

Dig that Disco Journalism

WATERLOO (CUP) — A scramble for ratings and pressure for advertising revenue have turned television news into "disco journalism", according to a CBC producer.

"In the early '70s, ratings for TV news began to fall off. Since TV is big business, the reason for it was sought. It was decided that people want upbeat lifestyle news which has led us to the kind of journalism we see a lot of today," Nick Filmore told a Waterloo audience recently.

Filmore, the producer of CBC radio's Sunday Morning news show and a former National news editor, said defining news is a major problem.

The average journalist develops a news sense that governs what stories he or she will do and from what perspective, said Filmore.

A second major problem is the necessity for TV news to make money, he said. Responsible, socially important stories are passed up when the evening news line-up is prepared because they aren't flashy or interesting enough to compete with other commercial programs, he added.

TV news also focuses on individuals rather than on groups, resulting in a warped view of the organization and its operations, he said. The result is often a story that seems great because of one individual but that has no substance, said Filmore.

Another fault of the media is its obsession with flashy success stories. We are swamped with stories about people like Edmonton Oilers owner and Alberta millionaire Peter Pocklington that have little social or news value, said Filmore.

The quality of our news is also declining because of financial cut-backs, although certain priorities are maintained.

Filmore cited a recent CBC decision to chop one of its few investigative units because the corporation felt it couldn't afford the \$250,000 a year cost, as an example.

However, the CBC recently spent more than \$250,000 on its trip to Katmandu, Nepal, to cover the Canadian climb of Mount Everest.

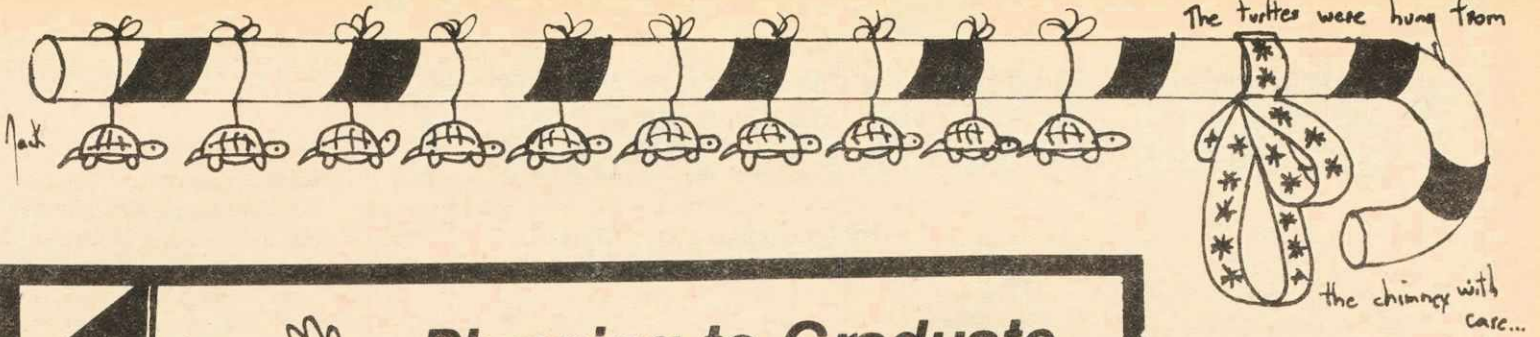
Meanwhile, the war in Lebanon was escalating, but there was very little coverage of it on the CBC news, and it didn't receive the same attention the Everest climb did, he said.


Even though the recession is affecting news-gathering in other areas, foreign bureaus are still being maintained.

According to Filmore, the bureaus are not used, because it costs too much to transmit the stories — one and a half minutes by satellite costs more than \$3,000. Canadian TV stations instead buy American news stories and the Canadian reporter on location phones in a story to match up with the pictures.

The major problem with the American news services is that they are well known for their bias — they only report the official position, said Filmore. As a result, Canadians get an American story with a Canadian voice.

Unfortunately, Filmore said he had no idea how to change or improve any of the problems.





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