

**NO  
NEWS  
IS  
BAD  
NEWS**

**FIRST REPORT OF THE  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE  
STATUS OF DISABLED PERSONS**



**PATRICK BOYER,  
M.P., CHAIRMAN**

Canada. Parliament. House  
of Commons. Standing  
Committee on Status of  
Disabled Persons.

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# No News is Bad News

Chairman Patrick Boyer / Président Patrick Boyer

## First Report of the Standing Committee of the Status of Disabled Persons

Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence of the Standing Committee on the Status of Disabled Persons / Procès-verbaux et témoignages de la Commission permanente de la condition des personnes handicapées

Status of Disabled Persons

Condition des personnes handicapées

### House of Commons

RESPECTING / CONCERNANT

In accordance with its mandate under Standing Order 96(1), a study of the relationship between disabled persons and the media / Conformément avec son mandat en vertu de l'article 96(1) du Règlement, une étude du rapport entre les personnes handicapées et les médias

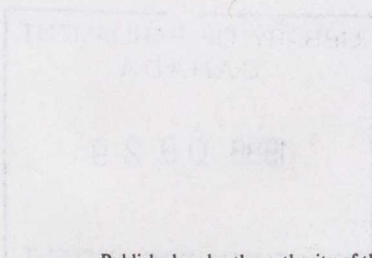
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HOUSE OF COMMONS

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**Chairman: Patrick Boyer**

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**Président : Patrick Boyer**

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**CONCERNANT :**

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**INCLUDING:**

The First Report to the House

**Y COMPRIS :**

Le premier rapport à la Chambre

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Second Session of the  
Thirty-third Parliament, 1986-1988

Deuxième session de la  
trente-troisième législature, 1986-1988

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF  
DISABLED PERSONS**

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William Young, Research Officer, Library of Parliament

Georges Royer, Editor

**The Standing Committee on the Status of Disabled Persons  
has the honour to present its**

**FIRST REPORT**

In accordance with its mandate under Standing Order 96(2), your Committee has heard evidence from individuals and organizations with regard to the relationship between disabled persons and the media and urges the Government to consider the recommendations contained herein.





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The publication of our first report is an occasion to celebrate the advance in the status of individuals with disabilities. The fact that our Committee on the Status of Disabled Persons is now a Standing Committee of the House of Commons means that a large segment of Canadian society has a permanent place in Parliament. As part of the ongoing integration of persons with disabilities into the mainstream of Canadian life, it is indeed a reason for celebration.

We are deeply grateful to all those who have contributed to our first productive months as a Standing Committee and particularly to those whose contribution has led to this report. We would like to thank our witnesses for their thoughtful briefs, presentations and willingness to answer our questions. Also, we would like to extend our gratitude to all those, throughout the country, who either as individuals or representative of an organization, took the time and cared enough to answer the questionnaires prepared by our researchers.

A study of this magnitude would not have been possible without the background papers which provided the grist for our mill. Glen Allen, Michel Crépault, Robert Everett, Frederick Fletcher, Paul and Laurie Grant, Dian Marino, Joanne McDermott, Joan Meister, Marie-Anne Rainville and Lynne Thomas have all contributed to this essential preparation for our report.

William R. Young from the Library of Parliament established and coordinated our research program and performed the additional research tasks required to complete this report.

The efforts of our Committee have been greatly enhanced by the commitment and support of our staff. The Clerk of the Committee, Patricia Russell, organized our hearings and made certain that all our activities have been carried out expeditiously and efficiently. Clairette Bourque served as an able substitute. Françoise Charland-Rose and Anne-Marie Labelle provided all Committee members with all appropriate assistance.

Our Committee is also thankful to Tranquillo Marrocco, another clerk, who volunteered his assistance and to Line Cadieux and Melissa Mastroguiseppe, who provided word-processing services.

We would also like to thank Georges Royer for his work on the text, Peggy Heath for her cover design and the staff of the Canadian Government Printing Services.

Neither our hearings nor this report would have been possible without the assistance of many services and support of the House of Commons staff. In particular, we would like to thank the translators, and the sign language interpreters for their constant attention.



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## INTRODUCTION

The news media in Canada examine the role and workings of parliamentary committees. Is turn-about fair play?

The reason our Committee on the Status of Disabled Persons is interested in the role and workings of the country's news media is not that we are taking on the task of professors in a journalism school seeking to instruct individuals on how they ought to cover stories and report the news. Clearly, that is neither the nature, nor the purpose, of this report.

Rather, we have embarked on this study of the news media in Canada because we recognize, in our capacity as legislators, that the role of informed public opinion is an essential element in a parliamentary democracy, and that in this process, the workings of a free press are indispensable. More particularly, as members of a parliamentary committee seeking to ensure that Canadians with disabilities can play the fullest possible role in the mainstream of our society, we see the need for attention to issues affecting these people and for awareness of their situation.

Our interest, therefore, lies in the manner in which issues that pertain to Canadians with disabilities are being covered by the news media of this country. In addition, we have a keen desire to improve access to information so that persons with disabilities can proceed with their lives on as equal a footing as possible as their fellow citizens.

As federal legislators, we know that government programs and laws can be developed only in relation to the awareness, concern, and commitment within the country as a whole about the desirability of new initiatives, of making changes, and of a greater role for Canadians with disabilities in the mainstream of our society. In that context, the news media of our country play a vital role as a free and independent press in carrying to the Canadian public an awareness and knowledge of issues that affect persons with disabilities.

It has been a concern of the members of this Committee to see an imbalance and, often, an absence of coverage. The adage "no news is good news" has an ironic twist in this context. That is why, for disabled persons, it is much more the case that "no news is ... bad news." And so we decided to examine this situation more closely and to prepare this report on the manner in which Canadians are informed about issues that affect persons with disabilities.

If there is one common characteristic which runs through the results of our Committee's findings to date, it can be summed up in the single word "unevenness". The news media of Canada are far from being alone in demonstrating this characteristic — it is equally evident in many areas of government, the educational system, the health care system and the private sector. This characteristic of unevenness shows up, too, in the work of advocacy organizations and in the level of performance of groups who speak of and for persons with disabilities and the way in which they get their point of view across to the media.

Again, our Committee, as a standing committee of the House of Commons, is not taking on the role of a public relations consultant who will, by fiat, reorganize the press relations of the advocacy organizations. That too, is neither the nature nor the purpose of this report. But we felt it unwise to ignore the comments of some journalists that more coverage of issues of concern to persons with disabilities would be improved if advocacy groups were more effective in getting out their story. Advocacy groups — like other organizations — must compete for scarce space on the airwaves and in the printed pages of the Canadian media organizations.

When he appeared before our Committee, Mr. Pierre Vennat, an editorialist with *La Presse* of Montreal, put the question succinctly. He asked:

Do ordinary people still have a place in the media when they are competing with the public relations juggernauts set in motion by governments, political parties, sports organizations, the business world, unions and powerful lobby groups?

Our work in preparing this report has proceeded on two fronts. The first consisted of studies that we have contracted that were carried out by people who are inside the world of Canadian journalism — people whose daily work consists of preparing what Canadians will watch on television, hear on the radio, or read in the daily press and periodicals. Those studies also included some content analysis of Canadian publications. We also have commissioned a study to canvass people with disabilities regarding their perceptions of coverage and portrayal by the media.

We also approached the issue in our hearings. Knowledgeable Canadians who have direct experience about these matters appeared as witnesses. They spoke to us, from their special vantage point, about news coverage of issues and concerns of persons with disabilities. This was our opportunity to listen and learn and put questions about things that are on our minds in respect to the nature and extent of interest in reporting on issues that are directly relevant to 13% of Canadians or 3,300,000 people.

As we conceive our Committee's mandate, one of its most important components is to propose and to promote mechanisms to generate desirable changes. We recognize that within the living memory of all of us, able-bodied people have run the lives of persons with disabilities. Since all humans are dependent upon others, there is nothing remarkable about this fact; it is just a matter of degree. Certainly, the current question, "independent living", did not emerge out of a vacuum, but from the realization by many people with disabilities that they wanted to be less dependent and that they could do more for themselves.

Our Committee is mindful of the pendulum swinging too far in the other direction, to the extent that we hear from some people the view that the only persons who can speak about disabilities are disabled persons themselves. We believe that there is room for all, and a role for everyone. In place of polarization, we seek harmonization. With regard to the situation of persons with disabilities and their relationship to the Canadian news media, we are specifically trying to bring the different forces together and to help people recognize that there is a lot of maturing to do.

We hope that this report will speed the process of harmonization and maturing. In its pages, disabled persons voice their views about their portrayal and coverage by the Canadian media. In turn, representatives of the full range of the media in Canada express their perceptions of disabled persons. We discovered that these two groups do not always find a common ground for dialogue. For example, disabled persons objected to some of the words which the media used to describe disabilities without realizing that journalists also objected to these same words as unsuitable.

Part of our report is an analysis of the content of the press and television. It is not designed to take sides, but to provide, for the first time, a reasonably objective view of the current situation. From these different perspectives flows our analysis of the policies of the various media organizations for the depiction and portrayal of disabled persons.

Employment of persons with disabilities is one of our continuing concerns and it naturally takes a place in this report — in part because employment can be a means of bridging the gap between disabled persons and the media.

The final issue raised in this report is the ability of persons with disabilities to gain access to the information which they require first to become integrated into Canadian society, and then to function independently, within that society. In very many instances, persons with a disability are expected to pay for assistive devices themselves. Our Committee feels very strongly that there is an anomaly in the Canadian situation. Canadians expect to get health care benefits from the moment they visit a doctor. Yet persons with disabilities — already economically disadvantaged — are expected to bear the cost of bringing themselves to the starting gate. This double standard shows up graphically in the failure to provide assistive devices and access to information — critical in education and employment.

Scholarship has shown that the news media are particularly important for the fortunes of “special publics”, or groups of persons who are seeking to advance specific policies. Media attention can propel these groups into public view and can provide those which lack influence or money the opportunity to expose their concerns to general public scrutiny. Furthermore, if the media approve these concerns, the groups have an opportunity to influence policy-makers. On the other hand, the media can prevent social change because their values and practices can reinforce traditional attitudes.

The media helps to shape public understanding of the disability community. It influences the climate of opinion within which policy affecting disabled persons will be made. The media can facilitate or impede the exchange of information between the policy-makers and consumer or advocacy groups. In addition, the media can perform other roles such as publicizing available services. It can also influence the self-perception of disabled persons.

The mass media possess a considerable degree of power in Canadian society. Democratic political theory invests the press with a prime responsibility to check abuses of power and to circulate fresh ideas and competing opinions. Because the media, in short, form such an important part of the process which determines the

legitimacy of social values and helps to set the boundaries for public debate on particular issues, it follows that the media play an important role in defining the nation's political agenda and in creating the basis for the economic, political, social and cultural changes needed to ensure, in Canada, equality for all.

### ***Recommendation 1***

**In light of the underrepresentation of disabled persons, the government should incorporate individuals with disabilities into its departments and agencies concerned with the media, culture and communications. Order-in-Council appointments to The boards of government agencies (such as the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission, the National Film Board, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the National Arts Centre) should include qualified persons with disabilities in proportion to the number of persons with disabilities in the population.**



# CHAPTER I

## People First

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We are persons (or women and men) who are disabled, NOT “the disabled,” “the handicapped.” Is it necessary to extensively discuss a person’s disability when that is not the topic of the story?

Cynthea Topham  
Winnipeg, Manitoba<sup>1</sup>

Individuals with disabilities now participate in most aspects of Canadian society to a greater degree than ever before. These people are organizing. They are speaking out. No longer should come to mind only images of passivity or pity: the grandparent in the hospital bed, the child with Down’s Syndrome at the special school or the man with no legs selling pencils on a downtown street corner. A trend is clear. Individuals with disabilities are demanding, and increasingly winning, the right to work beside their “able-bodied” neighbours. Disabled athletes, like Rick Hansen, Steve Fonyo or Terry Fox, have completed tasks of great perseverance and achievement. The ultimate goal of disabled persons is to live full, rich and independent lives.

Individuals with disabilities are concerned with turning the relationship between themselves and society into a better means to enable them to live with dignity. This concern gave rise to the first National Access Awareness Week, held from 29 May to 4 June 1988. Through the initial efforts of Rick Hansen and the Department of the Secretary of State, a national working group began planning a week to educate Canadians about five issues of great importance to disabled people: transportation, housing, education, employment and recreation. These are the five fronts on which a person with a disability will be either liberated or constrained in his or her efforts to lead an independent and productive life.

The emergence from the shadows of social non-acceptance and from the obscurity of indifference has, for individuals with disabilities and for the issues which concern them, been a slow and wearying process. Public attitudes and apathy still block progress. Overall, individuals with disabilities feel that the mass media rarely

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<sup>1</sup> Individuals or groups identified in this manner have responded to our researchers’ surveys.

reflect how they inhabit the world and that news reports too often display disabled individuals as objects of pity or inspiration and seldom as contributing members of the community at large. One respondent to our survey commented that "when somebody does become disabled, they feel worse about what society plants on them than about their actual disability.... I know some people who should use a wheelchair but they are so frightened of being patronized by the public, it's the major reason they don't want to use a wheelchair."

As a means of bringing this situation to light, our Committee on the Status of Disabled Persons has carried out studies and called witnesses to assess the current situation across Canada. We approached the question from various angles. First, we commissioned a study which involved questionnaires completed by individuals who either considered themselves to have a disability or were the parents of disabled children.<sup>2</sup> These questionnaires were designed to measure the level of satisfaction felt by disabled persons about the media. Those people who responded represent all categories of disabilities from all regions of Canada. Second, we contacted organizations representing persons with disabilities. Third, another study looked at the press relations policies of the various organizations associated with disabilities.<sup>3</sup> Fourth, our Committee questioned a number of witnesses, including Mona Winberg of *The Toronto Sun*, John Southern of *The Radio Connection*, Pierre Vennat of *La Presse*, James Roots of the Canadian Association of the Deaf, Mr. André Hamel of *La Magnétothèque*, and many others mentioned later throughout this report.

In approaching this subject, we recognize that there is, as yet, no generally accepted terminology which can be used to discuss the various types of disabilities. Generally speaking, the types of disability break down into three main categories: sensory, physical and mental. It is important to note, also, that one type of disability can result in another. The classification of disability types is far from a science but is, instead, a largely subjective matter where categories, concepts and characteristics intersect and blur. The Canadian Red Cross Society poignantly observed in response to our questionnaire that "the organizations serving the disabled have failed to reach consensus on [terminology]. It is little wonder that the media is confused..."

When Mona Winberg, a feature columnist for *The Toronto Sun*, appeared before our Committee, she stated that:

...the general public perceives most disabled people as being in wheelchairs. A wheelchair has come to be synonymous with disability.... [But] you can have a disability and have nothing wrong with your legs....

## **Individuality and Diversity**

Our primary conclusion is that persons with disabilities consider themselves to be, first and foremost, individuals. Only secondly do they consider themselves to be

<sup>2</sup> This survey was done by Joan Meister and Paul Grant of Vancouver.

<sup>3</sup> These studies were undertaken by the *Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec* and by Michel Crépault and Joanne McDermott of Montreal. The list of organizations and individuals who appeared before the Committee can be found in Appendix A. Our research studies are listed in Appendix B.

disabled. A stereotype or use of language, therefore, which places the disability before the person is not just a syntactical short-cut; it is also offensive. Disabled persons are also becoming angry at the manner in which the press can establish, and then reinforce, a pattern of stigmatization and separation from society. One respondent to our survey expressed these feelings by commenting that:

the whole way North America thinks — if something's not perfect, its not worth it. I'm determined they're going to ... portray me in the right way. If I am poor, it's society's fault, because I can't get a full time job.

This person described an experience with the press which, he felt, distorted his point of view. In an interview with a reporter, he suggested that a concept of "reasonable accomodation" might be used to work out a mutually acceptable job description with an employer. In practice, this would mean that if someone had difficulty operating a photocopier but could answer the telephone, some kind of job exchange could be worked out. He was very angry when the headline for the story based on his interview trumpeted: "The Disabled Can't Do a Full Day's Work."

Disabled persons feel that the concept of individuality is often lost when the media is faced with the task of defining and categorizing in order to cover a news story. Often, the media forget that individuals with disabilities have opinions and attitudes which may concur or differ. All people with disabilities, it seems strangely necessary to point out, do not think the same way.

One of our research studies canvassed francophone organizations concerned with disabilities. Our researcher asked:

How would you like radio and television to cover issues relating to disabled people: by focussing on "events" (openings of centres, sports competitions, receptions, etc.); by focussing on rehabilitation and reintegration; by focussing on medical and socio-medical research?

The answers were:

Events	13
Rehabilitation and reintegration	23
Medical and socio-medical research	8

Giving this a closer look, we recognized that most of the organizations which participated in the survey were devoted to rehabilitation and reintegration. Naturally enough, they urged greater news about these topics. Of those associations devoted to research, they too wanted a greater focus on this activity. In their desire to promote the activity in which they are engaged, associations for disabled people have the same attitude as other groups and organizations, whatever their areas of interest. They feel that they are, or ought to be, the centre of attention.

Individuals with one type of disability have problems and concerns which differ from others. In this respect, their nomenclature as "disabled persons" which unites

them all is somewhat misleading. For instance, the needs and attitudes of individuals with physical disabilities differ from those with sensory disabilities. This need to be seen differently is as true of their concerns with the media as it is with any other aspect of life and society. James Roots, the Executive Director of the Canadian Association of the Deaf, pointed this out in his presentation to our Committee. From his perspective:

Deaf people do not see themselves as a disabled minority. People with wheelchairs, blind people, or whatever, see themselves as a disabled minority. They think of themselves as "normal" but with a certain kind of handicap or something like that. Deaf people perceive themselves as a cultural minority.

That is an important distinction. It is very important in the context of media relations, because most media people find it easy to approach... wheelchair people or blind people, for example. It is easy to...pick up the telephone, talk to them, no problem. Or they make good pictures for television or for the newspaper....I am saying this is the media attitude.... There is a dramatic appeal to a picture of a person in a wheelchair or a person tapping along with a white cane.

But with deaf people, it is different. It is not easy to communicate with them by telephone.... [The media] perceive a communications barrier.

In contrast to this, a blind person might find that Mr. Roots's use of the "white cane" as an image is in itself offensive. Mr. Ron Kruseniski, the Chief Commissioner of the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, often appears on television and radio. He agrees that it is important for disabled people to have role models, but he is skeptical about the treatment of his blindness and its effect on the audience:

Television is a subtle form of staring.... No matter what the story is about, the cameraman always wants an introductory shot of my dog leading me into my office.... I personally react to that. If my blindness is relevant to the story, put it in.... Otherwise, don't mention it.

Mr. Kruseniski does not believe in specialized columns or segments about disabled issues on radio and television.

We might need transitional stuff, but it should be viewed as transitional only. We've got to get beyond it.

He relates the social situation to his personal experience:

When I meet a new person, I have to go through a period where they have to get used to my blindness and how I feel about it. When they discover that I'm not going to burst into tears when they use words like "see", "read", and "vision", we can begin to relate on a new level.... I'd like to think that I wouldn't have to go through this period of transition with everyone I meet, but I know when I'm 60, I'll be saying the same thing.

## **Words and Images that Disturb**

Not surprisingly, individuals with disabilities receive their news from the same sources as other Canadians. Like all of us, they rely on television, mass-circulation

newspapers, radio and periodical publications. It is also not extraordinary that they singled out newsletters prepared for disabled persons as the most accurate — though not the most frequently used— sources of information. Although they get their news from the mass media, disabled persons who responded to our Committee's English-language survey feel that they receive the worst quality and frequency of media coverage compared to other groups considered as minorities (women, visible minorities, native people, senior citizens, youth and homosexuals).

When French-language associations of persons with disabilities were questioned about the quantitative and qualitative nature of press coverage, the results were mixed: out of 20 groups, 11 were satisfied with the quantity of coverage compared to visible minorities. Yet even with this approval rate, most cautioned that the current satisfactory level was a passing phenomenon. Francophone associations felt that the written media adequately respected the spirit of press releases and transmitted the messages correctly, even if in an edited form. Many believed that there was a great improvement over the years in terms of unnecessary embellishment and sensationalism. In addition, these organizations found that the francophone press reflected the spirit of events. On the other hand, these groups complained of the difficulty of attracting journalists to press conferences.

These same organizations felt that disabled persons merited more space than ethnic minorities in view of the fact that disabled persons comprise 11 per cent of the population of Quebec and that around 2 million Quebecois live with or near a disabled person. With regard to the quality of coverage, 4 associations (out of 20) believed that disabled persons received a more positive portrayal in the press than visible minorities. Sixteen associations, however, found that minority groups of persons with disabilities and of visible minorities were treated in a sensationalist manner and that the press handled information about these two communities in the same manner.

The comments of individuals who responded to our survey are revealing:

I find myself keying in to all such reports [in the mass media] with the question: Is this a typical "human spirit surmounts all story" or will a relevant issue emerge from the specifics?

Mel Graham  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

I find that reporters really do not understand the issues and that everything [they write] is quite superficial and not in-depth.

Patricia Derrick  
Ottawa, Ontario

All or most media coverage of disability issues portrays a pitiful image.

Maria Barile  
Montreal, Quebec

Many of those who responded to the Committee's survey commented on their perception that news coverage of disabled persons is sensationalized.

Amount and accuracy is often generalized. Prominence is often dictated by sensationalist factors and it varies tremendously.

Stephen Little  
Agincourt, Ontario

In my experience, popular media remains mostly uncomfortable with people who are disabled and either uses it for a sensationalist purpose or as space filler.

Linda Wallbaum  
Toronto, Ontario

When the news deals with issues concerning the disabled, sensationalism gets the most coverage. Issues of concern usually end up distorted or not of concern....

Bernie Weinkauf  
Prince Albert, Saskatchewan

In canvassing the English-language stories which were deemed to be offensive, 5 out of 14 persons named news items which dealt with fundraising and charity. Four others objected to stories in a general category of disabled persons overcoming obstacles. One individual commented: "I felt angry that (the objects of the fundraising) were exploited." Others noted that they felt there was a considerable amount of inaccurate reports "based on newspapermen's patronizing attitudes...geared to elicit feelings of pathos."

Mr. John Southern, producer of *The Radio Connection*, a regular program on disability created for CIUT-FM in Toronto, commented on March of Dimes fundraising and the question of the yearly naming of "Timmys" and "Tammys" to raise money for the Easter Seals Campaign. He argued that:

In some ways, I think the Timmys of this world should be outlawed altogether, quite frankly. I know it is a good way for the agency to make money, but I do think it is not only harmful for the Timmys and Tammys,... but also harmful for the whole disabled movement.

Mona Winberg placed the issue in a different perspective when she appeared before the Committee. In her view:

Nowadays, it is very common to go around bashing telethons. I think they can do some good, depending on the way they are handled. They can educate a segment of the population that may not be educated any other way. The money has to come from somewhere.

I think there should be some kind of monitoring body to monitor telethons and to monitor advertising....

For the French-language media, the same general criticisms applied. Thirty organizations of and for persons with disabilities were asked about radio and

television coverage of issues relating to disabled people. Only 10 per cent believed coverage was good while 56 per cent believed it was acceptable and 33 per cent felt it was unsatisfactory. Of the 20 organizations canvassed about their opinion of the print media, five associations were satisfied while seven were dissatisfied and eight had mixed opinions.

Mona Winberg also commented that:

I have been really disappointed at the lack of leadership shown by television in this area. Television is very good in what we call the disability of the week. In some of the dramas, they focus on a disability and that drama usually has a happy ending.

Real life is not like that. You are not cured suddenly and you do not go riding off into the sunset with all of your problems forgotten.

In elaborating upon their assessment, most of those canvassed by our Committee did not express an opinion on the quantity of events covered, but on their quality. Our respondents deplored the tendency of radio and television journalists to latch on to the sensational aspects of events. They felt that television, in particular, tended to look for "tear-jerking" stories or those which portrayed a disabled person as a "super-hero". The francophone press was criticized for abridging the facts in the news stories and leaving issues out of context. Associations of disabled persons also felt that the French-language newspapers paid too much attention to destitution, "pitiful victims", dramatic, spectacular and suspicious events, rabble-rousers, case histories, telethons and sports. One association commented that:

When people are released from the Louis H. Lafontaine and Pinfort Hospitals, entire neighbourhoods don't allow reception centres for these children. I would really like to see the front page of the daily papers when the first patient released from Louis H. Lafontaine does something a little out of the ordinary.

Most individuals and associations could cite at least one example of newspaper stories which, they felt, demonstrated a crass lack of knowledge about an issue and the reliance upon unthinking stereotypes. "The experience of a hunchback," is one example and others noted caricatures which tend to be obscene. Another commented on the means by which telethons are titled: *Le téléthon de Monsieur Untel*, for example. In this cases the word *de* in French implies possession and overlooks all the people who were working just as much as, if not more than, the star after whom the program is named.

In commenting on the problems of depiction in the media, John Southern cited examples of advertising which could be considered offensive. He singled out television advertisement which showed a person in a wheelchair being bumped by people wearing blindfolds with a voice over which asked: Are your eyes closed to people in wheelchairs? A complaint, he felt, should be registered with the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission about the presentation of such an advertisement and also with the advertising agency which prepared an item which was very offensive for blind people and based on a lack of knowledge. He concluded by urging the prevention of offensive advertising and telethons.

## *Recommendation 2*

**Given the negative images associated with certain telethons and charitable advertising campaigns, it is advisable for mass media organizations to consult consumer-led advocacy groups before undertaking to provide free air-time or services.**

Rick Hansen's Man in Motion tour generated spontaneous comments by disabled persons. Many reported that they believed that the English-language news coverage of the Man in Motion tour made them feel better understood by able-bodied persons. At the same time, they cautioned against generating an attitude based on the view "if they can do it, I should be able to do it." At the same time, one respondent stated that the articles on Rick Hansen, Terry Fox and Steve Fonyo "have made me realize the tremendous potential of all disabled people." An apt assessment of this situation was made as follows:

I consider these three in a class of their own and it has not affected how I feel about other people with disabilities. I value a person for his or her individual attributes and I refuse to measure anyone against the likes of "The Three".

Georgina Heselton  
Regina, Saskatchewan

In expanding on these observations, certain representatives of English-language organizations noted that they believed that the news coverage of these three young men had created a "smokescreen between us and the general public's awareness." The implications for fundraising might be that more grandiose schemes have to be devised to "top" the previous achievement.

What about all of the people who are unable to do anything quite so spectacular? Does that mean that they are any less brave and resolute? Sometimes just getting dressed every morning for some people must feel like pushing from here to Moose Jaw.

DisAbled Women's Network,  
Canada

They only describe physical disabilities that are easy to understand.

