

Media panel unaccountable

by Mary Hamblin

"There is no such thing as a secret...and any good reporter knows it!", said Bill Smith, Editor of the Halifax Chronical Herald at last Wednesday evening's Media Accountability Session. Darce Fardy, Director of CBC TV responded by asking him to discover the whereabouts of Margaret Trudeau that evening.

Such was the quality of comments the audience of approximately three hundred were to put up with for two and one-half hours in the McInnes Room.

Other members of the panel included Clark Davey, managing editor of the Globe and Mail; Dr. Noel Murphy, a Newfoundland broadcaster; Ron Haggart, producer of CBC's 5th Estate; Charles Lynch, publisher of the Southam News Service; Bruce Little, media critic for CBC Information Morning; and Richard O'Hagen, press secretary to the Prime Minister. Robert Murrant, a lawyer and expert in the field of censorship acted as moderator.

The session, sponsored jointly by CBC and Dalhousie's School of Business was meant to offer the public a chance to confront media practice and policy. At the outset, the atmosphere of the panel was casual as they discussed the media's role and what kind of obligation they have toward the public. Lynch felt, "It is the right of the public to know what is going on in politics. We live in an open society in terms of rights and freedom." Having seen government controlled media, such as that of Red China, Lynch feels that the only issues that should be secretive are those that threaten government security. For instance, he found that the press' recent clash with the Prime Minister and Rene Levesque was justified. He was referring to the appearance of newspeople at a private conference between the two men.

Davey, however, disagreed. "I don't think there is any inherent right of the media to any infor-



l.to r.: Ron Haggart, Bill Smith, Noel Murphy, Clarke Davey

Dal Photo/Walsh

mation. I feel this was a case of civil disobedience."

In reply, Lynch said "often the newspaper reporter who is doing his best will be least liked. The idea of cabinet secrecy is a plot against the people for it is legend that you can't do business in public. You can."

Smith interjected, "Do you men do your business in public? I'm sure you don't?"

There was a fair amount of criticism aimed at Halifax's Chronicle Herald, one issue being the paper's refusal to run Gay Alliance for Equality (GAE) advertising. When Smith was questioned on this, he replied, "I have nothing to do with the advertising department, though I would agree with them if it were my choice." He told a spokesperson from the organization to write the paper a letter.

Co-panelist Haggart expressed surprise that Smith had not run into this issue before in the news department. "I don't know," replied Smith, "I don't interfere with the news." "I assume you read your own paper, Smith?" concluded Haggart.

Earlier in the session, Smith had called the audience an 'elite' group. "I have 500,000 followers, and I print for that majority. I do not take elite advice, but listen to the fisherman, the miner, and the woodsman." The audience received this statement with groans and disbelieving laughter. Lynch's comment at this point was that "There's an old legend that people get the government they ask for; so perhaps they also get the newspaper they ask for."

Muriel Duckworth, a local social activist, approached the microphone angrily with her comments. She was very perturbed about the CBC announcing the activities of

Margaret Trudeau every half hour throughout that morning. "Is that news?", she asked. "Furthermore, where are the women who ought to be on this panel?" A confusing discussion followed, attempting to rationalize the news worthiness of Margaret Trudeau's private life.

It was an embarrassing moment when Brenda Large publisher of three Halifax papers stood up to comment that she had been receiving calls asking her why she had not been invited to speak on the panel. She supported the view that Margaret Trudeau's actions are newsworthy saying that, "news is not always nice—usually it is not nice at all." She criticized the media for the fact that, although women can be found in editorial positions, few actually own or manage the papers.

The panel was asked that if a scandal such as Watergate ever happened in Canada, would the media be able to uncover it. Davey and Little felt that the scandal would have come to public attention, Little adding that he thinks "the CBC has shown itself responsible and fearless in investigating reporting." Smith and Haggart disagreed.

The audience generally felt that the idea behind the media accountability session was excellent, but unfortunately was poorly organized and mediated.

The panel tended to take over the session, talking amongst themselves rather than facing the audience. Had there been a stronger co-ordinating element between audience and panel, there may have been a far more refreshing result. However, they felt this first event may lead into improved sessions in the future. The size and variation of the audience showed a positive public response to such an event.

Kings rejects fee increase

by John MacLeod

The University of King's College Students' Union rejected an Atlantic Federation of Students (AFS) fee increase in a referendum held on Monday 14 March. Although the popular vote was in favour of the increase, by a margin of 106-65, the result is considered to be a defeat under the King's Students' Union's constitution which requires a 75% majority. Only 62% voted in favour of the increase.

When asked about the defeat King's Students' Union president John Wiles said "It has been defeated, but after our membership expires we will continue to cooperate with AFS although we will act

independently. I think it is important to keep solidarity with other students."

Wiles said that part of the reason for the defeat was probably the difference between the wording of the ballot and the prior publicity. He felt that many students did not understand what the referendum was about until they read the ballot which proposed an AFS membership fee increase from \$.50 per annum to \$1.00 per student per annum.

Wiles was optimistic that a fall referendum could be successful. "If something comes up between now and then and AFS does something, it will help them here."

standing of their common situation.

Larry Katz, research officer for the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) also spoke at the meeting.

Katz said the cutbacks in social services and wage controls were part of a general assault by the state of Canadian workers.

He said a state such as ours has a three fold function. First, it creates and maintains an economic climate which will encourage private investment and growth. Second, it settles disputes among the different investment interests in the best interest of private enterprise generally. Finally, the state must take the capitalist system acceptable to the people and it does this in part by providing social services.

During the current period of inflation and high unemployment the state has a choice to make. It can fulfill its third role and provide more services to satisfy public demand, such as more unemployment payments, welfare and hospitals.

Or, he said, it can fulfill its first function and satisfy the interests of private investors. It has chosen the second path in the hopes that private investment will improve the general situation. The result is less social services spending and more spending to subsidize private investments, who of course still keep their profits.

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who have despoiled the country."

She questioned what labour has in common with Noranda Mines which is now investing in fascist Chile, or Dominion Textiles which is building in the southern US with profits made from Quebec cotton mills.

Labour leaders who advocate tripartism do not understand that the true fight is between workers and private enterprise, according to Parent.

"What else can Morris expect but more strife?" she asked.

Parent maintained that the only real strength workers have is collective bargaining and the right to strike. Tripartism would put collective bargaining in the hands of a few "labour bosses" and would take away the right to strike from the rank and file.

She said the current call by business and government leaders to keep permanent controls on public employees such as municipal and hospital workers must be resisted. This would only turn worker against workers and be a first step towards removing the right to strike from all workers.

Parent advocates increasing rank and file communication between public and private sector workers. This would increase their under-

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