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PRINTING NEWS AND MONEY

A Look at Corporate Influence on the Press

by

Craig Pearson

A thesis

submitted to the

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

through the Department of Communication Studies

in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the

Degree of Master of Arts at the

University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

1995



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ABSTRACT

This paper takes a qualitative look at corporate interests -- and influence -- of the mainstream media. It studies management/labor viewpoints and their respective play in the news sheets. And it calls on academics and journalists to shed light on the issue, through literature and interviews.

The conversations explore many camouflaged aspects of news production, such as newsroom policy, editor manipulation, reporter self-censorship, personal perspectives, and practical limitations. They touch on trends, budgets, newspaper goals, monopolies, advertisers, readers, journalists, and asks for opinions on what system -- past, present or imagined -- represents the ideal.

No pretences are made to disguise the respondent group as a random, representative sample, for it is not. This project provides anecdotal information from a behind-the-scenes perspective.

The first chapter comprises a literature review; the second probes management-labor media coverage; the third focuses on advocacy advertising, using recent anti-Bill 40 (Ontario labor-law reform) ads as a case study, and dissects the issue through interviews with journalists; the fourth asks journalists for their thoughts on possible corporate influence in general. And the final chapter comprises conclusions and suggestions for improving our mass media system in order to promote democracy.

To Mom, Dad, Scott, Nana and Grandpa,
and to Sandy for all her support.

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I would be remiss if I did not thank the University of Windsor's communication studies department in general, for its inspiration over the years and its collection of wonderful people, such as Dr. Kai Hildebrandt and Ann Gallant. Most of all, I would be remiss if I did not thank my thesis committee: Howard Pawley, for his unwavering support; Dr. Stan Cunningham, for his prudent contributions, particularly with language; and Dr. Jim Winter, not just for his insight but for gently demanding more than I thought I had.

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"A free press should always fight for progress and reform, never tolerate injustice or corruption, always fight demagogues of all parties, never belong to any party, always oppose privileged classes and public plunderers, never lack sympathy with the poor, always remain devoted to the public welfare."

- Joseph Pulitzer

"The revolution will not be televised"

- Gil Scott-Heron

Foreword

In my work as a journalist, at three daily newspapers in two provinces over nine years, I have had the pleasure of meeting some of the most caring, intelligent people I have ever come across. Others seemed less scrupulous.

The point is, from reporter and editor to advertising representative and publisher, good people abound. Bad ones too, but that I imagine mirrors any profession. Some reporters keep me eagerly awaiting their next piece, for their writing as well as their research; some editors inspire me with their courage; some publishers impress me with their commitment to news. Most are dedicated professionals who take their work seriously. I have fraternized with all types, and include many as dear friends.

But friendships can thrive anywhere, and don't necessarily mean a system is perfect. Which brings me to journalism, the institution that informs our citizenry, and which facilitates democracy. The mass media are not perfect. And I doubt you could find many journalists who claim they are. I can vouch first-hand for the lack of perfection, since at one time or another I have: misspelled names; provided incorrect figures, dates, etc.; pressured innocent people for interviews; boiled their thoughts down to superficial coverage; misunderstood and mis-communicated; written fluff with exuberance; dug for a story that wasn't there, only to satisfy an editor who asked for it; ignored the plight of the needy; overlooked poverty; treated crime and accidents as profound journalistic

subjects; churned out formulaic stories in order to meet deadline; trumped up flashy controversy; played down complicated criticism; sensationalized; simplified; and generally neglected serious issues in lieu of violent, cute or sexy ones.

On the good days, however, I doubt I could find a profession to which I would be more committed. That's why I researched and wrote this thesis. Though journalists often criticize the media among themselves, disapproval more often revolves around editing decisions, or other examples of fine-tuning, not the *system*. And I don't think the system is ideal. As obvious as that seems to some, it doesn't appear often in our mainstream media. That's discouraging. So I have spent time reading about the topic, talking to journalists about it, and thinking on it myself.

The result is admittedly idealist, but there is no shame in shooting for the moon. The thesis deals with subtle tendencies, not absolutes; with a system, not a conspiracy; and with institutions, not individuals who do their jobs, and do them well.

The research I present, the interviews I provide, and the suggestions I give do not come because I hate journalism, but because I love it.

Preface

I cannot thank my collaborators enough for their valid and valuable input into this thesis. Though I have sometimes felt journalists strangely wary of criticism of their profession -- since, after all, it is occasionally their job to criticize others -- I found respondents generally forthright and open. Many were deeply critical of the profession, where warranted. All were intelligent and articulate.

Since this is a Master of Arts thesis, it uses endnotes for all references, and offsets quotations longer than four lines. The interviews, however, are not annotated. And in the interest of easier reading, they are not offset, since collaborators are often quoted at length.

Readers will notice that not all those interviewed respond to every question in this thesis. That is because the interviews were not rigid, designed instead to flow more freely. In the end, some questions were not asked; in other cases, some collaborators did not respond directly to all questions.

List of Collaborators

The interviews for this thesis, contained in Chapters 3 and 4, were conducted throughout 1994. They ranged in length from 20 minutes to more than an hour, sometimes by phone, mostly in person. The collaborators are daily newspaper journalists at various levels, from reporter to publisher. They all work in Ontario, except Charles Bury, who works in Quebec. Alphabetically, they are:

Charles Bury, editor of the *Sherbrooke Record* and chairman of the Canadian Association of Journalists.

Mike Dunnell, one-time managing editor of the *Windsor Star* who also worked briefly as a reporter for the *Stratford Beacon-Herald*.

Colin MacKenzie, deputy managing editor of the *Globe and Mail*, who has worked as Washington bureau chief, city editor, and was once an assistant managing editor of *Macleans*.

Jim Potter, copy/layout editor at the *Windsor Star* and editorial vice-president with the Guild, who has also worked at the *Chatham Daily News* as a reporter.

Andre Prefontaine, publisher of the *Windsor Star*, who has worked at the *Kingston Whig-Standard* and as editor of the *Sherbrooke Tribune*, where he also worked as a reporter.

Lee Prokaska, Hamilton *Spectator* workplace reporter, who has covered most beats, except sports and entertainment.

Gail Robertson, *Express* magazine entertainment writer at the *Windsor Star*, where she is also Guild president.

Rick Salutin, author, playwright, and media columnist for the *Globe and Mail*.

Lorne Slotnick, former *Globe and Mail* labor reporter who now works at the Southern Ontario Newspaper Guild, helping with contract negotiations and grievances at several newspapers.

The thesis also includes earlier but related interviews with Harvey Enchin, long-time business reporter with the *Globe and Mail's* Report On Business section; and Lindsay Crysler, former head of the Concordia University journalism department, who has worked at several newspapers, including the *Montreal Gazette* as city editor.

As well, a phone interview with Noam Chomsky in 1990 is also cited, as is Conrad Black, from an unpublished keynote speech he made in Ottawa to the Canadian Association of Journalists convention, Scrum 94, on Aug. 9, 1994.

CHAPTER 1

The Information Base

Journalism is the oxygen of democracy. True democracy lives only when citizens can access unfiltered information and many points of view. Since most of society's information flows through the mass news media, only when they operate properly on behalf of the majority can democracy do the same. Democracy, however, may be unduly ill in North America.

Mainstream media tend to avoid this topic, though they should not. In totalitarian countries, control over the media is definitive: the party line receives only flattery. In Western countries, the means of control differ but the *systemic* result bears some similar characteristics. Yes, politicians suffer criticism. But the capitalist system generally escapes reproach. Government and big business enjoy tremendous influence, while the media -- loud and critical though they are at times -- generally encourage the trend.

Existence of a media/establishment fraternity seems obvious to some. Yet even wondering about corporate influence is taboo within the mainstream media. The media -- the major shapers of public opinion -- avoid deeply criticizing themselves, thereby diluting discussion of potential media biases and of the failings of our economic structure. That's where, hopefully, this thesis comes in.

Outline

This paper takes a qualitative look at corporate interests -- and influence, overt or covert -- of the mainstream media. It studies the press's corporate connection, including a comparison between management/labor viewpoints and their respective play in the news sheets. And it calls on academics and journalists to shed light on the issue. Few matters produce such transparent depictions of corporate/union loyalties as do management-labor conflicts, hence they form this thesis's central theme, along with economics.

The work's soul is personal interviews with journalists, from reporters to senior managers. They provide not only voices on the topic of media studies but offer a certain insight that statistics cannot. The interviews span two chapters: the Ontario dailies' use of advocacy ads criticizing provincial labor-law reform in 1992 (Chapter 3); and journalists' thoughts on corporate influence in general (Chapter 4).

The first impediment to compiling a list of anecdotes from journalists is devising the methodology with which to collect them. The methodology comprises four data-collection stages: (1) developing a loose set of questions to follow; (2) selecting journalists to interview; (3) interviewing journalists; and (4) compiling and analyzing relevant information.

The interviews averaged about 30 minutes, unless common sense dictated that the discussion deserved an extension. The conversations explore many camouflaged aspects of news production, such as newsroom policy, editor manipulation, reporter self-censorship, personal perspectives, practical limitations,

and general thoughts on improving the craft. They touch on trends, budgets, newspaper goals, concentration and monopolies, advertisers, readers, journalists, and asks for opinions on what system -- past, present or imagined -- represents the ideal.

The interviews were intended to be in-depth and somewhat non-directive. The interviewer avoided leading the interviewee with specific examples but tried to serve more as a rather quiet conversation partner. The idea: respondents may talk freely and without manipulation about advocacy ads and other media issues, and what from those events -- if anything -- influences the news.

Respondents are considered collaborators, not subjects, and could speak candidly about any relevant thoughts, however abstract or obscure. All musings on the issue are pertinent.

No pretences are made to disguise the respondent group as a random, representative sample, for it is not. This project necessarily seeks something that statistics can't convey: qualitative information, insider insight, an intimate peek at the imperfections of the press. It also seeks those journalists who have noticed the subtle or unspoken. A meagre budget, unfortunately, helps create a modest survey. Yet the richness in material does not necessarily hinge on the cost of the venture. A handful of helpful reporters, offering close-up glimpses into the impact of news bias, provide ample return on investment.

A guideline sheet helped keep the interviews focused, but the object of the exercise -- namely, accumulating as much relevant information on any aspect of inside or outside influence on the news -- lends itself to natural conversation flow.

All interviews were recorded on cassette, with the consent of individual participants, and relevant information later transcribed.

The first chapter of this thesis comprises a literature review, where critics from Walter Lippmann and Neil Postman to Marshall McLuhan and Jacques Ellul are studied, on many aspects of the mass media: their influence, power and tendencies. The second chapter probes management-labor coverage in the mainstream media.

The third chapter focuses on advocacy advertising, using recent anti-Bill 40 (Ontario labor-law reform) ads as a case study. Daily newspapers around Ontario took an unprecedented step in 1992 by uniting to run full-page ads -- sponsored by the Canadian Daily Newspaper Association -- criticising the pending law. The New Democratic Party campaigned and won on a promise to introduce labor reform that would among other things ban the use of replacement workers during strikes and facilitate unionization. Most corporations disapproved since they feared unions would gain more power in contract negotiations. The corporate side of newspapers shivered then, in unison with many companies, which the ads illustrated.

The fourth chapter focuses again on interviews with journalists, this time dealing with their thoughts on possible corporate influence in general.

The final chapter comprises conclusions and suggestions for improving our mass media system. The Kent Commission serves particularly well here, though other similarly helpful sources are incorporated. As well, I include some personal thoughts and opinions on remedies to consider for systemic media problems.

The Hinge of Democracy

In order to establish the need for constructive media criticism, and perhaps subsequently for change, we must understand the media's power. CBC National News anchor Knowlton Nash likens journalism to "the hinge of democracy" or "the glue that holds together our democratic society."

Our job is to try to reflect reality, not somebody's self-image... I've always thought that the media are, in effect, an agent for the public in seeking out and providing information on what's happening, where, when and why... The heart and soul of our business is credibility. We get that credibility, and the respect and power that go with it, only by being a socially and professionally responsible agent for the public... Our job in the media, be it television or radio or print, is to provide that news, and to provide a searchlight probing for truth through the confusing, complicated, cascading avalanche of fact and fiction. ¹

Democracy is tacked like a welcome sign to the media in official statements and conventional wisdom. Politicians and journalists readily acknowledge the media's theoretical value. As the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's mandate says:

We stake everything -- indeed the whole notion of democratic society -- on the rational dialogue of an informed public. Only the media can reach the mass of population to provide the information base required for that rational dialogue. ²

Another more earnest version of the media/democracy perspective, proposed by British academic Nicholas Garnham, holds that:

It is a commonplace to assert that public communication lies at the heart of the democratic process; that citizens require, if their equal access to the vote is to have any substantive meaning, equal access also to sources of information and equal opportunities to participate in the debates from which political decisions rightly flow. I want to argue that it follows that changes in media structure and media policy, whether these stem from economic developments or from public intervention, are properly political questions of as much

importance as the question of whether or not to introduce proportional representation, of relations between local and national government, of subsidies to political parties; that the policy of western European governments toward cable TV and satellite broadcasting is as important as their attitude towards the development of a United Europe; that the FCC's policy towards broadcast regulation is as important as the question of States' rights and that politicians, political scientists and citizens concerned with the health and future of democracy neglect these issues at their peril. ³

The question always remains, however: Does theory meet practice?"If the media performed as ideally as they should, if they actually served an informed and interested citizenry, democracy might more closely approximate its ideal," says Robert Entman in *Democracy Without Citizens*.⁴ His point succinctly sums up the perils democracy faces without the benefit of a truly free press.

Even if the press does not mold our every opinion, it does mold *opinion visibility*; it can frame the perceptual limits around which our opinions take shape. Here may lie the most important effect of the news media: they set the issue agenda for the rest of us, choosing what to emphasize and what to ignore and suppress, in effect, organizing much of our political world for us. The media may not always be able to tell us what to think, but they are strikingly successful in telling us what to think about. ⁵

This is part of the media's power. Canadians' sudden preoccupation with the deficit, rarely discussed prior to conservative leaders' mention and the media's subsequent exploration of it, is a perfect example.

