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## "All the news it pays to print"

by Ron Norman

The media in a capitalist society must operate through the economic marketplace, consequently the role of the media must be examined within that context. The ramifications of such a relatively elementary statement were clearly and deftly illustrated in a speech to a meagre audience of some 50 people last Thursday evening in the McInnis room. The speech was delivered by Irwin Silber.

Mr. Silber is the executive editor of the New York based *Guardian*, a newspaper which characterizes itself as an "independent radical newsweekly". The *Guardian* began about 27 years ago and has undergone transformations over the years until now its staff, though they do not profess any organized political ties, are confirmed Marxists. From what one could observe from his speech Mr. Silber is not the kind of Marxist Dal is accustomed to; he stressed the need for a revolution in social relations and the upheaval of the capitalist system, yet he avoided the usual tired and worn out platitudes for which the left has been known (People's Canada Daily News).

The most significant statements made by Mr. Silber germinated from the role of the press within the economic framework of our society.

Because the media works through the marketplace, said Mr. Silber, "freedom of the press is nothing more than the freedom to go into the newspaper business." Freedom of the press, he continued, is no longer the freedom of any one person to print what they wish, but only to compete in the economy. With the present economic system imposing certain restrictions (ie. in order to enter the news business one must have huge amounts of capital; one must create a mass circulation; and one must have the resources to obtain information and get it onto the streets quickly), one's motive is diverted from freedom of the press towards the earning of a profit, or "all the news it pays to print".

From this point Mr. Silber went on to outline the main functions of newspapers in our society. Firstly, the mythology of present day newspapers is one of Clark Gable sitting behind an editor's desk violently and passionately striving to print the truth. Underlying this image, said Mr. Silber, is the false concept that the newspaper is a medium for individual thinking; not so says Mr. Silber.

Rather, the reality of the business of the press is coined in the phrase

"the brass check". The brass check was the token given a customer when entering a brothel to "test the wares". Upton Sinclair used the phrase for the title of his book about the newspaper business in reference to newspapers' prostituting qualities (in William Randolph Hearst Sr.'s words "You supply the story and I'll supply the war" - referring to the Spanish-American war).

The press also functions in the role of codifier or legitimizer of the existing beliefs and habits. The media piles half-truth upon half-truth, data upon data and prints speeches and quotations which no one can really question, thus giving a seeming relevance to reality and truth. In this way the press help to shape the present ideology in such a way that the people of all classes will accept society as it is - to believe that "what is around them is truth".

Mr. Silber identified the third function of the press as the mediator of the various power struggles within the ruling class. The purpose of the mediation, said Mr. Silber, is to legitimize the struggles and to define the limits so they will not destroy the society (analogous, said Mr. Silber, to the

role of the CIA, in its preservation of the status quo.)

The media also provides diversions for the public, by means of fantasies such as crossword puzzles, the sports section, letters to Miss Lonely Hearts, and a dozen more games and circuses. The real question of social relations is passed over.

All of the various roles of the press in this society basically lead back to the fact that freedom of the press is related in economic terms. In Mr. Silber's words freedom of the press should be "the freedom and responsibility to tell the truth... not to tell half-truths... We have never known freedom of the press of this kind in a capitalist society".

The role of the press in a socialist society would have to be twofold said Mr. Silber. The press would have to provide the necessary economic information that the working class would need to retain rule. The press would also have to provide a vehicle by which the working class may discuss bureaucracy which is not in the best interests of the working people.

Those interested in obtaining more information about the *Guardian* can write to (*Guardian*, 33 W. 17 St., New York, N.Y., 10011.

## Strikers look to public

by Ron Norman

Striking Liquor Store employees were to meet with their labour leaders sometime this week to discuss Prime Minister Trudeau's widely publicized economic measures, and to discern to what extent their position would be affected by the 10% maximum wage freeze.

Before this series of events had taken place, interviews had been obtained from a few of the striking employees in front of the Halifax

Shopping Centre Liquor Commission. At that time the strikers had not had a meeting with their labour leaders since negotiations had broken down and the strike had started.

The strikers seemed to have felt an antagonism towards them from the public because of the loss of liquor: "The public seems to be on their (the government's) side, but they have been pretty good about

the whole thing."

When it was suggested that the public might be expressing a backlash at labour for the numerous strikes and outstanding wage increases one striker commented: "Well, as the economy is today, the unions are trying to keep up with inflation. What's the value of your dollar today?"

The rumor was, and still is, that the government is planning to open up a store to service permit holders (i.e. liquor establishments). One striker's reply was "They (the government) make statements like they feel they're obligated to open up a store as much as we are to go on strike - to serve the people. If they think one store's going to do the trick well...."

Later on, the same striker again brought up the rumor of a store opening up in the Halifax area. "All the harping being done is to get a store open, like that'll solve the whole problem. Makes no difference about the contract."

Most of the strikers interviewed had no idea how long they would be on strike, and when asked how far away from agreement the government and the union were one striker replied: "Quite a way's away."

One young striker stepped into the conversation near its end and interjected: "We do have a signed document which they agreed to, saying that alcohol shall not be purchased or anything removed from the store. That's our agreement.... it doesn't matter to them."

## SMU faculty protests

The Saint Mary's University Faculty Union welcomes, and supports Premier Regan's call for wider representation on University boards of governors, and agrees with him that the present system is working badly. The Faculty Union rejects University President Dr. Carrigan's claim that his administration is already accountable to a sufficiently broad spectrum of opinion. The Union believes that even a slight broadening of representation on the Board of Governors would lead to a significant change of University policy.

A more important point, however, based on the Union's experience in the last two years, is that the composition of representation on the Boards is largely an irrelevant issue. We have had meetings and correspondence in the last two months with about a dozen members of the Saint Mary's Board. These members have included representatives of the faculty, students, alumni, and the provincial government. Much to our surprise, we have discovered from each of these constituencies that they - the Board members - themselves have very little knowledge of the positions the University is taking in its negotiations with the Faculty Union. In retrospect, this should not be surprising because the Board only meets about four times a year. But the Executive

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Strikers talking to Gazette