

Charles B. Seiv

## No Sugar-Coated News

"Why must you dwell on all that bad stuff? Why not print (or broadcast) more good news—news about people who do good, happy, constructive things?"

Every journalist has heard those questions and variations on them many times. There are answers, and they are given, but the exchange seldom ends in a meeting of minds. The journalist leaves it feeling that he and his work are hopelessly misunderstood. Members of the public leave it still convinced that news people are hooked on the sensational, the unpleasant and the destructive.

Now a pair of social psychologists have come up with evidence that the people pushing good news may have something. In a series of ingenious experiments, they have found that good news can cause you to feel and act kindly toward your fellow humans and bad news can turn you off so completely that you may become, at least briefly, "socially irresponsible."

The psychologists, Stephen M. Holloway and Harvey A. Hornstein, both college professors, have reported their findings in an article in *Psychology Today*. (It was reprinted in part in *The Post's* Jan. 9 Outlook section.)

Most of their experiments involved exposing subjects to phony radio newscasts, as if by accident. Some subjects heard broadcasts conveying "good" news—a donor responds to an emer-

gency call in behalf of a patient in need of a kidney transplant, for example. Others heard "bad" news—an aged artist beloved by all is strangled by an aberrant neighbor, for example.

After being exposed to the newscasts the subjects were tested to determine their feelings about other people. The psychologists found that those who had heard good news felt generally favorable toward other people and were willing to cooperate with them. Those who were exposed to bad news took a negative, suspicious view of others and were more inclined to compete with them.

Invariably, they said, "the good news produces more favorable views of humanity's general moral disposition than bad news does—despite the fact that the news deals only with certain special cases and not at all with human nature on the grand scale."

One of the most striking evidences of the social effects of news cited by Holloway and Hornstein was this:

In 1968, researchers conducted an experiment in which wallets were dropped on the street to see how many were returned. Testing had established reliably that about 45 per cent of the wallets would be returned within a few days.

But not a single wallet dropped on June 4, 1968, was returned. Why? Late that night Sirhan Sirhan assassinated Robert F. Kennedy.

Sirhan's belief, concluded the psy-

chologists, not only killed a man but "it damaged whatever social bonds had caused people to return those lost wallets. It demoralized people and made them socially irresponsible."

The Holloway-Hornstein findings should not be surprising. We all have felt the despair and discouragement brought on by news of man's inhumanity to man, and most of us would agree that we affect each other by our behavior, good and bad. Nevertheless, it is interesting and useful to have the effects of good and bad news demonstrated.

### The News Business

What does all this mean to the news business? Nobody would suggest that it means all calamitous news should be suppressed. But there may be some who would use the Holloway-Hornstein findings to justify sugar-coating the news—repressing the bad, inflating the good.

Others would say that the press should not repress or inflate but should try to give a more balanced picture of society than it does, with everything—the good and the bad and the in-between—in proper balance.

Both these approaches run contrary to the true role of the press. It is not to paint the world in rosier hues than the

facts warrant, although an occasional spot of brightness never does any harm. Nor is it to accurately reflect all the day's happenings; that would be impossible. It is, rather, to give the public what it needs to know in order to participate in and help shape society.

The judgments made in fulfilling that role are often less than pure. They are tainted by desires to shock and to entertain, to satisfy an audience, to achieve commercial success. Nevertheless, the basic role is clear.

Holloway and Hornstein decided on the basis of their experiments that "certain news stories can demoralize and estrange us from one another." Their conclusion: "We believe that this finding places a new and very heavy burden of responsibility on the news media."

They didn't say exactly what that responsibility is. It certainly is not to tailor the national news diet in order to spread sweetness and light. Any suggestion that the media can, or should, create a society of caring, socially responsible citizens is to distort the news function and life itself.

But there is a responsibility, although not a new one. It is the responsibility to recognize that the news business does not operate in a vacuum. News is not only about people, but it affects people.

If the Holloway-Hornstein findings are taken to heart as proof of that, they will be tremendously useful.

Walter Galyon

## A Profusion Of 'Non' Sense

Somewhere along the way we have been screened out, chopped up and ground down into a stack of neat little packages. And each package is stamped with a label identifying us as members of various groups. In most cases we are a simple, insignificant "non."

