



James Bailey

Journalistic excess

A lot of people aren't very happy with the press.

Scan the letters-to-the-editor column of any major newspaper and you will invariably find some reader protesting the way we do our jobs.

Quite often they're right. In the past few weeks, I've seen several examples of journalistic excess which make me wonder about the state of the business and the competence of the people employed in it.

I've noticed a rather distressing trend, for example, toward making the newsgathering process the news itself.

On Monday morning, one news medium, the Globe and Mail ran a front-page banner story about how another news medium, NBC News, handled a story on racism in Toronto. Recently the Globe wasted a great deal of presumably valuable space in a story on doctors' OHIP billings attempting to prove that the Toronto Star had scalped its lists of doctors' gross incomes from an earlier edition of the Globe.

When Charles Lynch of Southern News Service staged a sit-in protest against exclusion of the press at the federal-provincial first

ministers' conference in Ottawa, his action received massive national attention. The issue became so muddled that no one really knows for sure which reporters at the scene were covering the event and which were actually involved in the protest. If the trend continues, pretty soon we'll all be interviewing ourselves.

But back to the doctors for a moment. Personally, I found the publication of that list of doctors' names and gross billings to OHIP — with sidebar stories for those physicians who presented bills of \$1 million or more — to be mean-spirited, petty, and downright embarrassing to those among us who, in our naivete, have some journalistic ideals. Anyone with even a smattering of bookkeeping knowledge — including presumably the editors of Canada's two leading English-language dailies — knows that those figures are absolutely meaningless. They have no bearing whatsoever on amount of money the doctors actually receive as take-home pay. There's no justification for assuming wrong-doing because a physician has a high gross annual income. He may be carrying the fees of his associates on his own books, or the charges of a medical laboratory in which he owns an interest. His legitimate expenses in

running an office are also in that gross income figure. Or maybe — horror of horrors — he just works very hard and makes a lot of money.

Human nature being what it is, there may very well be fraud involved in some of those cases, but there was certainly no evidence presented in the lists which could possibly lead to that conclusion. And, of course, both newspapers were very careful to avoid making that suggestion in print.

But, by the amount of play they gave the lists, any rational human being would have to suspect that the editors handling the story felt something was wrong. The act of publication of a story implies that the story is newsworthy. By the way in which both papers covered the story, they clearly implied that a major scandal had been uncovered when, in reality, none existed — at least not on the basis of the information that was offered.

Had the editors involved spent the time and money to do major investigative reports on OHIP billing procedures using the lists as a starting-off point, and had they uncovered bonafide examples of frauds against the public based on real evidence, they would have unquestionably been fulfilling their responsibility

as journalists. By publishing lists of unaudited meaningless figures, they used a scattergun to take a cheap shot at hundreds of innocent individuals whose only sin was that they didn't realize their names were going to be published in the newspaper.

And speaking of cheap shots, how about that job the Globe did on Lloyd Robertson? After hearing rumours that Lloyd was still homesick for the CBC after his recent switch to CTV, a reporter managed to suck the hapless announcer into confirming them. A brief item for the entertainment page, one would think. But no — the Globe instead ran a lengthy front page story accompanied by a totally unnecessary mug shot (after all, we know by now what Lloyd looks like). The only reason for giving such prominence to the story seemed to be to get poor old Lloyd in trouble with his new employers. One would think that a journal which bills itself as Canada's national newspaper could put its front page to a better use.

To which, I imagine, the Globe's editors would reply, as did Mohammed Ali when he was turned down by the U.S. Army for mental insufficiency, "I only said I was the greatest, I never said I was the smartest."

The pawns in a struggle

Remember those trains which were blowing their horns at the "phantom" crossing at Given Road and the CPR tracks in the Mississauga Valleys?

Well, the pointless hooting has finally stopped. The trains began blowing their horns last spring when a dispute developed between the city and the Canadian Transport Commission. Even though the Given crossing is unusable and there is no vehicular access to the tracks, the CTC began to blow its horns.

You see the city wanted to transfer its rights for greater federal financial assistance for a grade separation established by the Given crossing to the potential Cliff Road crossing, nearby. This despite the fact that residents on Cliff and Grenville Drive are strongly opposed to any road extension.

While the city continued to try to get a future financial break for the taxpayers, the trains kept on making the federal government's position of opposition painfully clear to residents. They were awakened regularly at one-hour intervals in the wee hours of the morning.

