

A weekend of 'soul-searching'

Journalists retreat to York for self-appraisal

By ANNA VAITIEKUNAS
 "A newspaper or magazine is not the place to go see people actually earning a living, though journalists like to pretend they never stop sweating over a hot typewriter. It is much more like a brothel - short rushed bouts of really rather enjoyable activity interspersed with long lazy stretches of gossip, boasting, flirtation, drinking, telephoning, strolling about the corridors, sitting on the corners of desks, planning to start everything tomorrow. Each of the inmates has a little specialty to please the customers, the highest ones perform only by appointment, the poorest take on everything and anybody. The editors are like madams - soothing, flattering, disciplining their naughty, temperamental staff but rarely obliged to satisfy their clients personally between the printed sheets."

— Alan Brien, drama critic of the London Daily Telegraph, 1967.

The above remarks were presented at the '72 Media conference in Ottawa by Harry Boyle, current chairman of the Canadian Radio and Television Commission. Boyle's presentation dismayed his audience of journalists because he questioned the capability of the media to cope with new technology.

Last weekend, a dozen journalists and newspaper editors left their 'brothels' for a three day retreat into the academic conclaves of Winters college to discuss exactly the same issue Boyle had questioned: what is the record of the modern press in Canada. The panelists, including such media luminaries as Claude Ryan, Norman Webster and Gerry Haslam, were to do a little soul-searching and breast-beating and other hyphenated activities over the roles and responsibilities of the Canadian press. At times, however, the attempt at self-appraisal was dimly lost when several discussion periods turned into self-righteous back-patting ceremonies and feuding between Toronto Star and Globe and Mail journalists.

The scene, Winter's College junior Common room unfortunately did not do the conference justice. Bustling beer noises from the Absinthe coffee shop and faulty recording equipment blemished the whole event somewhat.

Claude Ryan, editor of the Montreal daily Le Devoir criticized newspapers for being too 'anti-idea'.

"Papers," he said, "pay attention to facts, the weather, and accidents but care little for ideas or work at universities. 'Newspapers should offer always opinions and take a stand on issues. He said that though it is important for the written press to be analytical it must first establish its reporters as journalists before they can embark on 'analytical' journalism."

"A journalist must obtain the newspaper experience and show that he can report the daily news accurately and fairly. It is very fashionable for young journalists to want to cover the legislative beat, he said.

Ryan's comments were however interrupted momentarily when Ioan Davies, master of Bethune college, (suffering the effects of Absinthe alcohol,) tumbled head over heel over a couch and sat on the panel table to discuss the 'fundamental difference between English and French Canadian papers'.

PEAKS AND VALLEYS

Gerry Haslam, editor of the Winnipeg Tribune spoke in a later panel discussion on international reporting (though he admitted he'd never covered international news himself). He warned the audience that the isolation of a Canadian presence in foreign newspapers and foreign news in Canada is causing 'us to exist out of the mainstream of the world.' He attributed this isolationism to the lack of expertise in the newsroom and the selecting process for publishing international news events. "We cover just the peaks and not the valleys of international events so that we lose sight of the overall picture."

"No one on my paper," he said, "can proclaim to have an area of concentrated knowledge in foreign affairs. 'Often the correspondent, because he is so close to the event, can't even tell what the significance is of the story.'"

He added that Canadian papers rely heavily on American wire services which are not set up for Canadian papers nor write from a Canadian point of view.

"I would like to be optimistic but I can't, he quipped. If we insist on living in a vacuum then we will be in deep, deep trouble." To which Walter Stewart, foreign correspondent for MacLeans magazine responded, "well, it's fine to meet in these con-

claves and say it's too bad about international reporting." Stewart then suggested that Canada establish a print extension of the CBC to get 'out of this bag all together.' Norm Webster of the Globe and Mail, another panelist, rejected the idea that the three major newspaper chains in Canada, - Southam, Thompson, and FP publications couldn't give their papers more foreign news coverage if they pooled their resources together.

Senator Keith Davey closed the conference by saying that the "media pays too little attention to its own abuse than other institutions like the medical or legal institutions."



An average of 30 professors, journalists and students attended each panel session for the 'Press in Canada' Symposium.



From left to right: Walter Stewart from Macleans magazine, Norm Webster from the Globe and Mail, Jerry Haslam from the Winnipeg Tribune, Ioan Davies from Bethune college and Mark DeVilliers from Weekend magazine.



Senator Keith Davey pondering the future of the Canadian press.

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 MEETING
 TODAY AT 2 p.m.**