Ontario Friends of Schizophrenics

Francophone organizations which were polled about the effect of radio and television reports found a similar positive result. Almost three-quarters of the 30 groups believed that the news coverage of Terry Fox, Steve Fonyo and Rick Hansen had increased receptivity to the problems of individuals with disabilities. Many felt that the press coverage constituted a way of teaching others about the considerable effort that a person with a disability must frequently exert just to accomplish actions which able-bodied persons do easily.



The affirmative effect of television coverage of events such as the Marathon of Hope and the Man in Motion tour was explained by the fact that television, by its very nature, aims primarily at the senses. By provoking emotional reactions, television news may stimulate further reflection. These types of events may make journalists, and then the public, increasingly aware of the nature of physical disabilities.

There are other ways to do this sensitively and accurately. In her appearance before our Committee, Mona Winberg, summed up her aims in writing for *The Toronto Sun*:

The first goal of my column... is to change people's attitudes. The perception of disabled people goes from one extreme to the other. Either we are noble beyond belief and almost superhuman, or we are useless and only want to collect our monthly benefits and watch television all day.

I am sure I do not need to tell you that neither stereotype is correct. Disabled people are like anybody else. This is one thing we are trying to do in our work. I think the most important thing is that we get involved in issues. I think that is my real inspiration, because I can expose problems, difficulties and other matters the general public are not even aware of. In my opinion, the newspapers are doing a pathetic job of getting disabled people and their issues in front of the public as are the other media....

Ms. Winberg expressed a view widely held by others. When disabled persons were asked about media reports on important political or legislative changes that had an impact on disabled persons, most believed that these did not gain appropriate attention. Georgina Heselton of Regina noted that these items usually appeared "on the back pages or with very short TV coverage." Of current questions which were deemed not to have received adequate attention were: the review of the *Vocational Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons Act* (VRDP), the impact of the Meech Lake Accord for disabled persons and the amendments to the Manitoba *Human Rights Act*, the impact of the free trade agreement, and the effect of tax reform. All these questions had been extensively discussed by organizations of disabled persons and certainly the VRDP negotiations involved extensive consultations with the provinces to establish new federal-provincial cost-sharing agreements for vocational rehabilitation under the Act.

Organizations of disabled persons had the same response to the question about the coverage of political events. They also pointed to the discriminatory assumptions about news of interest to disabled persons.

There is a narrow view of what legislation affects us. They forget that something like "free trade" will also impact on us.

Centre for Independent Living,  
Toronto

Too little attention is paid to this area. [News] generally focusses on how legislation adversely affects the non-disabled population.

Red Cross Society

### **Recommendation 3**

**The media should consider the advisability of finding a means of providing advocacy groups either space or time to communicate their concerns.**

Mona Winberg outlined the triangular relationship between government, the media and issues of interest to disabled persons. She drew an analogy with a family:

...any family who has a disabled member can see that disabled member (either) as an equal part of the family or (as) somebody a little substandard, and the way they treat that family member is the way the public will perceive that family member.

...government is in a unique position to treat disabled people with respect and dignity, and the public will react accordingly. But if government treats disabled people as a problem all the time, either financially or otherwise, then, when they want to find jobs or to get off social assistance, the public and the media will not have too much respect for them.

In addition to objecting to the tone which is often adopted by the media when referring to issues concerning persons with a disability, our respondents were also unanimously unimpressed with the language used to describe both persons with a disability or the disabling condition. This was the case for both the French and the English vocabulary. Words depict a reality that is filled with emotions, feelings and prejudice. People with disabilities believe, with cause, that the vocabulary can orient an entire perception in the public mind. At the same time, pejorative or pessimistic words not only bias the reality but injure or belittle the persons to whom they are directed. They can trivialize genuine support which a community is giving to disabled persons and associate and perpetuate stereotypes which imply a 'child-like' or dependent image. People are injured by the ideas behind the words as much as by the words themselves. On the other hand, the use of proper terms may restore the dignity of these same individuals.

Many of our Committee's respondents singled out very specific words. Among those English words which are considered to be the most offensive to disabled people are: cripple, confined to, handicapped, victim of, suffering from, stricken by, invalid, wheelchair-bound, sightless, spastic, inflicted with, gimp, deaf as a post, deaf and dumb, falling on deaf ears. Organizations of disabled persons agreed with this list but added one other word: 'special'.

Disabled persons almost unanimously objected to the phrase "confined to a wheelchair". This use of language is not only inaccurate — most wheelchair users can, and do, get out of their chairs — but it "sounds like a life sentence". Furthermore, wheelchairs are "the greatest mobility aid to people who can't walk." Such imagery discourages people from using wheelchairs for fear of public reaction. Indeed, many people who should use canes, do not because of the "image". If it were more accepted and portrayed as acceptable, cane use — and the relief and safety that would accompany it — would increase.

Francophones objected to terms such as *infirm*e (crippled), *arriéré* (retarded), *débile* (mentally defective). They also remarked that labels such as *handicapé* (disabled), *sourd* (deaf), *aveugle* (blind) are too often used without the corresponding noun "*personne*" (person). The same is true in English. Many francophones found it exasperating that, despite the explanations and clarifications provided to them, journalists still did not distinguish between *maladie* and *état* (illness and condition) or *défici*ence intellectuelle from *maladie mentale* (mental impairment from mental illness).

Anglophones and francophones noted that the problem showed up more acutely in headlines of printed articles. For example the Centre for Independent Living in Toronto cited the headline "Policeman Crippled by Bullet Returns to Work in a Wheelchair." The Centre then pointed out that "The use of the word 'crippled' in the headline defeated the content of the story. I don't understand why they use this word when almost all editorial guidelines say not to."

All these words, and others which subconsciously connote infirmity, are objectionable because they appear to be "but effective put-downs". Often, the offensiveness of these words is compounded by the insensitive use of combinations of phrases in the same news story.

The problem of language use, in effect, "reinforces the negative stereotyping of people with disabilities". Disabled persons feel that these exacerbate the media's tendency toward either glorification or exploitation, using words such as 'overcome' and 'suffers'. Terms such as 'wizardry' in headlines associate technical aids which have a practical genesis and application with some type of magic.

The Centre for Independent Living in Toronto succinctly observed that "there is an objectification of the disabled as figures of tragedy or heroes and the humanness falls between the cracks. The media tend to use language like 'cripple' and they should know better."

At the same time, some disabled persons see the need to understand, that if the press is to treat them in the same manner as others, they must expect some criticism. Brad McCannell, a former producer for CKVU television in Vancouver, notes that, as a disabled person, he believes the news media is quite reverent towards those with disabilities. "It's time to be honest" about individuals with disabilities. He points to certain positive depictions of individuals: a layout in a catalogue which includes a disabled person in a group shot for no apparent reason. A sense of humour is essential. He pointed out an advertisement in the Yellow Pages for a hamburger stand which claimed accessible washrooms. And they do, he said. "But you have to get up 30 steps to get to them." His advice for persons with disabilities is to "Take chances, be irreverent. It's better to create controversy than to create nothing."

The affirmation of youth perhaps gives the greatest hope for the future. The Committee's researchers asked a group of senior students at Vancouver's Jericho School for the Deaf about the portrayal of persons with a disability on radio and television. The students that participated in the survey are integrated into

Vancouver's public school system and share the classroom with 'regular' [their word] students at Kitsilano Secondary School. Their responses show an awareness of issues related to their disability but little knowledge of the dissatisfaction of adults with a disability.

When asked how they feel about the portrayal of persons with a disability, most students responded: "Proud". Clearly, these students enjoy seeing stories about other deaf people and their achievements. A number of them used as an example the Gallaudet College Story (where for the first time a deaf person was chosen principal). Rick Hansen was lionized for his achievements. But one student when asked about how Terry Fox, Steve Fonyo and Rick Hansen affected his perceptions, replied: "I feel sorry for them. They used to be normal, now they are changed... the same way [I was] when I was born deaf."

If these students were questioned ten years from now, after living independently in our society, we hope their answers would not be drastically different. But for now, their answers show self-assurance, interest and an ability to speak for themselves:

I hate ignorant words like deaf-mute. Deaf people aren't mutes!

Student, Jericho School  
for the Deaf

#### ***Recommendation 4***

**It is advisable that mass media organizations, including press councils and news services should familiarize themselves with the preferences of persons with disabilities regarding language use.**

#### **Conclusion**

Although individuals with disabilities see signs that they are beginning to emerge as people first, they feel that the media rarely show them as full-blown, complex characters with abilities and opinions ranging far outside the context of their disability. The media have picked up the wheelchair as a symbol for all persons with disabilities. But this emblem is incomplete for all.

The past year has shown an increasing trend to jump on the disability bandwagon. This is fine where they get the facts straight.

Linda Wallbaum  
Toronto, Ontario

Many of those contacted by our Committee felt that guidelines which provided a standard of useful, illuminating and non-judgemental terms and encouraged the positive portrayal of disabled persons could improve on the current situation. Disabled persons feel that the language which is used to describe them is a quagmire of euphemisms, obfuscations and medical terminology. These words by attaching

labels make them feel a little less human and put them at a distance from their able-bodied friends. Why say that someone is “physically-challenged” when that person cannot walk?

Disabled persons feel that they need a consistent and professional level of media coverage of disability issues. Part of that goal will be reached when persons with a disability are absorbed into all aspects of the mainstream media. A first step should include columnists reporting specifically about disability issues. At the same time, as one of our respondents argued, this is only a way-station on the road to the final goal:

I would prefer an integrated approach showing us as part and parcel of society instead of different and, therefore, special and deserving of the human interest approach.

It almost goes without saying that persons with a disability feel that they must have a say in the daily rush of events before they will be satisfied with their portrayal in the news. They have opinions on housing, budget reform and daycare. Yet, they feel that rarely do reporters seek their reactions on issues unrelated to disabilities. Persons with a disability feel that they need better access to the individuals who decide what the news will be.

To their credit, disabled persons want to avoid tokenism. They believe that it is no improvement to change coverage, language-use and stereotyping — and to end up in linguistic ghettos. Furthermore, an increase in the number of disabled persons hired by the media is no victory if they are not absorbed into the news gathering and reporting ‘process’. Disabled persons do not want greater access than other groups or individuals. They want equal access. This means working to remove not just the psychological barriers, but the fact that disability often puts individuals behind daunting economic and political hurdles.



## CHAPTER II

### A Quiet Voice

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Our Committee tried to get a sense of how organizations concerned with disability interacted with the press. We are aware that there can be differences between an organization which is made up of a majority of persons with a disability and an organization which is conducted on behalf of persons with a disability and not responsible to them.

Our Committee therefore canvassed certain representatives of both types of organizations. We found that the principal factor which determines the nature of the relationship between the media and organizations of and for the disabled is the associations' resources. Most associations depend on volunteers and do not have the time or the staff to engage in extensive monitoring of the media and trust that their members will clip relevant articles. At the same time, however, they express an underlying attitude that the media coverage is ephemeral and, therefore, quickly out of date.

#### Monitoring the Media

Of the twelve English-language organizations which were contacted, all but two have a newsletter and five of these distribute their newsletter outside their organization. Only three of the organizations have a budget for media work. Most report only sporadic contact with the media and only a few have weekly or even monthly contact. For English-language organizations, it is hard to escape the observation that some of the problems of both coverage and stereotyping of disabled persons result from the lack of regular contact with the media by organizations concerned with disability.

The same circumstance pertains in the francophone community. When twenty different and representative associations of disabled persons were contacted in Quebec, results did not differ greatly from those described above. Organizations were asked whether they kept an up-to-date file of press clippings from the major daily papers. Of the twenty, only three systematically clipped articles from more than one daily newspaper and two subscribed to services for this purpose. Twelve

organizations clipped articles on a sporadic basis. Only three associations have systematic arrangements with the weekly papers to send out articles dealing with their particular concerns. Eight other associations clip local papers and nine do not. With regard to keeping a file of clippings from major news and entertainment magazines, our survey found that nine associations collect only those articles that deal directly with their own problems; five associations also take occasional interest in articles dealing with other groups and only two organizations systematically collect all the news articles directly or indirectly related to disabled persons.

## Satisfaction not Guaranteed

English-language service agencies tend to be more satisfied with coverage of issues than are advocacy organizations. PUSH Ontario (People United for Self-Help) commented that: "Time and time again, when equality issues are dealt with, they never mention disability groups. It's hit or miss." On the other hand, the Canadian Red Cross Society told our researchers that "yes we have enjoyed excellent press coverage."

Our Committee's researchers found that this general trend remained true in our French-language survey. Among 35 associations concerned with disability issues, just slightly more than half expressed satisfaction with the news coverage which was received on radio and television. The associations were asked:

When you have requested coverage by radio or television, do you consider that you were well-covered, poorly-covered or ignored?

The answers were:

Well covered	17/30	56.6%
Poorly covered	9/30	30.0%
Ignored	2/30	6.6%
No answer	2/30	6.6%

When questioned about whether daily newspapers published the press releases distributed by the various organizations of disabled persons, both anglophone and francophone organizations which were satisfied with some aspects of press coverage had reservations on this score. Most organizations felt that it is a real challenge to try to gain the attention of the press "unless one goes in person to the office of the editor in chief" or "has someone on the inside to pull some strings." The most illuminating comment was: "Yes, especially when there are telethons going on...."

Associations in smaller communities tend to feel that their contacts in the community provide an assurance of good relations and coverage with the local media. For example, in Burlington, Ontario, Eugene Podilchak, Executive Director of the Association for Community Living, noted that:

The Burlington Association for Community Living is extremely well-represented in our community.... *The Post* and *Spectator* take an active role in presenting the



significant events in our lives, thereby enabling people, both handicapped and non-handicapped, to be proud of our community.

The three recurring themes which were isolated by disabled persons and by organizations which represent their interests can be summarized as follows:

1. Media coverage of disabled persons and issues of interest to them is sporadic, entirely absent for certain types of content, and generally tied to events rather than on-going issues or long-term trends.
2. This coverage is limited in that it offers an incomplete picture of the lives of disabled persons and the activities of consumer-led advocacy groups.
3. This coverage tends to be distorted, giving a false impression of people who have disabilities.

## **Making a Case**

The francophone organizations showed considerable sophistication in their understanding of what the media could do. These associations admitted that they wished actively to use the press to inform the public about the reality of disabled persons. Most felt that case histories could provide information if these were well-reported and not excessively dramatized. They believed that if these articles were well done with the appropriate nuances, they could serve as a vehicle for concrete information about the daily life of disabled persons. Francophone associations realize that "it is important to arouse public opinion if pressure is to be put on the different levels of government." But most organizations would rather avoid approaching the press with a sensationalistic case history if another means could be found to get the message across.

Many anglophone associations believe that the Canadian public, as a whole, lacks information and that before cramming the popular consciousness with sensationalist case histories, it is important to provide basic facts, primarily through stories in the written media.

Most organizations felt that it is important in getting coverage to have at least one person on the staff of a media operation. They consider that a disabled person within a large daily newspaper would not only polish the public image of the paper, but also would help the press to become representative of the community as a whole. At the same time, many were aware that a journalist with a particular disability might not be aware of or capable of understanding all the stories related to different types of disability. To begin, one of our respondents made the point that "the papers could begin by making their buildings accessible and demonstrating a little more openness."

Although most organizations that represent individuals with disabilities felt that the media does a poor job of presenting their concerns, few of these associations have examined their own activities to promote the coverage which they desire. The

Ontario Press Council, for instance, has never received a single complaint by an organization representing disabled persons or an individual with a disability about a news story. This situation contrasts with the use of the press councils by visible minorities and national groups. When he appeared before our Committee, Mr. Geoffrey Stevens of *The Globe and Mail* reported that his newspaper had received only two or three complaints from disabled persons and that these had less to do with reportage than with others' failure to act on questions of access and employment.

Furthermore, the advocacy organizations of disabled persons have not followed the example of women's groups and established media-watch campaigns. These campaigns, already organized by disabled consumers' groups in the United States, have proven effective in bringing the attention of electronic and print media both to good and to bad examples of media coverage of disabilities.

### ***Recommendation 5***

**Organizations of persons with disabilities should establish a media watch campaign to monitor press and television coverage in both official languages. This campaign might give awards for meritorious media coverage and also bring examples of objectionable coverage to public attention.**

In his appearance before the Committee, Mr. Sandy Baird, publisher of *The Kitchener-Waterloo Record* and Chairman of the Board of the Canadian Daily Newspapers Association, summarized the general point of view of the association. He said that newspaper publishers and editors:

are beset on all sides by people with a particular interest in getting a recognition of their situation in the newspaper. We have to make adjudications between this and that. We try to do all we can on competing interests....

the people in that group [organizations of disabled persons] have not been very voluble; they have not asked us for a great deal of coverage....Again, it varies from community to community, but speaking very generally, I do not think they have been very militant about presenting their interests to newspapers.

Our study of disabled persons and the English-language media, revealed that few of the disabled persons who responded to our Committee's questions examined their own motives for wanting greater representation and coverage in the press. Do they want reporters to cover issues on disabilities? to improve existing conditions? or to be better understood by the general public?

Of the individuals with disabilities who did comment on this aspect of the relationship between the media and disabled persons, one remarked that:

Many people expect the media to help achieve particular personal or philosophical goals and are disappointed that the media "reports" instead of "makes" the news.

The news media is in the business of promoting/detailing news. I think we must look to other forms of communication for advocacy purposes. On second thought, editorial sections of the media could play a stronger role in educating the public in this area.

### ***Recommendation 6***

**Organizations within the disability community should consider taking steps to improve their information programs. They could**

- a. establish a roster of sources,**
- b. initiate routine contact with the press,**
- c. distribute literature,**
- d. provide suitable news releases on important events.**

### **Both Sides of the Street**

Both the organizations of disabled persons and the individuals with disabilities tend to want to be seen in different ways at different times. On the one hand, they want to be seen as individuals and not as "the disabled". When it is time for disabled persons to speak up for their needs, they want to be treated as a group. This poses problems for any conscientious journalist when he is interviewing a disabled person: Is that individual a member of the larger whole or a person who happens to be disabled? It is a very fine line.

In addition to this, the level of resentment at media treatment indicates that disabled persons and organizations which represent them tend to look upon the media, as a whole, as champions of their causes. They do not always realize that if a journalist is too subjective, he or she will lose credibility and perhaps do as much harm as good.



## CHAPTER III

### The News Game

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Possible? Is anything impossible? Read the newspaper.

The Duke of Wellington, 1769-1825

Our Committee is aware that the structure and nature of the “news game” plays a considerable role in determining how coverage of persons with disabilities has developed in the past and the nature of portrayal in the future. It is possible to make any number of generalizations about the attitudes of management of media organizations — and undoubtedly some of them would be considered to be unfair. Nonetheless, some observations have been simplified for the purposes of this report.<sup>1</sup>

In the course of preparing this chapter, our Committee’s researchers were in touch with working journalists and managers at all levels in the media. The study of English-language print media attempted to contact 60 news organizations. Twenty of these organizations either did not return phone calls, or were opposed to or reticent about the idea of providing information about their attitudes and organizations to a parliamentary committee.

For our study of the French-language media, the response rate was better. Of the francophone print media organizations (community and daily newspapers and magazines), 65 out of 250 responded at short notice. For the French-language electronic media, 32 out of 40 radio and television stations answered questions posed by our researchers.

#### The Nature of News

Though news of government activities and public events has been disseminated in written form from the time of the T’ang Dynasty in China and Julius Caesar in Rome, there has not, to this day, ever been any comprehensive or agreed-on definition of “news”. In the present, the place of radio and television as well as

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<sup>1</sup> The research study on which these observations are made was conducted by Glen Allen and Lynne Thomas.

newspapers and magazines is firmly entrenched. They are consumer goods which must sell. For many executives and employees of media organizations, “news” — in the narrowest of senses — is quite simply that which offends community standards or disrupts or alters community life. It is a departure from that which is expected. Others might agree with a prominent editor of *The New York Sun* in the last century who said that news is “anything that interests a large part of the community and has never been brought to its attention before”.

These two somewhat contradictory definitions, however, govern a set of assumptions about the manner in which news and other forms of editorial material fit into one or more categories. These apply both to the electronic and to the print media. Hopefully, the creative editor will give news “weight” to items which depart from the norm but most stories can be seen to contain some of the following elements.

1. That which has an “impact” or “importance” such as elections, labour disputes.
2. That which involves prominent people or institutions. If a city’s mayor is caught shoplifting, the event has a greater news value than if the same act were committed by an ordinary citizen.
3. That which happens nearby.
4. That which is current or timely. Newspapers and television news go to great lengths to compete and to be ‘first with the news’.
5. That which involves conflict in politics, business, sports or between those who have power and those who do not.
6. That which involves tragedy. Editors believe that their readers have an appetite for disaster — the worse the news, the better the “news”.
7. That which involves the strange, unusual and bizarre. These stories involve the big winners in lotteries and the flag-pole sitters.
8. That which is “new” in terms of discoveries, cures, or trends.

Our Committee knows that there is no “absolute” news value which can be assigned to an event and that the weight which the press will attach to an issue can, and does, vary over time. The media both partly mirror and partly create social attitudes by the “value” or weight which they assign to events and to particular “stories” which are covered and published.

In the print media, there is a distinction between a “news” story and a “feature” story. The news story must give all the details in a few paragraphs which do not compel sustained attention but which peter out towards the end of the piece. The feature story is the mainstay of popular magazines but is increasingly found in newspapers as they become more ‘magazine-like’. These stories are almost always based on some event or person in the “news” but live in a more relaxed time frame

and usually have a longer shelf-life than the ephemera in the daily press. Feature articles involve more profound research and interviewing and tend to compel a longer attention span by increased use of anecdotes, and other tools of the writer's trade and conclude with a strong ending. The feature article, with its greater attention to process rather than event answers the questions "how?", "why?" and "what does it mean?".

For the electronic media, the most understandable basis on which stories can be told is the personal level. This means that journalists attempt to explain about what happens to corporations or governments by putting events in the context of individuals. For example, a story about a federal disability pension would be considered "boring" unless it is dealt with in terms of a personality. This is the reason that television journalists concentrated on every word and action of Terry Fox, Steve Fonyo and Rick Hansen. Although other organizations and corporations supported and benefitted from these individuals' actions, television personalized rather than objectified events. Undoubtedly, in many instances, this method is the best way to get a point across.

It is also important to discern between the demands of radio and television on the stations and on the audiences. In radio news, the message is conveyed exclusively by the spoken word, except for background noises. Like any other spoken message, it must be "decoded" by the listener before he or she can react. A foreign-language radio news program is incomprehensible. Television, on the other hand, is fully audio-visual: the spoken message is accompanied and reinforced by a visual one. It does not necessarily have to be decoded before a listener reacts and television news can be comprehended, in part at least, by someone who does not know the language of the broadcast. It is a form of communication which is "emotional" and the reaction is more immediate and can precede an intellectual analysis of content.

In electronic journalism, as well as the print media, the reporters are subject to the pressure of events — aggravated by the obligation to work rapidly to avoid missing a deadline. In radio, there is the pressure of getting on air first and preempting the competition. The decision to cover, or not to cover, a given event is based most often not on its relation to past news events but rather on its importance compared to other events happening at the same time, as well as on the personnel and equipment available. Our Committee is aware, for example, that television has for months and months been serving up spectacular images of Beirut lacerated by civil war does not mean journalists have become more receptive to the problems of Lebanon. Coverage will dry up once something, more immediately absorbing, comes to take its place.

Furthermore, 90 seconds is not enough time to tell someone's story. Yet, that is the average length of a television or radio news report. Obviously, this results in oversimplification in which complicated issues are reduced to simplistic morality plays. Stories which are too complex either do not get on the air or are so simplified that they are distorted. Recognizing this, the electronic media began to produce "current affairs" programs, which like *W5* or *Présent Dimanche* examine what lies beneath the surface of the news.

To a certain extent, journalists function independently from their news-gathering organizations. They follow stories on their own, chase down leads and generally keep the pot boiling on issues in which they are interested. But in most newsrooms, for both print and electronic journalism, there is a chain of command which figures at least partially in every story decision. The titles differ from shop to shop. For most newspapers, authority flows, on a day to day basis, from the managing editor through the subordinate editors or department heads (news, city foreign, national features). Of particular concern to the current system of reporting news about disabled persons, is the "Lifestyles" editor (formerly known as the women's editor) who is responsible for a large percentage of the news reports about disability. In radio and television newsrooms, it is usually a news director who runs the show.

Unmentioned above, but undoubtedly one of the most important players in the news game, is the assignment editor of all newsrooms, electronic or print. The assignment editors are the intermediaries between the radio, TV or newspaper reporters and the producer or editor-in-chief. They decide which reporter will cover each story, and in effect, what will be on the news agenda of any particular day. The assignment editor often arranges for the story's display in the paper and, along with the copy-editing staff, sometimes edits and rewrites articles presented by reporters for publication. The assignment editor and other editors with similar responsibilities can be seen as "gatekeepers".

At any one of the junctures in the hierarchy of news-gathering and dissemination, a story can be killed. Conversely, any one of the individuals mentioned above can originate a story from any number of sources, including news releases, tips, inside knowledge or immediate events such as accidents or political actions. The fact that a story gets covered at all can as often be the result of serendipity and coincidence, as it is the product of diligent journalistic leg-work.

Every day, a daily paper or newscast must fill its allotted space or time with material. This will vary since every daily newspaper, for example, has a special character which is designed to pick up the wave-length of a specific type of reader. Furthermore, the main characteristic of newspaper content is its transitory and ephemeral nature. Journalists go to great lengths to unearth more grist for the rotary presses. Daily, they must either dig up news or create it. Most news organizations hold a morning and afternoon meeting to decide how that space will be filled and editors and department heads may suggest certain stories. Any lobbying by outsiders to get a story included in the day's news has to be done before the meeting.

Reporters, as well as editors, often give preference to stories which are readily understandable, deal with a single-issue and in which spokespeople are articulate and easy to find. Complex stories, or stories in which the principal players are unknowns, are less likely to make the news. Reporters may bristle at the suggestion, but from all appearances they like their news in bite-sized chunks, if not entirely predigested. The simpler the story, the easier it will be for the reporter to retell it and the initial sortie, at least, must be rendered down to its basic elements. If there are too many players or too many side issues, the story will tend to get lost in the shuffle.



For example, the latest government scandal is big news, despite the fact that it affects none but those immediately involved, and is only interesting because it embarrasses the government. Similarly, a complicated story about disability pensions in which the increase in the federal government's pensions is deducted from the payments of provincial and private pension plans might get bumped from the news line-up because it takes too much effort to find people to talk about it. One story gets top billing because it is easy to find people to deny things; another story is killed because the reporter has no listings of disabled persons.

At the same time, there are "beat" reporters assigned to follow certain special topics, like disability issues. The person who is "covering" disabled persons, therefore, might file such a story on an upcoming conference into the newspaper's computer bank overnight. The editor who retrieves the story the next day would make a decision about the "play" which the story would receive in the paper that day. Many of those who responded to the Committee's inquiry noted that management might ask that a story or series of articles be prepared to describe a person, group or situation. That task would then be assigned to a writer.

