WHAT MEDIA PROBE IS ALL ABOUT

MEDIA PROBE was founded at a meeting held at York University on May 2, 1973, attended by people active in the field of mass media, university and community college teachers, students and others interested in this field. Donald Montgomery, president of the Labour Council of Metropolitan Toronto, and Professor Earle Beattie were co-chairmen. Berrie Zwicker served as acting secretary.

Those present were responding to a Prospectus sent out earlier which stated, "This organization is being formed at a time when a growing number of people are beginning to question the role of mass media in Canadian society... Public unrest over the media increased considerably in the sixties, culminating perhaps in the Special Senate Committee on the Mass Media, chaired by Senator Keith Davey. In its three-volume report (1970), the point was made that "Apart from the Managing Editors Conference... and a couple of excellent local groups, there is no organization worrying about how news is presented and how that presentation can be improved.""

"...MEDIA PROBE is acting on this suggestion and on the public interest evinced over the years, but extending its interest to all media. It is being started in Metro Toronto, but its area of coverage will include other parts of Canada. Local or regional Media Probes may be organized in other areas and, linking up will constitute a national organization.

"...While we will criticize the media, due credit will be given to the media as 'watcher, forum, teacher and entertainer' in society, the solid accomplishments of some media in preparing people for social change, investigating political and corporate abuses, airing dissent, investigating political and corporate abuses..."

"...it may be seen that our concern could be widened to include human communication problems at the interpersonal level and interacting with mass media messages; theories and models of the information and communication process, non-verbal communication as it applies to television particularly, subliminal communication, the appeals of popular culture, etc."

The following functions were set forth:

A. Research

1. To gather firsthand information and conduct research on public media and communication.

2. To crystallize experiences and collate research and various materials in this field and structure them in a coherent way for a patterned recognition of the problems.

3. To define standards of fairness and responsibility in media practice relative to social good.

4. To evaluate the work of press councils.

B. Action

1. To hold meetings, forums and seminars for discussion and social action relative to mass media and society.

2. To promote freedom of speech and freedom of media, including public access to mass media and media access to information vital to the public.

3. To act as ombudsmen on complaints of individuals and organizations concerning media content.

C. Public Presentation

1. To make representation to governments, media and other institutions on media issues.

2. To provide access to MEDIA PROBE's findings and activities to members through publication and distribution of a Bulletin, Review or Journal; to publicize generally our findings, ideas and comments.

A decision was taken to proceed slowly and inexpensively. To date, only mailing and mimeographing costs have been incurred; these have been met by individual members of Media Probe.
A second meeting of Media Probe was held at Ryerson Polytechnical Institute on May 24, 1973, and a third meeting on June 28 at radio station CJRT-FM, Toronto with John Twomey, CJRT manager, and Peter Middleton, Executive Director of Pollution Probe as speakers. Officers were elected at the second meeting on recommendation of a Steering Committee (see masthead page one). Executive meetings have been held since then. In January Media Probe members formed a panel to address students at a University of Toronto class.

Discussion at the meetings centred on the following subjects: Cooperation with Content, the Montreal magazine for journalists; need for a Freedom of Information law in Canada; public perceptions of mass media; the need for research and action, not just discussion; pros and cons on the Ontario Press Council; need for research on the Thomson newspaper chain; superficial coverage of events in Chile when the late Salvador Allende was president; poor coverage of society's poor; the Combines Investigation trial of Irving newspapers in New Brunswick; the crisis on keeping CJRT on the air, and the role of CJRT's Open College.

A motion was passed at Meeting No. 2 that membership fees be set at $2 for individuals and $10 for organizations. Membership would include subscription to a Media Probe publication, (see final page of this issue).

Specific plans for a monthly Media Probe publication were drawn up at an executive meeting in November.

Academic: University of Toronto Library Science as Communication

Outlines or descriptions of various courses in Communication and Mass Media will be published in our Academic section from time to time. These courses have proliferated across Canada in the last few years to a point where communication between communication teachers is now required.

Prof. John Marshall, University of Toronto, and a member of Media Probe, presents below an outline of the Objectives for his course, 1510 The Social Environment and Libraries, a required subject for students in the U. of T.'s Faculty of Library Science.

Objectives:

To achieve an understanding of the process of communication, the roles of communication agencies, and the characteristics of the various communication media.

To explore with the student the information needs of individuals and groups and their patterns of information seeking.

To introduce the student to the philosophy and service objectives of libraries and librarianship.

To examine the role and functions of the library and other agencies of information transfer.

To identify major political, social and economic forces affecting the flow of information, and the relationship of libraries to these forces.

To create an awareness of the problems and responsibilities of the library and of other information agencies with respect to intellectual freedom.

To provide a basis for the evaluation of library services.