

EDITORIAL

Media as drug

by Kwame Dawes

A year ago there was evolving a certain optimism in the world about the capacity of the people of this world to live peacefully with each other. The confidence emerged out of the repeated instances of 'people power' which ostensibly involved the rising up of normal people society against an oppressive regime that ruled them. The western media took up the anthem with relish and words like 'freedom' and 'democracy' became catch phrases. Gorbachev and Bush had met and gotten on royally; the Eastern European left wing hegemony was apparently crumbling, and there was already talk and some action with regard to slowing down the arms race. In South Africa, Mandela was being released and the ending of apartheid seemed more likely to take place without undue bloodshed.

Well, this is the picture we got, anyway. It turns out that things have not really improved in our world. The Persian Gulf crisis is a frightening reality and it would be a mistake to assume that it has emerged simply because Sadaam Hussein decided to be a bad boy. Sadaam has been a bad boy, but his delinquency must be seen within the context of the international oil rat race which is not free of questionable inclinations towards greed and power on the part of most of the big players in the game. The Israel/Palestine problems have played a significant part in dictating the tone of diplomatic relationships in the Persian Gulf and the last tragedy that took place in Jerusalem recently has not helped the situation.

Closer to home, the news that bombards us is not all pretty. Everyone is crying recession while the GST looms overhead. The turmoil in the senate coupled with Mulroney's wonderfully blatant political ploys suggest to me that it is quite possible that the sheer energy of political life is taking its toll on the thinking of our politicians. The sad news continues when we learn about the Air Canada layoffs which are indicative of a larger dilemma in the society. Added to all this is the problem with native people. The media has made every effort to suggest that the whole affair is over. That is one of the realities of media, especially a news environment that seems to thrive on sensationalism over valid newsworthy material. The native problem is not over. Oka is not over, and the sooner Canadians appreciate that, the sooner we will avoid a repeat of what happened in Quebec over the last few months.

The list could go on forever but the message is the same: We exist in a world that is not going to be content with peace, largely because we live in a world that is still rife with injustices and inequalities. It would seem to me that our best bet is to accept this reality and avoid being taken over by the hype. The reason is simple and it can be understood in the language of the drug addict.

The drug addict lives for a good buzz: a special kind of high that totally engulfs the entire body and mind. This high is not eternal, however, and so with each high comes the low. According to friends of mine who admit to enjoying the tremendous high, the lows grow increasingly lower thus making the need for a more intense high greater. The result is a dangerous cycle that is often reversed only through drastic action. Well, the analogy works in this way: The news-good news is the drug. If we buy the hype and wallow in the wonderful news without appreciating the realities that surround this news, we will be entering into the world of the high. The fact is that very soon, the high fades out very rapidly and the depression and hopelessness that follow are as uninformed as the high was. What happens is that we soon grow to depend on the media for our boosters until we become totally and irrationally hooked on the hype. When the recession hits and our relatives start to get killed in wars, a certain reality will overwhelm us when we are least prepared for it.

The reality is that we live in trying times and the solutions are not easy ones. Good and evil are not as easily demarked as we thought they would be. The media's agenda is no longer primarily to inform. Money, ratings, politics etc. have come into play and so what they put out must be understood in that context. Translation: The stuff we are getting is not top grade stuff. The buzz is a dangerously false buzz. Western media today is the crack of media. Instance: You may never believe the kinds of things international media was saying about Canada during the Oka crisis. Canada's media rarely gave us this impression, but then national loyalty may account for this.

But the Beatles were right in their 'obladiobladah' ditty. Life will continue. Babies will continue to be born to very excited parents; people will continue to party to rock music and the gurgle of beer; classes will not end; people will continue to make love and find pleasure in it; and sadly, people will continue to kill each other. Pessimism? Not really. Resignation to the inevitabilities of life? Closer. I would describe it as an appreciation of the context within which idealism can operate. That is what I like about the *Book of Revelation*. It's got that contextual stuff down pat and yet it ends with triumph. Now there is a more dependable buzz for you.

The Brunswickan

Canada's oldest official student publication
The University of New Brunswick

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The Brunswickan, in its 125th year of publication, is Canada's oldest official student publication. The Brunswickan's offices are located in Rm 35 of the University of New Brunswick's Student Union Building, P.O. Box 4400, College Hill, Fredericton N.B., E3B 5A3. Tel. 453-4983.

The Brunswickan is published by Brunswickan Publishing Inc. and printed with flair by Global Printing & Binding Inc., Fredericton, N.B.

Subscription is \$25 per year. Second class mail is in effect - #8120.

Local Advertising rates are available from The Brunswickan, (506) 453-4983. National advertising rates are available from Youthstream Canada Ltd., 1541 Avenue Road, Suite 203, Toronto, Ont. M5M 3X4, Tel: (416) 787-4911.

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