts where it was feared that

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court has stated that publication bans are a matter of national importance and that freedom of speech in Canada is not sufficiently protected at this time. The court in one judgment has done away with the traditional notion that the right to a fair trial is paramount. In *Dagenais*, the majority states that the right to a fair trial and the right to freedom of expression are now to be considered as equal in nature. The court has even gone so far as to require the party seeking the publication ban to give appropriate notice of their application not only to the court and the opposing party, but also to the media. As a result, the media now enjoys a very strong status in criminal cases.

As a trial lawyer, this recent decision gives me great cause for concern. I believe that the right to a fair trial is fundamental and cannot be sacrificed. The ramifications of an infringement of this right are dangerous, both to the accused person and to society in general.

It should be recognized that one of the crucial elements of a fair trial is the right to be tried solely on the evidence before the court and not on any information received outside of the courtroom. Section 11(d) of the Charter guarantees the right of any person charged with an offence to be presumed innocent until proven guilty according to law in a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal. The fairness of a trial, however, is also of general public interest. The fairness and integrity of the criminal process is a cornerstone of the legal system. In protecting the fairness of the trial, the courts have frequently recognized the potential for prejudice not only as it relates to the accused, but to society in general.

I agree with those who suggest that any limitation on the freedom of expression, or freedom of the press, or the public nature of the administration of justice should be carefully considered. However, I suggest that restrictions will occasionally be necessary and acceptable and in fact extremely important.

My concern is that in a high profile case, potential jurors will be poisoned by media accounts of allegations, both accurate and inaccurate. One need only turn their mind

to media reports of the bloody ski mask allegedly found at OJ Simpson's residence. Such blatantly false reports highlight my concern.

I suggest that in certain cases including those high profile in nature, that the media not be prevented from reporting the evidence rather, that the media be prevented from reporting the evidence until such time as a jury has heard and assessed the evidence.

What harm is done by such an approach? The courtroom doors would remain open to the public and the journalists would continue to be allowed to cover the proceedings thus ensuring that the judicial system will be scrutinized.

This approach is consistent with the traditional Canadian practice. The American practice on the other hand favors free dissemination of information through the media with little or no limits on the freedom of expression. The Americans endeavor to protect the right to a fair trial, in the face of open media coverage, by using such alternative measures as: changes of venue (trial transferred to a different locale), jury sequestration and challenge for cause, where jurors are questioned at length by lawyers to determine the existence of any bias.

These alternatives I suggest are simply not practical. They have the effect of lengthening trials, inconveniencing accused individuals, witnesses, and jurors. Moreover, they dramatically increase the cost connected with a trial, the costs being borne by both the state and the accused.

Unfortunately, as a result of the *Dagenais* decision, Canada is now one step closer to the American practice. A practice, in my opinion, where fairness is compromised.

Being mindful of the fundamental importance of each of these two rights, I believe that the general public should wait for a complete account of the evidence in criminal cases, at least until such time as the jury has heard the evidence.

Surely, this is a small sacrifice to make to ensure that justice is properly served. ☉

Edmond J. O'Neill practices criminal law at the law firm of Beresh DePoe Cunningham. Mr. O'Neill is presently serving on the executive committee of the Criminal Trial Lawyers Association.

potential jurors might read media reports of aspects of a criminal case that would later impair their ability to try the case impartially, based solely upon admissible evidence. However, there was little certainty as to the tests to be applied by courts in weighing an accused's right to a fair trial against freedom of the press and the role to be played by the media when a court was asked for a publication ban. In *Dagenais v. CBC*, the Supreme Court of Canada again emphasized the fundamental importance of the openness, and free expression. The Court also clarified the standards to be applied and procedures to be followed when a publication ban is sought. Speaking for the majority of the Court, Chief Justice Lamer held that a publication ban should only be ordered when:

1. *Such a ban is necessary in order to prevent a real and substantial risk to the fairness of the trial, because reasonably available alternative measures will not prevent the risk; and*
2. *The beneficial effects of the publication ban outweigh the harmful effects to the free expression of those affected by the ban.*

The Court also held that the party seeking the publication ban (usually the accused) bears the burden of proving and justifying that a limitation on freedom of expression is necessary. If the burden is not met, no publication ban will be ordered. If the burden is met, the judge imposing the ban has a duty to limit the ban as much as possible, in order to minimize interference with free expression.