Now there is no personal offense intended in these labels; they are merely a part of today's language. Instead of going into great detail about a person, a philosophy, an activity or a product, it's much easier to slap on a label.

Apparently this practice is for the convenience of pollsters, government agencies, manufacturers, advertisers and others who use statistics to sell, promote, prove and disprove or simply play with numbers and percentages. But instead of calling us what we are, we are best known for what we ain't.

Although you may think of yourself as an ordinary man or woman, chances are you are labeled as nonmale or nonfemale. Instead of being a positive something-or-other, you've got to be a negative something-or-other, like non-white or nonblack. Or maybe nonunion, nonprofessional or nonconforming.

You may be labeled as nonmilitary, nonvocal, nonbelligerent or nonaffiliated. Or maybe you're a nonsmoker, nondrinker, nonvoter and nonpolluter. You could be a nonsalaried, nonprogressive nonproducer.

You may believe in nonviolence, nonintervention, nonparticipation or nonrestraint. Or you can be a nonbeliever in nonspecifics.

You may be known as a nonconsumer, nonsubscriber and nonuser, but your home could contain at least a few noncombustibles, nonbreakables and nonreturnables. Some of your household items may be nonrefillable, nonfireproof or nonintoxicating. Some

may be nonusable and also nonreusable. If you think membership in "the silent majority" gives you a positive label, don't be misled; it may be only a courteous way of grouping the nonentities.

There are of course a few firm, positive labels scattered about, although they generally are used for individuals rather than groups. For example, dingo, clod, freak, twerp and meathead. Granted these are non-negative, but they're also rather nonpolite.

Anyone worth his salt is entitled to a few "nons"—either hyphenated or nonhyphenated. The thing to avoid is the

Mr. Galyon is a freelance writer.

"un," like unemployed, unhealthy, uninformed, unhappy, unloved and unnecessary. A good high-class non will always turn up his nose at a common ordinary un.

Since very few of us are important enough to be called something nice and positive, our best bet is to seek those negative labels that cause the least harm. For example, a nonhomeowner doesn't have to fight crabgrass; a nonviewer can avoid many hours of terrible television; and a nonreader will miss a lot of nonsense he didn't want to know anyhow.

Perhaps the ultimate of all nons would be the nontaxpayer. But to achieve such an enviable distinction might be extremely difficult unless one can first find a way to become a nonresident with a non-income-producing profession, or maybe a non-owner of a nonprofit organization. Unfortunately, by the time you get all that together, you may be eating nonedibles!

David Van Praagh

## A Bit of Hope in Bangladesh

DACCA—In Bangladesh, the economic equation is starkly simple. It involves people and food. If there are too many people and not enough food, the answer is death, as it was in 1974. If there is enough or even a little more than enough food to go around, the answer is life at a low level for most people.

At the moment, Bangladesh is doing well. This is a generally held but relative judgment of conditions that almost no other country would accept. Even Bengalis warn that some Western economic observers are too optimistic—and other Western observers shake their heads at their colleagues.

Two good rice crops in a row, plus a moderately successful effort to grow wheat and continued food im-

Mr. Van Praagh is on the faculty of Carleton University, Ottawa.

ports, have produced not only enough food but a problem of how to store the surplus. Meanwhile, a population of 81 million continues to grow at least 2.8 per cent a year, a rate that, if not reduced, will double the population by the year 2000.

So life goes on, and so do economic projections. For example, a trishaw wallah—a man who pedals a three-wheeled bicycle designed to carry another human being or two around Dacca for roughly seven cents a mile—may be able to buy a new T-shirt for his wiry frame, or even to turn around while pedaling to explain the sights to a customer in a mixture of Bengali and English.

There are no longer colonies of squatters near the center of the capital, only scattered huts, although this may be due mainly to the government's moving urban poor out of the city. The streets are clean, again by official order, although almost all buildings except the largely unoccupied and uncompleted "new capital" are dingy or worse. There are even a few smiles among the "babus"—the government clerks who labor, or make a pretense of doing so, amid stacks of yellowed, irrelevant papers.

