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THE COMMENT PAGE

Poilievre and the Big, Bad Media

By Bill Redekop

Pierre Poilievre set the tone with the media almost immediately after being elected Conservative Party of Canada leader.

In his first press conferences, which are usually amicable affairs for a new leader, Poilievre was strangely antagonistic. It was almost as if he was spoiling for a fight with reporters. Already.

Normally, there's a honeymoon period for any new leader. Even afterward, the media tends not to be hard on opposition leaders. It doesn't really care about them until there's an election because opposition leaders don't run anything. They run their own parties and try to get attention. For news media, it's really about reporting on the government. The government does things that impact people's lives.

But Poilievre's belligerence with media members flared at every opportunity (which weren't many because he prefers to communicate via the internet). Why? I had two thoughts on this.

One was some people don't like being questioned. You find this when you're in the news business. It's like you're always questioning their integrity.

My second thought was this was the party's strategy. Poilievre was setting up a narrative that the media were against him, even if he had to provoke the media into it. He was creating a narrative that said the media were hostile towards him due to their political biases. People wouldn't blame him for not taking questions from a biased and discredited media, which would help him in the future.

Poilievre worked the bias angle hard. For example, he claimed the Canadian Press wire service was biased against him because CBC is the biggest of its numerous customers. A wire service provides many essential stories for news outlets across the country, saving those outlets from having to cover certain events themselves. CP is a much-valued service, but those in the media know it's vanilla: its stories are composed in a very uncontroversial way for a national audience.

The CPC strategy worked well, I thought. Poilievre's attacks sensitized media to the fact they could be perceived as having a bias, and media became very careful in their coverage of Poilievre. But I also think reporters were smart and didn't take the bait. There were a few heated exchanges, but reporters weren't prepared to push too far against an opposition leader. He doesn't run the government.

That's even though Poilievre has a reputation for spreading "deliberate falsehoods," as columnist Dan Lett stated on the front page of the *Winnipeg Free Press* on the election's first day.

Fast forward to the election campaign and the latest escalation in the media war. First, Poilievre's camp announced it would break tradition and no longer allow news reporters on its campaign plane, a spacious, 146-passenger Airbus A319. Typically, reporters pay their own way on the plane, a less expensive way to follow a leader that also helps defray the party's flight costs.

But if reporters should make their own way to a campaign stop, only four questions would be allowed to be split between all media, and there would be no follow-up questions. It's almost not worth it.

The decrees didn't end there. Poilievre's handlers are now screening the questions, demanding reporters submit them in advance so they can decide which questions get asked. The CBC has been virtually barred from asking questions.

This has led to confrontation with Poilievre's handlers physically shoving away media. Oh, Mother Russia, Putin, and message control!

The Globe and Mail did a count: Liberal Leader Mark Carney fielded 140 reporter questions in the first two weeks of the election, to just 48 for Poilievre. Political neophyte Carney has barely got his feet wet in the job, and he's handling three times the number of questions as Poilievre.

If you are going to be entrusted with the billions of dollars we pay in taxes, you should at least expect to be held accountable. You should be expected to field questions because it's our information and our money you're handling. I expect my accountant to answer my questions.

Of course, this signals how Poilievre will govern if elected prime minister. Don't expect a lot of communication. Maybe he'll just tweet, like a certain leader to the south of us.

– Bill Redekop was a reporter at the Winnipeg Free Press for 31 years. His newest book is The Princess Auto Story.

Clipper Publishing's What's It? Challenge

Can you identify what this item is and what it was used for?

Please include your full name, home town and date the photo appeared in The Clipper.

Photos by Pioneer Village Museum in Beausejour

Email your answer to news@clipper.mb.ca or call 204-268-4700



Last week's What's It?



The What's It? object in the April 3 edition of *The Clipper* was a MEAT or VEGETABLE GRINDER. Congratulations to Janice Jurgens of Lac du Bonnet for being one of the first people to provide the correct answer. Aso providing correct answers were Bev Stewart of Souris, Carol Syganiec of Cooks Creek, Peter Sargent in Pinawa, Clarence Worona of Lowland, Kurtis Hadaller of Hazelglen, John Ritlbauer, Otto Best, Adele Streib, Reg Arnhold and Irene Machado of Winnipeg, Diane Wayne of Hazelridge, Kendar Olson, Ed Pauls, Julian Klym, Larry Shewchuk, Rhonda Grochowski, Ward Omichinski and David Peitsch of Beausejour, James Dyck of Birds Hill Park, Don Marion of Dugald, Julie Atamanchuk, Tatjana Burau, Pat Galbraith and Alice Tetrault of Oakbank, Ian Havelock of Tyndall, Jo-Anne Anderson of St-Georges, Gail Gross of Nourse, Marnie Beaulieu of Springfield and Art Koop of Anola.

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