Like most sociopolitical systems throughout in the world, the western free-market media order is far from its theoretical blueprint, which provides for and protects an enlightened population that holds freedom of speech as the key to liberty.

York University professor Arnold Itwaru writes eloquently about what he calls the farce of free speech.

What is free speech where in my freedom to speak I speak but no one hears? When free speech becomes the incessant and competitive reproduction of noise, the competitive accumulation and competitive sale of information, the utterances which set the agenda of conversations and the agendas of seeing, when free speech becomes the suasive articulation for the accommodation of domination -- free speech is made an obscene parody of itself, a gruesome and lethal farce. ⁶

Ideal journalism holds lofty goals: seeking the common good; investigating all aspects of society; uncovering wrongs; or according to the dictum press baron William Randolph Hearst allegedly followed, comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comforted. ⁷

In fact, this romanticized version of the media is warped. True, conservative thinkers habitually revile the press as biased toward liberal ideology. ⁸ Reporters, they say, slant in favor of progressive causes. Less often do they talk about how proprietors often slant in favor of the right, as do parent corporations, which most define the news system. Nor do they discuss conservative reporters. The allegedly liberal assessment arises simply because media stories publicize extreme establishment excesses -- surely what the press should do. In fact, much media criticism attacks superficially, bemoaning individual instances rather than the system which causes them. This still offends conservatives.

They would prefer a press dedicated to an exclusively unblemished picture of American business and American life, complete with upbeat stories about the military's prowess, its benign world leadership, and the ever-expanding blessings of the free market at home or abroad. Attacks from the right help the media maintain an appearance of neutrality and

objectivity. The charge made by leftist critics that the media are complicit with the dominant powers seems to be refuted when these same powerful interests attack the media for being a liberal tool.⁹

Besides, the evidence is suspect. A growing number of conservative editorialists, columnists, and TV and radio commentators publicly analyze our society. The right dominates TV discussion in particular, with such rightist ideologues as Rush Limbaugh, Robert Novak, William Buckley, John McLaughlin, George Will, and Pat Buchanan. The left is allegedly supported by Michael Kinsley, Sam Donaldson, and Mark Shields, essentially moderate centrists.

The conservative Adam Meyerson, editor of the rightwing Heritage Foundation's *Policy Review*, admitted that commentary in the "liberal media" is actually dominated by conservative columnists: "Journalism today is very different from what it was ten or twenty years ago. Today op-ed pages are dominated by conservatives... We have a tremendous amount of conservative opinion, but this creates a problem for those who are interested in a career in journalism after college... If Bill Buckley were to come out of Yale today, nobody would pay much attention to him. He would not be that unusual... because there are probably hundreds of people with those ideas (and) they have already got syndicated columns."¹⁰

The Subjective Analysis of Objectivity

If we accept that the news media remain vital to democracy, we must then ask ourselves if the media perform their duties well. That means, on behalf of the people. To do that, we must study accepted norms of the mass media. What is crucial, again, is the system, not the details. And we must willingly challenge systemic biases, no matter how accepted, to better society.

Axiom 1 of media philosophy, that reporters remain objective, results in the first distortion of the media message. Even blatant falsehoods can appear unquestioned in the name of neutrality. That type of influence proves especially carcinogenic because it is hidden, even to well-meaning journalists who practice it. If society is unchallenged, then the status quo remains. The status quo, needless to say, favors monied interests (global statistics indicate widening income gaps around the world) ¹¹. The end result is that journalists are expected to deal in a caricature of objectivity.

Before discussing the problems of alleged objectivity further, it should be noted that some theorists point out the tension between objectivity and adversarialism. "If investigative reporting is American journalism at its most vigorous and often its most influential, it is also American journalism at its most paradoxical," write American academics Theodore Glasser and James Ettema. ¹² The point they make is that those who wish the media to remain neutral above all, will dismiss investigative or critical journalism as "righteous indignation," to borrow a term coined by Ida Tarbell almost a century ago. After discussing the issue, however, Glasser and Ettema argue that since journalists wield great influence on the moral order, to completely avoid adversarial journalism is to defraud the public.

We have argued that the ideological consequence of a press seeking to be the "custodian of conscience" is an intimate, if always tentative, connection between the press and the moral order. We also recognize, however, that the consequence of a press seeking, at the same time, to be a detached observer is a devalued, censored, and repressed connection between the press and the public conscience. ¹³

Remaining allegedly objective gives the powerful a distinct edge, since they are most often in a position to be quoted. Significantly influencing our democracy usually requires massive amounts of capital, from operating media outlets to political lobbying, legal wrangling, mass marketing, and ideological funding.¹⁴ Reformers run the race strapped to a ball-and-chain. "A message in support of the status quo is typically considered to be "neutral," "objective" and "non-controversial," while a message that departs from the status quo is considered to have a "point of view" and "bias."¹⁵

In Windsor, the media generally promote the casino, the first such gaming house built in Ontario, citing jobs and new money as the city's savior. They are valid points. But other media, in cities without casinos such as Toronto and Detroit, more willingly criticize the concept and expose problems with it. This is not simply coincidence. But it raises a fundamental point. If casino coverage focused only on objective facts, then stories should mirror one another no matter the city nor the perspective.

Objectivity is problematic because truth does not lie in facts themselves, rather the journalist must seek the truth by interpreting and evaluating the facts. It is also problematic because the 'strategic ritual' of objectivity (As Tuchman calls it), whereby truth is taken to reside somewhere between what two opposing sources say about a matter, can be a way of avoiding the truth or constructing damaging untruths, as U.S. journalists found in the McCarthy era.¹⁶

Objective reporting stands as one of the values of a socially responsible press, identified by the Hutchins Commission of 1947, as well as the 1956 text *Four Theories of the Press*. The social responsibility theory holds that journalists represent the public and distrust government. Anita Recchia says of the roots of objectivity: "The purpose was to end mounting criticism

of the press, by emphasizing a socially responsible role, which in fact amounted to self-regulation in a libertarian free market." ¹⁷

Some journalists agree. George Bain writes in a fall 1991 article in *Maclean's*: The media are "ever militant in guardianship of the public interest and aggressive in the pursuit of the truth in government." ¹⁸

But this self-promoting assumption ignores several factors worthy of consideration, including the theory of objectivity. Says Recchia:

For the wire services, emphasis on "just the facts" meant presenting information acceptable to the editorial policies of all the newspapers subscribing to the service... Objective journalism was invented by the newspaper owners who wanted to attract advertisers, improve efficiency and increase profits. ¹⁹

Altschull calls objectivity a "mechanism of social control."²⁰ As Anita Recchia says, "Objectivity means quotes, which come from "authorized knowers," who represent the status quo." ²¹ That's what objectivity has become in the media, though an enlightened discussion can fortify arguments with good documentation.

Former *New York Times* correspondent David Halberstam says:

...the only thing that mildly approached objectivity was the form in which the reporter wrote the news, a technical style which required the journalist to appear to be much dumber and more innocent than in fact he was. So he wrote in a bland, uncritical way which gave greater credence to the utterances of public officials, no matter how mindless these utterances...²²

Finally, as Jack Newfield writes, "Objectivity is believing people with power and printing their press releases." ²³

Objective journalism tends to regularly quote what official sources happen to espouse; and less often what the average person wants to

discuss. Pulitzer-Prize winning journalist and media critic Ben Bagdikian argues that news is distorted not so much by some omnipotent businessman who sways editors to change news stories (though he says that occasionally happens) ²⁴ but by what isn't included in the daily reports. The inclusion of rather uniform opinion from authority figures far outweighs that of the poor, women, minority groups, workers -- in short, the majority of the population.

"When the Census Bureau comes out with periodic reports on wide income gaps, the media provide fleeting reports -- one-day stories that quickly sink into the ocean of news," ²⁵ says authors Martin Lee and Norman Solomon. This is one of the farces of alleged objectivity. Journalists argue -- and perhaps truly believe -- that issues of the poor are covered because stories periodically surface in the media. That is commendable. And what better proof, they ask? But they don't mention or don't see the sustained pro-status quo news stories that run roughshod over rare stories of class differences -- a topic deemed un-newsworthy unless affected by something "big," timely.

Allegedly objective journalism more often serves the status quo than readers, who aren't provided the context to decipher meaning from statistics. Facts alone don't necessarily convey a significant truth: "You can be accurate and not fair. So thoughtful journalists seek fairness as well as accuracy in their journalism." ²⁶ To achieve the goal of cleaning up society, according to Robert Miraldi in *Muckraking and Objectivity*, journalists need to be more than just "neutral technicians."

And why not? What is there in the definition of journalism that says a reporter cannot -- no, should not -- sort out the facts and not only say what they mean but what should be done about them? This is called, and condemned as, advocacy. One is not supposed to step over the boundary, even if the facts lead in that direction.²⁷

Writer Jon Katz argues that sometimes, only when someone is immersed in a story -- not apart from it -- can really outstanding, meaningful journalism grow. He uses Randy Shilts as an example. Shilts, 41, the openly gay reporter for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, won critical acclaim for covering the gay community and acquired immune deficiency syndrome. Katz's proof lies in Shilts's ground-breaking treatise on AIDS called *And the Band Played On*.

The idea of respectable detachment wasn't conceived as a moral principal so much as a marketing device. Once newspapers began to mass market themselves in the mid-1800s, after steam- and rotary-powered presses made it possible to print lots of paper and make lots of money, publishers ceased being working, opinionated journalists. They mutated instead into businessmen eager to reach the broadest number of readers and antagonize the fewest. There they have remained.²⁸

That seems a rather weak journalistic target. Journalism, the theory goes, should stir up thought like a blender, not avoid disturbing the status quo. So why do they?

Buddy-buddy Relationships

The old saying "You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours" aptly characterizes a lot of official scratching. It is hardly a coincidence that all but two daily papers in Canada supported free trade with the United States before the detailed paperwork was signed -- sealing a deal popular with rich men -- though the majority of Canadians opposed the pact near the end of

the long-running negotiations.²⁹ The trend continues today, with many average Canadians, particularly workers, reviling the North American Free Trade Agreement.³⁰ It extends free trade with the U.S., but on a grander scale, incorporating Mexico (and its cheap labor and generally unenforced environmental laws) thrown in. Organized workers in all three countries rallied against it, but the major media continue to support it, and ardently so.

If the media truly fight on behalf of the public, shouldn't the news more willingly expose the difficulties about which average people are concerned? Shouldn't there be at least as many editorials and high-profile stories criticizing NAFTA as those trumpeting it? The problem: media leaders dance with their counterparts in politics and business, philosophically and economically.

Media-establishment ties are legendary. Britain provides a telling example. In 1975, Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher appointed Sir Gordon Reece as personal media advisor. Reece began meeting with executives at the *Sun*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* -- all of which enthusiastically supported the Conservatives. Within six years of Reece's appointment, Thatcher recommended these editors receive knighthoods: David English (*Daily Mail*); Larry Lamb (*Sun*); and John Junor (*Sunday Express*). Also, Victor Matthews, former chairman of Express Group Newspapers, was given a life peerage. Non-knighted Donald Treford, editor of the progressive *Observer*, was the only Fleet Street editor in the mid-'80s not invited to dinner at No. 10 Downing Street by Thatcher.³¹

In Canada, media/corporate links surface as well. And the trend follows narrower control. Two corporations -- Southam Inc. (controlled by co-chairs Paul Desmarais's Power Corporation and Conrad Black's Hollinger) and Thomson Corp. -- govern 59 per cent of Canadian daily newspaper circulation. Meanwhile, the buyout frenzy continues. In 1994 alone, cable giant Rogers Communications gobbled Maclean Hunter (which controls the *Financial Post* and the Sun chain, among much else) for \$3.1 billion; Shaw Communications acquired CUC Broadcasting for \$635 million; and Hollinger Inc. bought the Chicago *Sun-Times* for \$185 million.³² Besides the obvious concentration of ownership, the behind-the-scenes inter-connections between media and other establishment elite prove significant. Not only are boards of directors notably similar between the media and, say, banks, political and social connections appear tight as well.³³ A 1984 survey, for instance, daily newspapers endorsed Republican presidential candidates over Democratic ones by about six-to-one.³⁴

Attempting news influence is a favorite pastime of any party, of course, not to mention most major organizations, including unions. But conservatives wield more power with their wealthy like-minded associates, says British author Mark Hollingsworth.

It would be dishonest to suggest that the Labour Party is not as keen as the Conservatives to control the flow and tone of press coverage of politics. But the simple reality of the situation is that the balance of editorial allegiance is so slanted in favor of the Tory Party that they have a much easier task.³⁵

This is not just prevalent, says American author Robert Cirano, but the very fabric of media ownership.

It is ownership of the mass media by the wealthy, rather than a conspiracy of any kind, that explains why the important decisions usually favor viewpoints that support things as they are, rather than viewpoints that support fundamental changes in society. ³⁶

A 1989 report by the media watch group FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting) surveyed a total of 865 *Nightline* programs with 2,498 guests. Former U.S. secretaries of state Henry Kissinger (a member of newspaper chain Hollinger Inc.'s international advisory board) and Alexander Haig tied for top guest with 14 appearances each, while State Department official Elliott Abrams and the Moral Majority's Jerry Falwell came next with 12. Not exactly a liberal, or even centrist, lot. The report shows that 89 per cent of U.S. guests on *Nightline* were men and 92 per cent white. On economic stories, corporate representatives outnumbered labor counterparts seven to one. On topics concerning politics or the media, commentators were 95.5 per cent white, 97.5 per cent American, and 90 per cent male. ³⁷ And their "expert" comments come with little opposition, according to Lee and Solomon.

