CBC, cont.

The results of the spotless programming there are now being evaluated.

Of the total national radio budget for the 1972-73 fiscal year, $46,092,000, only $2,803,000 was produced by ad revenue. But in television about one-third of the $150,628,000 spent on programs, distribution and transmission of the service came from advertising sales. Even so, many Canadians would like to see an end to commercials on CBC TV. Even inside CBC there are those (and they are not just producers and performers) who see a commercial-free CBC as at least a long range goal if not imminent or inevitable. The lines have been drawn and the discussion is heating up.

CBC radio may soon be "spotless" but in television, where the revenue loss would be about fifty million dollars a year, it may take a little longer. Canadians and Parliament must decide if they'll pay for the national service in taxes. Or, as consumers, will we pay extra for goods and services in order to pay for advertising and incidentally for television service?

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MUST WE BE AMBUSHED BY THE FUTURE? by Barrie Zwicker

Three major shortcomings afflict media coverage of the future, in my view. There is too little; it is fragmentary, and the fragments are mainly doomsday warnings and romanticized snippets about possible future technology (chiefly in medicine and transportation). The large realities are almost entirely missing.

I deliberately refer to "coverage" of the future. Some argue that you can't "report" the future because "the future can't be known." True, the precise "when" and "what" of the future are fitting subjects for the astrologer and tea cup reader.

You cannot tell me, without elaborate ballistics equipment, precisely where and when a ball I throw into the air will land. But you can tell some important things about that ball: that it will go up for a while, then slow in its rate of ascent, then stop and begin to fall, at an increasing rate of descent, until it hits the ground.

Similarly a great deal is known about the future. We don't know exactly when the oil and gas and coal will run out, but they will. The same with all the other non-renewable resources.

Technology will solve each shortage as it arises? Well, insofar as people believe that, it is but another indication of how poorly the media have been reporting the future.

I have met college graduates who do not know the difference between the birthrate and the number of births, even though population is one of the most important constituents and determinants of our future. Because Canada's birthrate is at present declining, they believe the population of Canada is decreasing! Surely this kind of misunderstanding is a rotten foundation on which to base one's personal decisions about the future, let alone political decisions as a citizen. The press -- and I watch the press closely on the subject of population -- seldom makes such elementary distinctions clear.

Probably the finest reporting on the future has been by TV public affairs producers. The 52 "Here Come The Seventies" programs created by Nobel Leiterman Productions Ltd. are the outstanding example. Recently CBC-TV's "The Nature of Things" devoted an hour to a program written by Bruce Martin explaining the nature and purposes of the Club of Rome, a group of fewer than 100 men and women from various countries and disciplines who are highly concerned about "man's predicament." The club studies the predicament and tries to publicize its findings. The best-known of the club's reports is the Potomac Associates paperback "The Limits to Growth."

Radio, with the exception of CBC-FM, has to my knowledge ignored the future, although the subject lends itself to radio treatment. Magazines are better, although they seldom
"put it all together." An exception was Bruce Hutchison's piece, "Storming The World," in Maclean's early last year (1973).

My comments apply mainly to newspapers. It is trite to say in media circles that newspapers are improving. Yet to give credit where credit is due this must be recognized. There are more in-depth reports (as with the Toronto Star's series on Metro Toronto), more investigation (as with The Globe and Mail's exposes on Ontario Hydro's headquarters and violence in the drywall industry) and more articles on trends (as with the Star's Insight page daily and weekly section.

But these changes are not occurring in a vacuum. They are occurring in a world which is, I submit, changing at a faster rate than journalistic improvement.

A New York Times executive once said something to the effect that a newspaper could be considered great if its readers were not caught entirely by surprise by any major event.

The degree to which newspapers and TV are failing can be gauged by the almost constant note of surprise -- and even the word itself, especially on CBC-TV newscasts -- that pervades reports of major developments. The energy "crisis" was foreseeable -- and foreseen -- years ago. The predictions were either not reported, or reported in such a fragmentary and trivialized way that they served almost no social purposes.

Food shortages? Paul Ehrlich, the U.S. biologist, began a 1969 article on this subject, titled "Paying the Piper," with this line: "The battle to feed humanity is over." Unlike military battles where the outcome is not known until the last shot is fired, he continues, the struggle to feed humanity could be predicted with tragic certainty far in advance.

The prime job of the media, stated the Davey Committee report, published in 1970, is "to prepare the people for the shock of change." Laudable as that conclusion was, it now is out of date, in my view.

Preparation for change -- implying acceptance of change -- is not nearly good enough (not that any but a handful of newspapers have consciously joined in the preparation). Preparing for change pretty well equates with preparing for destruction, as I see it.

The media should be helping people decide which changes to encourage and which to resist. The first step in accomplishing this is to begin to report which major changes are in store that cannot be avoided, and which can be avoided if certain actions are taken. It has been correctly observed that history has been taught in our schools with the "ifs" left out. Must we report our future with the "ifs" left out?

Some editors will no doubt say that "people are not interested in matters far off in distance or time." This is certainly true, as the first chart in "The Limits to Growth" portrays. Captioned "Human Perspectives," it shows that apparently only a tiny minority of mankind at present has the time, inclination or knowledge to think in terms transcending next week!

Should media people docilely adjust their blinders to correspond to the blinders of the majority? I contend we need a sharp sense of urgency about tearing these blinders off! The occasional Page Seven piece on the future, today, will not be found adequate by our children, tomorrow.

Evidently, back in November 1972, the Toronto Star was the scene of action by the Combines Investigation Branch of the Consumers and Corporate Affairs Department, Ottawa. A writ stated that the effect of the Star's buying the Toronto Telegram's subscription list of $10 million was to ensure that the Telegram stop publication. Decision was put in the hands of the Federal Justice Department which has now (January 1974) concluded that evidence was not such as to warrant criminal proceedings.