Though it is unspoken, newspaper writers and editors have created barriers to generating some stories beyond a certain limit. These boundaries are set by the managers' perceptions of the values they wish to reflect and by their perception of the desires of their advertisers and readers.

For newsmagazines and features magazines, the same type of unspoken barrier would govern the type of article which is produced. Newsmagazines looking for a "peg" for an article, will use a recapitulation of an event or trend. The end of Rick Hansen's tour would be such a "peg" — strong enough even to provoke a cover story on *Man in Motion* and larger questions relating to disabled persons. City magazines, with controlled circulation aimed at affluent urban and suburban dwellers, admit that they have not covered disability issues because "people who are disabled occupy a relatively small fraction of the entire city agenda..." (Editor of a city magazine).

Our Committee feels that this type of statement sets up a barrier which does not reflect the true situation. Are the media out of touch to the extent that the editors and writers do not know that there are 3.3 million or 13% of Canadians who can be considered to be disabled?

The situation in smaller dailies and weeklies differs considerably. In general, these newspapers are in closer contact with their community and feel that they can do a better job. One editor commented that:

When a paper gets big, you tend to lose sight of a lot of grassroots... The community is small enough to really feel what happens to a disabled person.

This interest is mirrored by the fact, our Committee's researchers found, that francophone community papers were overwhelmingly more likely to provide free space to organizations of disabled persons. At the same time, this group of newspapers was also most likely to provide indirect assistance by publishing press releases from organizations associated with disabilities.

Differing social and economic conditions across the country also have an effect on the coverage and portrayal of disabled persons. For example, Jonni Turner, a journalist who worked in Northern Saskatchewan, pointed out that disabled people were not visible in the north because they got "shipped out" and disabled natives are absorbed into their families. Even the big news stories of Fox/Fonyo/Hansen have had little impact, Ms Turner states, because "It's outside of the [native people's] consciousness... After all, you don't see many Indians in \$80 running shoes."

There are varying degrees of a reporter's perception of his or her responsibility to a story and to the people in it. To be effective, reporters must make the subject relate to the audience. That's why journalists call their work "stories" and not items or bulletins. And yet, credibility must be preserved. If journalists, through use of words, pictures or mannerisms become too involved with a person or in a cause, they may gain respect and admiration for their beliefs, but they may damage their credibility.

The public trusts journalists to define the news for us. Their job is to screen the audience from the barrage of events which occur daily. Journalists display little hesitation in discussing this part of their role:

I think that as a young person, you look to a powerful communications mechanism like the mass media for clues as to how society really perceives you on an impersonal basis. And I don't see how, over many years and after many different kinds of encounters, the media's treatment of others with the kind of disability you have will not have some effect on anyone's developing image.

Working journalist, Regina

This is a legitimate concern but activist journalism is still alive and well, particularly among feature writers. The implications of this for disabled persons are most evident in the francophone daily press where the "feminization" of journalism has challenged the hitherto male bastion and has promoted an interest in issues that were previously ignored. When he appeared before our Committee, Pierre Vennat pointed out that in the francophone press, there are activists who "openly support the causes of the people about whom they write. They have successfully gotten wrongs righted, children into schools and funds released." The means which they have used: case histories. Mr. Vennat also pointed out that the newspapers themselves were pleased because these challenges do not interfere with the interests of the media's owners and, in fact, helped to sell the paper by reconciling the concepts of marketing and service. In other fields, activist journalists might be seen with a more jaundiced eye.

At the same time, journalists, both French-speaking and English-speaking, sometimes hide behind their need for objectivity when they refuse to admit that they are ignoring an issue and will issue a terse rejoinder like:

Whether or not disability is involved in a particular story or feature is not a conscious issue.

Operations manager of a private radio station

If this were truly the case, disabled people would have nothing to complain about. And yet our study has found deep dissatisfaction with the portrayal of disabled persons.

### ***Recommendation 7***

**News organizations and organizations representing persons with disabilities should initiate local seminars and public forums as a means of communicating their concerns to each other.**

**The Department of the Secretary of State and the Department of Communications should coordinate these seminars as preparatory meetings to a national conference on Disabled Persons and Communications which should be held no later than June 1989. The agenda of this conference should be constructed in the broadest possible manner.**

### **Conclusion**

Given the nature of Canadian reporting of the news, our Committee wonders whether the "news game" has been examined by the country's news media, insofar as the "rules" apply to the concerns of disabled persons. According to the general criteria of what makes news, it would appear that, overall, the "news value" which working journalists assign to issues of concern to disabled persons is not always a fair reflection of their own rules, nor of the importance of the issues.



## CHAPTER IV

### A Blurred Image

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Unafflicted people will always see these people [with disabilities] as one form or another of charity case.... The intention of whoever wants to write about [disabled people] is not in any way to demean them: it is, if in any way, to help them. Having the disability is what makes them unique. [Their interests could be best served in] the cultivation of goodwill through advertising.

Publisher, Canadian newsmagazine

In the past five or six years, the number of stories [involving disabled people] has increased as a result of the organization and lobbying of disabled people themselves, expressing their own dissatisfactions. Disabled people have expected more fairness in the media; they don't expect treatment different from that of any other group that wants certain civil rights. They don't want stories that elicit sympathy. And it is apparent that stories [about disabled people] have come to be based on, not a sense of sympathy, but a sense of injustice.

City editor, large Canadian daily newspaper

It is fortunate that the first of these attitudes is no more widely-held than the latter.<sup>1</sup> They lie at the opposite ends of a wide spectrum of beliefs held by Canadian editors. For most journalists, the latter view probably provides a more comfortable pew than the former. It appears to our Committee that journalists' recognition of disabled persons' right to equal access to employment, education and housing is often coloured by the kind of well-meaning but prickly sensitivity that unfamiliarity brings.

Many of those who work or manage the Canadian electronic and print media are less than fully aware of what constitutes a "disability", of who disabled persons are, and of the percentage of Canada's population represented by persons with

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<sup>1</sup> The research report for much of this section was prepared by Glen Allen, Lynne Thomas, Michel Crépault and Marie-Anne Rainville. Various journalists spoke frankly to them on condition that their names not be used.

disabilities. This is not to say that there is neither good-will nor a desire to do better in the portrayal and coverage of disabled persons. Witness after witness who appeared before the Committee gave testimony which placed their good-will on record. The list ranges from the representatives of the advertising industry, the Canadian Advertising Foundation; private and public broadcasters (the Canadian Association of Broadcasters and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation); the National Film Board; the Canadian Daily Newspaper Publishers.

Ms. Suzanne Keeler, Director of the Canadian Advertising Foundation's Advisory Division, expressed the situation which applies to many of our other witnesses from media organizations when she stated that:

Today, if we use any terminology that might be irritating to those who are concerned with this issue, we apologize. It is relatively new to us. I think it is relatively new to many Canadians because there has not been the visibility of the disabled.... To develop a vocabulary that is familiar and useful to all of those concerned without insulting anyone, is one of the hurdles all of us have to get over.

When asked who disabled persons were, many journalists could, at first, reach little further than "users of wheelchairs". It was clear that many of those in the media had not done a great deal of thinking about global issues related to persons with disabilities. A large number of editors displayed little knowledge of the emergence of organizations controlled by disabled persons and the difference between these and service organizations for disabled persons. Furthermore, when most journalists think of disabled persons, they point out that "hero" stories and fundraising stories have "always been the standard thrust and still are the major thrust" of news coverage. One editor commented that he believed that the attention given to disabled persons is—"disproportionate to their presence in the universe of special interest groups.... In the God and Motherhood department, there's only so much room."

This situation seems to pertain to both the French and English media. Our Committee's study of the French-language electronic media found that radio and television treat disabled persons no differently than groups and individuals grappling with other social problems — welfare recipients, members of visible minorities, or native people. And these groups and individuals voice the same complaints.

### **Advertising and Depiction of Disabled Persons**

The media as a whole noted increasing pressure to reflect the changing nature of society in its coverage. In terms of advertising, Mr. Alan Rae, President of the Canadian Advertising Foundation, noted this pressure and remarked that "This is a very large issue, not only with advertising obviously, but with many, many elements of visible media."

In some measure, the changes are the result of calculations of dollars and cents; media organizations are commercial operations and, therefore, look to make profits. No businessman would willingly alienate his customers. As Mr. Rae put it:

The last thing that advertisers are is insensitive. It does not make sense for them to be insensitive, or they would alienate part of their markets, part of their consumers. They do want to portray a realistic society in their advertising.

He reiterated that advertisers try to portray current lifestyles because these images reached the markets.

Insofar as advertising is concerned, Mr. Rae pointed out that marketers have found that the fabric of society will accept a single approach to advertising. In fact, "you do not have to show a handicapped person in an advertisement to have a handicapped person buy a product...." He also noted that:

There is a huge difference, it seems to me, between marketing properly and the approach that says we would like to have all these different groups of people, all these interests appear in advertising, because that gives them some kind of credibility. Advertisers... get pressure from this source and pressure from that source. [When advertisers] sometimes venture into these areas, they blow it. They will show an oriental person, and they think they are doing something good and proper for that particular ethnic origin, but the oriental groups dump all over them. Somebody complains because they feel the portrayal is incorrect.

The issue is what is the nature of the portrayal in advertising. The advertising industry asks how do we portray all of these elements in our advertising without offending some groups and without having such a complicated portrayal that we are going to be leaving somebody out?

## **Tone and Image**

Groups of persons with disabilities or groups representing disabled people were viewed in the same light as any other advocacy group, but with one important difference: story "tone". The tone of stories seems to depend in decreasing order on:

1. the editor's tastes and inclinations;
2. the size and sophistication of the newspaper;
3. the strength, public relations skills and direction of local advocacy groups; and
4. community "feeling".

For disabled persons, the tone of most newspaper stories was restrictive and either related to "injustice" (a news story) or to sympathy (what some might call a "duty piece" or an article that a journalist felt obliged to cover from time to time on an "amazing person" or heroic achievement). Many journalists, naturally enough, saw their work on disabled persons to be a mixture of both. It was further evident from our Committee's research that, the larger or more sophisticated the newspaper is, the less likelihood that the tone of the story or the attitude of the journalist will be strictly "sympathetic" to people with disability. Most editors contacted by our Committee's researchers pointed out that stories on disability generated very few

letters to the editor and appeared to have very little impact on public opinion. The editors noted that they would publish more stories about disability if the public showed a greater interest.

Where this general situation did not apply, the comments of individual journalists and editors are illustrative:

There has been such an emphasis on integrating both the physically and mentally-handicapped into the community here that they aren't perceived as being different. Everybody deals with everybody else and there's not that uncomfortable feeling of anyone being different or strange.

Editor, Saskatchewan weekly newspaper

Disabled people are being viewed in a more positive perspective... [due] to the success of the work done by groups for disabled people. There are fewer stories with a Telemiracle bent.

Political reporter, large Saskatchewan daily

The news editor of a major metropolitan daily paper credits the work of the advocacy groups for increasing the coverage of disabled persons and issues. Their heightened presence as an interest group has helped to foster a new "image" of disability during the past few years. There has been a spillover from Rick Hansen's Man in Motion tour which is evident in the changed attitude of some newspaper editors, although it is seen far less in Canadian magazines. Editors in Quebec felt that they were far more conscious of disability issues than they had been in the past and credited the activities of the provincial government for this heightened awareness. Editors of restaurant listings in newspapers and magazines, for example, claimed to be aware of the need to list whether establishments have wheelchair access or not.

### ***Recommendation 8***

**The Department of the Secretary of State should fund improved informational activities by the disability community. Projects might include:**

- a. media watch campaigns;**
- b. special media projects; and**
- c. the establishment of data banks and photo archives.**

**These activities should be integrated with a comprehensive and continuing public information program based on research into public attitudes about the rights, contributions and unmet needs of disabled persons and should be integrated with the planning for Access Awareness Week.**



## Coverage and Audience

The overall attitude of the francophone editors did not differ substantially from the anglophone editors when it came to deciding what to cover. The francophone operation of Canadian Press, for example, is conducted along the same policy that coverage of disabled persons "all depends on the news item".

Our Committee's study of attitudes of editors and journalists appears to confirm the conclusion that news organizations, on the whole, do not monitor issues of concern to disabled persons. The media respond to issues which come at them from the outside and initiate relatively little coverage.

It appears that there is not a large number of reporters assigned to cover disability issues. When our Committee's researchers contacted the francophone press organizations, they found that no magazine had anyone assigned to these questions. Of the three dailies who responded, the assignment fell to the journalists who reported on health and social affairs. There were no specialist reporters. Of the smaller community papers which were contacted, 51 had no assignment for this subject and only 6 had a partial assignment. Of the French-language radio and television stations which were contacted, 25 out of 32 had no specialized coverage and only 7 had a partial coverage. These results are not particularly surprising, when most editors feel little pressure to increase coverage on issues concerned with disability. Of the managers contacted in the French-language electronic media, three-quarters felt that their coverage of disability issues was adequate.

This state of affairs might be due to the publishers' perceptions of their readers' views of stories about disability and disabled persons. Our Committee's researchers pursued this matter and asked members of the French-language print media to comment. Most editors of daily papers and magazines replied that they were very unsure of readers' interest in such coverage. For smaller community papers, however, the editors noted that they believed, in an unsubstantiated fashion, that there was a great degree of reader interest. Only 8 editors of community newspapers, out of 59, claimed little interest or no idea of the degree of interest. The vast number of editors agreed that their readers were interested in stories about disabilities to some degree. One pointed out that "readers are always interested in any news about disabled persons, for there is always a close relative, parent or friend who is disabled."

### *Recommendation 9*

**News organizations should consider the possibility of assigning specialist reporters to cover issues concerning disability.**

## The Press and Advocacy

Our study revealed that many editors and writers are unhappy about their relationship with advocacy groups. Many of these individuals noted that the material they receive from these groups is not suited to the needs of a news organization. A

writer who covers disability issues for a large-circulation metropolitan daily newspaper commented that:

[Material from advocacy groups] is not really written for us. It's written for them. And when you're faced with a whole stack of mail that [reads] "charity" on the outside, you know you're going to have to really think hard if you're going to [find news in it].

Many editors noted that much of the raw material they receive from disabled consumer groups is in the form of press releases and newsletters aimed at raising funds. Other news releases from service groups are of the "Timmy and Tammy" approach to raise money or relate only to medicine and follow the "medical model". In addition, editors have noted that, even if fundraising material comes with a "news" or feature "angle", they have trouble dealing with it and tend to throw it out, all but unread.

I have to say [that] the first thing I look for is the "Will you donate?" question. I have to read through to see if they are telling me something or are simply promoting themselves. If there isn't anything of news value, I dump it.

Editor, controlled circulation magazine.

Others pointed out that the advocacy organizations are not organized to approach the press. In describing his experience, the editor of a British Columbia weekly newspaper remarked that "Occasionally, I will get these press releases and a contact is listed and they don't know zip about it. We need a knowledgeable contact." The editor of a general interest magazine aimed at a large city market made the same point with regard to the manner in which advocacy groups approach him. With regards to information sent by advocacy groups, he said:

I certainly get bombarded with the stuff. But they often send it a week before something is happening. The groups don't realize that magazines require months of "lead time".

Journalists commented that advocacy groups should be more realistic about what makes a news story and what does not. They should sit down and ask "How am I going to sell this story to the media?" At the same time, they should avoid old issues and those that do not, in some manner, affect people and are "just" about government policy. According to the editor of a Nova Scotia weekly newspaper, the advocacy groups fail to understand the changing nature of news and the need of the media organizations to respond to public interest.

People tend to think that when [the organizations] have a query, we should be jumping up and down based only on what they have told us.... My overall judgment of them is that, in many cases, they don't seem to grow in connection with the community at large. You can't keep rewriting the same thing over and over. They should jump onto something else: say, let's work on getting access to jobs as opposed to building for awhile.

One editor cited the local "wheelchair day" which had been going on for several years, and during which prominent local citizens spend the day using wheelchairs.

The editor felt that this story had been written up too often and had to convince the local organization of disabled persons that its interest could be best served by a different type of story, for example, following a disabled student throughout the day at school.

Some editors felt that the advocacy groups wanted to put out "good news" all the time. An editor of a New Brunswick weekly noted that:

Most [groups] want to sugar-coat things. Like any public-relations people, they prefer to talk about the positive and not the negative. I'm thinking here specifically about the drive in New Brunswick to integrate handicapped kids into the regular school system. Off the record, people will tell you all kinds of horror stories about how it doesn't work. But on the record, no one will talk to you at all.

### **Personal Interest**

Journalists feel that, in presenting issues relating to disability, they are confronted by a dilemma: because disability is perceived very favourably by the mass of the population, it is very difficult to be critical without becoming an object of criticism. Naturally enough, journalists are reluctant to prepare stories that might be remotely perceived as casting a disabled person in a bad light. The way out for them is to focus on the celebratory or the hard luck stories.

News is created as a result of the symbiotic relationship among the editor, who decides that a story will be covered, the writer who is sent to dig up the necessary information, and the sources, who provide the necessary information. If an editor sends a reporter out to write a "hero" story and the sources, regardless of the actual situation, provide a "hero" approach to the story, then the writer is stuck. This journalist is in no position, regardless of what is the actual situation, to write anything but a "hero" story. This, will then satisfy the editor because it meets his or her preconception of the case. One reporter commented that, in writing an article on people who were affected by thalidomide, "those who represented thalidomide victims are people who were successful and well-adjusted. The others, who might have been less well-adjusted, were not being highlighted."

A reporter who covers disability questions for a large metropolitan paper commented that groups representing disabled persons will promise assistance and then not provide sources. This is part of the "mixed message" which she receives from consumer groups because she does not "think they understand how we work — what makes news and what doesn't."

A magazine editor said that advocacy organizations are leaning towards "the soft-sell approach... pushing the awareness factor. But you can make someone 'aware' to death. For me, as an editor, this has no impact.... [I want] a local 'peg' not a goody-two-shoes story."

Throughout its investigation of the attitudes of disabled persons and journalists and editors in the media, our Committee was persistently struck by the misunderstandings that each group had about the attitudes and operations of the other. This

lack of understanding is an indication of the faulty communication between the two groups.

## **Focussing on the Disability**

The media will admit that they have a tendency to concentrate more on the person's disability rather than on the person and showing the disability as incidental or secondary in nature. While disabled persons express concern about this, editors and journalists see this as a confusing and perhaps intractable question. A writer for a general interest city magazine commented that "The disability may not always be the focus, but it will always be fairly prominent. That's simply inevitable."

The editor of an influential Ontario weekly drew a comparison with the coverage of women's issues a few years ago. His paper stopped publishing "first women" stories years ago. He said:

Now it's a backward thing to run a "first-woman" story. So yes, there is a legitimate point there. It encourages tokenism. I have no magic solution as to how to deal with it. When there's a barrier, when the fact is that someone's disabled, [that] is newsworthy.

Generally, although journalists recognize the problem, they have not found a solution. One city editor pointed out that, "Without focusing on the disability, you, in a sense, take away the reason for doing the story." Another editor remarked that:

We make heroes out of people who get a PhD or even get a job. When are we going to go beyond this? We haven't found the alternative to that kind of story.... [Disabled persons] don't turn up in any other context.

Those working in the francophone electronic media argued that it will always be difficult for radio and television journalists to give special coverage to rehabilitation and reintegration, an area in which news events are rare. In these two areas, the changes in technology, attitudes and budgets take place slowly and opportunities for in-depth reporting, analysis, commentary, editorials or discussions are few and far between.

## **Psychiatric Disabilities**

Like the community at large, the media are more squeamish in dealing with individuals with psychiatric disabilities than with those who have a physical disability. In part, this is because the former are less visible: they cannot be recognized in a crowd. In their discussions with our Committee's researchers, reporters remarked that:

With the physically-handicapped, you can relate on an intellectual level and our business has a fair amount of intellectual play. [With mentally-disabled people,] you get ideas, not from the people themselves, but from those who are speaking for them. You are always hesitant, for instance, to quote a mentally-handicapped person, wondering if it is fair to do so when the person might have trouble

formulating or expressing ideas or opinions. You worry about compromising them or putting them somehow in a difficult position.

Reporter covering disability issues for  
a metropolitan daily newspaper.

Journalists perceive advocacy groups for persons with psychiatric disabilities as being divided in their goals and philosophy. Reporters noted that they felt these organizations were providing a mixed message on such issues as de-institutionalization. Journalists feel that service organizations and officials prevent them from gaining access to persons with psychiatric disabilities and, therefore, that their "side of the story" is not told as well as it should be. Journalists complain that the level of paternalism of officials and workers often prevents them from getting to their preferred sources: disabled individuals themselves. The city editor of a Maritime daily newspaper remarked that:

When we were working on the school integration stories, it was tough getting permission... [The groups] will want us to take pictures of the officials receiving gifts, let's say of equipment or something. And we have to really fight to get a human story. We would rather be dealing with the person who's going to be using the equipment... The mental health groups here run a lot of seminars and that's what they want us to cover — what various mental health experts are saying. We have trouble covering these events — and often don't — because we can't illustrate them with real people.

The editor of a large metropolitan daily newspaper remarked about the problems of dealing with government authorities who caused difficulties about:

stories on the mentally-handicapped. We had quite a battle with the Public Trustee's office earlier this year. We ran a photo of a mentally-handicapped woman who was being assisted in eating by a nurse's aide. The Public Trustee did not find it a nice picture at all. This led to a six-month exchange of letters between his lawyers and ours.

## **On Using Language**

Some editors were confused about "acceptable terminology". Others were, at least, unsure of the manner of dealing with guidelines. Opinion about the utility of guidelines was, to say the least, mixed, but all editors told our researchers that they would like to be consulted during the preparation of any guide to terminology. At the same time, most journalists and editors said that they would welcome some type of guidance in deciding what language was acceptable and what was offensive. Most editors believed that the organizations of disabled persons would not be able to arrive at any agreement about acceptable language for use in discussing disabilities.

In assessing current language usage, most editors agreed that terms such as "retarded, crippled, confined to, deformed, deficient" were derogatory, demeaning and dated. At the same time, many journalists were unsure about the use of words such as "handicapped, victim, wheelchair-bound, courageous, afflicted, suffering".

These are examples of connotive terms about which the journalists expressed confusion. A reporter who writes frequently on issues of concern to disabled persons commented that the language issue:

is a tough one. It is a policy at our paper not to use the word "handicapped" but "disabled" as a preferred term. I have trouble when you want to start distinguishing between "wheelchair-user" and "wheelchair-bound". My opinion is that neither is particularly offensive. You can bicker about these points forever.

Even some of the journalists and editors who expressed interest in the development of language guidelines also entered the caveat that they would not be bound by them. The journalists emphasized continuously that their primary concern was clear, expressive language and noted that guidelines could inhibit or obscure that aim. The publisher of an Ontario weekly newspaper set out the problem as follows:

The most important thing is that people understand what you're talking about. The public recognizes something and it's like a brand name. Organizations that push for a change of name risk losing the whole cause. It confuses the public. One of my favorite ones was the fundraising drive for the March of Dimes. It tried to change its title to The Ability Fund. It didn't work.

One city editor commented that:

I've had trouble with the various euphemisms for the disabled. Where I've had real problems are with terms like "mentally-challenged" and "physically-challenged". Our readers don't know what these terms mean. It's not good communication. The meaning gets lost.

In describing a set of language guidelines which were prepared in conjunction with the first Access Awareness Week, Geoffrey Stevens, Chairman of the Editorial Committee of the Canadian Daily Newspaper Association, noted that:

I think there is perhaps a searching too hard for euphemisms. This almost makes the descriptions either extremely awkward or meaningless. I do not see any problem in, for example, describing Ray Charles as a blind singer-pianist. I think it would be very awkward to try to describe him as a singer-pianist with a vision impairment. I think we can get silly sometimes with the use of language, so we have to be careful of that. But I do not think this proposed language code is the answer yet.

At this point, our Committee would like to note that disabled persons also expressed reservations about some of these "new-fangled" terms. Obviously, a better dialogue between journalists and disabled persons might help to sort out the problems.

Almost every journalist interviewed expressed some comment on the question of language. Many argued that a changed vocabulary would not change attitudes and that any guidelines would have only a cosmetic effect. The following is a sample of opinions:

I don't think the media needs instructions from anybody with respect to language use.

Publisher of a Canadian  
newsmagazine

New words are only good as long as they are new. It makes [language use] very unstable and inflexible. Bad connotations are retained even through word changes; the baggage stays with the person or group.

Editor of a provincial magazine

What [is] the difference, as long as the reader knows the guy's in a wheelchair and they are doing what they can to help him out.... People want to read something that's going to tug on their heartstrings. In order to have an impact, you have to tell it like it is.

Editor of a small northern weekly

The language gets so that there's a lack of clarity. Clarity and the straightforward description get a reader's attention. The Association for the Mentally Handicapped changed their name to the Association for Independent Living... Now every time you write that title you have to clarify or you've lost your story before you even start.

Editor of a small daily newspaper

When I try to say "developmentally-disabled" on the radio at 7:30 a.m., it's a real mouthful.

Host of a radio morning show

Francophone journalists also reacted to what they called "bafflegab" which, particularly in the electronic media, they felt did not make their work easier. They recognize that certain words, such as *infirmes* (crippled) are not acceptable and have moved to using *handicapé* as a noun. But now that this form is also seen as unacceptable by disabled persons, the rules of French grammar cause convoluted phrases such as *personne physiquement handicapée* (physically-disabled person). The journalists in radio and television have such a limited time in which to tell their story that they feel such terms use up a valuable portion of their sixty-second clip and can impede their finishing on time. This type of restriction, they argue, will tempt a producer to eliminate a story entirely rather than risk running into the weather forecast which follows a news bulletin.

Like their English-speaking colleagues, French-speaking journalists object to words which are imprecise and "constructed". Among these, they cite examples of "linguistic inflation" such as *personne à mobilité réduite* (equivalent to "physically challenged" but literally translated as "person with reduced mobility"). They, too, feel that the changes in names of associations impede popular understanding.

## Conclusion

To summarize the situation, it is likely the case that, as a rule, people experiencing some form of discrimination will always find the terminology used about them to be pejorative and want to substitute some other term which seems to them to reduce any stigma of language. It is also the case that journalists are slow to accept such changes either as a result of force of habit or because of their perception of the demands of their trade. It seems unlikely that grievances over terminology will ever be settled once and for all.