A lot of journalists apparently feel that government officials are there to dish out the facts, and reporters merely have to come and get them... Journalists often act more like stenographers than reporters, duly transcribing lies, half-truths, disinformation and propaganda without attempting to put remarks in perspective or pointing out when something is amiss. ³⁸

Becoming familiar with the establishment is often a natural trend, not necessarily one born of clandestine intentions. Working regularly with the same people, as those assigned to beats must, leads to certain professional friendships. That does not make it right, particularly when the befriended

establishment type doesn't have the public's best interests as the only goal. "High-level journalists and high-placed sources need each other. Whatever the tensions, cooperation is routine," Lee and Solomon contend.³⁹

What the Bigwigs Say

Not only owners hobnob with the powerful. Some journalists do, as well. That tends to allow more access, but of a less critical nature. I.F. Stone was one journalist who stuck to the ideal of his craft: avoid befriending officials.

Izzy, as his friends called him, was a real outsider. He had one cardinal rule: don't pal around with the folks you write about, don't fraternize with people in power. That's what he always told young people who wanted to be reporters. But his was a voice in a journalistic wilderness. When he died in 1989, Stone was lauded by many high-profile journalists who never listened to his advice.⁴⁰

"It is a bitter irony of source journalism," Walter Karp notes in his article "All the Congressmen's Men: How Capitol Hill controls the press" in *Harper's* magazine, "that the most esteemed journalists are precisely the most servile. For it is by making themselves useful to the powerful that they gain access to the 'best' sources." He continues:

Very few newspaper stories are the result of reporters digging in files; poring over documents; or interviewing experts, dissenters or ordinary people... The overwhelming majority of stories are based on official sources -- on information provided by Congress, presidential aides, and politicians... The first fact of American journalism is its overwhelming dependence on sources, mostly official, usually powerful.⁴¹

John F. Kennedy might have been the first American television president, but he was not the smoothest. His administration publicly announced military intervention and aggressive manoeuvres such as the attempted

invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in 1961, without fear of public backlash. Conversely, the Reagan administration found the public outcry too intense to ignore, so it hushed imperialist military operations. Yet Ronald Reagan could usually count on the media to comply with his foreign-affairs objectives, though reporters continually griped about being denied access to him. The press rarely criticizes aggressive foreign-affairs policies. Mark Hertsgaard, author of *On Bended Knee: The Press and the Reagan Presidency*, says:

A central animating assumption of the Reagan White House these past eight years has been that even the most controversial ideas could be sold if they were packaged and promoted properly; after all, politics were simply another form of marketing.⁴²

Hertsgaard said Reagan's advisors followed a set public-relations plan, by: planning ahead, staying on the offensive, controlling the flow of information, talking about issues they wanted to talk about, speaking in one voice, and repeating the message many times. As CBS Evening News senior producer Richard Cohen said, "Michael Deaver [White House deputy chief of staff] should have been listed as the executive producer on all the political stories we broadcast."⁴³

Then came President George Bush, to show just how malleable the press corps is. He resorted to the you're-all-my-buddies approach to dealing with the media -- with remarkable success. His love-in tactics were so overt, in fact, some journalists sneered. Andrew Sullivan humorously points out in *Esquire* magazine, in an article entitled "The Big Schmooze," how obliging White House reporters become after receiving a couple of invitations to a

movie, or a picnic, or a friendly chat with friendly Bush. This despite that Bush didn't try very hard to disguise the attempt to produce his own news.

The only difficulty Bush has is hiding his disdain for all the middle-class reporters who insist on accepting his invitations. Some feel he talks to them the same way he'd talk to the help. After Bush subjected reporters to an afternoon round of golf at Kennebunkport recently, one of them had the temerity to ask him a question. "You know the rules," he patronized back. He might as well have asked them to be his caddies. At the rate they're going, some of them might have agreed. ⁴⁴

To seriously challenge the status quo, as Bill Clinton did in proposing to let gays and lesbians serve openly in the military, is to attract aggressive media attention. The system seems to work that way. Meanwhile, the head of state's job requires a set public-relations plan be followed. That is not to say policies never suffer criticism. Certainly they do. But more often, particularly in election campaigns, criticism revolves more around personalities, campaign-trail mishaps, personal conflicts of interest, and superficiality than with substantive issues or policies. ⁴⁵

Though elections tend to heighten the trend, normal political coverage often follows a he-said-she-said pattern. This, too, leans toward the superficial. For instance, when Liberal Finance Minister Paul Martin promoted jobs as a priority at the G7 jobs mini-summit (later casually downgraded to G7 talks), in Detroit in March 1994, questions rarely strayed from the business of the day. Little did the media mention that Martin was also cutting unemployment-benefit payments by \$5.5 billion over five years, a dubious step toward helping the unemployed. Cutting benefits does not create one job. This appeared only fleetingly. ⁴⁶

In this day of news by press release, news by official announcement, news by PR firm, media seem somewhat obliging, lest they miss what the influential say. ⁴⁷ One way to gauge ideological links between the media and the establishment is to sift through the desk of public relations firms. Governments excel in the public-relations game. The White House and Pentagon each host two press briefings daily, while the State Department holds one. The White House produces 15 to 20 media releases a day, and the Air Force alone issued more than 600,000 in 1980, the last year such statistics were made public. As many as 13,000 PR people work for the American government, costing taxpayers \$2.5 billion yearly. ⁴⁸

Tough Guys Around the World

As mentioned, media routinely follow their governments' foreign-affairs directions, not like a student told to, but like a puppy eager for it. "As a general rule, if the U.S. government doesn't express interest in a foreign subject, neither will American news media, as they lurch from crisis to crisis while reinforcing Washington's version of the world." ⁴⁹

In early 1968, the *Boston Globe* surveyed 39 major American newspapers with a combined circulation of 22 million. Not a single one had called for U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam -- this at a time when millions of Americans were demanding an immediate pull-out. ⁵⁰

Winnipeg *Free Press* political columnist Frances Russell figures reporters act tough when criticizing other countries or social systems; but not our own.

We journalists are quite comfortable in the streets of Poland or Panama or China, but not in Toronto or Winnipeg. We are quite able to see class distinctions like workers and students, and to use language like "elites" and "propaganda" the

moment we set foot outside the country, but not in Vancouver or Montreal.⁵¹

In November 1987, the U.N. General Assembly voted 94-2 in support of a resolution calling for "full and immediate compliance" with the World Court ruling which found that the U.S. violated international law by mining Nicaraguan harbors. No major paper or network mentioned the vote. Yet the next day, many of these same papers, including the *New York Times*, reported that the General Assembly approved 123-19 a resolution calling for the Soviet Union to withdraw from Afghanistan.⁵²

When a Soviet interceptor plane blew up a South Korean passenger jet in September 1983, North American media immediately condemned the heinous act. A *New York Times* editorial said: "There is no conceivable excuse for any nation shooting down a harmless airliner... No circumstance whatsoever justifies attacking an innocent plane." But in July 1988 when a U.S. cruiser blew up Iran Air Flight 655, killing 290 people, a *New York Times* editorial said: "While horrifying, it was nonetheless an accident... The onus for avoiding such accidents in the future rests on civilian aircraft: avoid combat zones, fly high, acknowledge warnings."⁵³

Media mirror one another in particular when discussing economic matters. And economics define our system. Economists quoted in the media are almost always corporate economists, who support conservative views, theorizing on everything from development benefits to the need for large-scale layoffs. Adding a few economists from the other side of the perspective -- and they do exist -- would only improve the debate. Finance minister Paul Martin's budget consultations in December 1993, for instance,

included perhaps only one truly liberal economist, Robert Jackson from the Centre for Policy Alternatives. The media missed this economic deck-stacking.

When alternate views surface, they are generally stuffed inside the news sheets, in less prominent places than the campaign of deficit-cutting stories enjoys in the media. Almost five years into the longest-lasting recession since the Great Depression, a half decade into serious budget cutbacks and social-program chopping, we can still read banner headlines such as: "Free-spending days are over, Martin warns."⁵⁴ Alternative views exist, and deserve media play.⁵⁵

Consumerism is another common sport of the press. The media regularly address how government policies, the dollar, tourism, new industry, holidays and the weather affect shopping. A variety of consumer shows, sometimes featuring advertisers, and certainly suppliers to the advertisers, are routinely awarded high-profile play, even if they really don't offer much new. Environmental or social conventions rarely attract the same enthusiasm in the press, even if they generate more enthusiasm in the community. A healthy economy is desirable, but so too are a healthy population, society and planet.

Who Owns the Media?

Economic enthusiasm reflects a certain perspective, which corporate owners and directors often subscribe to. This begs the question, who owns the media? In one way, the answer is simple: fewer and fewer people.⁵⁶ Even if all publishers were completely altruistic, interested in nothing but

the public's good, allowing the national information flow into increasingly few hands is anti-democratic, particularly when massive multinational firms dominate. "Centralized control over information... is incompatible with freedom," Ben Bagdikian says.⁵⁷ He details how big media chains consist of "vast silent domains where ruthless demands for ever-increasing profits crush journalistic enterprise and block adequate coverage of the news."⁵⁸

Bagdikian, a former journalist of 30 years who later served until his recent retirement as the dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California at Berkeley, dissects concentration of media ownership and advertising influence in *The Media Monopoly*. He points out that at the end of World War II, 80 per cent of daily newspapers in the United States were independently owned. In 1989, the proportion was reversed -- an uncomfortable trend mirrored in Canada. Only 13 of 108 Canadian dailies are independent, according to the Canadian Daily Newspaper Association (March 1994). And this includes the *Halifax Chronicle-Herald* and the *Halifax Mail-Star* as two newspapers, even though they are essentially morning and afternoon cousins. The concentration of ownership is significant, given the relatively narrow range of big-business philosophy. Any multi-national corporation -- media or not -- seeks profit first.

Meanwhile, concentration of ownership tends to facilitate the trend of uniform news, as Jacques Ellul theorizes in his classic work *Propaganda*.

As long as a large number of independent news agencies, newsreel producers, and diverse local papers function, no conscious and direct propaganda is possible... To make the organization of propaganda possible, the media must be

concentrated, the number of news agencies reduced, the press brought under single control, and radio and film monopolies established. The effect will be still greater if the various media are concentrated in the same hands.⁵⁹

The point is well taken: what is the difference whether a government dictates the news, as is the case in authoritarian countries, or another branch of the establishment? Neither politicians nor businessmen should control the news for personal benefit. In a democracy, people have the right to be aware of that which they need. "A state monopoly, or a private monopoly, is equally effective," in terms of manipulating news, says Ellul. He argues this is an increasingly efficient phenomenon in the western world. "The number of newspapers decreases while the number of readers increases... all statistics converge on that."⁶⁰

Pretty Profits

Maintaining the social status quo makes sense from a profit point of view. The amount of newspaper advertising is quite simply enormous. And the statistics speak volumes. James Winter says in *The Silent Revolution* that advertising grew from encompassing 50 per cent of the average newspaper in 1945 to consuming 65 per cent today.

Canadian media mogul Conrad Black, known for turning the formerly progressive *Jerusalem Post* conservative shortly after buying it in 1989 through Hollinger Inc., started his celebrated career early. Though Black's Hollinger empire controls more than 400 daily and weekly newspapers in Canada, the United States, Britain, Australia, Israel and the Cayman Islands, with a combined circulation of 8.8 million, he started more humbly in Quebec. He bought half the shares of two weeklies from his

partner Peter White for \$500, the only personal savings he has invested in his lucrative media buying spree, he boasts in his biography *A Life In Progress*. At his first daily, the *Sherbrooke Record*, he quickly began his authoritarian style. He and White fired 40 per cent of the employees, he recounts, and within two years were making \$150,000 annually. Black notes the *Record* lost money before they purchased it. In his memoirs, he tells how he negotiated salaries with reporters at the end of each week, based on what he saw as the quality and volume of their work. He also philosophized in the paper: "There were amusing moments, especially when I received almost no response to my aerated editorials on world affairs, which, except for their stylistic excesses, could have been in a serious, arch-conservative metropolitan newspaper."⁶¹ The *Record*, by the way, was bought by Black and White from John Bassett Sr. for \$18,000 in 1969 and sold for \$865,000 in 1977 to independent George Maclaren, who sold it in 1987 to Pierre Peledeau's Quebecor for a profit of more than \$2 million.⁶²

Though hardly a money machine, the impressive investment triumphs of the tiny *Record*, with its 6,000 daily circulation, is indicative of a larger trend, with larger profits and greater contests for buyouts. Interestingly, media profits are perhaps the subject most taboo in the mainstream media. As media critic George Seldes said, the most sacred cow of the media is the media themselves.⁶³

Do media profits decrease in recessions? Of course, sometimes markedly so, as with any other industry. The difference is, however, that to begin with, the mass media comprise one of the most profitable industries

alive -- which perhaps explains the rush to takeover media outlets, even during stubborn recessions. Wall Street knows this well. But the average person doesn't. Nor does the average journalist, who often recites what owners want him or her to think: that papers don't make much money. That is misleading. Some papers do not. Others do, and lots of it. Less in a recession, a tremendous amount in good times.

"Gannett was a dependable profit machine in good times and bad," says former Gannett CEO and *USA Today* founder, Al Neuharth, in his book *Confessions of an S.O.B.* Making the company public worked well. "Soon Wall Street media analysts and publications began hyping our Gannett stock." As John Kornreich, of Neuberger & Berman, said: "Gannett's basic media business is awesome. It is virtually an unregulated monopoly." Or as the *Wall Street Transcript* said: "Gannett's management lives, breathes, and sleeps profits and would trade profits over Pulitzer Prizes any day."⁶⁴ Between 1967 and 1987, Gannett's annual revenues increased from \$186 million to \$3.1 billion; annual earnings leaped from \$14 million to \$319 million; and shareholder dividends increased 20 fold, from 4.8 cents to \$1. In 1972, Gannett stock sold at a price-earnings ratio of 36, twice the then average for companies measured by Standard and Poor. Twenty years after Gannett stock went public, each share of preferred stock rocketed from \$110 to \$29,835. Between 1970 and 1989, Gannett bought 69 daily newspapers, 16 TV stations, 29 radio stations, and became the largest outdoor advertising business with 45,000 billboards in the U.S. and Canada.⁶⁵

One of the best and most recent treatises on newspaper profits comes via a credible source. James D. Squires chronicles an almost outlandish scramble for profit in the corporate media, and how this adversely affects the news in his book *Read All About It! The Corporate Takeover of America's Newspapers*. Squires is no liberal stalwart. He was editor of the Orlando *Sentinel* and later the Chicago *Tribune*, one of the largest papers on the continent, as well as a conservative one. Squires bashes unions and criticizes some reporters (while complimenting others). But he also essentially blows the whistle on newspaper profits and executive salaries. He thinks it would be telling to record profit in the same manner as readership penetration.