In January, 1995, the Alberta Court of Queen's Bench adopted and applied the standards enunciated in the *Dagenais* decision in *Regina v. Kara*. Mr. Kara was accused of theft from the City of Edmonton. In addition to criminal proceedings initiated by the Department of Justice, the City of Edmonton sued Mr. Kara civilly. In the civil action, the City filed a number of sworn affidavits setting out evidence upon which the City intended to rely upon in trying to recover money it alleged Mr. Kara had obtained by theft. The Court imposed a publication ban on the affidavit evidence, pending completion of criminal proceedings against Mr. Kara. The publication ban was imposed to ensure Mr. Kara's right to a fair trial, since the affidavit evidence might

not be admissible in the criminal trial.

The media successfully applied to have the publication ban lifted. In a decision released in January, 1995, Mr. Justice Berger applied the *Dagenais* test, and concluded that the publication ban and sealing order of the affidavits were not necessary to avoid a real and substantial risk to the fairness of the criminal trial.

In lifting the ban, the Court pointed out that:

1. *Most prospective jurors quickly forget media reports of details regarding alleged crimes;*
2. *Jurors understand that you can't believe everything you read in the newspapers and hear and see on radio and television;*
3. *Jurors are always instructed that they must decide the case based only on the evidence they hear in the courtroom...Jurors appreciate full well their solemn duty to decide the fate of the accused only on the evidence adduced at trial.*

In serious criminal matters, there is often a delay of a year or more from the laying of charges to the actual trial. Appeals take even more time. Delaying publication is, therefore, not practical: information is not newsworthy unless it is current. Moreover, the timely dissemination of facts sometimes leads to new information, the disclosure of which enhances the administration of justice.

The *Dagenais* and *Kara* decisions are consistent with a strong judicial trend towards openness and free expression in reporting court proceedings, and the implicit recognition of the ability of jurors to follow the instructions of the trial judge, with no adverse effect on the accused. The administration of justice is best served by a well-informed electorate with access to current information about criminal cases. ☉

Frederick S. Kozak is a partner with the law firm of Reynolds, Mirth, Richards & Farmer. Mr. Kozak carries on a general civil litigation practice, with an emphasis on press and defamation cases, employment and health law. He also teaches "The Law and the Media" at Grant MacEwan Community College, and has been a sessional lecturer in the Faculty of Law at the University of Alberta.

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some degree we all are. It's not a conscious act, but we often don't see things the way someone from another culture, or the opposite sex sees them. We are all products of our upbringing.

What influences the news we get daily, or more importantly the news we don't get? The stories that are not assigned might be equally as important in someone else's eyes. In some newsrooms the staff plays the most influential role, while in other newsrooms it is the corporation itself which dictates what perspective the paper, or station will reflect.

"Newspapers in many ways are the way we write stories and the way we assign stories and the way we present them, in that we are somewhat prisoners of our own background. We're prisoners of our education, our lifestyle ...so the way that they would approach a story can sometimes, and is often, dictated from where they're coming from in their personal lives," says Cooke.

Paul Stanway, editor-in-chief of the *Edmonton Sun* says "Every newspaper has its own agenda. In this country, which I find kind of odd, they pretend that they don't—that they don't have a particular point of view, but they do. Every newspaper serves a particular audience and has a particular point of view. So at the end of the day all those stories are shoehorned into the newspaper's priorities, but not an individuals."

"Well it is impossible to keep bias out of stories...I think that's pretty well understood by most people. We try to limit that as much as we can," says Mark Jan Vrem, vice president of news and public affairs at *ITV*.

Without equitable representation of visible minorities and Aboriginal journalists, editors and producers there is a danger the public will only hear and read mainstream interpretations of the day's events. We need different perspectives in newsrooms and employers need to see the benefits of having diversity.

"Although we're (Edmonton) ethnically diverse it's not to the point where it influences the paper that people read or the way they spend their income. If you break it down to that level then you're appealing to such a small audience that it's really not worth it. We can't afford to do that," says Paul Stanway.

Targeting a specific community is different

from having diversity in your newsroom. If your news organization purports to handle stories in a fair and balanced manner it's essential to have a range of people on your team who can see more than just two sides to any argument. It adds perspective as long as it is more than tokenism.