With protests pouring in from Valleys' residents, our local politicians relented on their stand and decided to withdraw their request to transfer seniority rights for the grade separation to Cliff. That's when the horns suddenly stopped.

But as you can imagine there's still a lot of resentment at homes along Mississauga Valley Boulevard and Voltaire Crescent, among others.

Mrs. Pat Saito, who spent many hours writing letters and making telephone calls to end the sound-barrier barrage, detected pure spite among some of the train engineers. They'd open up their horns far behind the non-crossing at Given and not ease up until they were far beyond it. Of course, the worst of the tooting came during the hot summer nights when most of the residents' windows were open.

For Mrs. Saito the worst part was that "it just went on for so long. If we'd just known that somebody was doing something to stop them, it would have been bearable," she says.

After contacting then-councillor, now mayor, Ron Searle, Mrs. Saito got much better co-operation, she says.

Both Mrs. Saito and Paul MacDonald, a Valleys' resident who spent \$1,400 buying central air conditioning so that he could close his windows on summer nights, say that the new-found silence is eerie.

"Sometimes when you're lying in bed and you hear a train come through," says Mrs. Saito, "you just automatically grit your teeth, waiting for the whistle. It hasn't happened yet. But after what we've been through, you get pretty skeptical about what's going to happen around here."

The Valleys' residents were made pawns in a power struggle measured in decibels instead of dollars. As usual, the shriller feds eventually won.



Karl Schuessler

On religious salespeople

A man tacked up a sign on his front door: "The people in this house are Buddhists. They speak only a Tibetan dialect. They have very bad tempers."

If you think this sign is intended to drive away all door-to-door salespeople — the vacuum-cleaner men and the Avon ladies — you're wrong.

The man made it up for another kind of door-knocker — the person who comes around to your door and asks, "Brother, are you saved?"

Several recent religious magazine articles describe how you can shut the door, save face and still keep the faith.

Those religious salespeople have always made me edgy. I never could think up a good one-liner in reply. Imagine! A total stranger blitzing me with such a question.

Now if he'd start out by asking how I am — physically, that is — or if he carried on about the weather for a few minutes, that would be okay. I'd expect something like that. But no. It's "Brother, are you saved?" It's cutting the jugular without any previous blood-letting. I'm just not prepared for this most personal and intimate and soul-rendering question.

These magazine articles make some suggestions — real wham-bangers to start your own offensive. Why not reply with something insulting: "Are you educated?" Or you could say, "I don't like being propositioned." Or try something off-beat: "What's pi squared?" or "Why does the Bible say the hare chews the cud?" or "Who was Cain's wife?"

And if you have a little time on your hands, you could intimidate them with a little education of your own. Ask them what ancient Bible

text they're using. Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus or Bazaar? You must insist on reliable texts. And if that doesn't throw them in disarray, then you could memorize the Bishop of Durham's answer:

"Am I saved? Well that depends. Whether you mean in the past tense, the present tense or the future tense. If you mean 'Did Christ die for me?' — undoubtedly; if you mean, 'Are my feet firmly set upon the highway of salvation?' — I trust so; but if you mean 'Am I safe home in the blest kingdom meek of joy and love?' — certainly not."

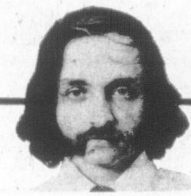
But I don't know. Does any of it work? Does any one word — or words — satisfy? Does anything work short of letting them know I like to think of myself as Christian, but not their variety. Being born again doesn't have to mean some electrifying experience where I can pinpoint time and date.

I can't remember my physical birth. Why press a spiritual timetable on me? I don't get my jollies out of remembering my birth — spiritual or otherwise. It's what I do along the way that counts; it's what I believe in that counts.

But no matter. I've learned to shut the door pretty fast on my callers, without the aid of all those helpful magazine remarks. Forget about the bright remark and fighting invective.

It's sad — real sad — when one of my door-knockers can say the local pastor could have a packed church every Sunday. The pastor could fill up his entire sanctuary, if only he were saved, born again.

It's so sad — and presumptuous — to look at God's gift of salvation as some sort of promissory note that I can get, payable on demand.



Stewart Page

No easy conclusions

"Kenneth Chesher has probably spent nine months in custody needlessly," says Toronto criminal lawyer Edward Greenspan. Chesher's case came to the attention of the Toronto media in early December, 1976. Chesher's 15-year-old daughter, in the summer of 1975, had set out one day, ostensibly on her way to school, but apparently had pre-arranged a meeting with some young man and ran away with him.