There is no corresponding profit index available because industry profits have been a well-kept secret, kept first by wily old publishers who did not have to tell anyone but the Internal Revenue Service, and now by corporate reports that hide the profits of individual newspapers in group numbers.⁶⁶

But using advertising lines and rate cards, experts can still estimate a comparable earning index. Analyses between 1969 and 1989 show "newspaper profits have increased as fast as penetration has declined." In the 1970s, says Squires, average profit margins hovered between seven and 12 per cent. Squires recounts profit ratios of 30 per cent at papers for which he worked. Even if they earn less than that, public companies (which generally earn more than family-owned papers but less than chain papers) show a robust industry. In 1985, the average profit margin was 20.5 per cent, in 1986 19.5 per cent, in 1987 19.2 per cent, in 1988 16.5 per cent, in 1989 19.5 per cent, and in 1990, 16.5 per cent. Profits declined further

in the early 1990s, to be sure. Yet as the largest corporations follow a 1990s tenet by cutting budgets and staff, they edge profits back up.

Monopoly markets give newspapers particular advantages. "One fact the industry has not tried to hide is that profit records are poorer in towns without monopoly papers." ⁶⁷ Yet in towns where true competition continued, and papers were forced to forego some profit in the name of beating the competition, circulations often rose: In Dallas in 1990, circulation had risen 147,743 since 1970; in Houston, it had grown 169,000; in Denver, 110,055; in Las Vegas, 65,091; Little Rock, 57,770; San Antonio, 89,572. ⁶⁸

As Squires points out:

Absurdly, the economic decline in 1990 sent newspaper industry stock into a deep depression, as if the collapse of the whole business was imminent. Newspapers responded not by improving quality and increasing sales efforts, as they would have if attacked by a new competitor, but by cutting back content and laying off employees. ⁶⁹

John Morton, an analyst for the Washington-based Lynch, Jones and Ryan brokerage firm, set the recession situation straight in *Presstime*, the industry magazine:

All that is really happening is that instead of being two or three times more profitable than most businesses, newspapers this year (1990) are reduced to being only one or two times more profitable... For newspapers, a recession means only that earnings may not grow and may decline, but it does not mean earnings disappear. There is nothing shabby about an average operating profit margin of 14.9 per cent, even if it's down from 17.7 per cent for the same period in 1989. There are lots of industries that do not see 15 per cent profit margins in the midst of their biggest booms in history. ⁷⁰

Morton, a former newspaper reporter, reiterated his faith in the financial success of the business in 1994. Though he said the industry had to contend with decreased ad lineage, and that many papers had closed in recent years, he says the predictions of the industry's demise were off base.

What this dire view of newspapers overlooked was that the newspaper industry remained a huge business with inherent economic efficiency -- efficiency that actually was increased by the recession because of cost-cutting and the closing of inefficient newspapers. Last year, in a recovery mode, newspapers collected nearly 50 percent of all local advertising -- more than television, radio, cable television and the yellow pages combined.⁷¹

True, he says, the percentage may be marginally less than 20 years ago, but "despite all the negatives, newspapers remain a powerful economic force."⁷²

Corporate Control

Newspapers earn profit as a consumer conduit for advertisers, which to a subtle extent frames what we read. James Winter, for example, writes: "Newspapers have been written for their advertisers rather than their readers."⁷³ In the words of Ben Bagdikian: "Increasingly, editorial content of publications and broadcasting is dictated by the computer printouts on advertising agency desks, not the other way around."⁷⁴ More simply put, again by Bagdikian, "Newspapers and magazines in the main do not want merely readers; they want affluent readers. Broadcasters do not want just any listeners; they want rich ones."⁷⁵ In other words, if they don't have the money to buy, they aren't as actively invited to read, watch or listen.⁷⁶ That illustrates one reason why the ruling powers' view so often resembles the media's. The trend is notably evident in most structured and prolonged

analyses of the news, which illustrate an overwhelming abundance of information that attracts white, middle-class North America. ⁷⁷

Top media managers often serve on the boards of directors of private companies, as mentioned earlier, though this rarely elicits conflict-of-interest criticism. Reporters are allowed few such official connections. Nevertheless, we should at least examine the phenomenon that those who control the news also control corporations with other financial interests. And they all necessarily have profit goals, say Lee and Solomon, who detail many interconnections between media and outside interests.

In March 1987, NBC News broadcast a special documentary, "Nuclear Power: In France It Works," which could have passed for an hour-long nuclear power commercial. In an upbeat introduction, NBC anchor Tom Brokaw neglected to state that his corporate patron is America's second largest nuclear energy vendor, with 39 nuclear power reactors in the U.S., and the third-leading nuclear weapons producer -- facts which gave rise to the moniker "Nuclear Broadcasting Company" among disgruntled NBC staff. ⁷⁸

General Electric, by the way, owns NBC. The more multinationals dominate the market place, the wider their interests become, according to Martin Lee and Norman Solomon: "Given GE's far-flung, diversified interests, there aren't many subjects that NBC News could cover that would not have a direct or indirect bearing on its corporate parent. Conflicts of interest are unavoidable as long as GE owns NBC." ⁷⁹

This premise is difficult to prove, since memos on the topic appear rarely indeed. Few can unerringly say A produced B, in socio-economics. But it may be reasonably argued when researched properly. For instance, any deep discussion of the Persian Gulf war should have -- but essentially

never did in our newspapers or on our airwaves -- at least touch on corporate connections, since major media provided ample pro-war coverage. American news media are occasionally underwritten or owned by major military contractors. GE builds, designs and supplies parts and maintenance for just about every major weapons system used by the U.S., including the Patriot and Tomahawk Cruise Missiles, the Stealth Bomber, the B-52 bomber, the AWACS plane, and the NAVSTAR spy satellite system. Gushing over the performance of American weaponry coincidentally advertises for the reporters' bosses. ⁸⁰

The *New York Times* ardently supports nuclear power, for instance, as its repeated editorials on the topic show. Never mentioned in these opinion pieces, however, is the paper's relationship with the nuclear industry. George B. Munroe, retired chair and CEO of Phelps Dodge, "a notorious anti-union company involved in uranium mining," sits on the 14-member *Times* board. So too does George Shinn, who along with Munroe is a director of Manufacturers Hanover, a bank that lent money to New York utility LILCO when it was having trouble with public opinion opposing its bid to build the Shoreham nuclear facility. Fellow board member William R. Cross is vice-chairman of the credit policy committee of Morgan Bank, another LILCO creditor. ⁸¹

GE president Charles Wilson, a supporter of a permanent war economy, who worked with the Pentagon's Office of Defense Mobilization during the 1950s, explained well his opinion on the media's role in

promoting a similar stance. In a speech to the American Newspaper Publishers Association, he called for Cold War support:

The free world is in mortal danger. If the people were not convinced of that, it would be impossible for congress to vote vast sums now being spent to avert that danger. With the support of public opinion, as marshalled by the press, we are off to a good start... It is our job -- yours and mine -- to keep our people convinced that the only way to keep disaster away from our shores is to build America's might.⁸²

Wilson's company, GE, naturally, stands to make vast sums itself as a major military contractor.

On March 4, 1985, the London *Mirror* said: "The government is right to be thinking very hard whether the BBC should continue to be financed at the expense of the viewing and listening public." The next week, on March 16, under the headline "The world at the touch of a button," an article described the benefits of cable TV, particularly Rediffusion Cablevision (in which British press baron Robert Maxwell had business interests). The *Mirror* -- unlike the *Times* -- declared its interests, but then shamelessly self-promoted the service anyway.⁸³

Despite whether journalists realize it, this phenomenon of self-promotion occurs from time to time in the media: news outlets implicitly support their parent firm's interests. That doesn't mean details are promoted, such as which shampoo best cleans hair, but that money-making policies are. Making money or saving money is rarely criticized. Spending it, however, does not enjoy such safety, which leads to business inter-connections again.

Corporations also sway media in other ways, sometimes blatantly. Major newspaper chains like Scripps-Howard, seventh-largest in U.S. circulation, and Cox Enterprises, ninth, have ordered their papers to adopt uniform editorial positions on national issues, such as which candidates to endorse.⁸⁴

Ad Power

Do ads ever directly affect the news? Yes and no. Advertising has and continues to win favorable coverage, though specific influence seldom occurs. Mostly, it is what the systems propagates. Other times, it is blatant. That is not to say nothing critical of business surfaces in the media, for it certainly does, rather that it is a topic often avoided. Most stories outlining financial losses or closings or restructurings come from the corporations themselves through press releases or corporate reports, or occasionally from government. Little independent muckraking exists in the business domain.

Advertisers pay the owners of mass media \$70 billion a year to deliver consumers for their messages. It is inconceivable that this gargantuan sum does not influence the media in some way.⁸⁵ A study published in 1992 in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that the more tobacco advertising a magazine had, the less likely it was to criticize smoking. Based on 99 magazines, it found women's magazines particularly susceptible.⁸⁶ Readers buy newspapers for less than a good cup of coffee. Therefore, advertising accounts for 80 per cent of the average newspaper's

revenues (and even higher for radio and TV), compared with about 70 per cent in the 1950s.⁸⁷

Canadian social philosopher Harold Innis once referred to "Newspapers the size of a blanket"⁸⁸ when criticizing the growing amount of advertising that papers include, which he claimed manipulates the news. Examples of implicitly supporting advertisers exist, though they garner little publicity. *Playboy*, which in 1989 received \$900,000 a month (a quarter of its revenue) from cigarette ads, ran an interesting essay. An attorney denounced the proposal to ban tobacco advertising, going on to defend a cigarette campaign aimed at teens. The issue contained 12 pages of cigarette ads and a tear-out coupon for free Marlboro Menthols. Examples of advertisers withdrawing advertising as punishment for unwanted stories abound, from local car dealerships to major international conglomerates.⁸⁹ Former CBS president Frank Stanton acknowledged: "Since we are advertiser-supported we must take into account the general objective and desires of advertisers as a whole."⁹⁰ Or as *TV Guide's* assistant managing editor Andrew Mills said: "I think it would be naive to expect publications that take a lot of revenue from the tobacco industry to go after them vigorously."⁹¹

If not vigorous, then how much glory can the media claim? Little of the bland stands out, so most of us remember only the basic elements of media campaigns or of the most sensational stories, such as the made-for-TV O.J. Simpson murder trial.

Modern marketing bases its concept on the knowledge that people tend to remember only the strongest, most repetitious messages. The information onslaught overwhelms. "Today, communication is a problem. We have become the world's first overcommunicated society. Each year, we send more and receive less," argue advertising theorists Al Ries and Jack Trout.⁹²

It can be difficult to make head or tail of what the media tell us. Advertising executives know this well, as Ries and Trout explain bluntly in *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind*, billed as a marketing classic.

In communication, as in architecture, less is more. You have to sharpen your message to cut into the mind. You have to jettison the ambiguities, simplify the message, and then simplify it some more if you want to make a long-lasting impression. People who depend on communication for their livelihood know the necessity of oversimplification. Let's say you are meeting with a politician whom you are trying to get elected. In the first five minutes, you'll learn more about your political product than the average voter is going to learn about that person in the next five years.⁹³

Ries and Trout speak simply in their analysis of the problem, aimed at corporate executives. Yet their thoughts are retreads of philosophical thinking, to which Marshall McLuhan attests:

Electric speed mingles the cultures of prehistory with the dregs of industrial marketeers, the nonliterate with semiliterate and the postliterate. Mental breakdowns of varying degrees is the very common result of uprooting and inundation with new information and endless new patterns of information.⁹⁴

Context and Socialization

The modern communication structure languishes not simply in technology but in unexamined patterns of behaviour. Besides sacred cows,

the media often harbor other tendencies which may subtly and inadvertently warp the view of society they provide.

Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman figure the media contain five distinct filters. "The five filters narrow the range of news that passes through the gates, and even more sharply limit what can become 'big news,' subject to sustained news campaigns," Chomsky and Herman say.⁹⁵ "Messages from and about dissidents and weak, unorganized individuals and groups, domestic and foreign, are at an initial disadvantage in sourcing costs and credibility."

Chomsky says the margins are set. The media ostensibly encourage debate, but reports only stray so far, he says. They don't criticize western society, don't dare disturb our economic system -- which media magnates hold so dear.⁹⁶ Yet C. Wright Mills in *The Sociological Imagination*⁹⁷ talks about the need to encourage controversy and debate in a society which intrinsically frowns upon it, at least backstage.

