Media '75

(The series "Ownership, Control and Decision-Making in the Mainline Commercial Media" consisted of four panels through Saturday, May 24, and Sunday morning. Following is a brief summary.)

PANEL "A" - AN OVERVIEW

The organizer of the series, Earle Beattie, was in the chair and panellists introduced themselves: Doug Lower, CBC Resources Department; Gertrude Robinson, McGill University Interdisciplinary Communications Program; Mack Laing, University of Western Ontario School of Journalism; Murray Goldblatt, Carleton University School of Journalism; Herschel Hardin, Association for Public Broadcasting in British Columbia. David Brough, Northern Network, made a brief appearance.

Professor Beattie read main points from his background paper, published in the Media 75 "Tabloid", copies of which were in the audience hands. (See article following). Doug Lower spoke on his experiences in British broadcasting and Luxembourg, discussing the European situation generally. Gertrude Robinson next provided information on the co-op structure of media in Yugoslavia which has a population approximately the same size of Canada's but has "six solitudes" within a nation that is like "three countries in one." The range and limits of criticism were also set forth briefly and one interesting item that would jar Western newsmen: a Tanu News Agency editor had part of his salary docked for distorting a story on an earthquake.

Herschel Hardin disagreed with the chairman's observation on the need for big capital outlays for effective media competition. Mr. Herschel noted that co-operative efforts, making use of the offset process or inexpensive transmission facilities, made it possible to proceed without big money outlays. He described how the Campbell River User's Co-op in cable TV sold $100 debentures while holding voting rights down to one vote per share-owner. The co-op had 5,000 members who paid a dollar a month and produced well above the 10% of gross income local origination level suggested by the C.R.T.C. This compared with 4% found on commercial cable. The "segmented structure" used in The Netherlands whereby time was accorded on broadcast facilities to citizen groups was also discussed with audience member Tony Westall of the Toronto Star and Carleton joining the exchange.
European systems and foreign coverage proved a prime topic. Murray Goldblatt criticized the low number of Canadian foreign correspondents abroad and outlined just who was where for whom. He said the situation was even worse than Professor Beattie had outlined. Southam News Service has its foreign reports repeated 15 times in papers across Canada which did not produce diversity. The Thomson newspaper chain has one foreign affairs analyst who is confined to Toronto. P. P. has one man in London and two in Washington. The Southam chain has one man in London, one in Washington, one in Peking, and has had a man in Brussels, one in New York for the UN, and a man for all Latin America. The Sifton (Armadale) papers have no foreign correspondents.

Some metropolitan papers maintain correspondents abroad, e.g. the Toronto Globe and Mail with one in Peking, one in London, and one in Washington. La Presse, the largest French-language daily in North America, has none. Canadian Press (CP) with its 110 member-newspapers has processing bureaus in London and New York and foreign correspondents in Washington and Paris. The result of such sparse coverage is reliance on foreign news agencies and the viewing of foreign affairs by Canadians through foreign eyes.

David Brough briefly outlined his Northern Access network plan for "200 linked northern stations in 25 or 30 places in the far north." He said native peoples of the north would be able to intercommunicate through the system. The CBC, he said, was not responsive to the native peoples' needs.

**PANEL "B" - DECISIONS: TOP DOWN OR BOTTOM UP?**

Jim Robinson, Toronto Star reporter and former president of the Toronto Newspaper Guild, was in the chair. He introduced as panellists Michael Cobden, Toronto Board of Education and former Star editorial writer; John Adams, Globe and Mail reporter; and Claire Hoy, Ontario government, who was recently fired by the Toronto Star for statements made about the Star on Toronto TV stations.

Cobden told how Star policy in support of the Spadina Expressway was a "top down" decision, contrary to staff wishes. He said that editorial bias in news stories is sometimes due to reporters mistakingly anticipating policy. Part of the value system, he said, lies in editors' hangups. Adams said that language played a role in establishing "bias, not information" and noted how, on the Business pages, it was "always employee, never worker." To demean teachers was another conscious policy, he said, and there was nothing in law that teachers can't strike, despite newspaper reports to this effect.

Claire Hoy, the reporter who coined the phrase "Big Blue Machine" for the Ontario Tory professionals, asserted that "reporters have to fight but can't fight alone" in combatting policy incursions that distort or falsify journalism. Hiring of "right-minded" reporters to support management bias, the inevitability of subjectivity in all media messages and the suppression of news in Kitchener-Waterloo were other topics.