

National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? Trust for media taking a plunge

Back in the prehistoric 1960s, your scribe was covering Toronto City Hall for the Toronto Telegram (which died in 1971) and recalls electors showing up at the municipal polls clutching their copy of the newspaper ? or other newspapers ? basing their votes directly on the ?slate? of editorial suggestions published during the pre-election period.

Such was the trust in the fairness and accuracy of newspapers at the time, that many readers felt no compunction in accepting the judgment of their favorite newspaper and casting their votes accordingly.

Fast forward to 2016 and we discover ? alas ? that the public's trust in the news media has collapsed to a record low six per cent (in a recent U.S. Gallup poll) who have ?a great deal of confidence? in the media, a calamitous collapse from the mid-1970s, when 72 per cent expressed considerable confidence in the media.

About half the respondents said they had ?some confidence? in the media, while 41 percent have ?hardly any confidence.?

So what has happened?

My theory is that the downward trend began with Watergate which, ironically, was the high point of media trust. Certainly the fine work of the Washington Post and others ended up in the resignation of U.S. President Richard Nixon and the vast majority of people felt the media had done the job it is supposed to do.

The problem is that after Watergate, newspapers ? and other media ? began to look at every story as a potential scandal and, rather than maintaining a strict line between editorial comment and ?straight? news reportage, every journalist became a self-appointed crusader.

The truth won out. Or, at least, the journalist's version of ?the truth.?

One might have hoped, given the embarrassing coverage of the recent U.S. election ? where most media dismissed Donald Trump as a clown and maligned his supporters as racists, etc. ? that the media would have learned something, i.e. to reinstate the old tried and true method of actually engaging with people to find out how they feel ? as opposed to telling them how they should feel ? and taking their views seriously.

Much was made of Hillary Clinton's elitist dismissal of Trump supporters as ?deplorables? ? all 62 million of them apparently ? but the bulk of the media pretty much treated these people as if they were all deplorables ? and continues to do so ? which is a major reason Trump won.

You would think that such a dramatic miscalculation would cause some introspection ? not only among the liberal elites in other fields, but among the overwhelmingly ?liberal? media hordes as well.

Yet, since the election there has been precious little evidence ? none, actually ? that the media has learned anything, which is why, I fear, trust in the institution will continue to evaporate.

Examples of this bias abound, but let me offer a recent one from the front page of the Saturday Star concerning the visit of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to the Star's editorial board.

Trudeau, the reporters tell us, ?rejected Trump-style politics? and ?cautioned that the rising tide of populism with (Trump's) victory in the U.S., the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom and nationalist movements in Western Europe, are not necessarily a foreign phenomenon.?

This has become the common post-election media theme, i.e. the absolute ?horror? of populism, a theme widely reported in most ?news? stories as well as repeated in editorials and opinion columns, essentially devoid of balance or even a nod to the possibility that contrary viewpoints are not automatically maligned as racist, misogynist, etc.

The fact that millions of voters in Britain, the U.S. and elsewhere actually supported this populism wave is still viewed as proof that the plebes are idiots. Or worse. If only they understood, they'd agree with the elites. But, alas, how can the haughty elites explain to people what they should be thinking?

And so we have long-time Liberal apparatchik Penny Collenette, in her Star column, ridiculing Trump's dismissal of NAFTA as simply ?another of Trump's tirades.?

Really? Never mind that the traditional Democratic strongholds in Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin all voted for Trump ? and assured his victory over Clinton ? precisely because they have seen their jobs disappear under these free trade agreements.

What do they know, eh?

Trump was all over the map on many issues ? as was Clinton ? but he has been crystal clear in his belief that these mega trade deals are bad for U.S. business.

Yet on this issue ? and many others ? the media, rather than hanging its collective head in shame, continues to lecture people on their ?truth? and dismiss those who disagree as Neanderthals. Or worse.

At this rate, trust for the media will soon be disappearing altogether. And all those thumb-suckers in charge will still not acknowledge their role in this mess. They just don't get it

