

**Not enough pride in the profession**  
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COMMENT As wise men say, pride comes before a fall. Though in Malaysian journalism, its lack is causing the profession to decline and hindering attempts to uplift it.

I am no greenhorn though not yet a senior journalist. Thus I say this more as a student of the history of the rise and fall of local journalism.

And that bit of me educated by those to whom the profession is still about pride in your work, is about doing justice to facts, the rakyat and ethics.

NONE It seems that to my observation now, money seems to be the guiding light to some.

One who works with a mainstream newspaper told me, "I am a mercenary, I go where the money is, I'll do what they pay me to".

"Why are you here, with your talent you should join bigger firms. Go where the money is," said yet another and more senior media practitioner with an official broadcaster.

To them, there is no motivation to be proud of their work; it is just a matter of course. The open bribery of junkets and media nights perhaps reinforces this.

Technically some do take great care on how they perform their jobs, but there is no pride in why they do it, what they produce, and how it is used.

I can perhaps understand, observing formerly illustrious Malaysian newspapers and experiencing the decline of stand-up broadcast news.

Both today, are widely lamented to be akin to stand-up comedy than stand-up reporting.

Questionable news

Association with a certain broadcaster's reporters whose stand-uppers have been accompanied by questionable news, have been admitted to with shame and regret by fellow journalists.

"Oh my God. What a ridiculous spin. And I knew the reporter, he was my batch in university," said one journo hanging his head.

Both print and broadcast news these days are dancing to the powers-that-be's rendition of 'Stand by me', forgetting that in a true democracy, their solemn duty is to stand by the rakyat.

"I am okay with being a wahyu reporter," a senior journalist told me, wahyu meaning revelations, the buzzword for those who write based on orders from up high.

While not all, many are like this, resigned to being used to propagate propaganda then really reporting news.

Patriotic perhaps, but misguided. Patriotism should be to the land and its rakyat, not the power- that-be per se.

In a way, these intelligent reporters are proud and diligent, but perhaps for all the wrong reasons.

mahathir ebook launching 091211 04As it is, our governance is the legacy of Mahathir's (right) guided democracy where the government controls and defines what democracy and freedom is.

In this regard, one can almost forgive government-run "news agencies" and such errant journos for their slant.

How cowed they are by the whip of the powers-that-be, to believe themselves performing a national service, or sugared by promised wealth from honeyed lips.

And one can understand completely that the government too needs a channel to communicate its policies and views, just like the opposition parties.

Though some would say it is scant excuse to turn one's back on ethics for those who supposedly practise "journalism", even if under the government's thumb.

Surely that role is more suited for the Information Department and the Office of the PM's Department of Special Affairs, rather than done willingly by some "news agencies" that yet still claim to be "independent media".

But one can understand why it is difficult for journalists and editors to stand up straight and not slouch the government's way, head safely down, no questions asked.

NONEFor many, their livelihood hangs in the balance, with dismissal like a Damocles' Sword, swinging over their heads.

Not many, if any, stood by former NUJ chief Hata Wahari (left) when he sounded the clarion call for press freedom and journalistic independence.

Sadder still, former journalists, once elevated to the high offices by those in power, oft become the very tendrils and pinions that have helped constrain the profession.

And the new blood recruited into the profession are no better, with many seeing it as a mere stepping stone to more lucrative careers in public relations or some politico's press office.

Mass produced

As admitted to by academicians who teach journalism today, most journalism graduates are churned out like mass-produced automatons.

Their instruction is only on the technical aspects of doing their job, with no sense of history, or having a greater philosophy attached to their learning.

"As per to industry requirements," was what one called it, though admitting that journalism only attracts the dregs in the first place, with no star students in most cases.

With the absence of such moral bulwarks, it is no surprise that many see no need for pride in the profession nor a compulsion to adhere to its ethics.

One example - those who see no wrong in plagiarising or lifting news without quoting the appropriate sources.

Some do it subtly by using the phrase 'reported by media' for exclusive stories, though others unashamedly use direct quotes when they were not even there at the event.

Bylines of absent reporters and no attributions as to the actual stories from the media they lifted it from,

are par for the course.

There is collaboration even among media supposedly hostile to each other when reporting news together at an event. We share recordings and quotes.

Especially at hectic news events where it is understandable that one or even two reporters cannot cover everything at once.

But you have to be there to share, not do it by "processing" news from your high rise office.

Absence of pride

More serious examples are the over-spinning of news and in some cases pure fabrication of stories by some.

It is a sad state that I believe the profession is now:

In the absence of pride, money becomes the guiding light  
In the absence of pride, many give in to fear  
In the absence of pride, we lose our hold on ethics  
In the absence of pride, we are too ashamed to resist  
With misguided heart, we serve not the rakyat's needs  
With misguided pride, the hand of tyrants we kiss.

Perhaps it is time to re-instill pride in the profession, to reignite the beacon that it once was and rekindle the lost years. It is after all a noble calling, though in Malaysia, we forget that.

Let us remember the time when even Utusan journalists picketed the paper for daring to presume to sell its shares to Umno.

It is useful perhaps for us to learn the history of journalism, as well as be fed with 'industry requirements', so that documents that define the profession like Walter Williams's 'The Journalist's Creed', could be enshrined where it matters the most, in the heart and soul of journalists.

## THE JOURNALIST'S CREED

by Walter Williams 1906

I believe in the profession of Journalism.

I believe that the public journal is a public trust; that all connected with it are, to the full measure of responsibility, trustees for the public; that all acceptance of lesser service than the public service is a betrayal of this trust.

I believe that clear thinking, clear statement, accuracy and fairness are fundamental to good journalism.

I believe that a journalist should write only what he holds in his heart to be true.

I believe that suppression of the news, for any consideration other than the welfare of society, is indefensible.

I believe that no one should write as a journalist what he would not say as a gentleman; that bribery by one's own pocket book is as much to be avoided as bribery by the pocketbook of another; that individual responsibility may not be escaped by pleading another's instructions or another's dividends.

I believe that advertising, news and editorial columns should alike serve the best interests of readers; that

a single standard of helpful truth and cleanness should prevail for all; that supreme test of good journalism is the measure of its public service.

I believe that the journalism which succeeds the best - and best deserves success - fears God and honours man; is stoutly independent; unmoved by pride of opinion or greed of power; constructive, tolerant but never careless, self-controlled, patient, always respectful of its readers but always unafraid, is quickly indignant at injustice; is unswayed by the appeal of the privilege or the clamour of the mob; seeks to give every man a chance, and as far as law, an honest wage and recognition of human brotherhood can make it so, an equal chance; is profoundly patriotic while sincerely promoting international good will and cementing world-comradeship, is a journalism of humanity, of and for today's world.

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