

Journalism is just a cheap product of big business

This week Forum writers discuss the state of journalism in New Brunswick. Jim Morrison, Managing Editor of the Daily Gleaner, writes that New Brunswick journalists suffer much the same problems as their contemporaries throughout Canada. Our other contributor is David Jonah, general manager of the weekly Bathurst Tribune and a former editor-in-chief of The Brunswickan. He says no one really wants to improve the news in this province. Jonah writes that New Brunswick has the news media it deserves. Read Forum, and let's hear what you think.

By DAVID R JONAH

Journalism is often confused in its goals because those partaking in this self-appointed profession often attempt to justify it as a social necessity or a worthwhile charitable social concern that should defy the laws of capitalism.

It doesn't.

Journalism of any kind is just a cheap product of a big business concern called publishing. Publishing anything is big business and it requires a lot of money to operate, but the lure of substantial money to be made draws those with lots of investment capital and business acumen to it like honey does bees.

Businessmen generally milk it for all it's worth and hardly concern themselves with what they produce in terms of editorial content. Editorial content is something that you have to have in order to beat postal regulations and hopefully draw enough people to keep the circulation up. Editorial copy, studies have shown attract very few readers. Crossword puzzles, comics and the daily horoscope keep your readers. News content is a cost that must be kept low.

In most every daily or weekly publication in Canada and without doubt in the confines of New

Brunswick the goal is not to produce a stimulating paper or even a good paper. The secret goal is to milk every bit of advertising possible out of a population figure of slightly over 600,000 bodies. The five dailies in this province reach a saturation point in all homes in the province with the exception of a belt of hardy citizens who live north of Newcastle around the Gaspé to Edmundston.

There is little or no penetration by any media here in the north of the province; but then who cares. There is no strong spending demographics here anyway and providing circulation of any importance would only increase the printing costs and transportation costs. It would not increase the advertising lineage.

If anything covering the whole province well with editorial content and circulation would cost more than it's worth. The decision, then is simple. The North Shore of New Brunswick will get even less coverage than the remainder even though the problems of this area and its vital development which makes this region such a vibrant area in which to live goes unexplained to the province as a whole.

This vitality and strength which makes northern New Brun-

wick development resemble the other great potential areas of Canada, like northern Ontario and Labrador, goes unreported. Consequently when representatives of northern New Brunswick go south or west in their quest for help in developing this hinterland of our province the good citizens who read their daily papers faithfully everyday know nothing about the area other than the distortion that it is supposed to be the land of welfare unlimited. The terminal end of eastern Canadian civilization.

Journalism in New Brunswick has done this area a great disservice by not preparing the rest of the province for the social change in its other geographical half. On the other hand no one in northern New Brunswick seems to have anything but contempt for the southern and western sides of the province because all they seem to do is spend all the tax money and revel in their luxury of being the economic citadels of New Brunswick. (Of course being a economic citadel in this region of Canada is like comparing a giant cathedral to a small country protestant church in Hartland.)

Nevertheless both divisions of this province have a distinct distrust and barely concealed contempt for one another. Because

all over this province newspapers are reporting the surface news that sells newspapers and playing up to every big shot with an advertising dollar while the true interpretations of the province go unreported and unrecorded.

This is as far as it goes. Most intellectuals and critics of this journalism in examining this province's newspapers are guilty of poor journalism in the academic and ethical sense. Our newspapers are intellectual midgets.

The question is are they poor newspapers? Financial midgets they're not.

They are the best that can be produced with the present economic facilities. This province doesn't have the population or advertising potential to support any more papers. The present situation will now change to any degree as far as I can see because of financial non-feasibility not to mention geographical impossibility.

Capitalism and publishing operate on the survival of the fittest. The journalism that we have today has evolved from a century ago to single-owner concentration. The citizens let it happen and for the most part the greater percentage of people in New Brunswick are satisfied with the Daily Gleaner the way it is now. The paper's owners with

their \$700,000 profit each year are happy and more importantly the men who control the advertising in New Brunswick for big firms as well as little firms say they are pleased and content with the service they receive from their advertising dollar in New Brunswick's newspapers.

Advertisers are the life blood of any publication that doesn't have the benevolent support of a rich financial body like the SRC does for the Brunswickan. A financial institution that can offset the advertising losses can keep a quality editorial product going, but it worth the effort?

Journalism schools could be started in this province to train more students better in the craft of journalism. You know the kind of classroom experience where the instructor says, "Now class this is a sheet of blank paper. When you fill it with typing it is called news."

Why bother doing anything? The people of this province have the newspapers they want. They have in academic and intellectual terms poor newspapers.

But they have the newspapers that they deserve.

If you don't like having these papers there isn't a hell of a lot you can do about it for less than several million dollars.

That's life.

Hard to find 'needle of truth'

By JIM MORRISON

So I'm asked to comment on the state of journalism in New Brunswick today. If a politician, I'd promptly reply "Journalism is strong" - but my facetious response would receive the same public acceptance as did PET's famous slogan in the late election, and rightly so.

Journalism in New Brunswick is in the same state as it is in every other province in Canada. Journalists are doing some good work, some sloppy, some inexcusable and some unnecessary. But they have improved considerably in the last decade, no thanks to our universities and high schools - supposedly the nursery

for would-be writers. There is considerable room for improvement.

First, I suppose, we should define the boundaries within which this discussion of journalism will be confined. Journalism, to me, includes all newspapers (daily and weekly), radio and television and magazines. Included would be newspapers and news-sheets published by universities, colleges and high schools.

Where were the improvements in the last decade? Journalists in all media are doing a better job of covering the day-to-day news happenings of their communities. Editorial writers (whether you agree with their opinions

or not) are hitting harder; there's less waffling, less generalizing. Reporters and editors are trying to achieve greater in-depth coverage of social, economical, governmental, cultural and other areas - with varying degrees of success.

Newspapers, radio stations and television stations have broadened their outlook, are striving to keep the public more fully informed of the complex relations and inter-relations of our complex society. It's no easy task. Our governments are confused. Our experts disagree. Academicians propose utopian solutions on paper, that won't work when given the stern test of practicality. From this can of worms a journalist is expected to keep the public informed, so old John Q can form a sound opinion. Sometimes the journalist succeeds. Often he or she fails.

Even the superior journalist has difficulty in giving an accurate report of complex issues, and the world has few newsmen in the superior class. Why? Because it is often difficult to find that needle of truth in the rhetorical haystack composed of the statements of politicians, business

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