However, it is important for Canadian media organizations, both public and private, to realize that their mandate extends beyond depicting a Canadian reality which stretches no further than comfortable living rooms in Montreal and Toronto. As Mr. François Macerola, the Government Film Commissioner remarked, the quality of the National Film Board's output has drastically increased as a result of the Board's gaining access to talented individuals across the country who are deeply connected with the social and cultural milieu of our country. If the media covers events and holds up images which ignore an important part of the Canadian reality, then there will continue to be a lack of awareness, a failure completely to comprehend the nature of Canada. With that lack of awareness and comprehension, popular attitudes will not exist to solve elusive problems and to achieve equality for all in Canadian society.



## CHAPTER V

### Voices other than their own

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The focus is on the disability rather than the ability.

Yukon Rehabilitation Society

In order to gain a standard against which to measure its other evidence, our Committee looked at the nature of mass media coverage of persons with disabilities, and discerned certain patterns in the coverage both of disabled persons and of disability issues. This approach confirmed to us that the news media are lagging behind the disability community in the perception of issues. At the same time, our Committee found a pattern that suggests that coverage of disability issues is in the early stages of a transition in perspective.<sup>1</sup>

Overall, we concluded that the media's emphasis on charity issues vis-à-vis disabled persons suggests that the media are not yet sensitive to the changing nature of the disability community with its emphasis on self-help and independence. Also, there has been relatively little coverage of the growing emphasis on the rights, services and political actions to achieve the goals established by advocacy groups of individuals with disabilities.

We felt obliged to undertake this study given the paucity of social scientific literature on the subject of disabled persons. Although there has been considerable research carried out on media coverage of visible minorities and other groups not yet in the mainstream of Canadian society, relatively little attention has been paid specifically to persons with disabilities. Recent scholarly interest reflects changes within the disability community itself, but this has yet to be translated into publications on the Canadian situation.

The fragmentary studies which currently exist, however, have noted an overall absence of media coverage relevant to disabled persons. Even in 1981, the International Year of Disabled Persons, a content analysis of two Canadian

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter is an edited version of a content analysis of Canadian newspapers and television news. This study was prepared by Frederick Fletcher, Dian Marino and Robert Everett of York University.

newspapers found that issues of concern to disabled persons did not find their way into these newspapers. This same study noted that discrete events with newsworthy characteristics, such as drama or emotional appeal, tended to be covered by the media, while the overall issues were neglected. The newspapers showed no ongoing commitment to coverage of the subject.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to this, indications showed that the media operated within a charity perspective which emphasized the dependence of persons with disabilities upon the good will of others. This certainly has been the case in the United States, where a comparative study of television programming over a ten year span (1976-68 and 1977-78) concluded that programming that made specific reference to disability had increased by about 70 per cent (from 149 in 1968 to 256 in 1978). The study found that there had been a shift towards news, documentary and telethon, but concluded that "What doesn't seem to be covered is the realistic life issues related to mental illness and alcoholism. Other researchers have remarked that much of the media coverage contains the usually implicit notion "that the disabled are unimportant and that society can afford to ignore them."<sup>3</sup>

Existing social scientific literature suggested that the media coverage of disabled persons rarely addresses cultural assumptions and the systemic nature of discrimination against disabled people. The lack of Canadian research on the mass media and disability, therefore, reproduces the disability-denying cultural orientation that social scientists have identified. Furthermore, journalists usually do not link stories of personal tragedy or surmounting a disability to larger issues such as de-institutionalization or the services available. Neither do they address the possibilities of integrated, community-based styles of life needed to accept the terms of the larger debate. Various studies have provided rudimentary comments on the distortion in the treatment of disabled persons. While there was some reporting of issues, there was very little analysis. American works reported that some distortion about the realities of life for disabled persons had to do with the accepted depictions of the passage of time (pacing) on television:

The time it would take a person with a spinal cord injury to dress or someone with palsy to speak or write would not even be portrayed. In short, the very chronicity of all disabilities is simply not conveyed.

This sort of reality distortion is common in television and is very difficult to alter. Also, there are some studies which demonstrate a link between the depiction of disabled persons and their "symbolic" value in literature. Very frequently, individuals were used to depict ugliness, evil and extreme behaviour.

Given that these conclusions are based on earlier studies with considerable limitations both in scope and sample size, our Committee decided to carry out a

<sup>2</sup> Peggy Hutchison and John Lord, "A Critical Analysis of the Portrayal of Mental Retardation in Canadian Newspapers", paper presented to the World Congress, International Association for the Scientific Study of Mental Deficiency, Toronto, August, 1982.

<sup>3</sup> E. Keith Byrd, R.S. McDaniel and R.B. Rohoden, "Television Programming and Disability: A Ten-Year Span", *International Journal of Rehabilitation Research*, 3:3, 1980, p. 326; E. Keith Byrd and R.B. Pipes, "Feature Films and Disability", *Journal of Rehabilitation*, 47:1, 1981, p. 80.

more complete analysis of these questions. The results of this study were based on a sample of daily newspapers published in major Canadian metropolitan areas, community newspapers serving a variety of markets and a small sample of national network newscasts on English-language television. We were particularly anxious that the community newspapers be included, since 79 per cent of Canadians read at least one such paper in an average week. At the same time, these newspapers possess an important entrée in communicating desirable themes into the fabric of community life.<sup>4</sup>

The study cast a wide net that would enable an assessment of the extent to which the overall thrust of activities in the disability community and the many types of disabilities are reflected in media coverage. At the same time, our study sought to distinguish between human interest items and those aimed at public education and between charitable activities and those of advocacy groups led by disabled persons. In addition, the study sought to look at images and stereotypes by analyzing symbols, images and characterizations of disabilities.

## Daily Newspapers

Our study found that the coverage of disabled persons and of issues concerning disability was relatively slight. On average, there was fewer than one item per issue in most newspapers. Certain dailies (*The Regina Leader Post*, *The Toronto Star*, and *The Ottawa Citizen*), which have a strong commitment to local coverage, contained a greater number of stories related to disability. These dailies are most likely to focus on local services and issues which arise out of these services. Only two newspapers, *The Toronto Star* and *The Toronto Sun*, print regular columns which deal with issues of concern to disabled persons. A few other newspapers have reporters who take a special (but irregular) interest in issues relevant to disabled persons. The papers which retained a more national focus (*The Globe and Mail* and *Le Devoir*) published fewer stories on disabilities and individuals with disabilities.

These findings have led us to conclude that news coverage concerning disability focuses on local services rather than on government policies and that disability-related issues are not high on the public policy agenda.

## Community Newspapers

With one item for every two issues, attention to disabled persons was even lower in the community papers than in the dailies. About 25% of the stories consisted of

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<sup>4</sup> We recognize that our study is both ambitious and exploratory. Although it is undoubtedly among the most comprehensive content analysis on this subject ever conducted in Canada, it lacks a significant time dimension and is not fully representative of the broadcast media. The study used the CBC national news (English only) and Global News to provide a general sense of news coverage on television. The 12 daily newspapers sample was drawn from issues published from 1 November 1987 to 31 January 1988. For the 39 community newspapers, the sample included 10 issues published from 1 October 1987 to 31 December 1987. For the details of the methodology and findings of this study see: Frederick Fletcher, Dian Marino and Robert Everett, "News Coverage of Disabilities and Disabled Persons in the Canadian Media", study prepared for the Standing Committee on the Status of Disabled Persons, April 1988.

publicity for charitable organizations. Larger weeklies, found mainly in urban and suburban areas, provided more attention and averaged one item per issue. French-language community newspapers printed fewer items (2.3 items for every 10 issues). In general, the emphasis in the coverage was on charity and related activities, rather than on advocacy, services or integration.

Some new directions pointed the way to a transition in coverage to a more advocacy and service-oriented approach. But these were few in number and tended to be tied in with other materials (such as a constituency report by a member of a provincial legislature). Examples of these were stories in *The Chronicle* (Pointe-Claire), which discussed public education about disability questions, and *The Goderich Signal Star*, which printed a supplement on aging which included services to disabled persons.

## Television

Our researchers also carried out a pilot study of television portrayal of persons with disabilities. This not only scanned CBC news coverage for 1987, but also examined all items dealing with disability classified by the Global Television Network. The most notable feature of television coverage of disabled persons was the presence of celebrities: 11 of the 20 items on disability featured prominent personalities and famous individuals. For example, Prince Andrew opened the Ontario Games for the Disabled in North York and thereby drew media attention to that event. One television report focussed on the games themselves by emphasizing the relationship between an athlete and her coach. Similarly, TV coverage of a show at Ontario Place in Toronto called "Reach for the Rainbow", supposedly serving as a "day of integration", ended up emphasizing the celebrities present and losing sight of the cause.

Television coverage usually failed to link disability issues with advocacy, interaction with government or the provision of services. One-half of the items made no mention of services and most discussions of these featured already-established operations. A majority of television news items (60%) emphasized a human interest angle. Nonetheless, in a few instances, advocacy groups were used as legitimate contacts for journalists. Beryl Potter, a prominent Toronto advocate, was interviewed in two separate items and argued a case for the right of disabled persons to transportation facilities. Global News also dealt with issues deemed important by disabled persons: transportation (improper use of parking spaces allocated for disabled persons), de-institutionalization, and community living.

Overall, television news analysed during the period of our study did provide a number of opportunities for individuals to speak on their own behalf. In particular, the Global Television Network conveyed more positive images of persons with disabilities than negative ones when contrasted to coverage in the newspapers. Also, the visual dimension of television helped to impart a sense of dynamism and conveyed important human qualities more effectively than the printed press could. Although our pilot study did not include a full analysis of CBC television coverage, to the extent it was examined, we found that the pattern for CBC appeared, in a general way, to resemble that of Global.

## Patterns of Coverage

Our Committee's study concluded that the mass media do not present the items of concern to disabled persons with great frequency or prominence. In newspapers, 8% of all reports about disability made the front page and 30% were given either a large headline or a significant space on a page. Much of the coverage consists either of announcements or brief reports. Fewer than 30% were 15 paragraphs or longer and almost 50% were under 8 paragraphs. (See Tables 1, 2 and 3.) Priority or importance of a story or news item can also be gauged by its position in a broadcast or its prominence in a newspaper.

**TABLE 1**

**Percentage of Disability-Related Items According to their Placement, by Type of Newspaper**

Page of Item	All Newspapers (n=609)	Daily Newspapers (n=383)	Community Newspapers (n=226)
Front Page	7.9%	8.1%	7.5%
Front/Inner Section	4.4	6.0	1.8
Editorial Page	3.4	3.7	3.1
Special Section	1.6	1.6	1.8
Inner Page	82.6	80.6	85.8

**TABLE 2**

**Percentage of Articles According to their Length in Paragraphs, by Type of Newspaper**

Length of Article	All Newspapers (n=608)	Daily Newspapers (n=382)	Community Newspapers (n=226)
Very Short (1-2 Paragraphs)	18.6%	12.8%	28.3 %
Short (3-8 paragraphs)	30.6	27.0	36.7
Medium (9-13 paragraphs)	21.4	24.3	16.4
Long (14-20 paragraphs)	13.0	14.1	11.1
Very Long (21+ paragraphs)	16.4	21.7	7.5

In terms of subject matter, most coverage is pegged to events such as fund-raising and charitable activities, incidents involving disabled persons, and accomplishments of disabled athletes. Furthermore, editorials and commentaries on issues relevant to disability issues were almost completely absent. Our content analysis could not determine, on one hand, the degree to which this coverage reflects

media norms or, on the other hand, the inactivity or lack of professional public relations activities by the groups of disabled persons.

The location of coverage of disabled persons and disability issues provides a good indication to our Committee both of the importance accorded these topics by the media, and of the social context in which they are placed. As already noted, coverage primarily dealt with community activities and life styles rather than services, rights and policy issues. For all newspapers, much of the coverage appeared either on community news pages (30%) or in lifestyle sections (15%). There was relatively little coverage in other sections: sports (3% of daily newspaper items), entertainment (3%) or business. (See Table 4.)

**TABLE 3**

**Percentage of Items About Disabilities According to their Headline Prominence, by Type of Newspaper**

Prominence of Item	All Newspapers (n=608)	Daily Newspapers (n=382)	Community Newspapers (n=226)
Largest Headline	27.5%	28.3%	26.1%
Other Headline	72.5	71.1	73.9

**TABLE 4**

**Percentage of Items About Disabilities According to their Location, by Type of Newspaper**

Location	All Newspapers (n=609)	Daily Newspapers (n=383)	Community Newspapers (n=226)
Local	39.2%	24.8%	63.7%
National	7.6	12.0	—
Regional	6.4	9.9	0.4
International	3.1	5.0	—
Sports	3.4	3.4	3.5
Entertainment	2.1	3.4	—
Lifestyle	14.9	22.7	1.8
Science/Medicine	2.0	2.3	1.3
Business	1.1	1.6	0.4
Editorial/Opinion	1.6	1.1	2.7
Letters	3.3	3.4	3.1
Classified	6.1	1.3	14.2
Miscellaneous	9.0	9.2	8.8

For daily newspapers, about 25% of the coverage was on local news pages and 23% in lifestyle sections. Weekly newspapers placed almost two-thirds of their coverage on community news pages. Local news staff wrote most of the stories (55%) while Canadian Press provided 20% of the material in the dailies and publicity and announcements accounted for 32% of the community newspapers. (See Table 5.)

**TABLE 5**

**Percentage of Items About Disabilities According to the Source, by Type of Newspaper**

Source	All Newspapers (n=605)	Daily Newspapers (n=379)	Community Newspapers (n=226)
Canadian Press	12.7%	20.3%	—%
Associated Press	4.6	7.4	—
Other Press Services	2.1	3.2	0.4
Staff Reporter	55.4	53.0	59.3
Special/Guest Column	1.7	1.6	1.8
Editorial	0.5	0.3	0.9
Letter	4.0	3.2	5.3
Other (Includes Advertisements)	17.0	1.1	32.3

The newspapers also overwhelmingly focussed on physical disabilities and largely neglected learning and developmental questions. In many newspaper stories about persons with disabilities, “the disabled ” are referred to as a single category, even though it is evident that the writer is referring to individuals with physical disabilities. Almost 40% of the newspaper coverage of disability issues dealt with physical disabilities. Of the remaining stories, 12% dealt with psychiatric disabilities and 11% with aging. Because de-institutionalization has an impact in many major urban areas, psychiatric disabilities received more attention in daily papers than in weeklies (16% compared to 5%). (See Table 6.)

Many disability types, such as developmental, visual, hearing, auditory and speech disabilities, received little media coverage. Television, in particular, tended to give a disproportionate attention to children in its coverage of disabilities (almost 66% of all items). This reflects the focus on charity appeals and human interest stories.

A classification of reports on the basis of the event or statement which attracted the media’s attention reinforces the conclusion that human interest stories and charity appeals constitute the most common type of coverage. Although these stories may communicate the essential humanity of a disabled person or even focus on a specific issue, they may tend to individualize issues at the expense of an understanding of their social implications. Charity appeals formed about 20% of the total coverage and an even greater proportion of the stories in the community newspapers (32%). In large measure, these were advertisements or announcements placed by

charitable organizations. A human interest story about an individual or a group constituted about one-quarter of the daily newspaper coverage. The thrust of this analysis was even stronger when the study isolated the primary focus of a media story. Disabled persons were most often mentioned in the daily newspapers while celebrities got the most attention on television. (See Table 7.)

**TABLE 6**

**Percentage of Items According to Type of Disability Discussed, by Type of Newspaper**

Type of Disability	All Newspapers (n=608)	Daily Newspapers (n=383)	Community Newspapers (n=225)
Aging Related	11.2%	11.7%	10.2%
Auditory	2.5	3.4	0.9
Developmental	6.3	6.5	5.8
Invisible	4.3	4.4	4.0
Learning	3.1	3.1	3.1
Physical	38.0	35.0	43.1
Psychiatric	11.7	15.7	4.9
Speech	0.7	1.0	—
Visual	4.6	4.4	4.9
Combination of above	9.0	8.1	10.7
General Reference	7.6	5.5	11.1
Uncodeable	1.2	1.0	1.3

**TABLE 7**

**Percentage of Items About Disabilities According to their Primary Focus, by Type of Medium**

Primary Focus	All Newspapers (n=608)	Daily Newspapers (n=328)	Community Newspapers (n=226)	Global Television (n=20)
Individuals With Disability	24.5%	30.6%	14.2%	—%
Residential Group	3.0	2.9	3.1	—
Work Group	3.6	4.5	2.2	—
Advocacy Group	7.4	8.4	5.8	10.0
Charity Organization	24.7	13.1	44.2	—
Medical Organization	7.1	9.4	3.1	—
Gov. Politicians/Officials	5.2	5.3	4.8	20.0
Practitioner/Care Givers	12.3	12.6	11.9	15.0
Donors/Volunteers	2.6	2.9	2.2	10.0
Family Settings	2.8	3.7	1.3	—
Business/Employers	0.7	1.0	—	—
Other (Includes Celebrities)	6.3	5.8	7.1	45.0



The surprisingly little attention given to government action as the focus for a story on disability proves the lack of attention to policy issues. The study pointed out, however, that although charitable appeals dominate the coverage, especially at the community level, a reasonable and increasing amount of media attention is being given to substantive issues of concern to disabled persons. (See Table 8.)

**TABLE 8**

**Percentage of Issues Mentioned in Items, by Type of Medium**

Issues Mentioned	All Newspapers (n=847)	Daily Newspapers (n=527)	Community Newspapers (n=320)	Global Television (n=15)
Appeal for Charity	20.7%	13.5%	32.5%	20.0%
Housing	5.3	5.9	4.4	6.7
Transportation	2.1	2.5	1.6	20.0
Allowances/Pensions	1.5	2.1	0.6	—
Education	3.4	2.7	4.7	—
Building/Thoroughfare Access	1.5	1.1	2.2	6.7
Group Home/Workshop	1.1	0.4	2.2	—
Employment	3.4	3.6	3.1	—
Recreation	5.5	3.4	9.1	—
Medical Research	5.0	6.8	1.9	—
Legal Rights	3.5	5.5	0.3	6.7
Independent Living	9.4	10.2	8.1	6.7
Advocacy	8.4	9.1	7.2	20.0
Prejudicial Attitudes	3.2	4.2	1.6	20.0
Media Coverage	2.2	2.8	1.3	—
Other/No Code	23.5	26.2	19.3	6.7

With regard to policy and service, the Global Television Network provided the most frequent coverage. Our Committee finds it very significant that newspaper items relating to housing, employment and accessibility of public buildings constituted less than 4% of the coverage devoted to persons with disabilities. At least, however, the daily newspapers paid some attention to public education, self-help, policy and legal rights and gave advocates for disabled persons the greatest amount of coverage. (See Table 9.)

The media also do not tend to allow individuals with disabilities to speak for themselves. Our Committee's study found that authoritative statements on disability-related issues were attributed to officials, medical practitioners and individuals in other professions. While the media mentioned disabled individuals most often (26% of those mentioned), disabled persons rarely appeared in their own right. Most commonly, the newspapers quoted medical and social service practitioners (23% of the items), charity representatives (14%), politicians and officials (8%) and relatives of disabled persons (8%). Television focussed on disabled individuals less frequently

than newspapers but, nonetheless, appears to have given them more opportunities to speak for themselves. Community weeklies mentioned representatives of charities much more often (25% of those mentioned) than either daily newspapers or television. Reflecting its entertainment orientation, television also mentioned celebrities most frequently. (See Table 10.)

**TABLE 9**

**Percentage of Items About Disabilities According to Principal Coverage Generators, by Type of Medium**

Coverage Generators	All Newspapers (n=824)	Daily Newspapers (n=492)	Community Newspapers (n=332)	Global Television (n=25)
Fund-Raising/Charity	20.4%	12.6%	31.9%	12.0%
Medical Research Care	5.6	7.5	2.7	—
Sports	3.0	2.4	3.9	4.0
Entertainment	1.0	1.4	0.3	—
Human Interest	18.6	26.2	7.2	44.0
Policy/Service Issues	12.9	13.6	12.0	20.0
Advocacy Issues	9.1	10.0	7.8	4.0
Educational	14.7	16.3	12.3	16.0
Other	14.7	10.0	21.7	—

**TABLE 10**

**Percentage of Personalities Mentioned in Items About Disabilities, by Type of Spokesperson**

Personalities Mentioned	All Newspapers (n=1126)	Daily Newspapers (n=708)	Community Newspapers (n=415)	Global Television (n=56)
Individual Disabled	26.3%	29.2%	21.3%	12.3%
Family Member	7.5	9.0	4.8	4.6
Disabled Residential Group	4.4	4.0	5.0	3.1
Advocacy Representative	7.3	8.1	6.0	3.1
Charity Rep./Donors	14.2	8.0	24.7	10.8
Official/Politician	8.0	9.8	5.1	13.8
Scientist/Researcher	4.0	5.8	1.4	3.1
Practitioner	17.7	15.7	19.6	7.7
Disabled General Sense	8.3	7.3	9.8	16.9
Other (Includes Celebrities)	2.8	3.1	2.4	16.9

Disabled persons were most often quoted, not as primary authorities, but in describing their reaction to expert and official pronouncements. Daily newspapers tend to rely on experts and community papers on officials. Very few of the disabled persons who were quoted were acting as spokespersons for groups. (See Table 11.)

TABLE 11

Percentage of Most Prominent Authorities, by Type of Newspaper

Most Prominent Authority	All Newspapers (n=609)	Daily Newspapers (n=383)	Community Newspapers (n=226)
Person with Disability	10.2%	14.4%	3.1%
Expert (Non-Disabled)	23.2	27.4	5.9
Official (Non-Disabled)	21.7	15.1	32.7
Other (Non-Disabled)	18.7	18.5	19.0
Official (Disabled)	0.7	0.5	0.9
Journalist	6.4	5.5	8.0
Authority Unclear	8.7	19.0	10.0

### **Recommendation 10**

**News organizations should make every effort to seek out disabled persons and advocacy groups as representative spokespersons in news stories.**

### **Images and Stereotypes**

In looking at the images which the print and electronic media presented of disabled persons, the results reinforced the perceptions which we have noted in Chapter I. For the purposes of our study, the decision about what constituted a negative or a positive image was decided by a panel of persons with disabilities. Their analysis of the media found that there were approximately twice as many negative as positive images presented by the various media. The single exception was television, where the relatively small sample which was analyzed showed that slightly over half of the images were positive, perhaps because of the visual element.

In scanning the materials, our Committee looked for both pejorative and positive patterns. These can be found in three areas:

1. **Images:** from static, pathetic and child-like to dynamic and empowering;
2. **Voice:** from passive and trivializing to active and interactive;

3. **Context:** explanations and background which range from isolated individuals deviating from social norms to contexts which involved social rights and responsibilities.

The most frequent negative images were those suggesting a dependence on charity, which appeared most commonly in the community newspapers and with some frequency in the daily press. All media tended to describe disabled persons as "victims" and to emphasize disability rather than ability and common humanity. Frequently, disabled persons are portrayed in photographs and on television in extremely static poses. Their images tend to be passive rather than as individuals who are engaged in some activity. Some of the symbols of disability, such as "White Cane Week", cause the person to disappear behind the symbol. Furthermore, television clips tend to emphasize the celebrities who dominate proceedings in certain events and to make disabled persons appear as props. Voice-overs and visual images often feature experts speaking on behalf of disabled individuals.

Positive images, however, were not totally absent and appeared in all media. A certain percentage of the media coverage, particularly in television, presented the capabilities of disabled persons. Both television and community newspapers also had a significant number of stories which portrayed disabled persons as part of community life. (See Table 12.)

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation showed two newsclips on 11 March 1988 which portrayed positive symbols. The "Deaf Victory" clip featured deaf students at Gallaudet University demanding the resignation of a new "hearing" president who had been chosen over deaf candidates for the job. The students were portrayed as serious, constructive and active, asking not for handouts, but for support. Their cause was neither trivialized nor exaggerated. Although the report used voice-over to summarize the issue, the majority of the material was in the voices of persons who are deaf.

The balance of positive and negative characterizations differed considerably according to the location of the item in the newspapers. More than half the coverage was positive in sports, entertainment and medical news coverage. Where image was positive, it would focus on capabilities, but, at the same time, there was a tendency to portray a disabled person who was the subject of the story as a super-hero. The positive balance in the lifestyle sections reflects attention to both capabilities and integration.

On the other hand, general news items, whether local, regional, national or international, tended to contain more negative than positive images. Front page news also showed a negative balance of images. Dependence on charity was a prominent feature of local news items, as was emphasis of the "victim theme".

With regard to the different types of disabilities, negative images significantly outweighed positive images in the coverage of mental disabilities. Persons with developmental handicaps were most frequently portrayed as dependent, diseased and restricted. Those with mental illness were most often identified as victims. On the

other hand, people with mental disabilities were most often presented as possessing legal rights. The media portrayed a strong positive balance of images only for individuals with learning disabilities. (See Table 13.)

**TABLE 12**

**Percentage of Items According to Primary Characteristics of Person with Disabilities, by Type of Medium**

Primary Characteristics	All Newspapers (n=605)	Daily Newspapers (n=381)	Community Newspapers (n=224)	Global Television (n=20)
Ordinary/Human	6.4%	11.0%	5.4%	12.1%
Capable	8.9	11.0	5.4	15.2
Active	1.2	1.8	—	15.2
Part of Community	6.3	3.7	10.7	3.0
Equal/Has Rights	5.3	6.8	2.6	9.1
Employable	0.7	0.3	1.3	—
Other Positive Trait	0.3	0.3	0.4	—
Balanced/Neutral	8.3	9.5	6.2	3.0
Depends on Charity	22.0	15.7	32.6	9.1
Child-Like	1.0	0.5	1.8	—
Super-Hero	4.1	3.9	4.5	15.2
Victim	11.2	12.6	8.9	18.2
Pitiful	2.8	3.4	1.8	—
Incapacitated/Restricted	8.7	7.1	12.0	—
Isolated	2.6	2.9	2.2	—
Diseased	7.3	9.2	4.0	—
Fearful/Monstrous	0.3	0.5	—	—
Saintly	0.3	0.5	—	—
Other Negative Trait	2.1	3.4	—	—

Photographs printed in newspapers also convey very powerful images. For example, a photo-headline-article combination from a Toronto community newspaper (*The Mirror*, 21 October 1987) shows a posed shot of a mother and her daughter. It conveys animation and liveliness. The ordinariness and familiarity of a mother hugging her daughter helps to integrate a person into the community rather than to create an image of distance. Another photograph for *Telemiracle* suggests charity-isolated individualization. The person is shown propped against a tree, and the portrayal does not convey a sense of dynamism or power. Disabled persons felt that this image encouraged paternalism and weakened the sense of disabled persons that they could control their own lives. Our study concluded that much of the imaging is unintentional because positive and negative images are often mixed together in the same story. Headlines, for example, might contain negative words

such as “victim” or “escape” while an accompanying photograph might convey a positive image of action.

