Mr. Hutsak described how television in the Alberta legislature had been set up in such a way as to favor the government benches. The cameras, installed four years ago, were in a fixed position to face the Conservative M.L.A.'s but could only pick up back views of opposition members. News management included confinement of the televisioned question period to 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. and then film was rushed to the lab, leaving little or no air time for the opposition. Premier Lougheed came off as a "cool image", the NDP were cool, others were hot."

Members of the audience asked a wide range of questions of all panellists. Sally York observed that "the media were attacking all the time. It is an adversary system."

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The social role of the media

Media 75 Introductory Remarks

The Social Responsibility of the Media: a personal view.

Obviously, the prime responsibility is to reflect accurately what is going on in society so that the individual who is being informed will have a relatively true picture as to what is happening, or at least be provided the opportunity to get such a picture. That's the essence of what the media can and must do in a democracy.

Going along with that is the hell raising role. Scandals and incompetence in high places continue to occur and it's the public's right to know what is going on. Muckraking isn't dead and there's no reason it should be.

Beyond that, the media should always be wary of large, strong institutions, public or private. Without there being an eternally hostile or adversary approach, there must always be a willingness to criticize!

In Canadian terms, the media have a duty to inform Canadians about each other. And in a regionalized society where a good deal of misunderstanding exists, there's no reason why such information shouldn't be as sympathetic as possible. (That doesn't mean it need be boring.)

One problem in the media approach to Canadian identity is the overwhelming use of foreign sources for world news. This may be inevitable, but it needs to be discussed. There are other areas of activity where we sense a conflict between responsibilities; for example, the public's right-to-know vs. the right of an accused person to a fair trial. Stuck as we are, somewhere between the British and American systems, there's no easy answer.

In the case of the fight against governmental secrecy, however, the answer seems clear: the press has every right to fight government pressure and drag things out into the open.

This doesn't absolve the press from its major role: to interpret, analyze and present public information in the most palatable way. And in so doing, it must realize that it isn't just dealing with one public. It is dealing with many different ones, each with its own interests, but all within a general Canadian context.

— Tom Sloan
Carleton University
Ottawa

Some questions to be raised:

1. Is there a short definition of social responsibility?
2. What about scandal mongering?
3. Should the press be hostile to government? to business? to labor?
4. What happens when reality is distorted?
5. Are there any special responsibilities for media in Canada?
6. What is Newfoundland more than?
7. Are foreign news sources enough?
8. Are the media violating the right to privacy?
9. What about government secrecy?
10. Is it enough for the media to give the public what it wants?
11. What is "the public"?
12. Does the public have any responsibility to the media?