In many parts of the countryside, the rural poor—often landless peasants who do not even have tenant-farmer status—receive enough wheat flour to live on in return for work moving earth for irrigation canals. In some villages, boys and girls and their mothers are earning a



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pitance making crude crafts and selling them through government co-operatives.

These are all mildly encouraging contrasts to the chaos and frantic foreign-relief efforts in the months following the violent attainment of independence from Pakistan in December 1971, and to the growing despair culminating in 1974's floods and mass starvation. The improvement is due mainly to good weather, or the absence for two years of natural catastrophes, such as cyclones and flooding, to which Bangladesh remains vulnerable. Food output has grown by 2 or 3 million tons to 13 million in 1976, and food imports—still the biggest element in aid provided by the two largest donors, the United States and Canada—have dropped to less than 10 per cent of need, although they make up most of the food for sale in Dacca.

But there are other plus factors besides the weather. Bengali farmers have started to take to high-yielding varieties of grain and multiple-cropping. The martial-law government under Major Gen. Ziaur Rahman has apparently reduced corruption and smuggling to India. It is even possible that poor Bengalis are working harder because they sense the government wants to improve their lot.

Bernard Zagorin, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Economic and Social Council and chief U.N. representative here, illustrates by holding each hand at a different level his point that Bangladesh is in a better position than in the past to sustain a bad crop year, and may even be on the way to food self-sufficiency.

Another Western economist is less hopeful. "It's all fragile," he insisted. "It looks good in the short term but in the long term even one poor har-

vest would make things bad again—it's not good enough fast enough."

"We have to take bold decisions and actions to hope to break the vicious circle of poverty," said M. N. Huda, the economic planning adviser to Ziaur. He is one of the few trained and realistic experts overseeing an economy that returns less than the equivalent of \$100 a year to the average Bengali, and considerably less to many because of the continued existence of a small, wealthy class of landowners. He was not optimistic about the prospects of bringing about genuine land reform benefiting the small cultivator and making it more likely he will buy the expensive inputs necessary for the Green Revolution to take root in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh's only reasonable hope for new and meaningful industrialization rests on natural gas deposits that can be used to make fertilizer. Its main export, jute, is in danger of becoming obsolete. Its long-range salvation, according to Agriculture Secretary Obaidullah Khan, lies in developing with India the vast food potential of the Ganges-Brahmaputra Plain, but Bangladesh suffers agriculturally now from India's diverting river waters for its own uses. Obaidullah believes that food production in Bangladesh can keep up with a population growth rate of 2 per cent.

Mohammed Sattar, a Harvard-educated family planning official, believes that poor women in Bangladesh want fewer children but are just becoming acquainted with safe, voluntary birth-control methods. He is optimistic that population growth will be cut, if only because "our position is so desperate something must happen."

A Western aid official who has been here more than four years may have summed up the life-and-death equation in Bangladesh most fairly and aptly: "The Bengalis have always kept their heads above water but most of them don't seem to want to do more. If they had two bad crop years instead of two good ones, it would be murderous. If nothing had been done to help Bangladesh a few years ago, or if nothing is done now, the end will come quickly—in five or 10 years, not 50. So Bangladesh is important not only for itself but as a prototype for dealing with a low-level society as a testing ground and showing that it doesn't have to go under. But we can't really expect much else, and we can't even be sure of that."

John C. Sawhill

## Toward a National Energy Plan

There is a growing national awareness that we face a serious energy problem in both the short and long term. And there is a general consensus that we need a national energy policy to deal with those problems. But turning that consensus into effective action has so far eluded us.

The new administration must move quickly beyond mere rearrangement of boxes on our federal organization chart—one of the few concrete proposals that has surfaced so far. For so little has been done since the 1973 Arab oil embargo that imports now account for a higher percentage of total U.S. consumption than they did then. And our energy conservation program is so ineffective (ranking near the bottom of the list of industrialized nations) that we are missing our best chance of defusing the Arab oil weapon.

The immediate problem is the growing U.S. dependence on oil imports increasingly concentrated in the Middle East. The longer-range problem is the need to find alternative sources of energy to sustain the world's economy in the next century when oil and gas supplies are depleted. Unless we solve the near-term problem, our domestic economy and our foreign policy will remain

unduly vulnerable to manipulation by the Arab states, and the mounting debt burdens on the non-oil producing less-developed countries will continue to threaten international financial stability. Unless we solve the longer-range problem, we will have difficulty maintaining a rising standard of living once liquid hydrocarbon reserves are exhausted.