**TABLE 13**

**Selected Type of Disability, by Percentage of Negative and Positive Characterization**

Type of disability	Negative Characterization	Positive Characterization	(n=)
Aging Related	59%	41%	(122)
Auditory	50	50	(18)
Developmental	61	39	(74)
Invisible	57	47	(37)
Learning	34	66	(29)
Physical	53	47	(415)
Psychiatric	66	34	(125)
Visual	54	46	(50)
Combination	48	52	(102)
General Sense	49	51	(82)

Dealing with the juxtaposition and effect of images demands both sensitivity and judgement. For example, an advertisement for “home care” for the elderly might show androgynous figures in wheelchairs. On its own, the image seems to have no negative impact and, in fact, depicts the positive value of independence. But the fact that the advertisement is placed between obituaries and other advertisements for funeral “pre-planning” associates the home care material to death. The advertisement, therefore, helps to perpetuate negative stereotypes and may also reflect the framework within which some media personnel view the issues of aging and disability.

Our Committee is fully convinced that sensitivity to image, language and location of news items in the press are a necessary part of the process of changing social values. Specific words and pictures both reflect and reinforce important and potentially influential perspectives on the status of disabled persons. As self-help groups become more powerful and effective in their approach to media relations, the language of the media will be more frequently challenged and, when confronted, will evolve.

**Conclusion**

We found that coverage of disabled persons in all media is sporadic, limited and, in some ways, distorted. Both print and electronic media tended to focus on charity appeals and human interest stories rather than on services and policy issues. News items were more likely to be brief, event-oriented reports than thoughtful discussions of policy issues. The stories tended to be about disabled persons rather than by them and, therefore, reflected voices other than their own. Characterizations of disabled

persons and disabilities tended to evoke symbols and language which perpetuated negative stereotypes. Characterizations identified as positive by disabled persons, such as capabilities, ordinariness, independence, rights and integration, tended to be overwhelmed by themes such as dependence on charity.

Although we are aware that an over-emphasis on "victims" might, in many instances, be inappropriate, we would also like to point out that a place for compassion must remain in news stories where, in effect, an individual is "victimized".

Our Committee knows that many organizations of and for persons with disabilities confront a dilemma. In some ways, they are caught between a recognition that an approach to the press which emphasizes the "poor crippled" approach may generate more support for their causes than an "I-don't-need- help" attitude.

At the same time, while the traditional themes tended to predominate, we found evidence of positive nuances and influences which demonstrates increased sensitivity on the part of some of those working in the media.

A more satisfactory portrayal of disabled persons in the Canadian media will only come from a demand that images and language change. The prime movers will be disabled persons themselves.

### ***Recommendation 11***

**In light of these findings, Canadian media organizations should consider the advisability of re-evaluating the nature of their coverage, their use of images and the treatment of persons with disabilities.**





## CHAPTER VI

### Room for Improvement — Policies of Media Organizations

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We do not have set policies. If the story is a legitimate news story, then we cover it.... Minority issues such as feminism seem to go in cycles, and disability issues are in vogue right now.

Television Network Coordinator

Very few media organizations in Canada have policies which directly address the coverage of issues affecting persons with disabilities.

#### The Federal Role

By various means at its disposal, the federal government can do much to improve the quality of the coverage of disabled persons. This can be accomplished both by getting its own house in order in the various federal departments and agencies and by suggesting, by threatening to regulate, or by regulating, the activities of those media organizations which fall under federal jurisdiction.

The Treasury Board sets the rules for the various federal government departments and publishes guidelines in its *Administrative Policy Manual*. Guidelines have already been published or are being prepared in an attempt to deal with problems of sexual stereotyping and others are being prepared to deal with other disadvantaged groups: visible minorities and native people. The various departments are then monitored by Treasury Board and by the relevant branch or department concerned with the adherence to the guidelines.

In terms of advertising, the government has an Advertising Management Group which has set policies for the depiction of various minority groups in government advertising. This policy states that:

Government advertising should be representative to the extent feasible as to sex, age, ancestry and ethnic origin and the presence of handicap or disability, both nationally and on a regional basis where applicable and should portray members of these groups in all aspects of Canadian life as appropriate.

It is obvious that the words "feasible", "where applicable" and "as appropriate" provide enough loopholes that the government does not necessarily have to devise a satisfactory means to portray disabled persons in its advertising and, to date, our Committee has received little evidence that the portrayal of disabled persons is being monitored.

### **Recommendation 12**

**The government should prepare guidelines to apply to internal and public documents, published material, films and advertising that portray persons with disabilities in a positive manner. These should be in place by 1990.**

### **Advertising**

The Canadian Advertising Foundation (CAF), a national organization established by the advertising industry, deals with the social and economic issues which affect the industry. It represents the advertising process as it serves consumers, governments and practitioners; it sets the ethical standards of advertising, and it works for a better understanding of the advertising process. It is supported by advertisers, advertising agencies, the media and related associations. Through the Advertising Standards Council, it also functions as an independent body for the administration of industry standards and codes of ethics. Over the years, this industry has demonstrated considerable success in regulating itself and in developing and maintaining adherence to various voluntary codes and, in particular, the Canadian Code of Advertising Standards. Of codes in place, there are those dealing with advertising directed towards children, sex-role stereotyping, cosmetic products and feminine hygiene products. The Council administers some of these codes for broadcasters within the industry as a condition of their broadcast licence.

During his appearance before the Committee, Mr. Alan Rae, the President of the Canadian Advertising Foundation, pointed out that the industry and the CAF members take pride in the manner in which its codes have evolved to reflect changing needs, the needs of society and significant changes in the industry itself.

The CAF's brochure, *The Canadian Code of Advertising Standards*, states:

As advertising volume increases, so does the responsibility of the industry to the Canadian consumer and the community. The average citizen is now exposed daily to an estimated several hundred advertising messages. It is therefore important that advertising be prepared in ways that respect the taste and values of the public at large. In a society that recognizes the equality of the sexes, advertising should also reflect an awareness of and a sensitivity to this reality and to other human rights issues.

Mr. Rae attributed the responsiveness of the industry to the ability of a self-regulated system to adapt quickly, particularly when the CAF combines the

regulatory with the advisory or "advocacy" functions, which reflect the industry's sensitivity to social issues as they emerge. The advisory division of the CAF provides a conduit for communication between the consumers and the advertising industry as a whole. In this regard, Mr. Rae stated that, from the point of view of the portrayal of disabled people, the advertising industry did not have a position, but that he hoped his appearance before our Committee would provide some ideas for the development of a position which the industry might adopt.

The Canadian Advertising Foundation recognized the fact that, because advertising is seen to have such an important effect on society, virtually every single-issue group wants recognition in advertising. Mr. Rae pointed out that advertisers know how to respond to this pressure, but that the response is quicker and more effective if a business enterprise itself is threatened. He argued that:

...given the right motivation, given an understanding of the need and a recognition it is an important need, the advertising industry, like any other industry, perhaps better than some, will respond.

In response to a request by the Committee, Mr. Rae, on behalf of the Canadian Advertising Foundation, undertook to begin the process of examining the portrayal of disabled persons in the same manner that the previous study of sex-role stereotyping had been carried out by the advertising industry. Despite this assurance, our Committee is still concerned that any code regarding the portrayal of disabled persons not be ignored by the advertising industry and that it accurately reflect the concerns both of the industry and of disabled persons. Since the Canadian Advertising Foundation brought its consultative mechanisms to the Committee's attention, the Committee would like to suggest that the CAF begin its work by undertaking a series of meetings with disabled Canadians and have them play an important role in the consultative process.

A voluntary code governing the portrayal of disabled persons in advertising would be the preferred outcome. At the same time, our Committee wishes to note that the Advertising Standards Council, which administers the CAF codes, is able to enforce the codes through its association. After the complaint procedures have been followed and heard, and if an advertiser refuses to modify an advertisement deemed to be offensive, the media, which unanimously support the codes, will not accept the message in its existing form.

### ***Recommendation 13***

**The Canadian Advertising Foundation, in consultation with disabled persons, should develop enforceable guidelines for the depiction of disabled persons in print and broadcast advertising.**

### **The Place of Broadcast Regulation**

The foremost federal regulatory agency dealing with the broadcast media is the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). The CRTC

has authority to make regulations, set standards and to develop guidelines for the broadcast media that come under its jurisdiction: radio, television, cable companies, pay-television and advertising. This includes programming and specialty services.

The CRTC has already gone through a process to deal with problems of sex-role stereotypes. The course which the CRTC followed in developing these guidelines began in 1979 with the development of an action plan to eliminate discrimination against women and the establishment of a task force to study the issue. In 1982, the CRTC issued a report which made recommendations about the means to improve the portrayal of women in the broadcast media and formed a committee to implement these recommendations. The following year, the Commission required broadcast licensees to submit a report (by September 1984) on their initiatives to reduce sex-role stereotyping. Finally, in 1984, the CRTC issued an amendment to its regulations which prohibited:

Any abusive comment or abusive pictorial representation that, when taken in context, tends or is likely to expose an individual or a group or class of individuals to hatred or contempt on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

While this amendment will cover many instances of abusive comment or representation of disabled persons, it does not address systemic problems of portrayal either of disabled persons or of other minority groups.

The CRTC recognized this omission in the case of women and, in 1986, the Commission released its report on sex-role stereotyping and held public hearings in Vancouver, Montreal and Ottawa. Following this, the CRTC issued a new policy on the stereotyping of women. This policy concluded that self-regulation by the broadcast industry was not entirely successful and would make adherence to sex-role stereotyping guidelines a condition of licence.

A similar course was followed in developing broadcasting policies designed to deal with the portrayal of ethnic and visual minorities. These guidelines are designed to encourage the development of ethnic programs on Canadian broadcast media and to ensure the availability of programs by and for these groups.

Although persons with disabilities are included in the general CRTC regulations prohibiting discrimination, the Commission has not prepared similar guidelines or policies which deal specifically with the stereotyping of disabled persons.

During his appearance before our Committee, Mr. Louis R. Sherman, Vice-chairman of the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission, agreed that "too frequently the portrayal of people with disabilities in television and film is inaccurate and discriminating." He commented that the CRTC "believes positive portrayal in commercials and television programs can further increase the growing perception of disabled Canadians as an emerging force." He also stated that "the time has come, if it is not long overdue, for an examination of this question of stereotyping which equates to discrimination in many cases...."

With regard to regulation, Mr. Sherman believed that broadcasters would modify their programming in response to representations by the general public and disabled persons themselves, particularly if the broadcasters receive positive reinforcement or complaints. He pointed out that the Commission prefers that the broadcasting industry proceed on the basis of voluntary action rather than by making the satisfaction of certain demands a condition of licence. But he did not eliminate the likelihood of regulation if voluntary action were not forthcoming. Our Committee, too, would prefer that a system of self-regulation be devised by the broadcasting industry.

At the same time, we urge the CRTC to begin the process of drawing up guidelines to deal with the coverage and portrayal of disabled persons in the broadcast media of this country. This process should be conducted with the active participation both of Canadian public and private broadcasters as well as a broad spectrum of disabled persons. We feel that guidelines can be drafted and put in place with considerably greater speed than that demonstrated in the CRTC's earlier efforts.

### ***Recommendation 14***

**The CRTC should, by 1990, develop guidelines for radio and television programs to address the stereotyping and portrayal of persons with disabilities. These guidelines should be a condition of licence if no other enforcement mechanism is put in place.**

The regulatory process in Canadian broadcasting has been through an exhaustive review, the last phase of which culminated on 23 June 1988 with the tabling in the House of Commons of a proposed new Broadcasting Act, Bill C-136. This review has involved intensive study by the Caplan-Sauvageau Task Force on Broadcasting Policy, various reports by the Standing Committee on Communications and Culture, and, finally the efforts put into preparing Bill C-136 itself.

Much of the study, particularly that dealing with social stereotyping in the broadcast media, has involved some debate around sections of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. In its examination, the Caplan-Sauvageau report noted that the Charter guarantees a number of fundamental rights including freedom of expression (Section 2(b)) and the right to equality (Section 15), subject to the limits set out in Section 1. The debate has centered around whether the interpretation of basic rights and freedoms should follow that of the press and whether broadcasters should be free to express their points-of-view and broadcast what they choose, subject only to criminal and civil liability, or should the airwaves, as a public asset and in the name of freedom of expression, be required to provide a balanced expression of different viewpoints.

The Standing Committee on Communications and Culture believed that it was important that broadcasting in Canada should respect the equality provisions in Section 15 of the Charter and that the system should respect the needs and interests of both sexes. In one of its recommendations, the Committee incorporated fair

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The Standing Committee on Communications and Culture believed that it was important that broadcasting in Canada should respect the equality provisions in Section 15 of the Charter and that the system should respect the needs and interests of both sexes. In one of its recommendations, the Committee incorporated fair

treatment of different groups in objectives for programming. The Committee recommended that:

...the programming carried by the system should provide a balanced representation of Canadian society, reflecting its multicultural and bilingual realities, its aboriginal peoples and the composition of its population with respect to sex, age, race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion and mental or physical handicaps.

Recommendation 24, *Sixth Report*,  
Standing Committee on  
Communications and Culture

The Standing Committee on Communications and Culture felt that the CRTC has flexibility in overseeing how they are realized. This recommendation also provides for a clear statement of programming goals for the Canadian broadcasting system as a whole.

Our Committee strongly endorses this position. As introduced in the House of Commons, Bill C-136 does contain a statement of programming goals for the Canadian broadcasting system, and proposes to declare them as the broadcasting policy for Canada (Section 3). Among the objectives embodied in the Bill, however, the Committee notes that Section 3(1)(c)(iii) commits the broadcasting system to:

strive, through its operations and programming, to reflect the circumstances and aspirations of Canadian men and women, including the linguistic duality and multicultural nature of Canadian society and the special place of aboriginal peoples within that society.

As it stands, disabled persons remain outside the pale and are not included in the proposed broadcasting policy. Their portrayal in the electronic media remains subject to the good will of individual owners and operators in the broadcast media which will be regulated by the Bill.

The Deputy Minister of Communications, Mr. Alain Gourd, explained to our Committee both the problem and solution:

...Section 3 of the *Broadcasting Act* establishes the objectives of the system, the mandate of the broadcasting system, and then it is up to the CRTC to translate these objectives into specific obligations for the various licensees. Therefore, in terms of improving Section 3 for the handicapped, one could first make a more specific reference to the handicapped people in the mandate of the system and then make certain that this... is applied to both the public and private sectors. Then the CRTC, having a clearer mandate... would perhaps be more inclined — and the licensees would be more inclined — to indeed translate that into specific progress for each of the licensees.

The Minister then pointed out that, because the *Broadcasting Act* is unclear, there was confusion and inconsistency in the CRTC's rulings.

We believe that Bill C-136 should be amended to ensure that the place of disabled persons in the Canadian broadcasting system is equivalent to that of visible



minorities, women, and aboriginal peoples, just as disabled persons are dealt with on the same basis in the *Employment Equity Act*. Other sections of the broadcast policy are discussed in Chapters VII and VIII of this report.

### **Recommendation 15**

**The programming and operations of the Canadian broadcasting system should reflect the circumstances and aspirations of Canadians with disabilities and that this be included in Section 3(1)(c)(iii) of the proposed Broadcasting Act.**

### **Public and Private Broadcasters**

Currently, the major public and private radio and television networks in Canada appear to have no specific policies which apply to the coverage and portrayal of disabled people. The Canadian Association of Broadcasters, which represents private broadcasters in Canada (including CTV) and some public broadcasters (such as TV Ontario), takes its cue from guidelines which set out standards of taste in portrayal and advertising. The CAB has 5 codes: *The Code of Ethics The Broadcast Code for Advertising to Children, The Feminine Hygiene Products Code, The CAB Voluntary Code Regarding Violence in Television Programming, and The CAB Voluntary Standard Regarding Sex-role Portrayal in Television/Radio Programming*. The Code of Ethics states in clause 2, its Human Rights Clause, that programming should contain "no abusive or discriminatory material or comment which is based on matters of... physical or mental handicap."

In addition, the CAB's sex-role portrayal standard — currently a condition of licence imposed by the CRTC and developed in conjunction with the Commission's activities outlined above — contains, explicitly or by implication, clauses relating to disabled persons. The code states that:

Television programming shall reflect a wide range of Canadian life, portraying people of various, ages, backgrounds and appearances actively pursuing a wide range of interests....

Women and men should be portrayed with fair and comparable demographic diversity in age; civil status, race and national origin;... and with respect to the mentally, physically and socially challenged....

Television broadcasters shall increase the visibility and involvement of women in broadcasting, both on and off the air... [and should] include women and men who are disabled.

Our Committee welcomes these statements and, as well, the commitment of the private broadcasting industry in Canada, as expressed by Mr. Bill Roberts, Vice-President (Television) of the CAB, to reflect and provide information on new developments within Canadian society. We were also pleased to receive Mr. Roberts' offer to work out the means of a co-operative effort to address the problems of the

social stigma and frustrations of disabled persons. Member stations of the CAB are to be commended for their undertaking to produce a 13 part series to provide an exploration of the issues surrounding disability in Canada.

During his appearance before our Committee, Mr. Roberts also committed the CAB to begin the development of a broadcast industry standard for the portrayal of disabled persons.

In this regard, the Committee would like to comment on the proposal for a Broadcast Standards Council, through which the CAB proposes to administer these standards among others. The CAB has demonstrated the value of the development of guidelines through consultation with industry groups and public interest groups. This method of proceeding can, in fact, move more expeditiously and effectively than regulation by government agencies. The Committee sees considerable merit in self-regulation by the broadcast industry as long as such a council puts in place mechanisms adequately to enforce the codes' provisions and allows for the participation of the public, particularly those affected by the codes. Our Committee, therefore, urges the expeditious consideration of proposals for such a council. Until the form of this council has been agreed upon, and adequate enforcement provisions included, we feel that the standards of portrayal of persons with disabilities in the broadcast media of Canada should be included as a condition of licence.

Mr. Mackay, Chairman of the CAB's Societal Issues Committee (Television), made an important comment during one of our Committee meetings which serves, in our view, as a very hopeful signpost to the future:

While we on the national level can work to create codes and publicize the issue and pass on to the broadcasters how important it is, where it is going to work is in the individual communities. That is where it is going to happen. I think those of us on the private side have demonstrated fairly concretely that those contacts [between broadcasters and disabled persons] are there and they are going to be expanded and the issue is one that is not going to go away. We will do our part to help you get the message across.

### ***Recommendation 16***

**The Canadian Association of Broadcasters, in consultation with persons with disabilities, should develop guidelines for the depiction of disabled persons, to be administered by a voluntary body, such as a broadcast standards council, with adequate enforcement mechanisms.**

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) also has a policy on standards of taste in advertising which also might be applied to the portrayal of disabled persons. The Corporation recognizes in its program policies that, as a broadcaster, it can influence public attitudes. It notes that:

Stereotypes are generalizations, drawn from perceptions that certain qualities and characteristics are commonly shared by certain groupings in society, reflecting race, nationality, regional or ethnic origin, religion, age, sex, marital status,

physical attributes or occupation. Ill-advised use of stereotypes tends to reinforce prejudices and constitutes an assault on the dignity of the individual.

The CBC's policies caution those responsible for program content that they should be alert to the "cumulative power of the electronic media to shape tastes..." and warn on-air broadcasters to present persons as individuals and "...challenge stereotypes when these may be introduced uncritically by other participants." (CBC Program Policy No. 2, June 27, 1980).

However, this policy does not spell out standards for the portrayal and coverage of persons with disabilities apart from more general views of what the Corporation sees as good taste and standards of taste overall.

When he appeared before our Committee, Mr. Pierre Juneau, President of the CBC, agreed that the Corporation should have guidelines specifically on the subject. In documents filed after his appearance, however, the CBC noted that it fully appreciates the importance of having a respectful level of language that facilitates the presence of disabled people on-air and their integration in society. The Corporation reiterated its intention to develop guidelines for the use of on-air personnel for reports concerning disabled persons similar to those designed to eliminate sexist bias.

During his appearance, Mr. Juneau warned that any guidelines ought not to be too prescriptive and that "there is perhaps an area where people should be left free to choose their own language, provided it is sensitive language".

This concern mirrors a similar wish on the part of our Committee to recognize that the use of language evolves over time. We feel that this evolutionary process should not be interfered with inordinately. Any attempt to guide the use of language should not go to the other extreme, where language concerned with disabled persons becomes antiseptic and where words lose their meaning.

### ***Recommendation 17***

**In consultation with persons with disabilities, the CBC should, by 1990, develop guidelines for its radio and television operations to address the stereotyping and depiction of disabled persons.**

### **The Press and Its Influence on Language**

While most newspapers and journalists follow various style guides, these manuals overall do not have any specific suggestions regarding the portrayal of people with disabilities. There are some deviations from the norm: for example, *The Toronto Star* has a policy not to point out that a person is a member of a visible minority or is disabled unless this fact has some relevance to the story. Mr. Geoffrey Stevens remarked, during his appearance before the Committee, that *The Globe and Mail* stylebook, which is in the process of being revised, will contain a section of suitable language for the discussion of disabilities.

Although journalists' and newspapers' views of language guidelines were discussed earlier, our Committee also received a *Statement of Principles* of Canadian daily newspapers, which was adopted by the Canadian Daily Newspaper Publishers Association in 1977. It seems that these principles, like many such declarations, have not been revised since then to reflect changing social values — particularly the increased visibility of various minorities and persons with disabilities. We hope that the newspapers which subscribe to these principles would consider whether more specific mention of minorities, including disabled persons, is not appropriate at this time.

The Canadian Press (CP) is, since the demise of the United Press Canada, the country's only wire service. It is a large organization with French and English-language services tailored to the print media and to the broadcast industry. It also has a photographic service for the print media. CP is a type of cooperative: subscribers (and there are few news organizations in the country that do not subscribe to it) also contribute to it their day's budget of news and will sometimes, at least in smaller communities where there is no reporter employed by CP, requests for contributions of either pictures or articles from other CP member. Many smaller, low-budget papers depend heavily on CP material to fill their news "holes". But larger papers, *Maclean's* magazine for example, also frequently make use of CP's services.

CP produces a number of handbooks for newspaper reporters and editors, most of whom are aware of — and respect — CP style. The largest of these books is the *CP Stylebook*, a 300 page manual which forms the bible for many news organizations. In its 1983 edition, the last revision, there are only two references to disabled persons and issues. They are included in the book's "Taste" section.

Apparently, a new edition of the stylebook will be distributed in a year or so. In the meantime, there seem to be no current plans to expand on these two notes and CP has not been subject to representations to change this as the result of complaints by disabled persons and their representatives.

However, last year, in a regular bulletin called *Copy Talk*, which is distributed to CP staff members and some subscribers, there was a special note about the reporting of disabilities. It took into account many of the concerns of the organizations of disabled persons. It is a sensitive and timely document:

**Disabilities.** Be accurate, sensitive and clear when describing a person with a disability, handicap, illness or disease.

Mention a disability if it is pertinent. But don't dismiss someone with an unqualified "disabled, handicapped, crippled" or the like. Write "Brown, whose hands are twisted with arthritis...." and perhaps indicate to what extent a person has overcome his disability or how he copes with it: "Morton uses a wheelchair once he leaves his studio."

Be accurate. "Afflicted with" connotes or suggests pain and suffering. It doesn't always apply. Nor does "suffering". People who use wheelchairs are not necessarily

“confined” to them. “Crippled” can be a temporary or permanent condition. People may be “deaf” or “slightly deaf”, “blind” or “have poor eyesight”.

Disabled is a stronger word than “handicapped”. A “patient” is someone under a doctor’s care. “Victim” connotes helplessness.

During his appearance before the Committee, Mr. Sandy Baird, Chairman of the Canadian Daily Newspaper Publishers Association (CDNPA), reported that almost all Canadian newspapers would have received this issue of *Copytalk*. He also stated that his association was prepared to send out a reminder that language usage was a matter of concern and to bring this matter to the attention of the member newspapers. The CDNPA also possesses other avenues of influence which could be used to eliminate barriers for disabled persons. For instance, the editorial division holds seminars for reporters and editors. One of these might be devoted to issues concerning disability. Also, the CDNPA might use its contacts with Canada’s journalism schools to survey the state of journalism education in this regard and to raise the profile of disabled persons in the training of Canadian journalists.

Prior to a revision of the *CP Stylebook*, a reminder would, as mentioned by Mr. Baird, be welcome. Our Committee also hopes that in revising the stylebook, the CDNPA will bring our concern to the attention of the Canadian Press, with a view to incorporating the appropriate use of language when referring to disabilities. We hope that any such changes will be done in consultation with disabled persons.

Our Committee is mindful that the Canadian Daily Newspaper Publishers Association cannot instruct the daily press to follow a particular course of action. At the same time, we note that each member newspaper has its own standards and its own view of acceptable language, which derives, in part, from the paper’s sense of the standards of its particular community. Our Committee urges the CDNPA to encourage newspapers and groups of disabled persons to hold meetings, in each community, and to discuss the question of language use. Undoubtedly, like a meeting held on this subject in Winnipeg on 30 May 1988, these forums will not resolve the issue, but they will provide a means for a thorough airing and may lead to increased understanding of each other’s position.

In addition to its assistance in helping to eliminate some offensive language from the press, our Committee would like to suggest that the Canadian Daily Newspapers Association can provide constructive help in reaching a broader audience. The Administration Division of the CDNPA has a Newspaper in Education program (NIE) which promotes the use of newspapers as an effective learning resource in education. It encourages teachers to use the newspaper to support reading and critical thinking skills in all areas of the curriculum. We urge the CDNPA to consider using its NIE program to advance awareness of the issues concerned with disability in Canada through its teacher workshops, newsletters, educational publications and contacts with the educational organizations.

There are other areas which our Committee thinks the CDNPA might be of assistance. For example, the Association has a research department which has

produced studies on journalists' attitudes toward the police and the judiciary, and attitudes of Canadian managing editors toward journalism education. We feel that a study of attitudes toward disability might prove to be an important first step in shedding more light on the subject. The CDNPA might also use its advertising division to make those who manage newspaper advertising sections and the placement of advertising aware that certain inadvertent images or words in advertising can be offensive. One example is noted in Chapter V, where an advertisement for home care for the elderly was placed next to the obituaries.

Many of these changes could have a greater effect than revised stylebooks on changing press perceptions and coverage of disabled persons and their concerns.

### ***Recommendation 18***

**The Canadian Daily Newspaper Association, the Canadian Press and individual newspapers should consider revising their style manuals to reflect the concern of persons with disabilities. Also, we recommend that the press use its resources to bring these concerns to a wider audience.**

### ***Recommendation 19***

**The Department of the Secretary of State should provide consultative services to media organizations regarding the depiction and portrayal of persons with disabilities.**

## CHAPTER VII

### The Key — Training and Employment

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The more we can encourage [disabled] people [to become] involved in all aspects of our industry... — so they are not noticed any more because of any particular handicap or any disability they have — the more it enhances our awareness of the whole issue.

