

Newspapers — Yesterday's News?

BY SALLY THOMAS

In the last ten years three-quarters of Canadians have stopped reading daily newspapers.

Still reading? Because a new book has something to say to everyone who's made it this far.

John Miller is a journalist and a professor of journalism at Ryerson University. His new book *Yesterday's News*, deals with the questions of how and why the mainstream Canadian print media is failing the public — and what can be done about it. Last week, he spoke at the University of King's College.

Miller attributes the failure of journalism to several things.

"During the recession downsizing occurred so there were fewer and fewer reporters left to cover the news."

In the book he points to the *Regina Leader-Post* and how in a city of 180,000 there are only seven reporters left. He says the owners of newspapers are less and

less concerned with quality in serving the public — and are more concerned with making a profit.

Miller's ideal would be papers acting like a "town hall meeting in progress". And to do this he says papers have to be worthy of public trust and give back or reflect a sense of community.

"I want newspapers to be citizens of the community they serve. I want them to be a public service. They are there to help me as a reader instead of helping some other big institution."

Instead, Miller argues newspapers have fled the communities they serve — alienating them from the people they intend to reach.

"Newspapers in most cities have retreated to the suburbs or industrial malls. You go into their buildings and you meet security guards instead of secretaries. A lot of reporters, because of cutbacks, have to gather their news by phone. They're not out in the community finding out other stories."

Miller also says papers don't recognize the public's need for quality in their media.

"They're pandering to readers who they think want gossip and news-light," he said.

Which leads to another plague Miller cites in the demise of daily newspapers — lazy reporting.

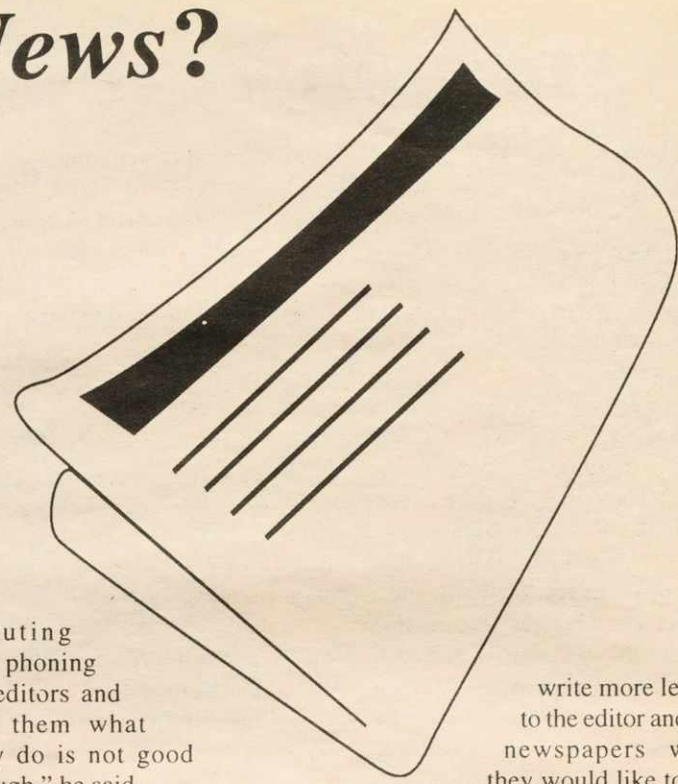
"Journalism is turning into stenography. What we need is commitment to cover new things in new ways," he said.

In-depth reporting, follow-up, and local issues are being ignored. And Miller calls for a public and professional debate on the subject.

"What job do we want [the press] to do for us? Do we want more quality? Do we want more depth? Do we want to trust the paper more? I think people have to speak up," he said.

So how can the average reader defend themselves against the onslaught of weak-willed and bland reporting?

"Newspapers say they're accountable to customers. Start



shouting and phoning up editors and tell them what they do is not good enough," he said.

"I would love to see a 'Media Criticism Day' where there's a substantial number of people unhappy about the newspapers and telling the editors."

He also suggests the public

write more letters to the editor and tell newspapers what they would like to see covered.

Because Miller says newspapers are lazy and egotistical in their coverage, ultimately it is up to the public to speak up and demand their voices be heard — and represented.

Film studies

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director of Dalhousie's office of Institutional Affairs, stated in a memo to the members of the Senate's budget committee that he hopes the existence of a Film minor will eventually encourage undergraduate Arts students to stay a fourth year to complete an advanced major degree. The program should also attract students to the university who might otherwise go elsewhere.