The perception (that the elite have something worthy to say while those who argue against the system represent "special interests" and are unfairly slanted) runs so deep, many people simply don't see it, even journalists guided by their consciences. Some media managers, in fact, view a pro-business viewpoint as a bonus. The *New York Times* often hires movers and shakers from big business, the government and the military -- such as Bernard Trainor, the paper's military specialist who served as a general for 40 years with the Marine Corps, and Jack Rosenthal, the editorial page editor, who had been a high-ranking official in Lyndon

Johnson's State Department. "By the same token, why not hire someone from Greenpeace to report on environmental issues? Or a labor organizer to report on the American workplace?" ask the authors of *Unreliable Sources*.⁹⁸

Even media owners, publishers and editors admit they control the news, though they rarely discuss the topic in their own papers (see Chapter 3 for more examples). They may mention it, however, when speaking to the right people. British media tycoons Robert Maxwell and Rupert Murdoch would usually deny conflicts of interest, but as one senior *Standard* editor said:

There's not a lot of point in sending a reporter to cover a story about the proprietor's building company knocking down a listed [heritage] building in London when you know it's not going to get into the paper... News editors and journalists will censor themselves.⁹⁹

As Robert Maxwell said: "Somebody has got to be in charge. There's a lot of nonsense about independent directors. They are a complete waste of time... It doesn't work on the *Observer* and it doesn't work anywhere. Newspapers, if they are to be well run, have to be a dictatorship."¹⁰⁰ Personal magnate control helps give a paper a personality, but it can infringe on editorial freedom. Editorial freedom then becomes a technicality, true only if editors heed an accepted formula. And then, what freedom is that? As Lord Matthews said in July 1977, after being appointed chairman of Express Group Newspapers: "By and large my editors will have complete editorial freedom as long as they agree with the policy I have laid down."¹⁰¹

Sometimes there are wedges of greater autonomy. Two British papers allow more editorial independence than others. The *Guardian* editor, since 1975, is accountable to a *Guardian* trust. The *Observer's* editor Donald Treford is the only one on Fleet Street to have been elected by the paper's staff.¹⁰²

Publisher Charlie Brumback allowed James Squires editorial freedom as editor of the *Orlando Sentinel* and later at the *Chicago Tribune* as long as it did not hurt profit.

My goal was to put out a better newspaper each day than the day before, one with more and better information reported by more and better journalists for more -- and better -- readers. Brumback's goal was to make more profit than last year, not just a little more but the most possible. When these goals collided, our respective rank within the company decided the outcome. His always took precedent over mine -- no matter what.¹⁰³

John Swinton, an American radical and journalist, surprised his colleagues in the early part of the century when at a banquet they offered a toast to the independent press. His response:

There is no such thing in America as an independent press... You know it and I know it. There is not one of you who dares write his honest opinions, and if you did you know beforehand that it would never appear in print. I am paid... for keeping my honest opinions out of the paper I am connected with -- others of you who would be so foolish as to write his honest opinions would be out on the streets looking for another job... We are the tools and vassals of rich men behind the scenes. We are the jumping-jacks; they pull the strings and we dance. Our talents, our possibilities, and our lives are all the property of other men. We are intellectual prostitutes.¹⁰⁴

Superficiality Reigns

The media unconsciously warp reality by reducing much of our complex social interactions into news bites or entertainment. Most newspaper sections -- including sports, travel, entertainment, food, fashion, auto -- provide entertainment first. Though exceptions always exist, only the news, lifestyles, or current-affairs pages provide much regular or serious reflection.

For all practical purposes, the U.S. today is a 24-hour, TV entertainment society. Everything in contemporary America is an entertainment, from sporting events to big business, politics, certainly religion, and even academia. If it isn't fun, cute, or packaged in a ten-second sound bite, then forget it. If it can't be presented with a smiling, cheerful, sexy face, then it ain't worth attending to.¹⁰⁵

News is entertainment, say Ian I. Mitroff and Warren Bennis in *The Unreality Industry*, when "mainly only surface issues in the form of numbers get reported (e.g., how many mines there are in the Persian Gulf, how many enemy soldiers have been captured, etc.¹⁰⁶), not the deeper why's of a situation."¹⁰⁷ An interesting mutation of this trend, they say, is *USA Today*, "a simulation of TV news which in turn is itself a simulation of 'real news.'"¹⁰⁸ As *USA Today* founder Al Nueharth says about his journalistic formula:

USA Today had to be different, in appearance and content. Wrapped in color. Four sections. Everything organized and in a fixed place. Short, easy-to-read stories. Lots of them. Heavy use of graphics and charts. Heavy emphasis on sports, TV, weather. News every day from every state.¹⁰⁹

About 15 per cent of the original reporting staff quit *USA Today* because they disagreed with such superficial stories.¹¹⁰

Many critics from all over the political spectrum dismiss the media's superficiality as a result of journalists' incompetence. Detractors cite personal bias, lack of knowledge, and limited expertise as the factor causing shallow reporting. "These kind of criticisms are often true, but they place too much blame on the weakest, lowliest link in the news manufacturing chain: the reporter," says author Michael Parenti.¹¹¹ Critics ignore the power of the editors to frame, assign, rewrite, attach headlines, layout pages, and enforce certain angles to stories. And they ignore the phenomenon that the stories produced are not only satisfactory to the editors, but encouraged. Parenti continues. "The press does many things and serves many functions, but its major role, its irreducible responsibility, is to continually recreate a view of reality supportive of existing social and economic class power."¹¹²

Most reporters possess only surface knowledge of general-assignment issues they cover, and don't have the time to learn much more than what spokespeople say. In the words of Ericson et al,

The generalist is obviously preferred in the newspaper, and even more so in the television newsroom. In one television newsroom we observed, a reporter who had graduate education in the social sciences, and read avidly, was the subject of frequent teasing and jibes. His ambitions to cover matters with greater breadth and depth were regularly undercut by his superiors who directed him to 'keep it simple.' For example, one morning several reporters were assigned to cover aspects of a major continuing story involving a series of complex, possibly illicit financial transactions. The reporter in question eagerly informed the assignment editor that he could bring to bear some research he had been doing on the matter, but the assignment editor kept telling him to forget it and concentrate on a point/counterpoint interview format, using two politicians

with opposing views on how the matter should be controlled.¹¹³

One reason light, fluffy journalism is common -- aside from offending no one, including advertisers -- is that it costs less. Much less. First, it dilutes the threat of lawsuits. Secondly, it requires fewer employees. As large media outlets continue to reduce staff, fewer journalists can invest time investigating stories. And fewer understand specific issues as beat reporters do -- since they must be generalists above all (available for any type of story at any time). Readership surveys often call for an improved product, particularly local news which is the most labor-intensive of content improvements. And readers expect newspapers to do what broadcast does not: provide context. Contributing analysis and explanation contrasts sharply with superficiality. According to the 1994 annual Times-Mirror poll, conducted by Environics Research Group in Canada, context impresses readers most. Environics president Michael Adams said the poll offers a clear message to newspaper publishers: "Give me context. Create the news by analyzing the situation."¹¹⁴

Despite the obvious call for it, spending money to improve content journalistically is rare. Money may be spent on improving the look, which is welcome. Money may also be spent on marketing, but hiring more staff to enhance substance (through increased and more in-depth, investigative coverage) is uncommon. When James Squires became a newspaper editor in 1976, he says the average editorial department's share of the paper's budget ranged between 13 and 16 per cent. He says he conducted an unscientific study that showed no monopoly-market paper increased its

budget proportion to the editorial department in recent years. He says editorial budgets account for no more than 10 per cent of overall costs at good papers today, and far less at bad papers.¹¹⁵ The Kent Royal Commission on Newspapers, however, put the average percentage for Canadian papers in 1980 at 17.4, up from 16.1 in 1974.¹¹⁶ But for 20 years, a trend has undoubtedly emerged: editorial departments have assumed more duties previously the domain of the production department, including typesetting, page composition and proofreading.

Cheap news is no longer necessarily pertinent or profound: "That this information is important, relevant, accurate or delivered in a context which gives it meaning is far less significant than whether it is titillating, controversial or entertaining." Newspapers are trying to do what their rival television does, contends Squires: entertain consumers for profit.¹¹⁷

Across the media spectrum -- from the front-pages of the most respected newspapers to the sleaziest television dramatizations or exposes -- the story of a public official's sex life or a celebrity's excessive behavior is more likely to qualify as "quality" editorial than a disturbing war photo or a wordy explanation of the savings and loan crisis or the AIDS epidemic.¹¹⁸

Assembly-line News

As in a factory, the daily assembly line of news requires a consensus of what constitutes good stories, good quotes, good topics, good pictures. The individual photos and stories of the day are selected by newsroom staff, but the principles behind the choices are primarily systemic decisions formed more by news managers than reporters. New journalists entering

the highly competitive craft quickly learn the drill. As theorist B. Roshco says:

The essence of news judgement is that it is consensual. Consensus minimizes the need for discussion and speeds routine role performance. The daily, time-pressured routines of news-gathering and production can be conducted only because most news judgements, if reviewed, would be concurred in by peers and superiors.¹¹⁹

In some ways a story is a product, as are, say, sweat pants in a clothing line. Its societal importance is infinitely greater, since it feeds the mind -- and hence, democracy -- rather than fashion. But like fashion lines, so too are there limitations on what the newspaper company will allow published, and what the market requests, and what budgets dictate, and what time limits allow, and what creativity is encouraged. Practical limitations restrict journalists, as well. These constraints lie outside the domain of corporate or government interests, and would likely impinge upon journalists in media systems radically different from ours. And yet, reporters still manage to provide occasionally inspirational material. At least one ethnographic study of newsrooms found this: "In spite of the fact that the knowledgeability of journalists is severely circumscribed, we see more openness, equivocality, and choice in the news process than do other recent academic analysts."¹²⁰

Simply, the two main practical limitations are: time and space. Both are byproducts of resources. But there is no reason to believe that limited resources could be surmounted in any system, since every publication in any media structure will have some space parameters in which to work; and every publication will have a limited number of reporters to dispatch

on investigations. The more detailed and complicated the problem, the more space is needed and the more time it takes to uncover the story. A daily publication could hardly fortify every inch of its news columns with such quality and costly copy. Covering relatively superficial events like accidents and crime, in comparison, is easy, thanks to public police reports. As Ericson *et al.* say,

a problematic and complex financial transaction involving many parties over time is very difficult to deal with in newspaper format and almost impossible for television. This may be one reason why the news generally gives less attention to corporate crime than to street crime.¹²¹

The cultural inundation is not discriminatory, affecting everyone in society. Unaware consumers of the media are equally affected. And journalists are socialized through the same processes that mold everyone. As with most people, journalists learn from childhood a system that tends to support rather than question the status quo. Only the mavericks among them push hard against the societal machine, figures Michael Parenti.

While repeatedly lectured to about the importance of objectivity and professionalism, a journalism student can easily go through an entire program without ever raising critical questions about how and why the capitalist economic system functions and malfunctions as it does.¹²²

Newsroom socialization is a part of a greater phenomenon in society. Socialization, within a country or a newsroom, ingrains certain viewpoints and perception in human beings. These shared perceptions lead to cultural biases which people carry like baggage (and which make the task of reporting with complete objectivity a myth, as already mentioned). Eliminating traces of preconceived notions, our years of experience,

thoughts and knowledge, and yes, opinions, is an all but insurmountable task. Pseudo-objective journalism assumes this is possible. Yes, the overwhelming majority of society can agree on certain black-and-white issues, such as whether murder is wrong, or even, perhaps, whether a journalist should take a bribe from a politician in exchange for a good story. Yet such absolutes are more rare than common. As American academic Deni Elliott says:

An absolute standard doesn't have to dictate a single, acceptable behavior. More often, an absolute standard clarifies what is absolutely not acceptable within the profession. For example, reasonable physicians may disagree about whether to treat a particular malady with surgery or with watchful waiting. However, their adherence to essential shared values of their profession means that they will agree that bloodletting is not an appropriate response.¹²³

Socialization affects us all. Everyone is targeted. And it succeeds largely through the mass media. This does not mean a conspiracy exists. A system does. Mass media can achieve mass socialization, after all. Philosopher Jacques Ellul hypothesises on this topic: "The most favorable moment to seize a man and influence him is when he is alone in the mass."¹²⁴

The Dominant Culture

All this socialization adds up to a culture, a dominant culture, which the media subtly reinforce. Disassociation from the media is a basic, unalterable feeling with many minorities.¹²⁵ Writer John Howard Griffin discovered this swiftly when he darkened his skin and disguised himself as an African-American man for an educational journey through the American Deep South -- his experience later retold in his famed *Black Like Me*. While hitching a ride with a white man, one of many who seemed obsessed with

talking to Griffin about the sex life of blacks, a white stereotype, he found himself tiredly explaining the route of misperceptions. The white man pointed to all the sex and crime blacks seem involved in. Griffin explained: "Southern newspapers print every rape, attempted rape or 'maybe rape,' but outstanding accomplishment is not considered newsworthy. Even the Southern Negro has little chance to know this since he reads the same slanted reports in the newspapers." ¹²⁶

Richard Hatcher, mayor of Gary, Indiana, takes media bias as a given. As he told *Time* magazine about the press: "I was the first Black mayor of this city and they've never quite forgiven me for that." After he was re-elected for a fifth consecutive term with 90 per cent of the vote, the *Post-Tribune* alleged that there was "no consensus" among the voters in support of Hatcher. And when the University of Chicago rated Gary first among 62 cities in fiscal policy, the local media never mentioned it. Hatcher also said: "About the only time you see Blacks giving their opinions, or given any serious space, is when it relates to minorities or civil rights. That seems to be the only time the media feel we are competent enough to express opinions." ¹²⁷

A newspaper article contains a certain slant, regardless of whether the writer realizes it, despite the writer's best intentions. Interpretations are a matter of perspective. When an interpretation falls into the general position held by mainstream society, and is portrayed as a "common sense" perspective, then it often passes like water in a stream for an "objective" piece. But Iraqis may hold a different opinion of the Gulf War than do North

American media, Sikhs a dissimilar view of multiculturalism, and the poor an opposing conception of the roots of poverty. Shouldn't those views appear, too? Or are our cultural assumptions correct simply because we think them?

Malcolm X talked openly on the idea of the white media holding fundamentally different perceptions of the truth from his own. In 1959, a television report called "The Hate that Hate Produced" aired, launching Malcolm X and his Black Muslims into a media frenzy. Coverage wasn't exactly neutral. As Malcolm X says in his biography: "First came the white newspapers -- feature writers and columnists: "Alarming"... "hate-messengers"... "threat to the good relations between the races"... "black segregationists"... "black supremacists," and the like."¹²⁸

The views of Malcolm X and members of his organization are not necessarily the truth. But the discrepancy between their concept of what is right, indeed what is reality, and the media's illustrates the importance of perspective. Truth can be too abstract when dealing with social situations. In some ways, though verifiable facts exist, truth is as socially constructed as table manners. White reporters could not hide their anger, nor their biases, when they phoned during the media whirlwind that soon began eagerly quoting black leaders opposed to Malcolm X's teachings.