"You don't want to ghettoize reporters, have women do women's issues, have natives do native issues and so on," says Warren Michaels, assignment editor at *CBC* television. Garnet Lewis, assistant news manager of *CFRN* television agrees. "You cover the issues as a journalist. I don't think you need to be a woman to cover a story about rape; I don't think you have to be a man to cover a sports story." Paul Stanway goes one step further and says "I think it would be far more difficult for that person (Aboriginal person) to cover Aboriginal issues and interpret them for the rest of the community." If you expand on those arguments one might ask why white journalists are allowed to report on the white community?

Although many reporters would not like to be lumped into a specific category according to their ethnic origin or gender, some would prefer to specialize in an area of interest. Of course you cannot hire one person for each different community represented in our city, but it is important to vary the perspectives which different reporters bring to the whole news outlet. It will ensure the outlet does not cater to any one community, including mainstream, white society.

"We have reporters working for us that are Aboriginal and the most valuable contribution they make for us, aside from going out and doing stories (and they are not all Aboriginal stories) is when we sit around the table and talk about stories, they add another perspective and it's a very valuable perspective," says John Baker, executive producer at *CBC* radio.

Ken Davis, news director of *CKUA* radio argues that there just aren't enough qualified people to fill the need. "You've got a federal government, for all the right reasons insisting for employment equity in broadcasting. But the challenge we still face as broadcasters is 'Yes, but are there people out there in all the defined groups under employment equity who can do what we need them to do?'"

Nick Russell is a journalism professor with the University of Regina's School of Journalism and Communications. He says the school would like to have more visible minority students because the demand for them is high. "We're aware of the needs of the marketplace and we're trying to meet those needs." This year out of a class of 25 there are two Aboriginal women and one Asian woman, the rest are white.

Valerie Alia teaches journalism at the University of Western Ontario. In her six years on staff she recalls an average of two visible minority or Aboriginal students in each year's class of 44 students. But at the same time she knows there are a number of good Aboriginal and visible minority journalists out there who have not been able to get permanent positions. "There is *not* a shortage of qualified people out there," says Alia. She says it often comes down to 'the last hired, the first fired' rule where people are brought in through equity programs, but then are let go when budgets are cut.

Bert Crowfoot is the publisher of *Windspeaker* and he is also a member of the National Aboriginal Communications Society. He says there is a shortage of qualified Aboriginal journalists. "We've bent over backwards to get brown faces in here...I've got some success stories, but I've sure got a pile of not-so-successful stories," says Crowfoot. He said it's hard to find someone who is dependable and that stretches beyond just Aboriginal people.

Ross Perigo is a journalism professor at Concordia University in Montreal. He says the climate of journalism in mainstream media is not always suited to other cultures. "They have to be good—good in the Western North American sense of the 'Go for the jugular' mentality which is not always easy."

There are a number of reasons why Edmonton newsrooms do not represent the diversity in the city's population: lack of qualified people; poor recruiting methods; uncomfortable work environments; shrinking resources; and/or a failure to appreciate the need to have a representative staff. Will it change? Yes, but as Michael Cooke of the *Journal* says, it's going to be a slow process. ©

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Language and Power:

