

Unlike our own study, which examined numerous aspects of content, the FI focused on a single issue, child poverty. It's worth noting that the Fraser Forum article in which the flawed study first appeared was reprinted almost word-for-word in the Calgary Herald (January 9, 1999), while our work has not been reported by any Canadian daily newspaper.

The report begins by misrepresenting the results of our study (reported in the related article). Miljan begins by asserting that we argue "that the (Sun) is more business-oriented now..." Our findings indicate that there was more business news in 1997 than in 1987 and this news has moved from the news section to the business section. This finding suggests that business items are now being written for investors rather than citizens as a whole.

The increase in business news also coincided with a decrease in labour news. On the whole, the Sun tended to frame business in a positive light and labour in a more negative light: most labour news was focused on business-labour disputes.

Miljan claims that "it does not necessarily follow that more business news is less balanced

Calling a 'balanced view' one that reports positively on its own ideologically driven characterization; critiquing NewsWatch Canada's study without reading it or reporting its results: the Fraser Institute's modus operandi becomes clearer all the time.

Sun devotes less space to poor after Hollinger takeover

Low Income Cut Off Line with the Fraser Institute's Basic Needs Index as a definitive measure of poverty. Such a move would drastically reduce estimates of poverty in Canada. (See the following article for a related story.)

Because the sources used by reporters shape news by promoting particular perspectives and definitions of social reality, we also tracked which groups were used as sources in poverty stories. We found an increasing reliance on political, social and economic elites or "authoritative sources."

Government officials (up from 41% to 50%), business people (up from 12% to 21%) and academics (up from 2% to 8%), not only increased in frequency but also were more apt to define the issue or set the terms of debate in the post-Hollinger Sun than in the 1988 paper.

This increase in authoritative sources was accompanied by an increase in unaffiliated sources (up from 21% to 37%). It is unclear if these "person-on-the-street" sources gave the poor increased access to the media, or whether the Sun focused on individuals, drawing attention away from the systemic factors that contribute to poverty.

Part of the answer may lie in the modest decline in the number of stories in which advocacy groups for the poor were accessed as sources. In 1988, advocacy groups such as End Legislative Poverty were the most frequently quoted source (43%), declining to 38% in 1997.

Also of note is the decline in the quality of access given to groups working on behalf of the poor. In the pre-Hollinger Sun, advocacy groups set the tone of the story (called defining sources) in 33% of poverty-related items. By 1997, they acted as defining sources in less than 25% of items. These findings suggest that organized critiques of the systemic factors that create poverty are receiving less attention in the Hollinger version of the Sun.

As a final qualitative aspect of the study, we looked at how the poor were portrayed. In both years, the poor were pictured as individuals at the mercy of social and economic circumstances beyond their control. The percentage of stories of this type, however, declined from 76% in 1988 to 68% in 1997. At the same time, the number of articles in which the poor were portrayed as lacking the incentive to work, or threatening the public purse, rose from 11% in 1988 to 17% in 1997.

Our findings suggest that the paper has taken on a more conservative and less compassionate approach to people living in poverty. Poverty is on the rise in Canada, but the amount of coverage the Vancouver Sun devotes to this problem has declined. This is disconcerting because, as media analyst Bernard Cohen has pointed out, "although the media can't tell people what to think, they can tell people what to think about."

Christine Krause and Scott Uzelman were participants in the NewsWatch Canada Question the Sun! study.