I can remember those hot telephone sessions with those reporters as if it were yesterday. The reporters were angry. I was angry. When I'd reach into history, they'd try to pull me back to the present. They would quit interviewing, quit their work, trying to defend their personal white devil selves. I'd tell them things Lincoln said in speeches, *against* the blacks. They would drag up the 1954 Supreme Court decision on school integration.¹²⁹

Black publications treated Malcolm X somewhat differently. Could white reporters truly be any freer of personal interpretations than black reporters on such touchy issues?

Cultural biases emerge often, as they did during the Oka crisis in the summer of 1990. Some reporting was wonderful, but rarely reported from a historical native perspective, according to Anita Recchia who studied the coverage:

If the media had explained the Mohawk land claim adequately, the minority interest may have prevailed over the dominant, capitalist interest. By slighting or minimizing or ignoring the claim altogether, the four newspapers [the *Montreal Gazette*, the *Ottawa Citizen*, the *Globe and Mail*, and the *Winnipeg Free Press*, which were used in a content analysis of Oka coverage] added credence to the official position. Shorn of the 300 year history, taking up arms appears, on the face of things, to be "militant." In context, however, it represents the final, desperate act of a downtrodden group which seeks social justice. ¹³⁰

Media Philosophy

To Jacques Ellul, propaganda is not so much an evil creation of warped slogans, but a system, however financially supported, which distils debate to a certain base level. The more effective this compromising of ideas becomes, the more propaganda succeeds. As he says: "In large societies in which propaganda is at work, opinion can no longer form itself except via the centralized media of information." ¹³¹ He continues: "Opinion will begin to eliminate its own contradictions and establish itself as a function of identical catchwords that will inevitably have a unifying effect." Catch phrases, slogans -- as Nazi propagandist Goebbels writes, reducing complex life into simplest terms -- are repeated. ¹³²

Ellul quotes Jean Stoetzel:

the distinction between stereotyped opinions and profound attitudes leads us back to the distinction between public and private opinion. Stereotypes are the categories of public opinion. Profound attitudes, on the other hand, exist where people live by the laws of private opinion.¹³³

Propaganda then, in Ellul's view, is not spray-painted slogans on a wall, or thousands of leaflets dropped from a plane, or even necessarily the diabolical plan of a few powerful and corrupt government officials calculating specific public responses for personal gain. It is partly the socialization of society. In some ways, it is the popular culture that entrenches a dominant paradigm of society. It is something intangible. Noam Chomsky argues that the media serve to legitimate public policies, to manufacture the consent of the public for elite ends. In this way, frequent propaganda -- or "common-sense" ¹³⁴ -- themes in western society include: Benevolent Foreign Policy; Virtuous Media; Conservative Economics Triumph; Consumerism as Savior; and Management Over Labor (see Chapter 2).

Diversity of opinion is an elusive thing. Not only are opinions concerning various social, political and economic issues subjective, so too are their selection for play in the mass media. Perhaps the most limiting factor in terms of a plurality of ideas are the restricted margins of debate which the press offers.

So-called extreme views, varying greatly with the status quo, to the left as well as the right, are effectively banished from the media. We cannot read overtly racist arguments unless it is to portray a group such as

skinheads as sinister. Disallowing such conspicuous hatred from the media is, of course, part of the media's social responsibility. But the relatively narrow margins of debate also serve to eliminate much alternative thought from the media, which social responsibility should foster.

Censoring Ourselves

Along the lines of inherent cultural biases and margins of debate comes the issue of self-censorship. Self-censorship, from individuals or from the media outlet itself (not government), is not a popular topic among journalists. Rarely, in fact, is it ever even a topic. But it exists, in all our cultural industries.

In 1971, the Writers Guild of America testified at a Senate subcommittee hearing that 86 per cent of its members -- who at the time wrote all the television comedy, drama and variety shows -- had personally experienced censorship. "It is our contention that the networks have deliberately and almost totally shut off (the flow) of ideas, have censored and continue to censor the writers who work for them." ¹³⁵

Only when people confront problems, of course, can they be overcome. On this front, the world seems bleak. Herbert Gans from *Deciding What's News*:

Journalists claim freedom from interference not only by non-journalists but also by superiors; they have the right to make their own news judgements, which is why they cannot be given orders. To be sure, individual autonomy is frequently illusionary, especially in a group enterprise. Moreover, the suggestions of powerful superiors are, in fact, thinly veiled orders, requiring polite circumlocutions in which demands are phrased as requests. Writers, therefore, must combine their own judgement with what they think will please their editors; if they have no interest in a story or no firm point of

view, they will write only to please them. Sometimes they will do so even when they have a point of view but do not want to work all night rewriting.¹³⁶

New York-based photojournalist Ken Jarecke knows the difficulty in publishing what rubs against the grain of accepted reporting. While working for *Time* during the Gulf war, he shot a charred Iraqi soldier killed trying to escape his truck during an air strike. The media edited his work. Some valid "image ethics" were certainly at work, but shots of dead soldiers *can* occasionally appear, though usually not if the victim was killed by a fellow compatriot.¹³⁷ *Time* did not run Jarecke's picture and the Associated Press refused to transmit it.¹³⁸ This was amid the onslaught of stories and pictures depicting smart bombs and other allegedly successful American weaponry, information and photos cleared by American military censors, if not *provided* by the U.S. military. Can censorship possibly lead to truth?

Yet brash manipulation of the media is not the most caustic, or common, source of corporate intrusion. As Lee and Solomon say:

A more insidious and widespread form of censorship occurs when reporters give up trying to write about subjects they know will not be acceptable. Alert to the preferences of their higher-ups, journalists learn they must adjust to the constraints of the corporate workplace. For some, this entails a rude awakening and profound career choices; others conform unconsciously, believing in earnest that they are free to express themselves with little managerial control.¹³⁹

Reporters inherently know what type of stories editors generally want, and need not be given a shopping list of guidelines to follow. That doesn't mean editors and reporters never debate certain stories, for in the monthly workings of a newspaper, that is common fare. But the socialization of a journalist includes an understanding of what news is, that is, what the

system labels as news. The punishment-and-reward system is conspicuously educational.¹⁴⁰ Though not exclusively, debate is more often limited to fine tuning, such as which quotes an article should include.

"A Free Press? Anybody in the ten-million-dollar category is free to try to buy or found a paper... As to us, we are free to buy a paper or not as we wish." says A.J. Liebling in 1947 in *The Wayward Pressman*.¹⁴¹ In fact, \$10 million would now be a bargain. Even \$50 million wouldn't go too far.¹⁴²

Conclusion

Does independent thought get to publicly rear its head? Of course, which many academics, philosophers and activists indicate. It just requires what Chomsky refers to as intellectual self-defense, for a barrage of bland, predictable reporting is oppressive. Herbert Schiller says:

Expression is an inseparable part of life. It is ludicrous to imagine that individual expression can be completely managed and controlled. Yet, no matter how integral to the person, it is ultimately subject to social boundaries that are themselves changeable but always present. These limits have been created by the power formations in society, past and present.¹⁴³

The previous examples and arguments, culled from various sources, should at least illustrate that many people consider our media system flawed. The reality of journalism is still far from the ideal: the fraternity between the establishment and the owners of the media remains close; reporting abroad is selective and often more forceful than at home; concentration is increasing while voices decline; the demands of time and space limit journalistic excellence, as do shrinking budgets and personnel; news often

becomes entertainment; self-censorship by the media themselves exists; and media profits are all important.

Journalism, however, remains a vital prerequisite of democracy.

Though the media often produce quality journalism, exposing troubles and telling interesting stories, the overall trend appears to support the status quo. Interviews with Canadian journalists will help focus the argument locally, and perhaps frame the discussions of this chapter. That is important.

Fatalists would argue that a system can't be changed, ingrained as it is like a concrete foundation. But thinking people challenge accepted power formations and inject democracy with life. To think is not to simply accept what one is told as gospel, but to read and listen to many, many sources, and to decide for oneself.

Notes for Chapter 1

1. Knowlton Nash, "The Imperfect Necessity," *Content*, January/February, 1988, pp. 7-11.
2. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, *The CBC – A Perspective*, submission to the CRTC in support of licence renewal, 3 vols., Ottawa, 1980.
3. Nicholas Garnham, *Capitalism and Communication: Global Culture and the Economics of Information*, Sage Publications, Newbury Park, Calif., 1990, p. 104.
4. Robert Entman, *Democracy Without Citizens*, Oxford University Press, N.Y., p. 129.
5. Parenti, p. 23. The point was first made by Bernard Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1963. Other critical academics, such as Dallas Smythe, claim the media's power extends much further than agenda setting, and actually shapes our very consciousness. See Smythe, *Dependency Road: Communication, Capitalism, Consciousness, and Canada*, Ablex Publishing Corp., Norwood, N.J., 1981.
6. Itwaru, Arnold, *Mass Communication and Mass Deception*, Toronto, Terebi Publications, 1988, p. 37.
7. Though William Randolph Hearst may have been best associated with the adage, Winnipeg *Free Press* political columnist Frances Russell says "the celebrated everyman Mr. Dooley" actually proposed that the modern newspaper's role is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comforted. See *The Silent Revolution*, James P. Winter, ed., University of Ottawa Press, 1990, p. 74.
 Mr. Dooley, a fictional, skeptical, Irish Chicago bartender of the turn of the century, was created by Finley Peter Dunne, a newspaper editor and political satirist born in Chicago in 1887. He said:
 "The newspaper does irvy thing fr us. It runs the polis foorce an' the' banks, commands th' milishy, conthrols th' ligislachure, batizes th' young, marries th' foolish, comforts th' afflicted, afflicts th' comfortable, buries th' dead an' roasts thim atherward." From C.N.R. Stewart, letters, *The Globe and Mail*, Nov. 16, 1994, p. A23.
8. For example, freelance writer Terry Przybylski argues in the conservative *Chronicles* magazine: "After three decades in which the term 'liberal Democratic media' has come to seem an almost complete redundancy, many students of American journalism today are no doubt stunned to learn that, prior to the 1960s, this nation's printed press was regarded by most prominent liberals and Democrats as a bastion of conservatism and Republicanism." From "Triberalism," *Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture*, October 1994, p. 23.

9. Michael Parenti, *Inventing Reality: The Politics of News Media*, 2nd ed., St Martin's Press, New York, 1993, p. 6.
10. *Extra!*, May/June 1989, New York, p. 15.
11. For a Canadian perspective of widening income gaps see: Linda McQuaig, *The Wealthy Banker's Wife: The Assault on Equity in Canada*, Penguin Books, Toronto, 1993.
12. Theodore L. Glasser and James S. Ettema, "Investigative Journalism and the Moral Order," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, vol. 6, no. 1, March 1989, p. 1.
13. Glasser and Ettema, p. 18.
14. For a complete treatise on the high price of democratic involvement, read William Greider, *Who Will Tell the People: The Betrayal of American Democracy*, Simon and Schuster, Toronto, 1992.
15. Joyce Nelson, *Sultans of Sleaze: Public Relations and the Media*, Between The Lines, Toronto, 1989, p. 133.
16. Ericson, Richard V., Patricia M. Baranek, and Janet B.L. Chan, *Visualizing Deviance: A Study of News Organization*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1987, pp. 108-109.
17. Anita Christine Recchia, *The Objective Framework and Mainstream Media Biases in Reporting the Oka Crisis*, thesis, University of Windsor, 1993, p. 15.
18. Cited in Winter, *Common Cents*, p. xv.
19. Recchia, p. 16.
20. J. Herbert Altschull, *Agents of Power*, Longman, New York, 1984, p. 133.
21. Recchia, p. 20.
22. (Cited in Michael Parenti, *Inventing Reality*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1986, pp. 52-53.)
23. Lance Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, Longman, New York, p. 76.
24. Xerox paid \$55,000 in expenses and fees to Harrison Salisbury for a 23-page article (evaluating the state of the country in its bicentennial year), as well as \$115,000 in advertising to *Esquire* in its February 1976 issue. After hearing about the deal, essayist E.B. White, a former *New Yorker* writer, wrote his home-town paper the *Ellsworth American*. An exchange of letters ensued between White and Xerox communications director W.B. Jones who argued that Xerox was simply expanding a broadcast tradition of "sponsoring programs of substance that might

not otherwise get on the air." White, on the other hand, argued:

"A funded article is a tempting morsel for any publication -- particularly one that is having a hard time making ends meet. A funded assignment is a tempting dish for a writer, who may pocket a much larger fee than he is accustomed to getting. And sponsorship is attractive to the sponsor himself, who, for one reason or another, feels an

urge to penetrate the editorial columns after being so long pent up in the advertising pages. These temptations are real, and if the barriers were to be let down, I believe corruption and abuse would soon follow... Buying and selling space in news columns could become a serious disease of the press... I don't want IBM or the National Rifle Association providing me with a funded spectacular when I open my paper. I want to read what the editor and publisher have managed to dig up on their own -- and paid for out of the till."

(From, "What E.B. White Told Xerox," *Columbia Journalism Review* 15, No. 3 (Sept./Oct. 1976), pp. 52-54.)

25. Martin A. Lee and Norman Solomon, *Unreliable Sources: A Guide to Detecting Bias in News Media*, Carol Publishing Group, New York, N.Y., 1990, p. 176.

26. H. Eugene Goodwin, *Groping for Ethics in Journalism*, 2nd ed., Iowa State University Press, Ames, Iowa, 1987, p. 11.

27. Robert Miraldi, *Muckraking and Objectivity: Journalism's Colliding Traditions*, Greenwood Press, New York, N.Y., 1990, p. 152.

28. Jon Katz, "AIDS and the media: Shifting out of neutral," *Rolling Stone*, Straight Arrow Publishers Inc., Issue 657, May 27, 1993, pp. 31-32.

29. From *The Silent Revolution*, University of Ottawa Press, Ottawa, 1990, p. 153. One case study found that during the heat of the free-trade debate, a random issue of the *Globe and Mail*, Nov. 11, 1988, included 21 pro-free trade stories, four anti-free trade, and one neutral. From *The Silent Revolution*, p. 140.