the Alpac Case

By
Mary
Richardson,
Joan
Sherman &
Mike
Gismondi

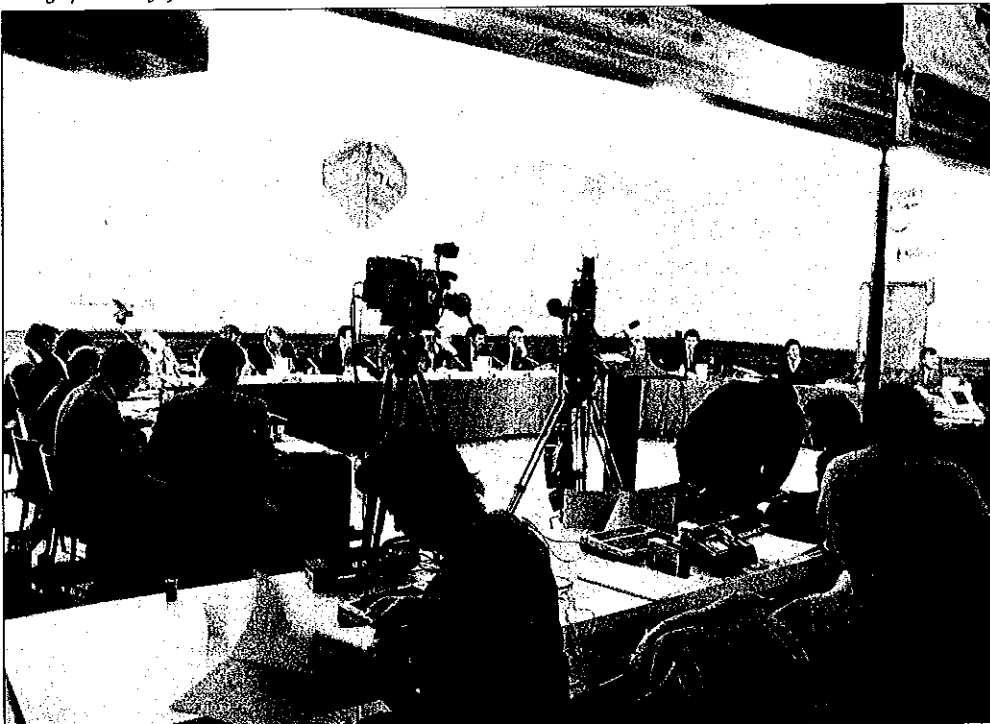
Language can cause power imbalances. Take the AB-Pacific (Alpac) pulp mill for example. The co-authors of this article participated in the Alpac public hearings in Athabasca. In the hearings, we noticed that several techniques of language used by government officials and industry spokespeople made public participants appear emotional, ignorant, and selfish. But even worse than that, language was used in a way that assumed the important questions were agreed upon, for example, that development was good, and that a huge bleached kraft pulp mill was "development." Five rhetorical techniques stand out for us in industry and government's attempts to push the project through.

grained that they are seldom questioned. Suzuki and Gordon give as examples of sacred truths, "nature is infinite;" "growth is progress;" "science and technology will solve our problems;" "we can manage the planet;" and "pollution is the price of progress."

In the Alpac hearings, sacred truths were used by all sides to win support for their positions. For example, in the debate over whether the mill project would be sustainable, the company assumed that if there were problems with current technology, more and better technology would solve them. Gerry Fenner (Vice-President Pulp, Alberta-Pacific) stated:

Our company believes in the Brundtland Commission message, which is sustainable development, development with the highest quality environmental standards and using renewable sustainable resources...our standards will set, in an environmental sense, world-class emission levels. They will be ahead of the targets of other countries, countries like Sweden. Our mill...will be in a position to be the leading edge technology in pulp and paper in the world.

Photograph courtesy of The Athabasca Advocate



1. Sacred truths—the term is taken from Anita Gordon and David Suzuki's book *It's a Matter of Survival*. In the environmental field, sacred truths are assumptions about how the natural world operates and they are so deeply in-

2. Creating dichotomies—this means framing discussions in terms of oppositions such as scientist versus environmentalist, jobs versus the environment, reason versus emotion, objectivity versus bias, and so on. The

opposites are then placed in a hierarchy, so that one is favored over the other. For example, the opposition of scientist versus environmentalist plays to the belief that scientists deal objectively with facts, while environmentalists and concerned citizens may be well meaning, but they deal with emotions and values. This belief often leads to a discounting of what is said by environmentalists and non-specialists. Scientists at the Alpac hearings sometimes established their expertise and objectivity first and then said they were environmentalists too. Then they had everything—reason and emotion. But environmentalists could not do that, because they couldn't establish their authority as experts first.

3. Euphemisms and prejudicial language—this is language that is used to assign a positive or negative value to a policy or action without giving sufficient evidence to back up the judgment. An example of this technique is citizens' groups being called "self-interest groups," whereas industry and government are never called self-interest groups.

In the Alpac hearings, this technique was used to great effect to divert discussion from the forest ecosystem. Logging was called "harvesting," as though trees were a crop. The forest disappears in this rhetoric. Air and water pollution were called "contributions." Trees were called "weeds," and again the forest disappears. Euphemisms and prejudicial language can appear value neutral, although they aren't. "Weed" is not just a botanical term—it is a term of negative valuation.