Chesher went to the police repeatedly over the next few days, pleading for help, but became dissatisfied with their efforts and decided to "take the law into his own hands." Armed with a gun, he set out after the men with whom his daughter was spending her time.

Chesher encountered two men in a park in Niagara Falls and demanded to know the whereabouts of his daughter. After being threatened by the men with a knife, an ugly incident developed and Chesher fired a couple of rounds from the gun at the men. After being charged by police with discharging a firearm with intent to wound, Chesher was released pending trial. Shortly thereafter, he again set out on his own looking for the "hoods," going from bar to bar in Niagara Falls. Eventually, in a dis-

traught condition, he was picked up by Niagara Falls police on a charge of being drunk in a public place and was sent to jail for eight days.

Chesher, apparently on his own, entered the Greater Niagara General Hospital and was given a psychiatric examination. From this point on, Chesher became a subject for the tentacles of psychiatry, ending up committed in mental institutions for nearly six months.

Was being distraught and being found allegedly drunk in a public place, together with the "symptoms" of a worried, concerned father, enough to constitute evidence sufficient to lock a man away for six months in an institution for the criminally insane, without benefit of any meaningful or immediate legal recourse? If not, are psychiatrists, together with the professionals who work in institutions, somehow likely to err in the direction of authoritarianism and so proceed to lock up someone as mentally ill when the person is perfectly normal?

Apparently, a growing number of people, including a number of mental-health professionals, as well as media people, believe that this sometimes does happen.

There exists a research study which is rapidly becoming a favorite of those who like to claim, for example, that "psychiatrists are crazy" or that "they aren't any different from the patients" or that "they can't tell in the hospital who's crazy and who isn't." The study was carried out by a social psychologist, David Rosenhan. Rosenhan arranged for eight "normal" persons to gain admission to several U.S. mental hospitals by faking "mental" symptoms. That is, each person came to the hospital's admitting office and claimed to have been hearing voices. All such persons were successful in gaining admission to the hospitals, the staff believing their "illness" to be real and at least mildly distressing to them. Upon gaining admission to the hospital, these normal individuals (Rosenhan called them "pseudopatients") stopped feigning the hallucinations and continued to act in a perfectly normal, reasonable, cooperative manner. Each pseudopatient was kept in the hospital, at the discretion of the doctors and other staff, an average of 19 days. Two were kept for about 50 days. When they finally left hospital, each fake patient was tagged with the diagnosis of "schizophrenic in remission."

Does the fact that eight "pseudopatients" could gain admission to a mental hospital and remain there for two weeks without being released mean that mental hospitalization is a sham? Does it mean that the mentally ill are not detectably different from the normal? Despite the conclusions drawn by Rosenhan and the fact that the media is all too ready to support him, the reaction to the study by the professional and scientific community, including many of Rosenhan's fellow psychologists, has been almost uniformly negative. There are several reasons for this. To mention but one, it may not be terribly remarkable that a person could gain admission to a hospital. Also, hospital staffers, confronted by a person stating he had problems of some sort, who chose to refuse admission would surely find themselves on the "front pages as quickly as did the mental hospitals in Rosenhan's study. This is not to say that psychiatric diagnosis is, or is not, a sham. But the actions of those mental hospitals do not necessarily lead to the easy conclusions which have been so gleefully drawn by so many people.

Dr. Page is director of research at Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital.



Community Alive!

Places to get information

By JOHN FISHER, JOANNE COOPER and CLARE PAGEAU

Before forming a new group or organization, it is important to see if you can join forces with one that already exists. Don't reinvent the wheel. In addition, it is worth spending time to learn all you can about your area of interest. Knowledge is power. The following sources of information exist in most communities:

The public library: Through inter-library loans your library can borrow a book from another library elsewhere in Canada; provides reference services, community information, meeting space, films and audio-visual equipment, educational programs; holds meetings on community issues, and may help your group develop an educational program or start a service. Before using a library, meet with your librarian to discuss your needs and the library services available.

Newspaper clipping library: Usually found only with large newspapers. All clippings are filed under subject headings. There usually is a charge, except for students.

Film library: Lends films, provides reviews of films, rents projectors and screens.

Social planning council: Monitors social trends, does research, co-ordinates and supports citizen groups of all types; evaluates community programs in relation to social needs. Arts councils carry out the same functions for cultural groups.