Mr. Al Mackay,  
Canadian Association of  
Broadcasters

Until disabled people are assimilated into the everyday media, not only for writing columns or doing radio shows on disabilities... but also for doing the fashion column or sports or whatever, [employment and affirmative action] has to be one of the major issues.

Mr. John Southern,  
*The Radio Connection*

These two witnesses who appeared before our Committee highlighted a very critical question: the employment of disabled people in media organizations across the country. This, in turn, presupposes a certain type of training given by journalism schools in preparation for getting a job. Because we have monitored the employment of disabled persons, particularly in the public service and in crown corporations, our Committee felt it would be useful to explore employment and training issues in both the public and private media organizations.

We realize that, with regard to the media, there are two sides to the coin. In the long term, one way to address the issues of concern regarding coverage and stereotyping of disabled persons is through training programs for aspiring journalists and other employees in the media. A second approach would be for the media organizations to train and employ more disabled persons in the various aspects of on-air and behind-the-scenes production. We believe that both these avenues are worthy of some consideration.

## Education

In order to gain an appreciation of the direction that journalism will be taking in the future, we looked at the current training which journalists receive. Nine anglophone and three francophone journalism programs answered questions for our researchers. In the past few years, there has been a proliferation of journalism schools affiliated with universities and community colleges. The best-known anglophone journalism schools are the oldest practitioners of a relatively new academic discipline in Canada: The University of Western Ontario, Carleton University, Ryerson Polytechnic Institute, the University of King's College in Halifax, Concordia University, and the University of Regina. The francophone schools are: *l'Université de Montréal*, *l'Université du Québec à Montréal* and *l'Université Laval*. All these schools and those affiliated with community colleges across the country instruct students in the physical act of gathering news, interpreting information and forming words, sounds and pictures into cohesive news stories. Our future story-tellers are among these students, and their work methods are developing now.

It appears that schools, academic or technical, do not specifically teach how to cover issues relating to persons with a disability. There are no courses which discuss the limited access that disabled people have to the media. There appears to be little or no discussion about the portrayal of disabled people on TV and radio or about the type of stories in which these people are included. This does not mean, however, that the subject is not broached in the classroom, because it might arise in any individual course. Some schools have courses in journalistic methods which, for example, teach future journalists to be sensitive to their sources of information. Others have courses in journalists' rights and obligations, which are designed to make a student aware of human rights and ethics. These courses, theoretically, should keep journalists from writing articles marked with discrimination or tinged with ignorance. In teaching, many schools use "wire copy" to determine which news items are to be covered in the practicums, and should this concern disabled persons, it would be treated with neither more nor less importance than any other story.

Most of the schools had a very small number of students with disabilities in their journalism programs. When these students were admitted, the school administrators had to make special arrangements for them. However, our researchers found an interesting exception. The *CEGEP* in Jonquière, the only college-level institution in Quebec that teaches journalism, has established an extension program. This is a media immersion course established for chief executive officers of businesses, high-level public servants or any other person likely to hold a conference, write press releases, or be interviewed by journalists. It is designed to give people an understanding of how the media function and to relate this to their work-place. Some disabled individuals have taken the course.

Directors of the schools of journalism generally demonstrated the same contradictory views exhibited by their *confrères* in the working press. Most agreed that media organizations are very conservative institutions. They also pointed out that the very nature of the media discourages people from approaching the press, and



most people do not know how to go about it. Most directors also agreed that journalism, as a profession, is relatively inaccessible, in a physical sense, to many people with disabilities. In large part, these barriers reflect the facilities found in newsrooms and in television and radio studios, which are not constructed or renovated with people with disabilities in mind.

The directors argued that, although teaching how to write about disabled persons is not formally a part of their curricula, the schools constantly fought against *clichés* and tried to teach sensitivity. There was also a general consensus that it is important for reporters to avoid language which might be offensive. Words can convey messages which dictionaries fail to mention. Others thought that coverage of disabled persons has been broader than that of other groups: visible minorities, native people and women. However, they warned that disabilities will continue to be portrayed as the exception rather than the norm. "If it wasn't a novelty, it might not get in the paper."

Not surprisingly, students in the various schools of journalism and mass communication expressed the same mixed attitudes. However, those who were studying in technical programs to become recording engineers, camera operators or editors of audio and visual material had vague and negative impressions. They felt that disabled persons received too much coverage and that media over-kill in the treatment of Rick Hansen and Steve Fonyo had led to boredom. On the whole, students in the journalism programs showed sympathy but, at the same time, many believed that disabled persons get more frequent coverage than other minorities. One student commented that:

I would like to see more disabled people incorporated into [other] stories.... There must be more to them than a disability.

I have a feeling that stories on disabled people are specially edited. When disabled kids learn to ski, for instance, they fail and are frustrated just like anyone else. But this is never shown. The pictures are... therefore, unrealistic.

Sometimes... disabled persons are singled out for coverage because of their saleability. The media has to learn to pull back and assess more carefully. The exploitation may be unintentional, but it is there.

### ***Recommendation 20***

**a. The government should establish scholarship and training programs for individuals with disabilities who wish to pursue careers in communications.**

**b. Funding should be given to groups of individuals with disabilities to set up vehicles to provide this training: radio and television programs, magazines, films, documentaries and videos.**

**c. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the National Film Board should establish integrated training programs for persons with disabilities.**

d. Private broadcasters and newspaper publishers should be encouraged to develop training programs for persons with disabilities.

e. Journalism schools should be encouraged to establish contacts with groups of persons with disabilities and to encourage individuals with disabilities to enroll in their programs.

## Employment

Approximately three-quarters of the 40 news organizations surveyed felt that the current coverage of disabled persons was adequate. Almost the same percentage believed that having a disabled person working in a newsroom would make journalists more sensitive to disabled persons.

During his appearance before our Committee, Mr. John Foy, President of the Canadian Daily Newspapers Association, stated that, although precise data regarding the employment of disabled persons in the newspaper industry are not available, he could affirm that:

there are handicapped people who are employed, some in jobs that are quite menial but that is because of the experience of that individual. If a person is qualified... then there is no barrier to positions within our organization.

In this regard, our Committee awaits with interest the release of the figures on the employment of disabled persons under the *Employment Equity Act*. This will reveal the degree to which crown corporations and federally-regulated industries (with 100 or more employees) employ disabled persons. For the first time, information will be available on the major radio and television networks and stations, as well as other media organizations which fall under the Act. The extent to which corrective measures should be taken can then be gauged. The requirement to report annually will eventually provide a bench-mark which will assist in determining areas where systemic barriers exist. It will not, however, guarantee the employment of disabled persons in specific operations within any media organization.

We are aware that there are other examples to follow. In the United Kingdom, under the *Disabled Persons (Employment) Acts* of 1944 and 1958, the British Broadcasting Corporation is required to employ disabled persons to the extent of at least 3% of its total staff. If the BBC fails to meet its quota, it must obtain a special permit to fill a vacant position. Furthermore, the British Manpower Services Commission has published a *Code of Good Practice on the Employment of Disabled People* with the objective of increasing employment opportunity for disabled persons using voluntary means. In addition, the *Code* gives practical guidance on recruiting and employing disabled persons, together with details of advisory services and financial assistance available to employers.

Regarding the current Canadian situation, preliminary figures presented to our Committee, show that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation does not employ very many persons with disabilities. After its appearance before our Committee, the CBC

tabled figures which listed 129 employees who had identified themselves as disabled. This represents only 1.2% of the Corporation's staff. The current target for crown corporations is 1.8% and will rise to 2.4% by 1990.

Our Committee would also like to put on record our displeasure with the tendency by government bodies to inflate the figures for the employment of individuals with disabilities. During his appearance, the President of the CBC informed our Committee that the Corporation employed 158 persons with disabilities. This figure is 22% higher than the figures tabled later by the Corporation. Mr. Juneau also stated that the CBC's target was to increase this number by 36% during the following three years. This will not bring the figures up to the government's target for crown corporations for 1990. Given that government departments have a target of 2.1% for 31 March 1988, and 3.3% by 1991, the Corporation, which should be setting an example for private broadcasters, is not fully meeting the test of employment equity.

This employment inequity should not be present since the CBC has a policy on equal opportunities which reflects the principles of the *Human Rights Act* and which prohibits discrimination on the grounds of physical disability. The Corporation currently has a coordinator of employment equity, whose job is to identify and remove systemic barriers and to develop programs to better reflect the representation of women, disabled persons, aboriginal people and visible minorities. A corporate policy on equal opportunity and employment equity has been drafted. In this regard, the CBC has undertaken to make managers aware of the skills of disabled persons and the aids available to assist them in their jobs.

Our Committee has received correspondence from Mr. Peter Reynolds, Executive Producer of *The Radio Connection*, a weekly public affairs radio program produced by and for persons with disabilities, which casts serious doubts on the CBC's willingness to move both on the question of employment and of programming for persons with disabilities. In April 1988, the producers of *The Radio Connection* contacted Mr. Pierre Juneau to offer assistance in training broadcasters and technicians with disabilities. *The Radio Connection*, they felt, could both serve as a training vehicle and provide a program which the CBC could use on its English-language network. They offered the program free to CBC Radio.

After a considerable delay, Mr. Juneau finally responded by turning down the offer to use *The Radio Connection* as a source of programs. Mr. Reynolds argued that the CBC could take over *The Radio Connection* and use it as a step in implementing an employment equity policy. He pointed out that "by exposing disabled persons to the CBC and the CBC to disabled persons in a real work situation, you would begin to break down the non-physical barriers." This is evidently sensible and in view of the CBC's employment record, our Committee cannot understand the CBC's failure to accept the offer. Mr. Juneau's actions are particularly incomprehensible since he recently stated that CBC Radio had to repeat programs as a cost-cutting measure.

With the construction of the Toronto Broadcast Centre, the Corporation has an opportunity to improve its facilities. During his appearance, Mr. Juneau made much

of the CBC's commitment to remove physical barriers in existing CBC facilities. (Our Committee has noted that, in the past, such renovations and new buildings are most successful if disabled persons are consulted during the planning process.) In conjunction with the Toronto Broadcast Centre, *The Radio Connection* has offered to assist the CBC to install studios and work stations to meet the needs of disabled broadcasters. This studio could be equipped with the newest assistive devices to permit the broadcasters to do their jobs. This could be the first of its kind in the world and would bring credit to the CBC.

Of the other government agencies which appeared, the figures presented to our Committee by the National Film Board indicate that of the 702 full-time employees, 12 have identified themselves as disabled. Therefore, its employment rate for disabled persons is only 0.02%. The Board, however, has established an objective of 3.3% by 1996. The Board has also promised to develop specific training programs for disabled persons and to designate specific positions for them.

In the absence of data for non-governmental bodies, we have had to rely on verbal testimony regarding the employment of disabled persons in the media. When he appeared before our Committee, Mr. John Southern, a broadcaster with *The Radio Connection*, pointed out that there is a very small number of disabled persons employed in radio and television and, of these, only a handful appear on-air. He also noted that he had been told that, as a blind person, it would be a problem for a radio to employ him, even though he had training in radio journalism. This appears to be a rather common situation. The group that established the program on CIUT (the FM Station of the University of Toronto) in Toronto, *The Radio Connection*, had considerable difficulty in getting the money to acquire the necessary tape and equipment in order to train disabled persons. Mr. Southern felt that the media could make greater strides in this area and urged our Committee to recommend affirmative action and training programs. He also made a strong case for action when he asked:

How long have we got to keep on educating? It is an excuse for not employing disabled people. Oh, we do not know about: we do not know the kinds of equipment they need. Dammit — ask!

As a journalist, Mr. Pierre Vennat described the difficulties which he had in entering the field as a reporter, and commented that management "would never have hired me had they known I was hard of hearing at that time...."

Insofar as other areas of the media are concerned, it is also clear that the advertising industry does not have a pool of account executives who are either disabled or have some experience in dealing with disabilities. The subsidiary organizations for modelling and casting have not developed a talent base which would allow them to put forward commercials which depict disabled persons as part of the society.

When the Canadian Association of Broadcasters appeared before the Committee, Mr. Bill Roberts, Senior Vice-President (Television), pointed out that

the CAB has, in effect, a guideline which governs the employment of disabled persons. According to Mr. Roberts, it states that "television broadcasters shall increase the visibility and involvement of women in broadcasting, both on and off the air" and "should include women and men who are disabled".

In addition, Mr. Roberts pointed out that the CAB has developed an employment equity package outlining the steps which are required to meet the reporting provisions of the *Employment Equity Act*. Mr. Roberts explained that this reflects the private broadcasters' efforts to eliminate direct and indirect barriers in the workplace for disabled persons among other groups. We await the results of these reports with considerable interest. Mr. Al Mackay, Chairman of the CAB Societal Issues Committee (Television), provided certain examples of the employment of disabled persons by various CAB members and called attention to the selection, by the Saskatchewan Association for the Mentally Retarded, of STV in Saskatchewan as employer of the year.

Several witnesses representing the media talked about the difficulties of employing disabled persons. In terms of barriers, Mr. Vennat also pointed out that the media are slow to practice what they preach in terms of affirmative action and employment equity. Furthermore, he commented that disabled individuals are not given access to educational facilities where they could acquire the skills they need. He also said that disabled persons would have difficulty on the job due to the physical inaccessibility of newsrooms and broadcast studios. Mr. Mackay noted that the employment of disabled persons in the television industry, such as for example, in the news room, involves a considerable degree of accommodation. Mr. François Macerola of the National Film Board also discussed training and indicated that getting practical training in film-making was more difficult. He explained that one of the NFB's objectives was to explore the possibility of working together with organizations specializing in training people in communications, film and broadcasting to make these programs more accessible to disabled persons.

While fully aware of the difficulties, the private sector media acknowledged its responsibilities regarding the employment of people with disabilities. Mr. Sandy Baird, President of the Canadian Daily Newspapers Association, told the committee that:

We... are in a business that is not quite a business. It has a social responsibility. I think all of us are aware of our social responsibility to set an example for the communities in which we operate in terms of such things as employment of visible minorities, people with disabilities and people who are disadvantaged.

In light of this comment, it is shocking and surprising that Mr. Mackay of the CAB noted that, in his seventeen years of experience in the media, he never encountered anyone with a visual or hearing disability seeking employment, for example, as a news presenter. Mr. Geoffrey Stevens, managing editor of *The Globe and Mail* commented that his newspaper did not receive many applications from disabled people.

Despite these statements to our Committee, we are aware that the privately-owned media have not always responded to concrete suggestions which could provide training and employment for disabled persons. The producers of *The Radio Connection* approached the CKO Radio Network with a suggestion that their program might be of interest to CKO stations. There was no follow-up beyond an initially favourable response. The Canadian Press, which operates Broadcast News, both declined an offer to test *The Radio Connection* and did not follow-up on suggestions to produce a weekly column on disability issues for its member newspapers.

The privately-owned broadcast media can be required to increase the employment of individuals with disabilities. For example, in its Sixth Report, the Standing Committee on Communications and Culture discussed the question of the employment of minorities in the federally-regulated broadcasting field. The Committee's Report included the following recommendation:

That the *Broadcasting Act* should include provisions designed to increase significantly the number of women and minority groups at all levels within broadcasting undertakings, until such time as equitable representation is achieved. These provisions should be based on the *Employment Equity Act*. In addition, they should apply to all licencees, though taking into consideration the nature of their operations, and involve consideration of employment practices affecting both salaried and contract workers. The CRTC should be empowered to enforce these provisions, and in particular to implement employment equity through conditions of licence.

Although our Committee would prefer that that regulation come into effect only if voluntary action does not accomplish these ends, we are making this recommendation a part of our own Report. When the Minister of Communications appeared before us, she stated her strong commitment to the principles of employment equity both on her personal behalf and on behalf of her department. We hope this recommendation will receive consideration in any changes to broadcasting legislation which currently makes no mention of employment equity in the federally-regulated broadcasting industry.

This Committee is concerned that undue physical barriers to employment should be removed and recommends that if voluntary action is not taken soon, the CRTC should be empowered to make the removal of these barriers a condition of licence.

### ***Recommendation 21***

**Wherever possible, the government should enforce, and private media organizations should be encouraged to develop, affirmative action hiring of persons with disabilities. This includes making physical accessibility to premises and employment equity conditions of broadcast licences to be enforced by the CRTC.**

Our Committee is aware of efforts to improve the situation. Mr. François Macerola highlighted a crucial aspect of the employment issue when he told our

Committee: "I think that what we have to do is simply [to] change attitudes inside the organization so that people feel that senior management really is committed to a program that will enable the disabled to take their rightful place." When individual witnesses from the various media organizations appeared, they all cited several examples of individuals who were disabled and who worked for the organization or for its component members. We look forward to the time when this handful of individuals has greatly increased in number.

## Improving Access I

We know how important it is to have access to information at all levels. How important is it to have access to education, to work and to the services of government? It is to be able to have an equal opportunity to participate in the life of the community. It is to be able to have an equal opportunity to participate in the life of the community. It is to be able to have an equal opportunity to participate in the life of the community. It is to be able to have an equal opportunity to participate in the life of the community.

If persons with disabilities are truly to become integrated and to function independently in society, they must have the same access to information as other people. If there is a single issue which has affected the lives of visually impaired and hearing impaired Canadians of all ages, it is the issue of access. Our Committee has had the privilege of drawing attention to our attention in different ways. When Statistics Canada released the results of its Health and Activity Limitation Survey, the potential magnitude of the problem in human terms became extremely evident: 971,830 Canadians reported hearing impairments and 552,580 Canadians classified themselves as visually impaired.

Witness after witness who appeared before our Committee emphasized the importance of access. To name a few: Mr. André Massé of Les Magnétos, Inc., John Westland of the Canadian Coordinating Council on Disability, James Rault of the Canadian Association of the Deaf, and Dr. Charles Hertz of the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. In addition to this, we heard from those who were in a position to provide or to improve access to the media of communication, including the Department of Communications, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission and the Canadian Association of Broadcasters.

Accessibility is now supported by law. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees this in section 32(1). Section 34(1) provides for judicial





## CHAPTER VIII

### Improving Access I

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...We know how important print is in our society at all levels, how important print is to have access to education, to work and to all kinds of information coming from the government and elsewhere, to have access to consumer information or to be able to have an input into political and social decisions, to have access to an interesting form of recreation, which is reading....

André Hamel  
*La Magnétothèque*

If persons with disabilities are truly to become integrated and to function independently in society, they must have the same access to information as other people. If there is a single issue which has captured the attention of visually-impaired and hearing-impaired Canadians in the past year, it is the issue of access. Our Committee has had the problem brought forcefully to our attention in different ways. When Statistics Canada released the results of its Health and Activity Limitation Survey, the potential magnitude of the problem in human terms became extremely evident: 973,830 Canadians reported hearing impairments and 552,580 Canadians classified themselves as visually-impaired.<sup>1</sup>

Witness after witness who appeared before our Committee emphasized the importance of access. To name a few: Mr. André Hamel of *La Magnétothèque*, Joan Westland of the Canadian Coordinating Council on Deafness, James Roots of the Canadian Association of the Deaf, and Dr. Euclide Herie of the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. In addition to this, we heard from those who were in a position to provide or to improve access to the means of communication, including the Department of Communications, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission and the Canadian Association of Broadcasters.

Accessibility is now supported by law. The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* guarantees this in section 15(1). Section 24(1) provides for judicial

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<sup>1</sup> This post-censal survey carried out in 1986-1987 did not classify individuals as disabled if they used an assistive device that completely eliminated the limitation, i.e. hearing aids or eyeglasses.

remedies. Increasingly, public buildings and services will have to conform to accessibility requirements. In addition, facilities and services must not only be accessible, but they should be known to be accessible to everyone.

Our Committee is also fully aware that lack of access to communications has ramifications far beyond the capacity to understand television or to read a book for leisure. As the Canadian Association of the Deaf pointed out, a federal government survey released in the summer of 1987 showed that six and a half million Canadians are functionally illiterate. This statistic shocked many people — but not those who are deaf or who work with them. Illiteracy is extremely prevalent among deaf people: most have the reading and writing skills of Grade Five students. Only 5% of deaf people graduate from high school but most of these get a leaving certificate and not a graduation diploma. Such a state of affairs exacerbates the communications barriers faced by Canadians with disabilities. How do people who are unable to read or write adequately fare at the hands of society?

Our Committee strongly recommends that the federal government take action to deal with the problem of illiteracy, particularly inasmuch as this will also assist people with disabilities and improve their access to information.

## **Library Services**

In its publication, *The Accessible Canadian Library: A Planning Workbook for a Barrier Free Environment*, the National Library sets out two principles with regard to library services which our Committee fully endorses:

1. A disabled person has the right to be treated with the same dignity, consistency and consideration as any member of the general public who receives library service.
2. The onus shall be on library administrators and personnel to show why any limitation to service exists, rather than on the patron to prove his/her right to a certain service.

Our Committee is concerned that action be taken to make barrier-free access the norm, not just to buildings but to card catalogues, microfiche readers and on-line catalogues, reference services, collections, special format materials in proportion to the total potential user population.

There are several major services in Canada which produce and maintain libraries of material produced in alternate formats for those unable to use printed material in the regular format. The purposes and clients of these institutions cover a broad spectrum. The services try to meet the needs of the education system, to help maintain employment and to provide material for recreation. Many of them lend their books over a wide geographic area within a province or across the country itself. The Charles Crane Memorial Library, housed at the University of British Columbia, contains 40,000 recorded, brailled and large print book titles. The Canadian National Institute for the Blind maintains a recreational collection of 13,000 book titles and 45 magazines in alternate format as well as one of the largest special

format music libraries in the world. *La Magnétothèque*, in Montreal, maintains a collection of 4,600 titles for students and those who require educational or specialized material to support them in their occupations. The *Institut Nazareth et Louis Braille*, in Montreal, is the largest French braille producer in Canada and has created a recreational collection of 12,000 circulating titles of taped and brailled books. The Montreal Association for the Blind loans brailled recreational titles, textbooks and magazines. Ontario has established an Audio Library Services which records books under contract with the provincial Ministry of Colleges and Universities. British Columbia has established an Audio Book Program in the Library Services Branch of the Ministry of Tourism, Recreation and Culture to distribute talking books directly or through inter-library loans at public libraries. It also operates a direct mail book service to remote areas. Most provinces also have established provincial resource centres for the visually impaired which produce braille elementary and secondary school textbooks. The newest service is the University of Moncton's French Braille Project which began production in 1987 and is funded only until the end of 1988. It has begun to produce French braille books which were formerly accessible in New Brunswick through Quebec agencies.

Across the country, most regional or main urban libraries provide some facilities to persons with print handicaps. Most of the large libraries have established some type of special collection which includes talking books, or large print books, but not all maintain a collection of brailled material. These special collections tend to be small with fewer than 100 titles. Many public libraries, particularly in rural areas, do not possess departments or coordinators of services to disabled people; many also provide no services to visually-impaired clients (home delivery, reader advisers, special catalogues or interlibrary loans). The range of assistive devices is also very inconsistent with many libraries not providing all such aids (talking book machines, Kurzweil reading machines, VTEK Magnifiers, Perkins Brailers, large-print typewriters or talking calculators). The majority of the largest of the public and regional libraries do not appear to have all of these devices which increase the accessibility of their collections to visually-impaired clients.

Our Committee urges that as part of any plan for a barrier-free library, at least one staff member should be responsible for acquiring and maintaining information on assistive devices and for making recommendations for obtaining new equipment. In addition to those mentioned above, libraries should be accessible to hearing-impaired persons through the installation of TDD's (telecommunications devices for the deaf) to enable deaf or hearing-impaired persons to communicate with the library. Closed captioning must be prepared for audiovisual presentations.

In addition to libraries, there are other facilities to serve print-handicapped students. Universities provide a certain service, but again these are neither consistent in terms of technical aids nor in the establishment and maintenance of a centre for disabled students on each campus. According to a study presented to our Committee by the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, in at least four provinces, not a single university has any such centre. Library services for print handicapped students at the primary and secondary school levels are also limited and inconsistent due to the restrictions on funding for 'special needs' students. This is a reflection of the fact

that while boards of education across Canada have committed themselves to providing education to students with disabilities, the cost of education for this group is particularly high. For blind and visually-impaired students, most textbook materials are available through inter-library loans from the producing agencies or Departments of Education can contract to have texts transcribed into braille or onto tape.

Our Committee has found that there are considerable difficulties for persons with visual impairments gaining access to government documents and publications. In response to the *Obstacles* report, Treasury Board recommended that all federal departments and agencies set aside up to 1% of their information and publicity budgets for the provision of their pamphlets and publications in special forms such as braille, large print or cassette. These are to be available on demand, on the same terms as print copies are provided. Some documents, such as the Audio Tax Guide, are routinely transcribed as are other materials known to be of direct interest to persons with visual impairments. Unfortunately, the Treasury Board does not appear to have a mechanism in place to ensure that this requirement is met, nor has it provided information on the departments' use of this budget. It is not unreasonable to expect that certain government publications, such as job listings, tenders, etc. should be available in large print and audio format, *at the same time* that they are released in standard print. All forms such as those to apply for unemployment insurance and pensions should be available in alternate format. Also, even when such material is available, there have been difficulties tracing documents which are produced in alternate format because it appears that departments and agencies are not following the requirement to deposit copies in the National Library. Nor is there a central catalogue of all such materials which gives locations of specific items.

The federal government, through its publishing operations in the Department of Supply and Services, should establish a centre for the centralized production of federal government documents and publications in alternate formats. This centralized production would ensure that adequate standards are applied and would also make a central reference service and control of supply much easier to monitor.

The National Library of Canada, in accordance with recommendation 60 in the *Obstacles* report, is currently charged with the coordination of reading services for the print-handicapped. In 1982, the National Library established CANUC:H (Canadian Union Catalogue of Library Materials for the Handicapped) and CANWIP (Canadian Works in Progress). Both these systems are on the bibliographic database system DOBIS which is available to subscribers across the country. They contain the records of special media materials held by the other agencies serving the print-handicapped and those materials which are currently in production. The CANUC:H listings can also be purchased on microfiche for libraries which do not subscribe to DOBIS. As a result, producers make informed decisions regarding the production of titles, and libraries are able to locate titles for their clients. These systems, therefore, reduce the duplication of production.

The National Library has access to the listings of holdings of the Library of Congress, National Library Services for the Blind and Physically Handicapped in

Washington. These are available through the inter-library loan network and will provide information on alternate format materials in the United States. There are plans to increase resource sharing between the two countries.

The National Library has also published a booklet, *Reasonable Access*, which serves as a guide to federal government departments in making their publications accessible to print-handicapped persons. It gives certain steps to ensure that access is possible. It appears, however, that many government departments and agencies have neither taken advantage of this useful service, nor do they automatically ensure that their publications are either deposited with or listed in the catalogue (CANUC:H) of the Library.