4. Using abstract nouns to suggest that something exists—the idea here is, "If you say the word often enough, people will think it exists." An example we hear today is "ecosystem management." Never mind that no one knows what it is or whether humans could manage a natural ecosystem, or that what really needs to be managed is people; not ecosystems.

5. Authoritative discourse—this term covers several rhetorical techniques for consolidating and maintaining authority. In the Alpac hearing, these techniques were used by government officials, company representa-

tives and consultants and scientists. They included the use of the passive, timeless voice, as in "studies show that" and "it was concluded that" to indicate that science is objective and holds true at all times and in all places, and the use of technical jargon such as "test species" for fish used in an experiment. Such jargon reinforces the idea that decision-makers must rely on experts for guidance.

At the Alpac hearings, it was not easy for members of the public to counter these rhetorical techniques, because there is a power imbalance in environmental public hearings between the public and project proponents when the government has already granted approval in principle to a project. Being familiar with the techniques is a good first step. ☺

Mary Richardson teaches philosophy at Athabasca University.

Joan Sherman is a researcher at Athabasca University.

Mike Gismondi teaches sociology at Athabasca University.

*They are the authors of **Winning Back the Words**, which chronicles the politics of the Alpac hearings and illustrates how the public challenged the authority of experts.*

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A Woman Behind the Microphone!



By June
Sheppard

If memory serves, I had just left my teens when I decided to make a change—take a leap!

Not east to Bangkok; not west to the South Seas. Just a move from the medicine department of the Compensation Board (then known as the Workmen's Board) down Jasper Avenue a few blocks into the world of radio. Just *radio* not the *media*.

After working as a medical secretary the word *media* tended to mean something like the middle coat of the wall of a blood vessel!

In fact some years later I recall the Edmonton branch of the then active Canadian Women's Press Club taking considerable umbrage when the main branch in Eastern Canada suggested the clubs as a whole be called the 'Canadian Women's Media Club.' Why should we be lumped in under a word which seemed vague and undefined in this context.

Today, of course, it's as familiar a word as the mall.

Before I could be hired at the radio I had to pass a few tests. The tests of my ability to write radio programs and advertising went much beyond my expectation in terms of quantity!

It involved dialogue for a one-hour program that had breaks for commercials which also had to be written. The same procedure was used for a one-half hour show, followed by a 15-minute show as well as quick 'flashes' of no more than two minutes.

The whole thing then had to be done again but for non-commercial programs this time picking musical 'fillers' from the station's large and varied library.

That night I wrote on my standard typewriter (remember those?) at home, pounding into the small hours. Only once did my mother come

downstairs to find out if I was ever going to 'stop the clatter!'

I did eventually and I did get the writing job at CJCA, thus becoming a part of what was to be called *the media* in the future.

There were several young women on general staff, apart from myself and the two others in the writing or *continuity* department as it was called.

From time to time one of the female staffers got a chance at the microphone. A certain store had a lingerie sale. Only a female could be permitted on that assignment!

One of the producers came up with his idea for a program that would *star* two women—one being myself. We were to discuss recipes, make-up, fashions, and hair styles.

Nothing wrong with any of them, but it went on weekly and I wondered aloud to him if we could not introduce books and reading as well.

He agreed instantly, if they were about the *female subjects* mentioned above!

However, one day about a year later the manager of the writing department suggested something different for me to handle.

Would I be interested in writing commentaries on the news of the day at home and abroad; some views on politics, the education system as I saw it, etc. I was elated and agreed! He turned as he was leaving the room—"this will be a 15-minute piece at 5:45 every Friday afternoon. Please have it ready at 5:00 p.m. at the latest so I have time to read it over a few times before I go on the air."

My hopes for that introduction to the *mic* withered but didn't quite die!

His explanation, given to me in a most fatherly way (I think he was nine years my senior), was that serious subjects of this kind would not be taken seriously spoken in a female voice!

Marriage and children took me away from the 'media' for a few years. I returned as a freelancer for CKUA radio where ability was deemed to belong to both sexes.

I do remember an interview with Cheddi Jagan, then President of Guyana and his seeming hesitation, at first, at the idea of a woman questioning him! But he relaxed.

