

Third World News Coverage

There may be a vague assumption, especially in journalistic circles, that coverage of Third World news by the Canadian media has improved immeasurably since the mid-1960s. That is not the conclusion of a survey just completed for the North-South Institute. It has found that among Canadian newspapers reaching the largest populations in their regions, the amount of Third World coverage had changed little between 1966 and 1986. And it found that while the quality of coverage had improved slightly, far too much of it was still from American sources despite the recent expansion of foreign bureaus by the wealthier Canadian newspapers.

This study concentrated on five: the *Toronto Star*, the *Montreal Gazette*, the *Vancouver Sun*, the *Halifax Chronicle-Herald*, and *La Presse* of Montreal. There was, however, a briefer survey of *The Globe and Mail* in Toronto, our "national newspaper". It was done at 10-year intervals, in 1966, 1976, 1986, and to give random selection, it looked at 12 days in each year, one a month on different days of the week, and looked at different days in each English-language newspaper. The brief *Globe and Mail* comparison was based on one day each decade, selected on the basis of the date(s) when the other five showed the highest concentration of Third World coverage.

The surprise was that the amount of the "news hole" devoted to Third World developments and issues had not changed significantly over the two decades in question despite an obvious recent increase in the number of Canadian correspondents assigned abroad. The average percentage of the total news hole in these papers devoted to the Third World was 5.25% in 1966, 5.39% in 1976 and 5.18% in 1986. Adding the *Globe and Mail* fully to the survey would not have raised the averages very much, possibly because it devotes so much space now to business news.

Other surveys have indicated that most Canadians get their news from television, but it was impossible for this one to get an historical comparison of TV coverage. It did make a cursory survey in 1987 that suggested how little informative news is available in TV news broadcasts compared with a newspaper report on the same day.

As far as the surveyed papers were concerned, improvements in page layout, typography and placement within the paper have made Third World stories more attractive to the readership, although there is still much of it relegated to "filler" columns or to world notes in brief. Political notes, rather than coups or earthquakes were the top news category. But items about Third World development, social, economic and cultural issues, were at the bottom of the list. Tourist puff items filled an increasing amount of news space. The vast majority of coverage was (hard) news with minimal editorial comment and rare (but increasing) analysis and the coverage by *La Presse* was no better than the others despite reliance on different sources.

The evidence of how Third World news is played indicates that it is hardly a priority with Canadian editors. Pressured as they are by space and time, these editors may need background and experience to understand the importance of informative Third World stories to Canadians today, and the need to play them more prominently and consistently.

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New to the national press corps in Ottawa, Adly Bseiso is the first full-time staff correspondent assigned by an Arab news agency to Canada. "You are beginning to have a different and more active role in our part of the world," the Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) correspondent explains. "There have been large investments and introduction of Canadian products to the Gulf region . . . and our people began to wonder about this part of North America." A 1977 mass communications and political science graduate of American University in Cairo, he immediately joined the state-owned but unusually autonomous KUNA. Not as parochial as its name might suggest, the agency serves the Arab world in general as well as Arab papers in London and Paris and the BBC.

Should Bseiso seek membership in the Parliamentary Press Gallery, he'll be joining a small but growing group of people who bring a foreign perspective to Canadian affairs. Al Ahram, the largest daily newspaper in Egypt, has been represented for some time by Moustafa Sadek. However, the Soviets have long had the largest foreign representation in the Gallery and it currently includes Igor Dorofeev of Novosti News Agency, Vadim Fotinov of Soviet TV, Yuri Gulev and Alexei Malnikov of Soviet TV & Radio and Vladimir Shalkov of Pravda. China's Xinhua News Agency is represented by Yuan Ronjshenj and Zhenyun Liau while the People's Daily of China correspondent is Wenfu Guo. Taiwan's Central News Agency staffer in Ottawa is David Ting. Western European interests in the Gallery are represented by Barbara Halsig of West Germany's Deutsche Presse Agentur, Herva Lionnet of Agence France Presse, and Russ Blinch and Gary Regenstreif of Reuters. John Urquhart and Rose Tamburri represent the Wall St. Journal while Time has James Graff and Reader's Digest has Courtney Tower. — KAP