

Media watch-dogs

by Neal Watson

Edmonton media beware - the Edmonton Media Working group is watching you.

With the intention of becoming a local media watch-dog, the Media working group met Tuesday night to discuss local coverage of the peace movement and propose ways to intervene effectively in the local media.

The newly-founded media group is headed by political science department researcher Robert Hackett. Its primary intent is to monitor, intervene and improve media coverage of the peace movement.

Approximately 20 people attended last night's meeting.

Guest Speaker Robin Denton, a prominent local peace activist, referred to the scheduled December deployment of American Pershing II and cruise missiles in W. Germany (approved Tuesday night by the West German Parliament) as evidence of the growing danger of nuclear war and of the necessity of highlighting the peace movement in the media.

Denton pointed to the ABC movie "The Day After", about a nuclear attack, aired last Sunday, as an effective device for heightening the awareness of the average person about nuclear war.

The peace movement, he said, was getting "more favourable treatment" from the media.

However, Denton warned that the "newsworthiness" of any story for the media was determined by how controversial that story was. He accused the media of doctoring facts and selective reporting.

After informing the group of his experience in dealing with the media and emphasizing the importance of coverage for the peace movement, Denton conducted a session on media handling.

The seminar included tips on dress, manner and style of presentation.

"It's nice to have coffee for them (the reporters)" said Denton.

Robert Hackett, who wrote a treatise on the media coverage of

the Korean flight disaster (see Gateway Oct. 25) said that the media works to create a framework for interpreting a story.

This framework emphasizes certain facts and information about the story and it highlights a particular theme. Consequently, public opinion is established on that story.

For example, Hackett said that American newsmagazines such as Time and Newsweek stressed President Reagan's "Evil Empire" interpretation of the Soviet Union.

The media tends to focus on the victims in these stories because it "suits the west's ideological purposes," said Hackett.

Hackett defined four potential biases that exist when the media covers a story.

The first is evident when the media "buries" a story or simply ignores it.

Secondly, the labelling of a story creates a bias. For example, referring to the Grenada incident as rescue or invasion.

The sources used by reporters also creates a bias. In the KAL story, dozens of reaction were heard from all top American officials, but virtually no reaction was printed, Hackett observed, from the peace movement.

The last bias is created by the theme that is highlighted in the reporting: Reagan's "Evil Empire" versus what is called the reasoned response - interpretation of the KAL crash.

To combat this bias in terms of the peace movement, Hackett proposed that newspapers create a "peace beat" for one reporter to cover only the peace movement. This way the movement would be given the coverage it deserves said Hackett.

Hackett says he sees a productive "role for critical media analysis." He also said there is a "constituency" among the people for such an undertaking.

The media, Hackett maintained, "will accept a reasoned analysis of its performance."

For anyone interested, the media working group next meets on December 6th.



photo Angela Wheelock

CABARETS Absolutely no minors admitted

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