

They're *not* spectators. They control the presentation of the news, and therefore have a vast and perhaps disproportionate say in how our society defines itself. The power of the press is the power of selection. Newspapers and broadcasting stations can't dictate how we think and vote on specific issues; but their influence in *selecting* those issues can be enormous.

"This quaint notion of media-as-spectator appears to be shared by most of the people who control the corporations that control the news. But then, too many publishers and broadcasters seem to harbour a positive affection for the nineteenth century."

The committee suggested several reasons for the current public disenchantment. The media's built-in institutional bias in favor of a consumption-oriented society was one. Another "even more compelling reason" is the way media selects its material—the nature of news itself.

"Today, in a society where *everything* is changing, we're still defining news in the same old way. If it is to be news, there must be a 'story.' And if there is to be a 'story,' there must be a conflict, surprise, drama. There must be a 'dramatic, disruptive, exceptional event' before traditional journalism can acknowledge that a situation exists. Thus the news consumer finds himself being constantly ambushed by events. Poor people on the march all of a sudden? But nobody told us they were discontented! Demonstrations at the bacteriological warfare research station? But nobody told us such an outfit existed in Canada! People protesting pollution? What pollution? The paper never told us . . .

"We exaggerate, of course, but we think the central point stands up.

"Part of the trouble is the media's understandable tendency to look for news only in the old, familiar places: city hall, the courts, the police stations, the union halls—places where there's always a man whose institutional credentials allow the news to fit easily into prevailing journalistic pigeonholes. The result often resembles a shadow-play: plastic figures saying plastic things which are transmitted in a plastic way."

The committee acknowledged that the best newspapers are aware of these limitations and try to deal with them. Later in the report the committee put forth what it considered to be good journalism: "The standard we chose to employ is pretty straightforward: *how successful is that newspaper or broadcasting station in preparing its audience for social change?*"

Part of this job of the media, the committee said, is to define the nation—the common image people have of themselves. "It is perceptions of journalists—together with education and the arts—which help us to define who and what we are.

"We all know the obstacles involved in this

task. Geography, language, and perhaps a failure of confidence and imagination have made us into a cultural as well as economic satellite of the United States. And nowhere is this trend more pronounced than in the media. Marquis Childs on the editorial page. Little Orphan Annie back near the classified ads. Nixon and Tiny Tim and Jerry Rubin and Johnny Carson and Lawrence Welk and Timothy Leary on the tube. The Beach Boys and Blind Faith and Simon and Garfunkel on the radio. The latest VC bodycounts courtesy of A.P. and U.P.I. The self-image of an entire generation shaped by Peter Fonda riding a stars-and-stripes motorcycle. Need we continue?

"We are not suggesting that these influences are undesirable, nor that they can or should be restricted. The United States happens to be the most important, most *interesting* country on earth. The vigor and diversity of its popular culture—which is close to becoming a world culture—obsesses, alarms, and amuses not just Canadians, but half the people of the world.

"What we *are* suggesting is that the Canadian media—especially broadcasting—have an interest in and an obligation to promote our *apartness* from the American reality. For all our similarities, for all our sharing, for all our friendships, we *are* somebody else."

[SOLUTIONS]



AMONG ITS RECOMMENDATIONS for improving the scene, the committee recommended a heavier commitment to journalism training; the creation of an industry Press Council, modelled after the British Press Council, to monitor the press and foster professionalism; and offered the following observations:

"What this country now needs, to achieve the sort of editorial competition that is our best guarantee of a good society, is a journalistic equivalent of the Volkswagen.

"The Committee believes a 'Volkswagen press' is just beginning to emerge in this country, and that is the most hopeful development in print journalism for many years. The Volkswagen press usually appears weekly or monthly, not daily. It can be produced relatively cheaply and it does not aim at the total market. It concentrates on basics; telling what's going on in a personal and opinionated manner, primarily designed for readers, not advertisers. We believe there is a large minority of the Canadian public that will buy that kind of product."

The committee said there are no financially successful Volkswagen newspapers or magazines, but some promising ones. Among them:

"*Last Post*: Produced by an editorial co-opera-