

an influence in itself? Doesn't the very fact that the media live on advertising revenue imply a built-in bias in favour of a consumption-oriented society?

This institutional bias, we suggest, may be one of the chief reasons for the current public disenchantment with the media. But there is an even more compelling reason, and it has to do with the nature of the news itself.

At the annual meeting of a troubled financial corporation in Toronto recently, a woman shareholder stood up and berated the reporters present for printing "all that bad news" about her company. (The bad news consisted of disclosures that the company was earning much less money than previously, that the company's senior executives had borrowed heavily from company-controlled banks, and that the company's founder had got the firm to guarantee loans so he could buy *three* airplanes.)

The applause she received from her fellow-shareholders was literally thunderous. How come? Why this visceral hostility?

Part of it was the well-known tendency of people, when they hear bad news, to blame the messenger. But not all. The sheer prevalence of this shoot-the-messenger syndrome indicates that much of our journalism is failing to prepare its readers for conditions of constant change.

In a static, pre-industrial society, the news must concern itself with isolated events which somehow fracture prevailing patterns: COLUMBUS DISCOVERS AMERICA! The trouble seems to be that today, in a society where hardly anybody will die in the town where he was born, where many of our children's lifetimes will embrace not one but several careers, where exploration into our minds and outward to the stars is a constant process, in a society where *everything* is changing, we're still defining news in the same old pre-columbian way.

If it is to be news, there must be a "story." And if there is to be a "story," there must be conflict, surprise, drama. There must be a "dramatic, disruptive, exceptional event" before traditional journalism can acknowledge that a situation exists. Thus the news consumer finds himself being constantly ambushed by events. Poor people on the march all of a sudden? But nobody told us they were discontented! Demonstrations at the bacteriological warfare research station? But nobody told us such an outfit existed in Canada! People protesting pollution? What pollution? The paper never told us

We exaggerate, of course. But we think our central point stands up: journalism's definition of what constitutes "news" is still far too narrow. It still concentrates overmuch on the dramatic, exceptional event – the voting, the shooting, the rioting – and not enough on the quiescent but visible situations which could spell trouble later on.

Trouble: that's something else that's wrong with journalism's current definition of the news. There is much more to life than hassle and strife, but the media's entrapment in drama, conflict, and disruption prevents them from reporting it. There are terrible divisions in any technological society, but there