The United States Library of Congress, National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, established in 1931, could provide a model for the future expansion and coordination of the currently-existing Canadian services for persons with print-handicaps. This service, through 56 regional and 103 sub-regional libraries, forms a network which provides free library services including braille and audio cassettes to American citizens. The National Library Service has a major production facility in Washington and also contracts with various tape and braille producers annually and distributes this alternate format material through the library network.

The establishment of such a network of designated regional libraries across Canada and the capacity to contract for services and the production of alternate format material might considerably enhance the quality of service, particularly that available through large public libraries. It might also set standards for the quality of the talking book collections and could set firm policies with regard to abridgment of books when they are recorded.

Commercial suppliers of talking books, particularly novels which are an increasingly popular form of entertainment for the general public, want to abridge the material to sell more tapes since it is expensive to record an entire novel or textbook. Currently, the purchasers of unabridged texts tend to be public libraries since the cost (approximately \$80 per book) tends to be prohibitive for individuals. Abridged books sell at about \$12. Commercial publishers tend to record either books whose copyright has expired or current best-sellers which can be easily marketed. This leaves a huge gap in the production of talking books which must be filled by other means. In the United States, the Library of Congress finances, produces and distributes talking books which help to fill this void. No similar federal program exists in Canada.

Furthermore, the National Library could establish and maintain technically-advanced, but inexpensive, solutions to provide access to information. One of these, suggested by the CNIB during its appearance before our Committee, was access to audio data bases by touch tone telephones. If the Library were made a depository institution for alternate format material produced by the government or if government departments were required to submit catalogue information and locations for alternate format material, the Library could establish a special

telephone reference service which could provide information about obtaining government material in alternate format.

### ***Recommendation 22***

The government should, by 1989, increase the amount of alternate format material available to print-handicapped Canadians, by requiring the appropriate departments to:

- a. Provide funds for alternative format publications. These funds should be included in regular assistance programs to publishers. The first objective should be alternate format material for education and for employment.
- b. Establish an adequately-equipped and staffed system of regional and sub-regional libraries of alternate format material under the auspices of the National Library of Canada.
- c. Ensure that schools of library science develop a core curriculum course on library services for persons with disabilities.
- d. Encourage all universities to establish a centre for students with disabilities.
- e. Facilitate the exchange of alternate format materials between Canada and other countries.

### ***Recommendation 23***

The government should regularly promote, monitor and begin to audit the efforts of government departments, agencies and crown corporations to make their publications available in alternate format. The government should systematically pay particular attention to ensuring:

- a. Within one year, that all advertising, particularly that for employment, be released in alternate format.
- b. Within one year, the simultaneous release of all publications and advertisements in printed and alternate format versions.
- c. The immediate deposit and cataloguing of all alternate format government publications by the National Library of Canada.
- d. The establishment by the end of 1989 of an audio database system for alternate format materials which is accessible to the public.
- e. A central facility in the Department of Supply and Services to produce alternate format material.

## Radio Reading Services

A survey, recently conducted by the Canadian National Institute for the Blind confirmed that radio constitutes perhaps the most important means for blind or print-handicapped persons to gain access to information. In this survey, 90% of the visually-impaired respondents indicated that they listened to the radio every day.

Radio services in the United States have proven to be an effective means of distributing a wide range of newspapers and periodicals to individuals who are blind or otherwise print-handicapped. In other words, these provide an accessibility of materials available on a news stand which compares to that of a sighted person.

Broadcast reading services in the U.S. allow the listener to choose his or her source of information — whether it be from *The National Enquirer* or *The Wall Street Journal*. As Mr. André Hamel described the radio reading service:

It simply brings to a visually-impaired person what is in the print media.... It is not competing with the commercial radio. For example, let us take sports news. We try to concentrate on feature articles, long articles about certain players, certain events and these things are not reported as such on commercial radio or television....

If you buy a newspaper, it is because you have a need for something more than just the radio and television. If we listen to a radio reading service, it is because we have the same need for more information, or more structured information... than we would be able to hear on both radio and television.

There have been efforts to establish a national service in Canada, but to date, these have been sporadic and not successful. *Obstacles*, the report of the Special Committee on the Disabled and Handicapped, contained a recommendation (52) that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation produce radio programs for visually and print-handicapped persons. A reading service was established in Oakville which ran from 1976 to 1984 when it ceased operations due to a lack of funding. In Montreal, *La Magnétothèque*, a non-profit organization, started broadcasting a reading service in 1985 and currently prepares 4 hours of programming every morning which is then replayed throughout the day. The service is on the air 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. This service is now used by an estimated 25,000 people throughout the province of Quebec and is funded through provincial subsidies and fundraising. This service allows a listener to request a particular story to be read and the reading service will try to accommodate him or her. The service does not duplicate newscasts from television or radio but concentrates on feature articles and analytical content such as editorials.

Our Committee heard impressive testimony from Mr. André Hamel, the founder of *La Magnétothèque*, who urged the establishment of a national service. He pointed out that a national service would be used not only by visually-impaired persons but also by elderly persons, by persons with other disabilities which prevent them from reading, and by persons who have never learned to read. When a national service is established, additional local programming can be added without a great increase in cost. The initial problem he isolated was:

To make sure there is one well-equipped, well-organized radio reading service that is the basis for all intervention, for all participation of other locations in one province or in the entire country.

Our Committee wishes to reiterate the special importance of the local segment of a national radio reading service to those for whom such a service is designed. This local news segment will provide information of immediate use and information to enable a disabled person to gain access to local events and facilities. It must not be overlooked.

When she appeared before our Committee, the Minister of Communications indicated the willingness of the Department of Communications to undertake to fund the establishment of a national broadcast reading service. When the Minister introduced Bill C-136, the 1988 Broadcasting Bill, she simultaneously announced that the government would provide a start-up grant of \$120,000 followed by a five-year annual operating grant of \$100,000 to establish a satellite-to-cable distribution of a national reading service across the country in both languages and to get an English-language service to parallel *La Magnétothèque*.

Our Committee welcomes this commitment, but at the same time, we note that this national broadcast reading service will depend on the generous provision of distribution facilities by cable and satellite operators to reach across the country. Our Committee wishes to encourage these operators to follow the example of the cable industry in Quebec. In order to facilitate access of disabled persons to *La Magnétothèque's* services, the cable companies waived the payment of the installation and monthly fees for a cable outlet to allow a visually-impaired person access to the radio reading service. In the United States, the cost of distributing the service across the country has been considerably reduced because the satellite owners have waived transponder fees and the telephone companies provide lines at no charge.

In the United States, most of the radio reading services use the Subsidiary Communication Multiplex Operation (SCMO) channel for broadcasting. This allows the radio reading service to be piggybacked onto an FM subcarrier. At the same time, our Committee notes that this method of transmitting a reading service requires a special decoder that costs approximately \$45 to pick up the broadcast. In a country like Canada, which is almost completely cabled, our Committee believes that a means of transmitting the national reading service should be used which will not require the expense of a decoder. We are also aware, however, that in certain remote areas, the SCMO method and a decoder might be required and where this is the case, the decoder should be available at no cost to the user.

Our Committee heard evidence on the development of descriptive video. This works on much the same principle as closed captioning for persons with hearing impairments. It is designed to allow a visually-impaired person to gain access to regular television programming and is based on a technique developed for use in the theatre. During special performances of plays and operas, visually-impaired persons can be provided with receivers and ear phones which are designed to pick up short-



range FM frequencies. Using a similar system to that used in parliamentary committee meetings for simultaneous translation, a visually-impaired person is given a verbal account of the non-spoken or non-auditory parts of a theatre performance. This provides a greater understanding of the action on stage.

When this principle is applied to television, a precise description gives information which the viewer misses as the result of a visual impairment. In the United States, this has been developed for use with either a stereo television or a device which costs under \$100. Developed by Dr. Margaret Pfansteihl, it is currently being tested by the Public Broadcasting System in the United States. *La Magnétothèque* indicated a desire to develop a description service for Canadian television. With a view to adopting this system in Canada, our Committee urges an investigation of this system and further research by the appropriate government department.

### **Recommendation 24**

**The government should, for the next five years, guarantee adequate funding and licencing for a national broadcast reading service with a significant amount of local programming. This broadcast reading service, in both official languages, should be made available by satellite to various cable companies. They should transmit it on an unused cable frequency such as an alphanumeric channel which uses music as background. In order to receive this service, individuals with print handicaps should not incur extra costs for the additional cable outlets which may be required. We also recommend investigations regarding the adaptation of descriptive video to Canadian broadcasting.**

### **Copyright**

A potential roadblock to the successful expansion of the library system for the print-handicapped and to the establishment of a national radio reading service could be the difficulty of securing permission to reproduce printed material for use in an alternate media. It appears that up to the present, this has not been a difficulty faced by *La Magnétothèque's* radio reading service. Mr. André Hamel told the Committee that his organization:

did not avoid the problem. We faced the problem directly. We went to the copyright owners and asked them to collaborate with us in bringing the reading of the newspapers to the blind or otherwise visually-impaired persons. Since these people were already quite *sensible* to *La Magnétothèque*, they were already aware of the problem, they were already part of our fund-raising committees, they of course granted us permission to use their publications.

Despite the fact that he had not experienced difficulties, Mr. Hamel expressed his concern that permissions to use copyrighted materials were given by the good will of the copyright owners and that the reproduction of works for use by persons with visual impairments was not guaranteed. He urged an exemption for this type of

reproduction in the copyright legislation and noted that such an exemption would assist in the development and continuation of radio reading services.

In February 1986, the government's response to the Report of the Sub-Committee on the Revision of Copyright stated that the revised *Copyright Act* will contain an exemption to allow the production of special media material for persons with disabilities. There would be no requirement to pay royalties. During her appearance before our Committee, the Minister of Communications repeated that in phase two of legislation to amend the *Copyright Act*, she had recommended an exemption for producers of material specifically designed for persons with disabilities. She mentioned that this would include brailled materials, large-type books, talking books, captioned televisions and films as well as broadcast reading services.

Our Committee feels that these changes should be made as expeditiously as possible in order to reassure producers of special format materials as well as broadcast reading services. We are also concerned that a means be found so that any such products which have a wider clientele than persons with disabilities should not interfere with the normal provision of materials to the general market by the commercial private sector.

### ***Recommendation 25***

**The government should amend The *Copyright Act* as soon as possible to increase the access of persons with disabilities to alternate format material which is currently protected by the Act.**

## CHAPTER IX

### Improving Access II

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Media accessibility is a major concern of ours because of the special situation facing the deaf. Ours is a disability of communication; and, as the noun implies, "the media" — newspapers, magazines, television, radio, telephone and telecommunications systems, movies, music, theatre, lectures and even committee hearings such as your own — are media of communication.

Brief to the Committee,  
Canadian Association of the Deaf

During the past few months, the demand of deaf and hard of hearing persons for greater access to the media, particularly television, has been one of the stories which has gained national attention in the media itself. Increasingly, persons who are deaf are presenting their demands as a question of human rights. Part of the problem arises from the perception of the difficulty in ensuring accessibility — not by people who are deaf or hard of hearing, but by those with full hearing. Currently, technical devices can break down the barriers between persons with hearing-impairment and those with full hearing. The means exist to make telephone communications fully accessible. Other information is accessible via electronic messaging networks such as Disability Information Services of Canada (Disc). These services can facilitate contact.

#### **Telecommunications**

This is certainly not to say that the situation has become anything close to ideal. Not all telephones in this country (or even all telephones in public buildings) are equipped with a magnetic coupling device to ensure their accessibility to persons using hearing aids. In an effort to produce cheaper telephones, the various telephone companies have regressed from the period when Canadian telephones were all equipped with such a device. Telephone message relay services are not available to everyone across the country. Not all emergency services, public buildings, airports, train stations, etc., — nor all federal government offices — are equipped with Telecommunications Devices for the Deaf (TDDs). Not all staff know how to use such equipment when it is available.

Our Committee heard testimony that deaf persons still experience difficulties when they come to court because of ignorance and/or inconsistent policies regarding the provision of sign-language interpreters, oral interpreters or amplification devices. Customs officers do not always fully implement Revenue Canada's policies regarding the treatment of assistive devices being imported from abroad. This is particularly a problem with TDDs, and closed captioning decoders, since most of these sold in Canada are imported from the United States. This not only increases the purchase price for Canadians but also leads to frustration and inconvenience. Public buildings and apartment dwellings are not equipped with visual alarms. Deaf and hard of hearing persons do not always have access to programs offered by colleges and universities. As we noted in the previous chapter, many universities do not have continuing support programs and services available for disabled students. Literacy and life skills programs are not universally available for deaf students at any level. There is still an acute shortage of professionals qualified to work with the deaf and hard of hearing, in part as a result of a shortage of training programs and personnel.

Our Committee finds it very disturbing that not all Canadian Employment and Immigration Commission offices have TDDs and that the Commission fails to ensure that all jobs are advertised and interviews conducted in an appropriate manner to ensure the accessibility of individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing. One means to do this would be, for example, to post job openings on electronic messaging services. Overall, the federal government does not ensure that all its advertisements over the electronic media are accessible to deaf and hard of hearing persons.

There are various ways of ensuring that telecommunications are made accessible to the deaf and the hard of hearing. One that has been followed by the CRTC, for example, is to obtain a commitment by a broadcaster to install a TDD at the time a broadcast licence is renewed or issued. Our Committee urges the CRTC to extend this practice at upcoming hearings.

### ***Recommendation 26***

**The government by the end of 1989 should take measures to increase the access of persons with disabilities to telecommunications by:**

- a. Requiring the CRTC to ensure that all public telephones are compatible with hearing aids.**
- b. Requiring the CRTC to make certain that documentation for its hearings both for broadcasting and for telecommunications are available in alternate format.**
- c. Including all assistive devices (such as teletypewriters and amplifiers) for persons with disabilities in the monthly basic charge for telephone service.**
- d. Monitoring the TDD's installed in government offices to ensure**
  - i. that they are in place where required;**

- ii. that personnel are familiar with their use;
- iii. that they are kept in good repair.
- e. Extending the discount on TDD long-distance charges and message relay services to individuals who use these services to communicate with persons who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- f. Contacting the provincial ministers responsible for telecommunications and requesting them to bring these recommendations to the attention of telecommunications companies within their jurisdiction.
- g. Taking measures to reduce the cost of assistive devices and ensuring that the domestic manufacture or importation of these devices is facilitated.
- h. Ensuring that all federal facilities and public buildings where meetings are held are equipped with devices such as FM loops, TDDs and visual alarms, as appropriate.

## Captioning

Television programs can be made accessible to deaf and hard of hearing persons in different ways. Open captions are transcripts of the dialogue printed on the screen and similar to subtitles for foreign language films. However, technology has made it possible for viewers with special cable decoding equipment to receive captioned messages at the bottom of their picture where other viewers would see only the program. This is known as closed captioning. The cost of a decoder currently ranges from about \$250 to \$450. The third method is to superimpose an insert of a sign language interpreter in the corner of the screen. Although this method is seldom used elsewhere, it is the customary method for broadcasts from the House of Commons.

Our Committee heard evidence that the cost of decoders for television imposes an even greater burden on an already economically-disadvantaged group. We are pleased that in 1987, the government decided to allow decoders to be deducted from income tax as a medical expense. At the same time, we note that these are still subject to federal sales tax and urge that this be removed. As with much new technology, recent advances are going to bring down the cost of devices such as decoders and we hope that the recent attempt to market an all-Canadian decoder which is priced at approximately \$250 will be encouraged.

Our Committee is concerned about the adversarial relationship which is developing between the deaf community and the television networks over the question of closed captioning of television. The provision of closed captioning has taken on the aspect of a crusade by members of the hearing-impaired community who see it as a right in improving their access to information and entertainment. Our Committee has received correspondence from organizations of the deaf demanding that all television broadcasts should be closed-captioned as a right under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

The issue of closed captioning has been addressed many times during the past few years. In 1982, following the *Obstacles* recommendation (55) that the federal government establish a Canadian closed captioning facility, the Canadian Captioning Development Agency (CCDA) was established to offer captioning services in both official languages. As well, the CCDA had a mandate to promote research and development. A second French-language company, *Sous-Titrage Plus*, has been established in Montreal. Other companies, the Western Captioning Institute, Video Captions Inc. and Nathaniel and Waite Enterprises, fill the English-language demand. The latter specializes in "real-time" captioning, which can be used for sports and current events. While the Canadian networks contract with these companies to provide captioning for their programs, both the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the CTV Network have in-house captioning facilities for certain other broadcasts.

## Costs

Given the competition between the various commercial captioning facilities and advances in technology, the cost of captioning a television program has dropped substantially from about \$3,000 to approximately \$1,500 per hour. Imported captioned programs are available from the United States at an extra cost of approximately \$225 per hour.

These amounts — for both imported and domestic programs — are a very small portion of the total cost of producing one hour of television. Our witnesses pointed out that for Canadian productions, this should be seen as part of the basic budget for any program rather than an additional amount granted as a favour to persons with hearing impairments. Our Committee shares this point of view.

The advertising industry, which is a sensitive barometer, has taken the lead in including captioning as a cost of production. Overwhelmingly, the industry appears to have decided that captioning is a benefit to business. The Canadian Captioning Development Agency notes that over 240 Canadian companies have made it a policy to caption their television commercials. These corporations include 90 out of 100 of the largest television advertisers in Canada. The average cost of producing a 30 second television commercial in 1988 is \$110,000. The cost of captioning it is \$300 or  $\frac{1}{4}$  of 1% of the total price.

Our Committee welcomes the decrease in the cost of captioning inasmuch as it may ensure a vastly increased number of hours of captioned television without any increase in budget. At the same time, we are concerned that in an effort to maintain a commercially-viable captioning business, the various competing captioning companies may prepare a product for television which decreases in quality. We, therefore, recommend that a body such as the CRTC or a national organization of persons who are deaf and hard of hearing (a representative group would be ideal) maintain a watching brief to ensure that improved access to television does not result in an inferior product. In fact, the CTV Network is to be commended for the recent establishment of such a committee.

## Regulation

With regard to the provision of closed-captioning on Canadian television, *Obstacles* recommended that the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) require all television broadcasters, as a condition of licence, to provide a significant amount of closed captioning within a reasonable period of time (Recommendation 54). The CRTC and the Department of Communications, however, opted for an approach which relied on the encouragement of voluntary action by television broadcasters to caption their product. In 1986, the Caplan-Sauvageau Task Force recommended that at the time of renewal of a television broadcaster's licence, the CRTC should take into consideration the licensee's willingness to increase the number of programs with closed captioning for the hearing-impaired (Recommendation 6.15). Then, in 1987, the Sixth Report of the Standing Committee on Communications and Culture took the position that the voluntary approach adopted by the Department of Communications and the CRTC had not proven effective. That Committee recommended that a new Broadcasting Act should specifically bind the CRTC to ensure that, within five years of the passage of new broadcasting legislation, at least 50% of national television programming on conventional television networks should be available with closed captioning or other means (Recommendation 33). Most recently, in its Fifteenth Report, tabled in June 1988, the Standing Committee on Communications and Culture reiterated and clarified its earlier position and recommended that:

Within five years, 50 percent of all network programming on conventional television networks, including 50 percent of Canadian programs, should be available with closed captioning.

### Recommendation 127

The Standing Committee on Communications and Culture also included in its report a recommendation that, at the forthcoming hearings on renewal of licences of individual television stations, the CRTC should give particular attention to obtaining commitments for the captioning of local programming, particularly news shows, where it is feasible (Recommendation 129).

The government responded to this recommendation in Bill C-136 which was introduced in the House of Commons on 23 June 1988. This bill contained clause 3(1)(l) which states that:

programming accessible by disabled persons should be provided within the Canadian broadcasting system as the resources become available for the purpose.

Our Committee strongly recommends that the new Act clearly spell out the CRTC's obligation to ensure the availability of captioned television.

Our Committee would like to note that when the Minister of Communications appeared before us, she stated that "the provision of closed-captioning is ... technically simple and not a costly undertaking." Following the introduction of the bill, our Committee has received representations from the Canadian Captioning

Development Agency and the Canadian Coordinating Council on Deafness which point out that the proposed broadcasting legislation does not include specific reference to closed captioning. We note that the bill gives support in principle to captioning, but essentially, it leaves the current voluntary system in place.

## Profile of Captioning

According to the Department of Communications, the voluntary system has ensured that, since *Obstacles* was tabled in 1981, 10% of Canadian television broadcasts are captioned. Given the establishment since that time of commercial and in-house captioning facilities, as well as technological advances, this is not an admirable record. Currently, the CRTC is using the voluntary system to reach a goal of 15% for the amount of captioned programming by 1992. The Commission has encouraged the major Canadian networks to caption programming in the last round of licence renewals in 1987, but it appears that broadcasters are not required even to present to the Commission a forecast or a budget for future captioning. As a result of CTV's failure to caption its coverage of the Winter Olympics in Calgary, we are aware that the CRTC has asked the Network for a progress report on the development of its captioning facilities and captioned programs. We await this report with interest, particularly because we are aware that CTV has recently put in place an in-house captioning facility and has established a consultative committee with executives of the Network and representatives of organizations of those who are deaf and hard of hearing.

Our Committee also notes that the private broadcasters in Canada are currently broadcasting considerably more captioned programs than is the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. According to figures presented to our Committee by the CRTC, the amount of captioning for the English-language television networks is as follows in Table 14.

**TABLE 14**  
**Captioned Hours Broadcast (1987)**

Network	Hours committed to CRTC to be captioned	1986-87 captioned Hours broadcast per week
CBC	15	15
Global	14.4	19.5
CTV	13	20

Private broadcasters are to be commended for exceeding their commitment with regard to captioned programming. At the same time, it appears as though the private



broadcasters have reached these figures by importing previously-captioned television shows from the United States. Figures tabled before our Committee by the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (and verified with the CCDA) also demonstrate that private broadcasters caption less of their *own* product than does the CBC. The figures for Canadian-generated captions are given in Table 15.

**TABLE 15**

**Broadcasters closed captioning created in Canada  
Approximate hours per year\*  
(as of March 1988)**

Network	Programs	News	Total Hrs.	Hours/Week
<b>FRENCH</b>				
Radio-Canada	300	121	421	8.1
Quatre Saisons	—	121	121	2.3
TVA	130	251	381	7.3
Radio-Québec	104	—	104	2.0
<b>ENGLISH**</b>				
CBC(E)	200	121	321	6.2
CTV	80	121	201	3.9
TVO	116	***	116	2.2

\* Represent hours of new captioned programs and does not include captioned repeat episodes nor captioned U.S. shows broadcast on the network or station.

\*\* Figures for Global not available.

\*\*\* TVO also runs Queen's Park Question Period with captions when the Ontario Legislature is sitting.

The failure of Canadian networks to caption their own products and to rely on imported programs with captions is illustrated in the following figures, provided by the Canadian Captioning Development Agency, in Tables 16 and 17.

Our Committee was continuously frustrated by the inconsistency of the statistics for captioning which were presented to us by the various witnesses who appeared.

It is obvious to our Committee that the CRTC has not carried out — or perhaps has not publicized — adequate monitoring on the amount and nature of captioned television in Canada. When we asked the Commission about the amount of uncaptioned programs which are broadcast in Canada while they are, in fact, captioned for American audiences, the CRTC could not provide us with precise figures.

TABLE 16

**Canadian/U.S. captioned broadcasting  
on Toronto Television\***

Toronto Market — Fall 1987 — One Week — 5 pm to midnight — 12 Stations

Daily	Canadian Captioned Hours/Day All Broadcasts	United States Captioned Hours/Day All Broadcasts	Total Hours Captioned Broadcast Per Day	Total Hours Air Time/Day All Broadcasters
Sunday	4.5	15.0	19.5	84
Monday	7.5	23.0	30.5	84
Tuesday	5.5	21.0	26.5	84
Wednesday	4.5	18.5	23.0	84
Thursday	8.0	18.5	26.5	84
Friday	5.5	23.0	28.5	84
Saturday	3.0	13.5	16.5	84

\* May not include certain movies shown in closed-captioned format.

TABLE 17

**Weekly — Breakdown by Broadcaster\***

Toronto Market — Fall 1987 — one week — 5 p.m. to midnight

Weekly	Canadian Captioned Hours/Week	U.S. Captioned Hours/Week	Total Captioned Hours/Week	Total Possible Hours/Week
CTV	7.5	19.5	27.0	49
CBC(E)	11.0	8.5	19.5	49
Global	1.0	18.0	19.0	49
CITY	0.0	1.0	1.0	49
CHCH	0.0	9.5	9.5	49
TVO	4.5	0.0	4.5	49
Radio-Canada	10.0	0.0	10.0	49
TVO(F)	4.5	0.0	4.5	49
ABC	0.0	35.0	35.0	49
CBS	0.0	13.0	13.0	49
NBC	0.0	15.5	15.5	49
PBS	0.0	12.5	12.5	49

\* May not include certain movies shown in closed-captioned format.

Our Committee asked about the captioning practices when Canadian signals and commercials are simultaneously broadcast on American stations distributed by cable systems (simultaneous substitution). This may mean that an uncaptioned Canadian tape is substituted for a captioned tape which is being simultaneously shown on an American station. In replying to our questions, the CRTC pointed out that this is an important principle in Canadian broadcasting and has sent "notices" to broadcasters "to encourage to the fullest extent possible" an effort to present the captioned versions. In fact, the CRTC amended Section 19 of the regulations governing cable television to encourage, but not require, the use of captioned programs. Our Committee has not received evidence on the effectiveness of this policy but we would hope that the CRTC can provide exact figures to prove this is, in fact, the case. In terms of simultaneous substitution, the Commission should also make every effort to encourage the use of captioned programming where problems continue to exist, for example, in particular cities or with particular stations.

A very large number of applications for licence renewals of individual radio and television stations are going before the CRTC in the coming months. Our Committee is aware that the Commission has requested applicants for an audio-tape cassette of their applications. This will make the complete application accessible to persons with visual impairments. We hope that this new practice foreshadows a complete investigation by the Commission into proposed services which will increase the accessibility to persons with disabilities to broadcasting services in Canada. We also recommend that the Commission should consider that if the carrot does not work, the stick should be applied. Furthermore, the CRTC should take the opportunity of these licence renewals to begin systematically to publish a report which will, in layman's terms, set out the achievements and the targets of Canadian broadcasters as a whole.