The number of female voices on CBC radio and television today is remarkable if you can look back as far as I can! ☺

June Sheppard was a pioneer woman journalist, working in print and electronic media for the past 47 years. June is an honorary member of the Edmonton Social Planning Council and the first honorary member of the Alberta Status of Women Action Committee.

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Story Telling—

By Heather
Harris

The Aboriginal peoples of North America tell many different kinds of stories for many different purposes. Before Europeans arrived most information was transmitted orally from person to person, down through the generations. Different cultures had different reasons for telling stories. Probably all North American Aboriginal peoples told stories with moral lessons, sometimes with a familiar central figure who teaches us through his follies. The West Coast and many Dene peoples call him Raven. Some call him Coyote, others call him Manabozho or Gluscabi.

Most North American peoples tell historical stories. Most Aboriginal elders can tell stories about important events which occurred in the lifetimes of their grandfathers, sometimes of many generations. The stories of the signing of the numbered treaties of the plains and the north can be related in precise detail by elders today. Many peoples can tell you how they migrated from another place and settled their land very long ago.

For the Northwest Coast peoples and their Dene neighbors, the historical accuracy of stories relating how their territory was acquired is considered essential to their very survival. So they have developed a method of maintaining accuracy by public tellings at potlatches and other events where mistakes can be corrected by any of the hundreds of witnesses present. The result of this system of memorization is that these peoples can relate histories going back to the settlement of the northwest as the ice was receding at the end of the last ice age 10,000 years ago.

Although few peoples deem it necessary to remember 10,000 years of history, all consider the transmission of culture through stories essential. Such transmission, of course, includes at least some history but it also includes many other things such as the origin of the people, their view of the place of people in the universe, their relationship with the Creator and all his creations, practical economic concerns and every other aspect of cultural knowledge.

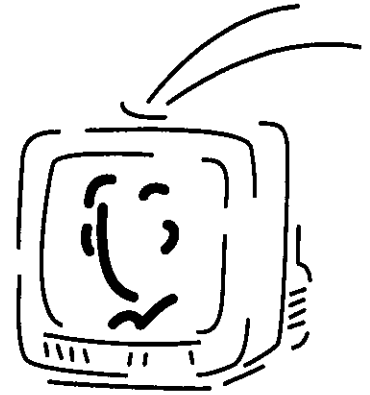


When Europeans first came to North America they were weak and unable to survive in an unfamiliar land without the help of the accumulated knowledge of the Aboriginal peoples. Soon the relationship of power changed as newly introduced epidemic diseases devastated the Aboriginal people and the Europeans continued to increase in number. With the deaths of so many keepers of knowledge and the introduction of schools and wage labor which separated parents and children, the oral transmission of knowledge declined. Much of the old knowledge is now gone forever but much still remains. Ironically, that knowledge is now being preserved in written form in books and on computers. Although many say that the old stories lose much of their original flavor and subtle meaning in being recorded and translated, others are happy that the stories are being preserved in some form since few young people have the time or inclination to spend many hours learning them from the elders. Perhaps the best way to record the old stories is to record them on tape in the actual words of the elders so that they can be heard in their original form in the future.

The transmission of traditional oral knowledge is certainly not dead. There are people among every First Nation in North America who have at least some of this knowledge. With the upsurge in cultural pride among so many young people in recent years there has come a revived interest in all types of cultural knowledge and many efforts, both individual and organized, are now being made to preserve the oral histories of the First Peoples. ©

Heather Harris is presently working on her doctoral thesis concerning oral histories from the northwest which record events at the end of the last ice age.

Television as Life



By Tony
Fisher

Television, the communications medium or the physical machine which sits in my family room, is an important part of our lives. The *average* North American (who ever that is) watches more than four hours of television daily, watches a machine. That is an important investment of time. Some people may watch five hours of TV while others watch less. So the impact of TV is uneven and because of this unevenness its impact is complex.

One would think that sitting quietly watching a machine was a relatively harmless thing to do. But, in the case of television, it is not harmless. Television can harm our communities, and it can harm the people who live in our city (whether they watch a lot of TV or not). The fact that watching television can be harmful is disturbing, in part, because the television industry is so large and powerful. Again, the issue is made complex by how and what people watch, how and what is available to viewers.

