Know a mis-reported event
And you'll distrust all news

I had a doctor friend once, a man with a mind as precise as any of the instruments he used to do bone grafts and the like. He used to shake his head at the world as he kept discovering what he called "carelessnesses."

One day he told me he had discovered that the two city newspapers weren't to be trusted. "You know this row about the General Hospital" he said, "well, I've been following it closely in the papers because of course I work at the General and I'm interested. But in this case I'm not just interested: I happen to know a great deal about the subject. (He was the hospital's chief orthopaedic surgeon.) And whenever I read a story about the General, I find it contains many inaccuracies.

I suppose that's not surprising. But it is distressing. It makes me tend to believe that every story, whatever the subject, is likely to contain inaccuracies. I don't recognize them because I don't have a great knowledge of the subjects involved. But somebody must have. And I presume that he or she must have the same sort of experience with each story on his or her subject that I have had with the stories on the hospital. Do you think I'm right?"

I said I thought he was.
"Doesn't that surprise you?"
I said it didn't. I worked for a newspaper, you see. I didn't believe anything I read. Not even if I'd written it myself.
"Well, then, doesn't it disturb you?"
I said yes, it did disturb me.
"What can be done about it?"
I didn't know. I still don't.

LET'S MONITOR MEDIA REPORTS
FOR ACCURACY, BIAS, SUPPRESSION

However, I do have the germ of an idea. Somebody outside the media suggested it to me, and I want to pass it on to you. The suggestion is that, as a start, several major centres of news might be persuaded to monitor media reports on themselves. So, for example, City Hall would check every story in, say, the Toronto Star that involves City Hall. The school boards might do the same thing. And Queen's Park. And the unions.

Once a month they could do a report that would itemize all the inaccuracies they found. These would be confined to matters of indisputable fact. They might also attempt an analysis of such matters as the tone of stories, the paper's apparent point of view (or bias), and the paper's judgment of what was newsworthy (including the very important matter of what the paper did not report).