

SUBMISSION

Walter Starck

Our news media tend to present a middle class, left wing, academic bias. When this is combined with their tendency to focus on conflict, controversy, sensationalism, and blame the distortion is compounded.

Unfortunately, overseas, and in particular Asian, media have very few reporters here producing their own independent views of Australian affairs but instead rely almost entirely upon an assessment of events as reported by our own media. It is hardly surprising that a picture of a racist, arrogant, anti-Asian society presided over by an insensitive incompetent government should emerge.

Some of the more egregious recent examples which come to mind are, the Papuan fruit fly hysteria, the Hanson phenomenon, illegal boat people events, arrest of the Care workers in Serbia, and sundry aspects of the East Timor crisis. In such situations events of minor import may be elevated to headline status and presented in the worst possible light. Innocuous statements are regularly taken out of context and interpreted in a false or extreme manner. Erroneous information which could easily be checked and even deliberate fabrications are reported as factual. Individuals are harmed, businesses damaged, and Australia as a nation is slandered. News is not so much reported as it is created.

Freedom of speech is not freedom to defame, lie and deceive. It certainly isn't for individuals, why should it be for the media? We already have appropriate laws to deal with such behaviour, all that is needed is to apply them. When false information is presented as news, either by intent or lack of reasonable diligence, the mandatory remedy should be the same as for any other defective product. The defective one should be replaced with a good one in the form of a free reprint of the publication or rerun of the program including free rerun of associated advertising.

Such a remedy would not have to entail horrendously expensive and lengthy litigation but, like product recalls, be required immediately upon establishment of the relevant facts and errors. It would only take one or two such instances and we would experience a wondrous improvement in the honesty of our media.

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