30. For example, 12 of 16 callers to a Talk of the Town question on the North American Free Trade Agreement criticized it. See "Majority of our callers pessimistic on NAFTA," the *Windsor Star*, Saturday, Jan. 8, 1994, p. A5.

Other examples abound, including the Reclaim Our Future Rally on Parliament Hill May 15, 1993, one of the biggest such demonstrations in Ottawa's history with 60,000 in attendance. Demonstrators from across Canada "railed against cuts to unemployment benefits and social programs, unfair taxation, and especially the job-killing effects of free trade and the devastation to come from the North American Free Trade Agreement." See Brian Cross, "From hostility to hope: Message delivered despite arduous trip," the *Windsor Star*, Monday, May 17, 1993, p. A10.

31. Mark Hollingsworth, *The Press and Political Consent: A Question of Censorship*, Pluto Press, London, 1986, pp. 32-34.

32. For arguments from industry against concentration of ownership within the Canadian communication industry, see: "Southam chief seeks ban on cable-newspaper link," *Windsor Star*, Sept. 23, 1994, p. D6. For a peek at 1994 corporate takeovers, see: "Big business says 'I do': Corporate marriages hit five-year high," *Windsor Star*, July 5, 1994, p. C4.
33. For an elaboration of increasing ownership concentration in Canadian media and interlocking boards of directors, see James Winter and Amir Hassanpour, "Building Babel," *The Canadian Forum*, January/February 1994, pp. 10-17.
34. Survey in *Editor and Publisher*, Nov. 3, 1984.
35. Hollingsworth, p. 32.
36. Robert Cirano, quoted in *Mediaspeak: How Television Makes Up Your Mind*, Donna Woolfolk Cross, Mentor, New York, 1983, p. 115.
37. Lee and Solomon, p. 27.
38. Lee and Solomon, p. 45.
39. Lee and Solomon, p. 17.
40. Lee and Solomon, p. 103.
41. Walter Karp, *Harper's*, July 1989, "All the Congressmen's Men: How Capitol Hill controls the press."
42. Mark Hertsgaard, "Journalists Played Dead For Reagan -- Will They Roll Over Again For Bush?" *Washington Journalism Review*, January/February 1989, p. 30.
43. Richard M. Cohen, quoted in Mark Herstgaard, p. 31.
44. Andrew Sullivan, "The Big Schmooze: How George Bush is love-bombing the media into soft coverage," *Esquire*, October 1990, pp. 105-106.
45. Political-campaign studies often illustrate how devoted the media, TV in particular, are to personalities over issues. At least one American campaign stressed personal quirks and campaign events four-to-one over issues. (Doris Garber, *Mass Media and American Politics*, Congressional Quarterly Press, Washington, D.C., 1980, pp. 169-180.)
46. I can mention the case from an close-up perspective, since I was one of several reporters covering the talks for the *Windsor Star*. I was as much to blame as anyone, implicitly knowing that news requirements dictate more of an up-to-the-minute feel. We looked more deeply at job issues leading up to the event, and almost stopped cold after it. But those stories somehow sink in the river of action pieces quoting this or that politico, who often espouse freer trade and spending cutbacks (despite that it was a supposedly a job-creation summit).

47. Joyce Nelson outlines the influence of and media's dependence upon public relations in her book *the Sultans of Sleaze: Public Relations and the Media, Between The Lines*, Toronto, 1989.

48. Lee and Solomon, p. 104.

49. Lee and Solomon, p. 257.

50. Lee and Solomon, p. 107.

51. Frances Russell, quoted in James P. Winter, *The Silent Revolution: Media, Democracy and the Free Trade Debate*, University of Ottawa Press, 1990, p. 76.

52. Lee and Solomon, pp. 257-158.

53. Lee and Solomon, p. 278.

54. *The Windsor Star*, Wednesday, Oct. 19, 1994, p. A1.

55. For instance, see Linda McQuaig, *The Wealthy Banker's Wife*, for an elaboration of how social programs help society, and can be afforded through such policies as a return to higher corporate taxes and lower interest rates.

56. The Royal Commission on Newspapers was launched precisely because concentration of ownership seemed extreme in 1980. The commission points out that Canadian newspapers were mostly independent in the early part of the century. But by 1970, independent English-daily circulation had shrunk to 39.6 per cent; by 1980 it was 25.7 per cent. In 1970, daily French-language circulation was 50.8 per cent; by 1980 it had shrivelled to 10 per cent. See the Royal Commission on Newspapers, Tom Kent chair, Minister of Supply and Services, Ottawa, 1981, pp.1-19. The scope of concentration has narrowed even further since, as recent takeovers by Rogers can attest.

For American figures, see Ben H. Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly*, 3rd ed., Beacon Press, Boston, 1990.

57. Ben H. Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly*, 3rd ed., Beacon Press, Boston, 1990, p. 3.

58. Bagdikian, p. 76.

59. Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, Random House, Toronto, 1965, p. 102.

60. Ellul, p. 103. Noam Chomsky, however, argues a more controversial position: that private media monopolies are actually better than state-run systems at promoting the status quo because their biases are concealed. See *Language and Politics*, edited by C.P. Otero, Black Rose Books, Montreal, 1988.

61. Conrad Black, excerpted from his biography in *Report on Business Magazine*, the *Globe and Mail*, Toronto, October 1993, p. 50.

62. Black, p. 59.

63. Lee and Solomon, p. x.

64. Al Neuharth, *Confessions of an S.O.B.*, Doubleday, New York, N.Y., 1989, p. 178.

As an illustration of how much money newspaper chains make and how much top

media managers become part of the elite, Neuharth describes his vantage point in 1979 (before he launched *USA Today*): "I was fifty-five, CEO of the USA's largest newspaper company, making more than a million dollars a year. Company jets flew me wherever I wanted to go, whenever I wanted. Limousines eliminated the hassle from ground travel.

"I had pretty fancy offices and/or homes in New York City; Washington, D.C.; Cocoa Beach, Florida; and Lake Tahoe, Nevada. And staffs to look after my care and feeding in Gannett locations from the Virgin Islands in the Atlantic to Guam in the Pacific, and nearly everywhere in between.

"Presidents and prime ministers, sports and entertainment heroes and heroines were among my friends or acquaintances. The best seats were mine at the Super Bowl or the World Series.

"Gannett was on automatic, grinding out bigger profits year after year, even quarter after quarter, by then forty-six quarters in a row." p. 106.

65. Neuharth, pp. 180-183.

66. James D. Squires, *Read All About It! The Corporate Takeover of America's Newspapers*, Random House, Toronto, 1993, pp. 94-95.

67. Squires, pp. 94-95.

68. Squires, p. 96.

69. Squires, p. 96.

70. As quoted by Squires, p. 97.

71. John Morton, "Hold Off On the Funeral Plans: The newspaper business is thriving and will remain hugely profitable," *American Journalism Review*, November 1994, p. 52.

72. Morton, "Hold Off On the Funeral Plans," p. 52.

73. James Winter, *The Silent Revolution: Media, Democracy and the Free Trade Debate*, University of Ottawa Press, Ottawa, 1990, p. 123.

74. Bagdikian, p. 111

75. Bagdikian, p. 113.

76. Leo Bogart, retired executive vice-president of the Newspaper Advertising Bureau, started a technique of audience measurement that would shape a business. But he did it in 1959 when he worked for the cosmetics firm Revlon, which sponsored the wildly popular *\$64,000 Question*. The scandal had just erupted that the game show was rigged, with winners not only selected in advance but given the correct answers. A congressional hearing into the affair threatened to damage Revlon, so Bogart began a nightly series of in-person interviews with viewers to determine how it affected their perception of Revlon (the survey indicated no ill feelings).

"A decade later, the use of audience measurement as a sales technique had started to undercut the traditional economic underpinnings of the nation's newspapers, which was the sale of advertising rates based on total circulation," says James Squires in *Read All About It! The Corporate Takeover of America's Newspapers*, Random House, Toronto 1993, pp. 74-75) In other words, the interest shifted from wanting as many readers as possible to wanting the right ones: well-off ones.

77. *Unreliable Sources, The Media Monopoly*, and the media watchdog FAIR all provide examples of surveys supporting the contention that stories and sources favor the establishment.

78. Lee and Solomon, p. 78.

79. Lee and Solomon, p. 81.

80. Lee and Solomon, p. xviii.

81. Lee and Solomon, p. 82.

82. As quoted by Lee and Solomon, p. 82. They cite *INFACT Brings GE to Light*, a publication by INFACT, a group opposed to nuclear profiteering. INFACT's TV commercials, recommending consumers not buy GE products, were banned by NBC and other television broadcasters.

83. Hollingsworth, p. 14.

84. Lee and Solomon, p. 93.

85. Lee and Solomon, p. xiii. The United States and Canada have six per cent of the world's population but consume more than 57 per cent of the world's advertising. American newspapers annually use more than 10 million tons of newsprint, which means the average person consumes 94 pounds. The Sunday edition of the *New York Times* weighs about four and a half pounds and contains some 500,000 words. (Al Ries and Jack Trout, *Positioning: The Battle For Our*

Mind, 2nd ed., Warner Books, New York, N.Y., 1986, pp. 11-12)

86. Kenneth Warner, "Cigarette Advertising and Magazine Coverage of the Hazards of Smoking -- A Statistical Analysis," *New England Journal of Medicine*, Jan. 30, 1992, p. 305.

87. Kent Commission, p. 66.

88. As quoted in *The Silent Revolution*, from Harold Innis, *Political Economy of the Modern State*, Ryerson Press, Toronto, 1946.

89. For instance, tobacco companies cancelled ads with *Mother Jones* magazine when it ran stories linking cigarette smoking with lung cancer and heart disease. (Martin A. Lee and Norman Solomon, *Unreliable Sources*, Lyle Stuart, New York, 1990, p. 5.) A study of five women's magazines -- *Cosmopolitan*, *Mademoiselle*, *McCall's*, *Woman's Day*, and an older version of *Ms.* (before it became advertising-free) -- showed that not one carried a single negative comment about smoking despite that it frequently reported on women's health issues and simultaneously carried tobacco ads. (Lauren Kessler, "Women's Magazine Coverage of Smoking Related to Health Hazards," *Journalism Quarterly*, 66, Summer 1989, pp. 316-322.) Coca-Cola disparaged NBC for running a documentary on poor conditions for migrant workers at the Coca-Cola Food Company, for which the network could not find even one sponsor. (Les Brown, *Television, the Business Behind the Box*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1971, p. 196.)

90. Quoted in Eric Barnouw, *The Sponsor*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1978, p. 57.

91. Lee and Solomon, p. 6.

92. Al Ries and Jack Trout, *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind*, 2nd ed., Warner Books, New York, N.Y., 1986, p. 1.

93. Ries and Trout, p. 8.

94. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, McGraw-Hill, New York, N.Y., 1964, p. 31.

95. Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, Pantheon, New York, 1988, Chapter 1.

96. Noam Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions*, based on the CBC Massey Lectures, CBC Enterprises, Toronto, 1989, p. 48.

97. C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination*, Oxford University Press, New York, p. 191.

98. Lee and Solomon, p. 110.
99. Hollingsworth, p. 8.
100. Robert Maxwell, *Press Barons*, BBC World Service, Dec. 23, 1984.
101. As quoted by James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power Without Responsibility: The Press and Broadcasting in Britain*, Methuen, London, 1985.
102. Hollingsworth, p. 23.
103. James D. Squires, *Read All About It! The Corporate Takeover of America's Newspapers*, Random House, Toronto, 1993, p. 58.
104. John Swinton as quoted in Sender Garlin, *Three American Radicals*, Westview, Boulder, CO., 1991, pp. 31-32.
105. Ian I. Mitroff and Warren Bennis, *The Unreality Industry: The Deliberate Manufacturing of Falsehood and What it is Doing to our Lives*, 2nd ed., Oxford University Press, New York, N.Y., 1993. p.7.
106. For a further critique of coverage of the Persian Gulf War, see: Douglas Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1992; and the "Truth as the First Casualty" chapter in James Winter, *Common Cents*.
107. Mitroff and Bennis, p. 11.
108. Mitroff and Bennis, p. 19.
109. Neuharth, p. 130.
110. Neuharth, p. 132.
111. Parenti, p. 7.
112. Parenti, p. 8.
113. Ericson et al, pp. 127-128.
114. Michael Adams, "Canadians content, survey finds," *The Globe and Mail*, Wednesday, March 16, 1994, p. A1.
Adams also said "Canadians see the media as a powerful instrument of social change and of exposing the hypocrisy of traditional institutional authorities." Yet the poll was not encouraging. Six of 10 Canadians believe that news organizations are "often influenced by the powerful." The *Globe* article continues: "Large majorities favored government restrictions on news organizations, particularly for material that is racially insulting, sexually explicit or violent or involves military secrets. The general concept of censorship was rejected, as was any curtailment to avoid embarrassing political leaders."

Though many Canadian respondents said they spend more time watching TV news than reading newspapers, two-thirds said they read newspapers regularly. And four in 10 said they have a better understanding of an event they saw on TV after reading it in a newspaper. But 35 per cent felt newspapers are repetitive.

115. Squires, p. 217.

116. *Royal Commission on Newspapers*, Tom Kent chair, Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1981, Table 1, p. 67.

117. Squires, p. 211.

118. Squires, p. 219.

119. B. Roshco, *Newsmaking*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1975, p. 105.

120. Ericson et al, p. 352.

121. Ericson et al, p. 140.

122. Parenti, p. 44.

123. Deni Elliott, "All is not relative: Essential Shared Values and the Press," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, vol. 3, no. 1, p. 31.