Television programming is controlled by a few large corporations—some of which control television distribution, some of which buy television time and determine what gets sent to the distributors. The television medium, television program production, is designed to make a profit for the corporations which control distribution and production, so it is designed to attract and hold an audience. This audience is then *sold* to the corporations who buy television time by buying commercial time or whole programs. Programs are not primarily for useful information or actual involvement of communities or the people in them. Television programs are primarily for the production, distribution, and sales corporations.

Television broadcasting is a one-way distribution system. From a few central sources a signal is sent by broadcast, satellite, or cable

to millions of television receivers. In the U.S. television broadcasting is government regulated but owned and distributed by a few giant corporations. In Canada television is government regulated and owned and distributed by a few corporations and the government's corporation, the CBC. The Canadian network owners buy U.S. made programs to sell to Canadian audiences and advertisers who buy TV time. The government regulations say things about "public interest" and the regulators hold public hearings now and again. Mostly, however, regulation has to do with how the corporate owners can *collect* their audiences so that they can sell them to other corporate owners.

In the U.S. 75 per cent of this TV time is bought by 100 large corporations. It is to these huge transnational corporations that the television networks must sell their programs, not to us viewers. We viewers are also sold to these transnationals as an audience. It is to us that the transnationals want to sell their cars, beers, shampoos, soda pop, and feminine hygiene products. These same corporations determine which first-run programs we Canadian audiences get to see at least half of the time.

The technology of television filming and transmission is not the reason television programs and the daily TV schedule is chopped up as it is. There is nothing in TV drama, live TV, or even sports events which forces television broadcasters to break things up into half hour, hour or two hour pieces. It is broken up this way to make programs marketable to television time buyers.

The early evening news, or 6 o'clock news is an example of breaking up time for broadcasting purposes. Locally, this early evening news comes in both half hour and hour long programs. Both half hour and hour programs are broken up into smaller units, each of which

is sold to corporations which buy TV time. These smaller segments are set off from one another by advertisements for other programs or products, major segments by as many as two program promotions and four commercials. As you can see it *pays* to break up time this way.

The people who read the news (they seldom write it or record it) and the subject matter of the news are designed to present a view of the station's broadcast community. Both the items presented as news and the people presenting the *news, sports, and weather* are presented as being of the community, "it's ours" blares one local TV broadcaster. This community presented on television is not a real or actual community, it is a synthetic one made up or synthesized by the broadcasters and advertisers.

This community of the early evening news has no history, no sociology, no political economy. It is made up of individuals facing individual problems, personal issues. These problems and issues are discovered by other individuals, reported to *the media* where they are covered by individuals, and solved by other individuals. These problems are immediate, quickly passing.

In this manufactured community help is available. Just call the TV station's 'people helper', 'consumer advocate,' or 'trouble shooter' (his/her phone number will be repeated at the end of the program) and help will be available. The audience need not organize, analyze, protest or confront institutions or organizations. There's nothing really wrong with the way things get done in this TV manufactured broadcast community (We might fire an individual politician or city bureaucrat but nothing's really wrong).

The main items in the TV news are the image of the TV news readers and reporters, the weather, sports babble, on-the-spot coverage with mobile *cams* or video tapes sent in by the audience (*hot shots*), and images of people running away from TV cameras in front of the Law Courts Building. The weatherman promotes community events, the sports guy talks about the new, comfortable seats in the Coliseum, and the newswoman does a *voice over* while some politician talks silently as background. These images express the values and concerns of the manufactured community.

News is chopped up into pieces tailored to fit the sub-segments between *promos* and commercials (the average viewer, mentioned at the beginning, is presented with more than 20,000 commercials a year—mostly bought by those transnational corporations). Indeed, the TV commercials themselves are chopped up into several, rapid, kaleidoscopic images as in the *Molson Canadian* beer commercials.

Television's format and how it appears in our homes gives us little control over what it does to us, our children, our parents and grandparents. People who watch a lot of TV are very concerned about crime in the streets, drunk drivers, and the lives of the characters on *Northern Exposure*. They are less concerned about the people they see on an Edmonton street selling *Spare Change*, less concerned with the loss of social programs. It is harmful to replace a real community with real issues with a manufactured one.