The writer, former Federal Energy Administrator, is president of New York University.

Several critical decisions are called for, the first of which is to establish short- and long-range goals for U.S. dependence on foreign sources for petroleum. A second is to set a target for reducing the growth of energy consumption and to enact a package of tough energy-conservation measures. Somewhat higher fuel prices, coupled with other economic incentives (like tax credits for insulation) and regulatory measures (such as banning nonreturnable bottles), could reduce the rate of energy-demand growth well below 2 per cent a year.

One of the most pressing energy issues before Congress is whether the government should continue to regulate oil and gas prices. Opponents of regulation claim that controls encourage consumption, discourage investment in new production, and maintain an unnecessary government bureaucracy. Proponents argue that oil prices have always been regulated de facto—first through production limits set by the Texas Railroad Commission and later through the import-quota program.

If controls were completely eliminated today, the price for oil would not be determined by free market demand-and-supply conditions, but by the OPEC cartel. U.S. oil prices should be as consistent as possible with U.S. economic recovery and energy objectives; it is unlikely, to say the least, that the OPEC managers will act on this criterion. My own view is that complete deregulation is not the best course. The United States must continue to regulate crude oil prices with a view toward keeping our economic engine lubricated, but permit them to rise enough to encourage conservation, new exploration, and the development of new facilities. Petroleum product prices and the price of

new natural gas at the wellhead should be deregulated, however, since they will tend to move with crude-oil prices.

The best way to moderate world energy prices is to reduce our import dependency. Beyond this, however, there are other actions that should be explored. One is the possibility of establishing a government agency to purchase some imports (such as those necessary to build an oil stockpile) under a system whereby OPEC suppliers would be required to submit sealed bids for access to the U.S. market as a means of fostering competition among them. The dissension at the recent Qatar meetings suggests that there may be opportunities for the new administration to widen cracks in the cartel, and thereby bring downward pressures on prices.

In addition to prices, a pressing question facing the new Carter energy team is the future role of nuclear power. Reducing our dependency on oil as a primary energy source in the longer term will require much expanded capacity for electrical generation besides an increased role for coal. This means some firm decisions on nuclear energy. The current debate on this issue has centered around questions of reactor

safety and waste disposal and, as a result, has tended to obscure the more critical issue, which is the problem of weapons proliferation. The key to reducing the proliferation risks is to limit the spread of plutonium until appropriate safeguards are in place.

Fortunately, the U.S. has sufficient uranium reserves to last well into the next century. For this reason, we are in a position to defer the decision on plutonium recycling and on commercialization of the breeder reactor (which uses plutonium) in order to influence foreign suppliers to do the same. Simultaneously, we should work from the other end to persuade potential buyers of these facilities that their benefits are outweighed by the risk of weapons proliferation. Strengthening and broadening the mandate of the International Atomic Energy Agency would help to enforce measures to limit proliferation.

In sum, then, we need serious commitment to a national energy plan. We will be able to measure the seriousness of this commitment by the speed with which proposals are made and decisions are reached on these overall goals. The consequences of continued inaction are grave indeed.

Helms, who has emerged as an aggressive and influential figure on the Republican right, telephone Brock shortly after his election to congratulate him for winning as a "born-again conservative." The phrase reveals the dubious but widely-held view by many conservatives that Brock lost his Senate seat in Tennessee last year by straying too far left and now has moved right again to be elected national chairman.

Helms then suggested that the Republican National Committee demand equal time to answer President Carter's contemplated fireside chat on the Panama Canal negotiations. Reagan, said Helms, would be admirably equipped to present the Republican viewpoint.

Indisputably, Brock did not give a total no to Helms. But whereas friends of Helms report that Brock agreed to making use of Reagan, friends of Brock say he was only agreeing to the principle of demanding equal time.

The Ford camp, led by the former President himself, would protest loud and long should Reagan represent the party on canal negotiations. So, Brock is at once faced with a divisive issue from out of the past that runs exactly counter to his search for issues that will unify the bedraggled party.

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