Community information centre: Provides information about citizen groups, government programs, various resources and where to get them; can put you in touch with services and experts on many subjects; may be involved with identifying community needs, advocacy and policy change, and may provide translation and interpreting services. If your community doesn't have an information centre, contact the Federation of Community Information Centres, c/o Etobicoke Central Information and Referral, 3828 Bloor St. W., Islington, Ontario M9B 1K9.

University or other institute of further learning: May have experts in your field of interest, who are or wish to be involved with the community. Universities have one or more libraries and may have a centre of information or research about the problem you are trying to solve.

For surveys and research on your area of interest, and information on just about everything, contact: The Canadian Council on Social Development, 55 Parkdale Ave., Ottawa, Ontario.

Remember, find all available information. Don't duplicate an existing organization's program if you can strengthen it by joining it.

Also, looking for facts is the best way of meeting people who can help you achieve your goal. Keep up these contacts!

For a pamphlet containing more information, books to read and actual examples of projects which have used the information in this column, enclose \$1 and send to: The Management and Fund Raising Centre, 95 MacLennan Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M4T 2H6.



David Busby

Who's the big, bad wolf?

According to published reports, Fortune magazine, the big U.S. financial monthly, is having trouble drawing up its annual list of the 500 top corporations. What with take-overs, mergers and conglomerations, big businesses are not only swallowing the small fry, they are even gobbling up each other.

That won't worry many Mississauga businessmen. What bothers many of them is the chance that an NDP government could come to power in Ontario in 1977. By the time a provincial election comes around, Premier William Davis and the Progressive Conservatives will have persuaded them that an NDP victory would mean a combination of red revolution and blue ruin.

Most of the businessmen I know aren't hankering to be in the top 500 or even the top 5,000. Most of them work long hours with few holidays and no breaks. What they want from the Ontario Legislature is just enough rules to keep a crooked competitor from forcing them into bankruptcy. Instead, most of them expect nothing but trouble from governments.

That's odd. The only governments Ontario businessmen have experienced have been form-

ed by Liberals or Conservatives. And aren't Liberals and Tories heart and soul the friends of free enterprise? If you can't trust your friends, how about your purported enemies?

And that's the connection with the Fortune 500. New Democrats aren't out to get independent businessmen. Why make enemies of 130,000 hard-working people who employ half this province's work force? What the NDP wants is a mixed economy with plenty of room for the imagination: energy and sacrifice of independent business. What we see instead are giant corporations like the Weston empire controlling the price of everything we eat, or huge oil companies with gross revenues bigger than the income of the government of Canada.

It wasn't government that wiped out the neighborhood grocery store or that chased local pharmacies out of business. It isn't government that cancels service-station leases, opens self-serves or sets up a discount gas bar to rob one of its own lessees. It isn't government that threatens Streetsville or Clarkson merchants with ruin when customers flock to the new covered shopping malls financed by the huge corporate retailers like Eaton's, Dominion Stores, K-Mart or The Bay.

But it is government which looks on and finds it all wonderful. Isn't it a little odd that after 33 years of Conservative rule in Ontario, small businessmen should now feel themselves to be an endangered species?

The NDP doesn't want to be Big Brother, saving small businesses in spite of themselves. We think it's a scandal when the Davis government spends our tax dollars to bail out losers. But we do think that small business will survive only if it gets organized — perhaps through neighborhood improvement committees, as in many parts of Mississauga, or through trade associations committed to raising standards and up-grading professionalism. If independent people want help, an NDP government would help, but we won't be pushy.

We think it might be a good idea to look into the pricing policies of major corporations to make sure that they don't discriminate against small operators. Take a local example: In the giant shopping centres like Square One, the big stores at the corners usually pay a much lower rent per square foot, and under the Assessment Act, they get a much smaller share of the taxes. Guess who pays extra?

Like the NDP governments in western Canada, we'd like to give smaller companies the same chance at government contracts as their big competitors have always enjoyed under the Conservatives. And, after a third of a century with the same party in power, I suspect that the tendering system could do with a little fresh air and exercise.

Of course, a few words from me can't match years of claims by Conservative politicians that they are the only friends free enterprise ever had. Of course, as long as the Davis government can frighten business people into line with a few flourishes of the socialist bogie, they will be able to take them for granted.

In politics as in business, it usually pays to have a good look at the competition. On the day that Ontario businessmen can no longer be taken for granted by any party, they will start getting service. And any party includes the NDP.

Mr. Busby is the New Democratic Party candidate in the Mississauga North provincial riding.