### **Government: An Example**

We believe that the situation in the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation is worth an extended comment. We feel that the CBC, as a publicly-owned corporation, has a duty to set an example for all Canadian broadcasters. Although it broadcasts fewer hours of captioned programs than the other Canadian television networks, the CBC does, in fact, do the most captioning of its own product. We are pleased that the Corporation is captioning its French-language programs because French viewers do not have access to the already-captioned programs brought in from the United States. The products which are marketed through CBC Enterprises should be available in alternate format. The Corporation should also exceed the private networks in the amount of captioned programming which goes on-air. We also note that in its proposal last year to establish a Canadian all-news network, the Corporation undertook to caption 50% of its programming or 12 hours per day. The budget for this was \$250,000 for the first year and the 50% target was to have been reached within the first five years of operation of the news channel. If the CBC is prepared to make this commitment for a new service, why can the Corporation not make the same undertaking for its current operations?

Our Committee heard evidence that the CBC had a budget for captioning of about \$1.3 million per year, of which a large portion was not being spent on captioning. When he appeared, Mr. Pierre Juneau stated that he was certain that the budget was in fact used up. But despite our request, the CBC has not provided our Committee with an appropriate breakdown of expenditures to indicate the exact disposition of funds.

Furthermore, the Committee has been provided with correspondence to the effect that when the Canadian Coordinating Council on Deafness (CCCD) contacted the CBC regarding some of these questions, the reply was unsatisfactory. In response to an offer to provide assistance with regard to the questions raised by our Committee, Mr. Juneau told the CCCD that "The Corporation ... is therefore *studying the possibility* [sic] of an effective consultative process." This slow pace contrasts unfavourably with the CTV Network which, since the appearance of the private broadcasters before our Committee, has already established a consultative group. This body, moreover, includes representatives named by associations of persons who are deaf and hard of hearing.

We would hope that the CBC's capacity for captioning both pre-recorded and live programming will be greatly increased as a result of the Corporation's decision to construct a new broadcast centre in Toronto. This centre should not only be designed in the best barrier-free manner but it should also contain state-of-the-art captioning and other technical equipment to ensure that persons with disabilities have complete access to the products created in this centre.

Our Committee was pleased that when the Government Film Commissioner, Mr. François Macerola, appeared before us, he undertook to increase significantly the National Film Board's (NFB) commitment to caption its products. As a public producer, the Film Board recognized its special responsibility to increase the options for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing. Beginning with the current year, all NFB productions will be captioned in video format before they are released. These productions are available in video format in over 350 public libraries. Over 50 hours annually (over 200 titles) will become available in the original language of production. In addition, the NFB promised to actively seek funds from both public and private sources to make the other 3000 titles in the NFB collection available to viewers who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Our Committee commends the Board for its initiative and recommends that the Board clear up the ambiguities in its financial commitment for the captioning of its products. Since captioned films are of little use if no-one knows they exist or if there is no system to distribute them, our Committee hopes that the National Film Board will work out a distribution network which makes these available to Canadians who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Telefilm Canada has made some progress in the captioning of films which it funds. Until recently, it had not fulfilled recommendation 63 in *Obstacles* that all its films be captioned. This agency includes a clause in its contract giving it the right to require that the productions which it finances are captioned. Furthermore, the CBC

makes it a condition of its agreements with Telefilm Canada and other co-producers that their product be received in captioned form. In the recent past, Telefilm allocated \$300,000 for captioning production which covered the cost of captioning about 50% of Telefilm Canada's output. Our Committee recommends that captioning should be included as part of the production cost of every film which receives funding from Telefilm Canada. This would form a minimal part of the agency's appropriation of \$101 million as set out in the 1988-1989 estimates. In the announcements made at the time of the introduction of the new broadcasting bill on 23 June 1988, the Minister of Communications has listed Telefilm's budget for captioning as \$500,000. We trust that this increase will suffice to meet the above recommendation.

Our Committee was pleased to note the great advance in facilities for disabled persons at the major federal cultural institutions in the National Capital Region. At the same time, we are aware that barrier-free designs and plans for accessible audio-visual products, can often fail in their implementation. We also know that all these facilities are not available in all federally-funded cultural centres across the country. In this sense, we are speaking not only of captioned videos but also of barrier free designs for exhibitions and exhibition halls and appropriate measures to make these centres accessible to persons who are blind or have visual impairments.

### **Accessible Technology**

Both public and private broadcasters in Canada should take advantage of the new technology to improve and extend their captioning of their own productions. Real-time captioning opens a new range of information accessible to the deaf and hard of hearing. Persons with disabilities are able to gain access to a great deal more local and national television programming — as events occur. These systems can be applied to news programs, election speeches, debates, conferences — any event where live activities are broadcast. Apart from these benefits, real-time captioning can be adapted for the instantaneous preparation of subtitles translated from another language. These systems, therefore, have an obvious use in classrooms and can be applied to teaching literacy skills, as well as languages.

Canadian technology in this area is well advanced. The American ABC network contracted with Canadians to provide real-time captioning for their coverage of the Olympic Games. The Ontario Legislature has used real-time captioning for the Speech from the Throne and Question Period for the past two-and-a-half years. During the recent Ontario election, the television debate among the party leaders was captioned by means of real-time technology. These efforts were accomplished by means of a computer with a special program that translates shorthand into text and instantaneously generates captions. These can be transmitted, added to a video signal and then broadcast live.

Since the major television networks now caption their national news, our Committee is aware that the captioning of local news is considered by deaf and hard of hearing Canadians as the most important area for continued improvement.

Captioning supper-hour newscasts has been identified as a priority. The Canadian Captioning Development Agency has developed a system for captioning news. This system, *NewsCap*, is a software program for use with a personal computer to generate captions for news broadcasts. The software costs about \$750 and the cost of operation is the cost of a staff person to input the material. This is the method which CTV uses to caption its national news. And it can be applied to local news at a very low cost.

During our National Parliamentary Forum, our Committee arranged for a demonstration of another new technological system which can be adapted for broadcasts but which has many other uses. This system, *InstaCap*, can be pre-programmed for certain short forms of words but it is not a verbatim record of events. Its greatest use is for note-taking and it displays captions on a television monitor to augment visual language interpreters. It permitted our verbal proceedings to be instantaneously available on a television monitor in the room. The *InstaCap* system requires personal computer, a caption generator (which costs approximately \$1,000), software and a television monitor.

This technology offers many avenues to widen further the access to information of persons with disabilities. For example, television could be used as a form of "silent radio". Scripts from radio programs could be entered on a computer and the printed version could be broadcast after the end of regular daily programming. This could then be taped by persons who are deaf and hard of hearing for later viewing.

The National Film Board also is working on two projects that will advance Canadian technology and facilitate the subtitling of films. The first of these improves the efficiency with which films can be subtitled by using a computer system to automate the process. The second project involves the development of a low-cost method to create electronic subtitles for film to display them on a panel below the screen. These projects would not only increase the access of deaf and hard of hearing persons to the National Film Board's output, but would also make unilingual NFB films accessible in the other official language of Canada.

Given the technology which is available to caption television and film, it is most unfortunate that progress takes place at a snail's pace. In attempting to understand why this is so, our Committee became aware that the skills required to create real-time captioning are in extremely short supply. The major reason for this is not a shortage of equipment but a shortage of trained personnel. The same situation applies for captioning pre-recorded programs. There is no centre for training technicians to operate the new machinery. For most captioners, their skills are acquired on the job and paid for by their employers. Our Committee, therefore, recommends that the federal government fund programs to train technicians to operate as real-time captioners, as operators of the *InstaCap* system, and as captioners of pre-recorded broadcasts.

Finally, our Committee feels that perhaps the major barrier to captioning and access to information generally is the problem of awareness. Far too often, the problem does not have to do with the availability of the technology or the personnel.

It is simply that the needs of the deaf and the hard of hearing are not thought of when a television program is planned. In large measure, the solution to this problem lies with persons who are deaf and hard of hearing. They can bring their concerns to the attention of the broadcasters, make the station owners aware of economically-viable alternatives for captioning and cooperatively work to ensure the eventual captioning of all television programs, films and videos which are produced in this country.

### ***Recommendation 27***

**The *Broadcasting Act* should ensure that the regulation of closed captioning remains within the jurisdiction of the CRTC. The government, should require:**

- a. **The CRTC to enforce that 50% of all programs produced in Canada are captioned by 1992. This should be a condition of licence. The CRTC should prepare, as part of its annual report, a detailed yearly progress report on captioning.**
- b. **The CRTC to ensure that the policy of simultaneous substitution does not lead to the broadcast of uncaptioned programs.**
- c. **The appropriate departments to reduce the cost of closed captioning decoders: for example, by removing the federal sales tax on them and by providing for research and development funding to encourage the domestic production and use of affordable assistive devices.**
- d. **All videos or films which receive federal funding to be captioned.**
- e. **Appropriate federal agencies, broadcast organizations and distributors of films, videos and broadcast programs systematically publicize the availability of captioned products.**
- f. **The standard of captioning be maintained by an advisory committee of captioners, educators, persons with disabilities and the federal government.**
- g. **All safety and instructional videos prepared for the public, as a matter of course, to be open captioned.**
- h. **That the Parliamentary Channel systematically use real-time captioning for the broadcast of parliamentary proceedings.**
- i. **All public hearings of federal government departments and agencies systematically use an *InstaCap* or similar system.**
- j. **Funds to be made available for training programs for captioners, in both official languages.**
- k. **Further explorations of the link between captioning and literacy with a view to addressing their effect on access to education.**

- l. The CBC to set an example in terms of captioned hours created, captioned hours broadcast and physical access to broadcast and public facilities.
- m. The Department of Communications to monitor, on a continuing basis, the accessibility of all federal, and federally-funded cultural institutions with regard to their accessibility. This should include not just physical access to premises but also audio-visual assistive devices.



## LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

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### ***Recommendation 1***

In light of the underrepresentation of disabled persons, the government should incorporate individuals with disabilities into its departments and agencies concerned with the media, culture and communications. Order-in-Council appointments to the boards of government agencies (such as the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission, the National Film Board, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the National Arts Centre) should include qualified persons with disabilities in proportion to the number of persons with disabilities in the population.

### ***Recommendation 2***

Given the negative images associated with certain telethons and charitable advertising campaigns, it is advisable for mass media organizations to consult consumer-led advocacy groups before undertaking to provide free air-time or services.

### ***Recommendation 3***

The media should consider the advisability of finding a means of providing advocacy groups either space or time to communicate their concerns.

### ***Recommendation 4***

It is advisable that mass media organizations, including press councils and news services should familiarize themselves with the preferences of persons with disabilities regarding language use.

### ***Recommendation 5***

Organizations of persons with disabilities should establish a media watch campaign to monitor press and television coverage in both official languages. This campaign might give awards for meritorious media coverage and also bring examples of objectionable coverage to public attention.

### ***Recommendation 6***

Organizations within the disability community should consider taking steps to improve their information programs. They could

- a. establish a roster of sources,
- b. initiate routine contact with the press,
- c. distribute literature,
- d. provide suitable news releases on important events.

### ***Recommendation 7***

News organizations and organizations representing persons with disabilities should initiate local seminars and public forums as a means of communicating their concerns to each other.

The Department of the Secretary of State and the Department of Communications should coordinate these seminars as preparatory meetings to a national conference on Disabled Persons and Communications which should be held no later than June 1989. The agenda of this conference should be constructed in the broadest possible manner.

### ***Recommendation 8***

The Department of the Secretary of State should fund improved informational activities by the disability community. Projects might include:

- a. media watch campaigns;
- b. special media projects; and
- c. the establishment of data banks and photo archives.

These activities should be integrated with a comprehensive and continuing public information program based on research into public attitudes about the rights, contributions and unmet needs of disabled persons and should be integrated with the planning for Access Awareness Week.

### ***Recommendation 9***

News organizations should consider the possibility of assigning specialist reporters to cover issues concerning disability.

### ***Recommendation 10***

News organizations should make every effort to seek out disabled persons and advocacy groups as representative spokespersons in news stories.

### ***Recommendation 11***

In light of these findings, Canadian media organizations should consider the advisability of re-evaluating the nature of their coverage, their use of images and the treatment of persons with disabilities.

### ***Recommendation 12***

The government should prepare guidelines to apply to internal and public documents, published material, films and advertising that portray persons with disabilities in a positive manner. These should be in place by 1990.

### ***Recommendation 13***

The Canadian Advertising Foundation, in consultation with disabled persons, should develop enforceable guidelines for the depiction of disabled persons in print and broadcast advertising.

### ***Recommendation 14***

The CRTC should, by 1990, develop guidelines for radio and television programs to address the stereotyping and portrayal of persons with disabilities. These guidelines should be a condition of licence if no other enforcement mechanism is put in place.

### ***Recommendation 15***

The programming and operations of the Canadian broadcasting system should reflect the circumstances and aspirations of Canadians with disabilities and that this be included in Section 3(1)(c)(iii) of the proposed Broadcasting Act.

### ***Recommendation 16***

The Canadian Association of Broadcasters, in consultation with persons with disabilities, should develop guidelines for the depiction of disabled persons, to be administered by a voluntary body, such as a broadcast standards council, with adequate enforcement mechanisms.

### ***Recommendation 17***

In consultation with persons with disabilities, the CBC should, by 1990, develop guidelines for its radio and television operations to address the stereotyping and depiction of disabled persons.

### ***Recommendation 18***

The Canadian Daily Newspaper Association, the Canadian Press and individual newspapers should consider revising their style manuals to reflect the concern of persons with disabilities. Also, we recommend that the press use its resources to bring these concerns to a wider audience.

### ***Recommendation 19***

The Department of the Secretary of State should provide consultative services to media organizations regarding the depiction and portrayal of persons with disabilities.

### ***Recommendation 20***

- a. The government should establish scholarship and training programs for individuals with disabilities who wish to pursue careers in communications.
- b. Funding should be given to groups of individuals with disabilities to set up vehicles to provide this training: radio and television programs, magazines, films, documentaries and videos.
- c. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the National Film Board should establish integrated training programs for persons with disabilities.
- d. Private broadcasters and newspaper publishers should be encouraged to develop training programs for persons with disabilities.
- e. Journalism schools should be encouraged to establish contacts with groups of persons with disabilities and to encourage individuals with disabilities to enroll in their programs.

### ***Recommendation 21***

Wherever possible, the government should enforce, and private media organizations should be encouraged to develop, affirmative action hiring of persons with disabilities. This includes making physical accessibility to premises and employment equity conditions of broadcast licences to be enforced by the CRTC.

### ***Recommendation 22***

The government should, by 1989, increase the amount of alternate format material available to print-handicapped Canadians, by requiring the appropriate departments to:

- a. Provide funds for alternative format publications. These funds should be included in regular assistance programs to publishers. The first objective should be alternate format material for education and for employment.
- b. Establish an adequately-equipped and staffed system of regional and sub-regional libraries of alternate format material under the auspices of the National Library of Canada.
- c. Ensure that schools of library science develop a core curriculum course on library services for persons with disabilities.
- d. Encourage all universities to establish a centre for students with disabilities.
- e. Facilitate the exchange of alternate format materials between Canada and other countries.

### ***Recommendation 23***

The government should regularly promote, monitor and begin to audit the efforts of government departments, agencies and crown corporations to make their publications available in alternate format. The government should systematically pay particular attention to ensuring:

- a. Within one year, that all advertising, particularly that for employment, be released in alternate format.
- b. Within one year, the simultaneous release of all publications and advertisements in printed and alternate format versions.
- c. The immediate deposit and cataloguing of all alternate format government publications by the National Library of Canada.
- d. The establishment by the end of 1989 of an audio database system for alternate format materials which is accessible to the public.

- e. A central facility in the Department of Supply and Services to produce alternate format material.

### ***Recommendation 24***

The government should, for the next five years, guarantee adequate funding and licencing for a national broadcast reading service with a significant amount of local programming. This broadcast reading service, in both official languages, should be made available by satellite to various cable companies. They should transmit it on an unused cable frequency such as an alphanumeric channel which uses music as background. In order to receive this service, individuals with print handicaps should not incur extra costs for the additional cable outlets which may be required. We also recommend investigations regarding the adaptation of descriptive video to Canadian broadcasting.

### ***Recommendation 25***

The government should amend the *Copyright Act* as soon as possible to increase the access of persons with disabilities to alternate format material which is currently protected by the Act.

### ***Recommendation 26***

The Government by the end of 1989 should take measures to increase the access of persons with disabilities to telecommunications by:

- a. Requiring the CRTC to ensure that all public telephones are compatible with hearing aids.
- b. Requiring the CRTC to make certain that documentation for its hearings both for broadcasting and for telecommunications are available in alternate format.
- c. Including all assistive devices (such as teletypewriters and amplifiers) for persons with disabilities in the monthly basic charge for telephone service.
- d. Monitoring the TDD's installed in government offices to ensure
  - i. that they are in place where required;
  - ii. that personnel are familiar with their use;
  - iii. that they are kept in good repair.
- e. Extending the discount on TDD long-distance charges and message relay services to individuals who use these services to communicate with persons who are deaf or hard of hearing.

- f. Contacting the provincial ministers responsible for telecommunications and requesting them to bring these recommendations to the attention of telecommunications companies within their jurisdiction.
- g. Taking measures to reduce the cost of assistive devices and ensuring that the domestic manufacture or importation of these devices is facilitated.
- h. Ensuring that all federal facilities and public buildings where meetings are held are equipped with devices such as FM loops, TDDS and visual alarms, as appropriate.

### ***Recommendation 27***

The *Broadcasting Act* should ensure that the regulation of closed captioning remains within the jurisdiction of the CRTC. The government should require:

- a. The CRTC to enforce that 50% of all programs produced in Canada are captioned by 1992. This should be a condition of licence. The CRTC should prepare, as part of its annual report, a detailed yearly progress report on captioning.
- b. The CRTC to ensure that the policy of simultaneous substitution does not lead to the broadcast of uncaptioned programs.
- c. The appropriate departments to reduce the cost of closed captioning decoders: for example, by removing the federal sales tax on them and by providing for research and development funding to encourage the domestic production and use of affordable assistive devices.
- d. All videos or films which receive federal funding to be captioned.
- e. Appropriate federal agencies, broadcast organizations and distributors of films, videos and broadcast programs systematically publicize the availability of captioned products.
- f. The standard of captioning be maintained by an advisory committee of captioners, educators, persons with disabilities and the federal government.
- g. All safety and instructional videos prepared for the public, as a matter of course, to be open captioned.
- h. That the Parliamentary Channel systematically use real-time captioning for the broadcast of parliamentary proceedings.
- i. All public hearings of federal government departments and agencies systematically use an *InstaCap* or similar system.

- j. Funds to be made available for training programs for captioners, in both official languages.
- k. Further explorations of the link between captioning and literacy with a view to addressing their effect on access to education.
- l. The CBC to set an example in terms of captioned hours created, captioned hours broadcast and physical access to broadcast and public facilities.
- m. The Department of Communications to monitor, on a continuing basis, the accessibility of all federal, and federally-funded cultural institutions with regard to their accessibility. This should include not just physical access to premises but also audio-visual assistive devices.

*Recommendation 25*

The CRC to ensure that 20% of all programs produced in Canada are captioned by 1992. The CRC should prepare a detailed yearly progress report on captioning.

The CRC to ensure that the policy of simultaneous substitution does not lead to the broadcast of uncaptioned programs.

*Recommendation 26*

The appropriate departments to reduce the cost of closed captioning devices for example, by providing for research and development tax on them and by providing for research and development funding to encourage the domestic production of affordable assistive devices.

All video or film which receive federal funding to be captioned.

Appropriate federal agencies, government organizations and distributors of film, video and broadcast programs should carry out the availability of captioned products.

The standard of captioning be maintained by the industry committees of captioners, educators, persons with disabilities and the federal government.

All audio and instructional video prepared for the public as a matter of course to be open captioned.

That the Parliamentary Committee inquire into the situation and explore for the benefit of parliamentarians.

All public records of federal government departments and agencies systematically be available in both official languages.



# APPENDIX "A"

## WITNESSES AND SUBMISSIONS

ISSUE NO.	DATE	ORGANIZATIONS AND WITNESSES
5	Thursday, February 25, 1988	<p>Mona Winberg, Columnist, <i>The Toronto Sun</i>            John Southern, Broadcast Journalist</p>
6	Wednesday, March 2, 1988	<p>Pierre Vennat, Journalist, <i>La Presse</i></p> <p><b>Canadian Advertising Foundation</b>            Alan J. Rae, President            Suzanne Keeler, Director, Advisory Division</p>
7	Wednesday, March 23, 1988	<p><b>The Honourable Flora MacDonald</b>            Minister of Communications</p> <p><b>Department of Communications</b>            Alain Gourd, Deputy Minister            Richard Stursberg, Assistant Deputy Minister, Telecommunications and Technology            Marcel Drouin, Assistant Director, R &amp; D Integrated Systems.</p> <p><b>Nazareth and Louis Braille Institute</b>            Mario Beaulieu, Technician responsible for the Integrated Reading Program</p>
8	Wednesday, March 30, 1988	<p><i>La Magnéthothèque</i>            André Hamel, President</p> <p><b>Canadian Coordinating Council on Deafness</b>            Joan Westland, Executive Director</p>
9	Thursday, April 14, 1988	<p><b>Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission</b>            Louis R. Sherman, Vice-Chairman            Fernand Bélisle, Secretary General            Larry Durr, Executive Director, Broadcasting</p>

Guido Henter, Executive Director, Telecommunications  
Avrum Cohen, General Counsel

**Canadian Association of Broadcasters**  
Bill Roberts, Senior Vice-President (Television)

Al MacKay, Chair, Societal Issues Committee (Television)

10 Thursday, April 21, 1988

**Canadian Broadcasting Corporation**

Pierre Juneau, President

William Armstrong, Executive Vice-President

William White, Vice-President, Regional Broadcasting Operations

Madeleine Champagne, Advisor to the Executive Vice-President

Pierre Racicot, Vice-President, Human Resources

Joan Gordon, Director, Parliamentary and National Relations

11 Tuesday, May 3, 1988

**Canadian Daily Newspaper Publishers Association**

K.A. (Sandy) Baird, Chairman of the Board

Geoffrey Stevens, Chairman, Editorial Division

John E. Foy, President

**National Film Board**

François Macerola, Government Film Commissioner and Chairman

Joan Pennefather, Director of Corporate Affairs and Vice Film Commissioner

13 Wednesday, May 18, 1988

**Canadian Association of the Deaf**

James D. Roots, Executive Director

## APPENDIX "B"

### RESEARCH STUDIES

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#### **Glen Allen and Lynne Thomas**

"Report on the Portrayal of Disabled Persons in the English-Language Print Media", 1988.

#### **Michel Crépault and Joanne McDermott**

"The Representation of Disabled Persons in the French-Language Press in Quebec"

#### **Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec**

"French-Language Radio and Television News Coverage of Persons with Disabilities"

#### **Frederick J. Fletcher, Dian Marino and Robert Everett**

"News Coverage of Disabilities and Disabled Persons in the Canadian Media"

#### **Paul Grant and Joan Meister**

"Fine Tuning: Focusing on the Portrayal of Persons with a Disability"

## REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 99(2), the Committee requests that the Government table a comprehensive response to this Report.

A copy of the relevant Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence (*Issues No. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13 and Issue 16 which includes this Report*) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

**PATRICK BOYER**

*Chairman*

## MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Thursday June 16, 1988  
(23)

The Standing Committee on the Status of Disabled Persons met "in camera" at 9:08 o'clock a.m., in Room 701, 151 Sparks Street, this day, the Chairman, Patrick Boyer, presiding.

*Members of the Committee present:* Anne Blouin, Patrick Boyer, Jennifer Cossitt and Bruce Halliday.

*In attendance: From the Library of Parliament:* William Young, Research Officer.

The Committee commenced consideration of a draft report to the House.

By unanimous consent, it was agreed,—That the Committee authorize the expenditure of funds from the Committee budget to retain the services of an editor for the First Report to the House.

At 10:40 o'clock a.m., the Committee adjourned to the call of the Chair.

Wednesday, June 29, 1988  
(24)

The Standing Committee on the Status of Disabled Persons met "in camera" at 3:45 o'clock p.m., in Room 208, West Block, this day, the Chairman, Patrick Boyer, presiding.

*Members of the Committee present:* Anne Blouin, Patrick Boyer, Jennifer Cossitt, Roland de Corneille and Bruce Halliday.

*In attendance: From the Library of Parliament:* William Young, Research Officer.

The Committee resumed consideration of a draft report to the House.

By unanimous consent, it was agreed,—That the draft report, as amended, be adopted as the Committee's First Report to the House and that the Chairman be authorized to make such typographical and editorial changes as may be necessary without changing the substance of the report.

At 4:50 o'clock p.m., the Committee adjourned to the call of the Chair.

Wednesday, July 6, 1988

(25)

The Standing Committee on the Status of Disabled Persons met “in camera” at 3:40 o’clock p.m., in the Government Lobby, this day, the Chairman, Patrick Boyer, presiding.

*Members of the Committee present:* Anne Blouin, Patrick Boyer, Jennifer Cossitt, Bruce Halliday and Jean-Luc Joncas.

*In attendance: From the Library of Parliament:* William Young, Research Officer.

The Committee resumed consideration of a draft report to the House of Commons.

By unanimous consent, it was agreed,—That the Committee print 6,000 copies of its First Report to the House in tumble bilingual format.

By unanimous consent, it was agreed,—That the title for the Committee’s First Report to the House shall be: “No News is Bad News” in English and “*Pas de nouvelles, mauvaises nouvelles*” in French.

ORDERED,- that the Chairman table the First Report to the House and that pursuant to Standing Order 99(2), the Government be requested to table a comprehensive response to the said Report.

By unanimous consent, it was agreed,—That the Committee authorize the expenditure of funds from the Committee budget to pay the costs incurred for the reprinting of 100 additional copies of the *Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence* of May 30, 1988.

At 4:25 o’clock p.m., the Committee adjourned to the call of the Chair.

Patricia Russell  
*Clerk of the Committee*

Thursday, August 11, 1988

(26)

The Standing Committee on the Status of Disabled Persons met “in camera” at 3:22 o’clock p.m., in the Government Lobby, this day, the Chairman, Patrick Boyer, presiding.

*Members of the Committee present:* Patrick Boyer, Roland de Corneille, Bruce Halliday and Neil Young.

*In attendance: From the Library of Parliament:* William Young, Research Officer.

The Committee considered its future business.

By unanimous consent it was agreed,—That the Committee authorize the expenditure of funds from the Committee budget to retain the services of Pixelgraph Studios, for work to be performed relating to a report on the National Parliamentary Forum held on May 30, 1988.

By unanimous consent it was agreed,—That the Committee authorize the expenditure of funds from the Committee budget to retain the services of Michel Provencher to provide the musical part of a videotape of the National Parliamentary Forum on the Status of Disabled Persons.

By unanimous consent it was agreed,—That the Chairman be authorized to retain the services of a firm for the production of audio cassettes of the report *No News is Bad News / Pas de nouvelles, mauvaises nouvelles*.

At 3:38 o'clock p.m., the Committee adjourned to the call of the Chair.

Clairette Bourque  
*Acting Clerk of the Committee*