This is not just a quirk. Teachers have a hard time interesting children in math, science or history in a world where the same kids can see the sci-fi machines of *Star Trek's* disconnected generations as many as ten times a week. Captain Kirk, Jean-Luc Picard, etc., etc., are not real, are not science, are not historical, and are chopped up segmentary episodes formulated to capture a U.S. audience for the corporate giants who buy the original programs and the re-runs. This, too, is harmful and will make us poorer for the education our children won't listen to.

TV is harmful to us for leaving out the real us, for using the real us to make money. TV is not evil. It's just a shoddy commercial venture with a lot of impact. ☺

Tony Fisher has the distinction of professor emeritus of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Alberta.

RANDOM Acts OF Kindness

How on earth could we choose a poster from these grade twoers as they stood around us with anxious faces? All their posters were beautiful. "That's mine," said one little girl, her face beaming with pride. Another child tried to explain to us that one of his markers had run out and he had to change colors half way through a design. The pressure on Lesli and I was immense and so we decided to pick them all and retreat back to our office.

The posters are depicting "Random Acts of Kindness" and what this has meant to the kids of Mary Hanley Catholic Elementary School in Millwoods. Their teacher Colleen Ring is trying to introduce the community to a concept that has caught like wild fire in the school. She originally brought the concept to her teaching colleagues and students last spring after the death of Barb Danelesko in Millwoods. Colleen thought some kindness might help both her students and other teachers come to grips with the tragedy.

Since spring students have been doing a number of activities to promote, encourage and acknowledge kindness. They've made posters, had rallies, developed a kindness creed and kept track of kind deeds in the kindness keeper which serves as a classroom ledger. They post thank you notes on the kindness corner which is a bulletin board in the school's library and they even have a kindness resource center.

So where does the Edmonton Social Planning Council fit into all this? Colleen approached us early in January after failed attempts to have the City of Edmonton declare February 12-17 as Random Acts of Kindness Week. The



City told Colleen she would have more success if she was representing a non-profit organization. We agreed to let our name stand, but it wasn't enough to convince the City to buy into the concept. No matter. Colleen has been approaching businesses,

churches and other schools to spread the seed of kindness.

The Council will be trying to come up with a poster idea, using the grade two class posters. We hope to find a sponsoring agency or foundation so that the posters can be printed along with some bookmarks, buttons and other notions. While the material won't be ready for the kindness week we hope it will be useful in the ongoing effort to make this city more caring. ESPC kept track of group activities during Random Acts of Kindness week. Kindness has certainly worked in Mary Hanley School—we're not talking miracles or anything, but kids are co-operating, sharing and caring. For instance one youngster wrote a note of thanks to a friend after a recess game of soccer. "Dear Phillip, I remember the day when you said I was playing really well in soccer. I felt like you were saying I was playing best out of everyone on the field. You actually made me feel so good I played even better!" Another child wrote a note of thanks to a classmate who had showed him around on his first day at his new school. "You



By Sheila
Hallett-
Kushniruk

To:

From:

Edmonton Social Planning Council

Suite 41, 9912-106 Street

Edmonton, Alberta

T5K 1C5

Phone: 403.423.2031

Fax: 403.425.6244

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showed me where everything was and it made me feel not shy and really happy."

The kids are taking it seriously and have been for months now, so it's not just a passing craze. They are being taught to be kind to themselves; be kind to others; and be kind to the earth. As Colleen describes it "It is a program of hope and optimism that teaches that each one of us has the power to make a difference in our own lives and the lives of others."

Maybe this is an opportunity for people to learn from children. The concept is certainly not threatening—it doesn't cost anything; you don't have to join a group; it's not political or denominational and it doesn't require any huge effort. You could shovel a neighbor's walk, or compliment someone—there is no right or wrong way to perform kindness. It might even help people to deal with our daily dose of bad news from papers, television and radio, which can be overwhelming. Random Acts of Kindness is a healthy way to stay grounded to the community without expecting our news outlets to continually find ways to make us feel like the world isn't such a bad place. ☺



Have you had a kindness shown, pass it on.

It was not given to you alone, pass it on.

Let it travel down the years till it wipes another's tears.

Till in heaven the dead appears, pass it on.

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