"The minor in Film Studies is apparently viable without Dalhousie's participation. A decision not to participate might result in the loss of several potential students to other metro [Halifax] universities."

Student loans delay Beemer purchases

BY CARLA TONELLI

TORONTO (CUP) — Ever since Ontario Premier Mike Harris commented that student debt "might put off the purchase of a BMW for a year", education stakeholders have been asking what figures the premier is working from.

Speaking at the Ontario Jobs and Investment Conference in St. Catharines on Oct. 15, Harris said "the majority of [post-secondary] students do not have any debt at all."

He cited figures which contradict those from a 1998 Statistics Canada report, which stated the average national debt for

students in Canada will be \$25,000 this year.

But Harris told more than 20 student groups that the average student debt in 1997 was \$12,100, adding high school students needn't be scared by reports of high student debt.

"I don't want to belittle this but I think the debt might put off the BMW for one more year and I don't think that should be an imperative for any young person that's accepted in any formal medical school here in Ontario," Harris said.

A moment before he made that comment the premier stated medical school graduates sometimes owe as much as \$40,000 or \$50,000 in student loans.

Last week, opposition politicians hammered the Progressive Conservative leader for the remark, saying it shows he's out of touch with student reality.

"He has this bias that students are somehow high on the hog, but it's not right," said Liberal member of provincial parliament David Caplan.

"Setting off buying a BMW for one year — that's insensitive and unacceptable. What really bothers me is this is so mean spirited."

The chairman of the Ontario component of the Canadian

Federation of Students agrees.

"We know this government clearly hasn't done a lot of their homework," said Joel Harden, who says Ontario is the second most expensive province for tuition in Canada, after Nova Scotia.

"I don't want to belittle this but I think the debt might put off the BMW for one more year and I don't think that should be an imperative for any young person that's accepted in any formal medical school here in Ontario"

The cost of many university programs in Ontario skyrocketed this year after the province deregulated tuition.

"To indicate that deregulating is only affecting students by delaying their purchase of a BMW indicates nothing more than this premier is completely out of touch with the way real students live," Harden said.

Others were appalled by the premier's apparent departure from the common knowledge that student debt in Ontario is a significant problem.

"I believe Statistics Canada," said Howard Hampton, leader of the provincial New Democratic Party.

"The Harris government is notorious for manipulating figures to try and hide the truth of what is really happening," he added.

The BMW remark is not the first time Harris has come under fire for what some considered outrageous statements about Ontarians.

Last spring, he publicly apologized for saying that mothers receiving social assistance could handle a \$24 cut in funding because it was only

"beer money."
"It takes a lot of nerve to make those statements," said Caplan. "I think he just doesn't care, quite frankly."

Following a week of media coverage and public criticism, however, Harris

stands by his statement. "The premier is not insensitive to the needs of post-secondary students and this government is certainly not insensitive [to] the need for funding to colleges and universities," said Wallace Pigeon, a spokesman for Harris.

"He was describing a very specific graduate [demographic]" he added.

He said the premier made the comment just after saying medical school graduates can expect a \$300,000 salary within three years of study.

The average cost of a BMW is \$50,000, according to one Toronto outlet.

Prof pleads guilty to cultivating pot

BY JAMIE WOODS

VANCOUVER (CUP) — A University of Victoria sociology professor who specializes in the family's role in society has pleaded guilty to cultivating and possessing marijuana for the purpose of trafficking.

During a raid on the home of Jean Veevers, police found 122 marijuana plants and 8.6 kilograms of marijuana, the Vancouver Sun reported last Wednesday.

The University of Victoria

says it will wait until Veevers is sentenced before deciding on any disciplinary action.

"I guess we'll just have to wait and see what happens," said Patty Pitts, a university information officer. "There's no cut and dried policy for this kind of thing."

Veevers, who has been a faculty member at the University of Victoria since 1980, is slated to teach a third-year course on the family and society in January.

Neil Boyd, a professor of criminology at Simon Fraser

University, says he's not aware of a faculty member ever being convicted in Canada for such an offense before. But he says Veevers wouldn't be the only professor in Canada with a criminal record.

"Certainly there are faculty in Canadian universities who teach with criminal records, and there are faculty who have received convictions for things like impaired driving," he said.


Veevers will be sentenced Nov. 27 in British Columbia Supreme Court.

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-Member at Large
-Treasurer
-Secretary
-Chair



All are Welcome!

"I swear that I did not have sexual relations at the DAS AGM"
-President Clinton