124. Ellul says propaganda must be total. The press, radio, TV, movies, posters, door-to-door canvassing, meetings, all participate in the entrenching of ideas. "Propaganda must be continuous and lasting -- continuous in that it must not leave any gaps, but must fill the citizen's whole day and all his days." (p. 87) Every modern state functions with propaganda, Ellul says, and as such, there must always be a "Ministry of Propaganda," that naturally goes by another name. In fact, each ministry has its own department of propaganda, if you will, only they are called the public relations departments. Effective propaganda, Ellul contends, does not contain lies. The facts are simply presented in a certain way to evoke a certain response. Psychological manipulations do not appreciably change people's entrenched opinions. An adamant Christian, communist, or capitalist, for example, is not easily swayed from their root convictions (if at all). The molding of the mind starts at an early age and continues through most of what society dictates. A propagandist must know the principle symbols of society and its culture to be effective. (pp. 33-34)

"Propaganda does not aim to elevate man but to make him serve." It must use the most basic and widespread sentiments, appealing to the lowest common denominator, not the highest. "Hate, hunger and pride make better levers of propaganda than do love or impartiality." Broad myths, ideologies, assumptions, stereotypes must be used. (p. 38) What's worse, in terms of the impact of news: "Propaganda in its explicit form must relate solely on what is timely... the only interesting and enticing news is that which presents a timely, spectacular aspect

of society's profound reality." (p. 43)

125. In *On Prejudice: A Global Perspective*, Doubleday, Toronto, 1993, editor Daniela Gioseffi provides several essays by minority authors on how one culture dominates others through mass media.

126. John Howard Griffin, *Black Like Me*, Penguin Books, New York, N.Y., 1960, p. 92.

127. Richard Hatcher, *Time*, Dec. 12, 1983, p. 84.

128. Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, as told to Alex Hailey, Ballantine Books, New York, 1965, p. 239.

129. Malcolm X, p. 242.

130. Recchia, p. 151. For more on the cultural and public relations biases of the Oka crisis, see the chapter "Showdown at the Oka Corral," by James Winter, *Common Cents*, Black Rose Books, Montreal, 1992.

131. Ellul, p. 203.

132. Ellul, p. 205.

133. As quoted by Ellul, p. 206.

134. James Winter discusses the idea of accepted "common sense" perspectives in *Common Cents*, Black Rose Books, Montreal, 1992.

135. Lee and Solomon offer examples of common story themes in *Unreliable Sources*, pp. 60-63.

136. Herbert Gans from *Deciding What's News*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), cited in Joe Fox, *Social Influences on Decision-making in the Toronto Star Newsroom*, thesis, University of Windsor, 1988, pp. 101-102.

137. *Toronto Star* photographer Paul Watson, in fact, won a 1993 Pulitzer Prize for his shot of a dead American soldier being dragged through streets in Somalia.

138. Squires, p. 225.

139. Lee and Solomon, p. 98.

140. In *Inventing Reality: The Politics of News Media*, Michael Parenti offers three pages of documented examples of reporters who quit, were fired, demoted, or censored when their reports radically opposed the establishment's view of things, pp. 46-49.

141. As quoted by William J. Puette, *Through Jaundiced Eyes: How the Media View Organized Labor*, ILR Press, Ithaca, N.Y., 1992, p. 140.

142. Of the 1,700 daily papers in the U.S., 98 per cent are local monopolies. Fewer than 15 corporations control most of the daily circulation, and the introduction of competing papers is nearly impossible. After *USA Today* started in 1982, it incurred losses of half a billion dollars, not including \$208 million in capital costs, in five years. Television requires even more "gargantuan" capital. An independent Los Angeles station sold for \$510 million in 1985. ABC's New York affiliate has an estimated value of \$800 million. (From Schiller, *Culture Inc.*, p. 36)

143. Schiller, p. 6.

CHAPTER 2

Labor's Lot

Flipping through the newspaper would prove particularly interesting, at least for its novelty, if you could chance upon a labor section. You can't, of course. That simple fact seems as natural as newsprint ink staining hands. Yet it represents a tangible slant: most papers carry daily business sections but virtually none carry corresponding labor sections.

Imagine that. An entire section dedicated solely to issues of concern to organized labor. It may seem radical at first, but should it? And how would it affect news stories? Likely, we could read more about organized labor than we do now, and could thus learn more about issues other than strikes, delve into matters with greater depth. That, naturally, would allow us better understanding of unions than simple coverage of strikes -- which almost by nature provides a superficial glance at organized labor, and often negative.

Regular labor sections aren't liable to emerge, however. The rationale seems obvious: there wouldn't be enough ads to support the section. The point is, if business-friendly ads -- relatively plentiful from firms such as banks and investment groups -- command a certain section, then that provides concrete evidence of at least one type of corporate influence.

Yet it stretches further than that. If ads can dictate a section, critics might wonder whether they can subtly influence editorial content elsewhere. "If we saw only commercials from labor organizations or environmental groups on television

it would doubtless strike us as odd, off kilter. Yet we rarely give it a second thought when we see one commercial after another from corporate sponsors," argue Martin A. Lee and Norman Solomon in *Unreliable Sources: A Guide to Detecting Bias in News Media*.¹ If labor paid the majority of the bills, it seems fair to figure we would read and hear more about unions, strikes or not. And perhaps it would be more favorable coverage. Certainly now it is rare to read an editorial in a major daily that supports strikers over management, at least in this country.

Media and Labor

An intriguing trend is that backing for workers rallying together in communist and socialist countries afar is routine in North America. "The U.S. media have cheered on workers organizing in communist countries, while turning a blind eye to the suppression of labor inside our own borders."² Two examples illustrate that point well. In 1981, the year martial law restricted the fledgling workers Solidarity movement in Poland, U.S. President Ronald Reagan fired 11,000 air-traffic controllers, crushing the union. Martial law was roundly condemned in news reports here, while Reagan's move was more often praised. As well, at the end of the '80s when Soviet coal miners went on strike, the *New York Times* said the shut down received "widespread, generally sympathetic coverage of the strike by Soviet newspapers and television."³ Not so in North America, where -- simultaneously -- U.S. coal miners were on strike (and had been for four months). They had suffered 2,500 arrests, and the United Mine Workers of America and its officials had been rapped with \$4 million in fines.

Coverage of the American strike focused on union violence, instead of the working conditions they were protesting. *The Nation* columnist Alexander

Cockburn analyzed network TV coverage and found that the nightly newscasts provided 36 minutes of Soviet coverage in eight days, twice the amount the U.S. coal miners had received in four months. ⁴ At home, editorials are more likely to label strikers greedy, and to explain how their work stoppages unfairly infringe on the greater population. This is not new.

The man who coined the term yellow journalism, A.J. Liebling, noticed what he saw as an anti-labor bias in newspapers while studying at Dartmouth College, which he entered in 1920. A professor of his pointed out an example of sensationalist media treatment of the great steel strike of 1919 from the *Pittsburgh Chronicle-Herald*:

Yesterday the enemy of liberty was Prussianism. Today it is radicalism. Masquerading under the cloak of the American Federation of Labor a few radicals are striving for power. They hope to seize control of the industries and turn the company over to the 'red' rule of Syndacalism... America is calling you. The steel strike will fail. Be a 100 per cent American. Stand by America... GO BACK TO WORK MONDAY. ⁵

More recently, James D. Squires, former editor of the *Orlando Sentinel* and the *Chicago Tribune*, reveals a more subtle but nevertheless typical management sentiment toward unions, in his book *Read All About It! The Corporate Takeover of America's Newspapers*. He brands union leaders as selfish, implying that union membership is duped and wouldn't seriously advocate union positioning if it understood hidden subtleties of contracts and negotiations. And he thinks unions are foolhardy to strike (though that is a union's only real strength). For instance, three of the *Chicago Tribune's* unions called a strike in 1985, when Charles Brumback, renowned for cost-reduction artistry, was publisher. Squires says: "Ironically, it turned out to be a gift to the *Tribune* and Charlie Brumback's career

from the self-centred leaders of the typographical union, whose members were in the midst of a referendum on whether to join the Teamsters." ⁶ Squires claims union leaders saw the lost strike as a personal victory, since the Teamsters' vote was defeated and their leadership maintained. "It was a simple case of self-preservation on the part of elected union leaders, an attitude that has been as responsible as mechanization for the decline of organized labor." ⁷

Ganging Up

The Glasgow University Media Group conducted the first detailed analysis of TV union coverage in Great Britain, in 1975. It found: "Typically unions were blamed for national industrial and economic problems despite ample evidence to the contrary which was either ignored, smothered, or perverted." ⁸

While the Bureau of Labor Statistics consistently reveals a strike-incidence rate per contract of less than two per cent, a 1983 survey by Jerry Rollings for *Labor, the Working Class, and the Media*, found that the percentage of labor coverage focusing on strikes was: 25 per cent at NBC; 26 per cent at CBS; and 31 per cent at ABC. ⁹

News media tend to concentrate on what strikes will do to the economy rather than what caused the strike in the first place -- such as low wages and unsatisfactory working conditions. Space limitations, of course, have a lot to say about this. And insightful workplace pieces appear, such as stories detailing trends in plant injuries, or union seminars on sexism and racism, or the Canadian Auto Workers charitable donations. But a general trend toward neglecting unions unless there is workplace unrest seemingly guides journalism, at least with high-profile stories. ¹⁰

Free thinkers, dissenters and radicals are stigmatized by the press, called unrepresentative, and assaulted personally for daring to speak out against the establishment, claims British writer Mark Hollingsworth in *The Press and Political Consent: A Question of Censorship*.

Their alternative explanations of political and social realities are reported in terms of the personal quirks of a few individuals rather than a reasoned critique. Their views are presented as 'extreme' or 'Red' or 'hard-line,' somehow dangerous. Such an aura of sceptical denigration has led almost inevitably to Britain's radicals being marginalized on the political agenda. They are seen in effect, as being beyond the pale.¹¹

"By and large, the promoters of radical change have been greeted pretty coolly by Canadian media," says Nick Russell.¹² For example, Russell notes: organized rallies by the unemployed in the 1930s received a cold shoulder from the media; Tommy Douglas and the CCF party met media resistance when they proposed medicare in 1962; the radicals of the late '60s were dubbed hippies, flower children and their ideas for change depicted as rather drug-induced.¹³

The press can then unconsciously narrow the margins of debate and deflect responsibility for social and economic problems by using scapegoats, Hollingsworth says, for which there is no fair excuse. "It cannot be argued that character assassination of leading trade unionists and Labour Party activists is born out of misplaced professional techniques or journalistic ignorance, as some maintain. They are political acts."¹⁴

In 11 of 12 general elections in Britain since 1945, the number of Labour voters far exceeded editorial support for the Labour Party in Britain. The Conservative vote fell after 1959, but press support for the Tories rose. In 1983, the Conservatives received 44 per cent of the vote and 74 per cent of national daily

circulation support. As further proof of a chasm between public opinion and editorial stance, not one British paper has called for the withdrawal of American cruise missiles, for instance, while opinion polls show between 55 and 65 per cent of Britons oppose them. "It is no coincidence that as the concentration of ownership has contracted, so the range of political views expressed in the press has narrowed." ¹⁵

In Canada, the Charlottetown constitutional referendum stands as an example of the public contrasting with the press. Most major media supported the deal and yet it was roundly defeated by voters. A similar example is free trade. Only two dailies in Canada opposed it, which contrasts with the fierce tide of public opposition it now suffers. But that doesn't deter the elite from claiming its advantages.

One defence of media tendencies and superficiality holds that issues are often too complex for the average citizen to understand. Yet such rationalizations distort discussion, particularly when the press differs with the public in a uniform direction. As Jacques Ellul says in the preface of his ground-breaking work *Propaganda*:

I have no sympathy with the haughty aristocratic intellectual who judges from on high, believing himself invulnerable to the destructive forces of his time, and disdainfully considers the common people as cattle to be manipulated, to be molded by the action of propaganda in the most intimate aspects of their being. ¹⁶

Jacques Ellul theorizes that the mass media, when uniform in their approach to various topics, and uniform in their choice of topics, represents an effective form of propaganda. That does not mean media leaders gather in furtive settings to mix potions and craft evil plans of thought control. Indeed, most news

managers are committed to their craft. Ellul's point: simply, this is how our system operates, for cosmetic coverage of news cannot sufficiently enlighten us. "The public is prodigiously sensitive to current news. Its attention is focused immediately on any spectacular event that fits in with its myths." ¹⁷ A significant truth, therefore, is not a set of numbers, say, the nightly box scores of the Scuds versus the Patriots in the Gulf War. Significant truth comes via context and analysis. As Ellul writes:

Straight news reporting never gives him [the average news consumer] anything but factual details; the event of the day is always only a part, for news can never deal with the whole. Theoretically, the reporter could relate these details in other details, put them into context and even provide certain interpretations -- but that would no longer be pure information. ¹⁸

The Global Workforce

Teresa Hayes argues in her book *The Creation of World Poverty* that subtle media support for management over labor extends in a more insidious fashion to foreign countries. She says Western economics force a system of low wages and meagre means on Third World countries, through a complex series of aid, policies, investments and marketing. The press takes a very uniform stand of support for foreign economic intervention, unless it is to complain that it is too generous. The issues may not on the surface be about labor conditions, but they hover in the wings.

For instance: Africa, Asia and South America are rich in cultural and intellectual history. Poverty, however, is now rampant. But western media analyses often obsess with overpopulation, mismanagement and government corruption -- though they are valid considerations -- as if global economics play no part in the system it defines. Spanish, French, British and American

colonialism still exists, in a refined fashion. "The process continues today, with many 'pro-Western' governments being dependent for their survival on outside support." ¹⁹ The global economy works like a fine tool for the richest countries, relatively speaking. Problems exist, and recessions continually return, but only so much wealth exists in the world. The richest countries, even in feeble economies, still devour much more than their share. We couldn't easily enjoy so many of the products we do now if all people in the world received a fair wage, and if dependent poor countries didn't have to focus on providing raw materials at low prices and assembling high-tech equipment, in order to repay debts and ensure what little profit they can. This system is hardly conducive to a flourishing economy. "If there had been no foreign domination of the countries that are now underdeveloped, they might well have developed faster and with less hardship for their peoples." ²⁰

All the while, however, the media support our governments in principle in maintaining this system. Where are the stories highlighting not just global inequalities, but the causes of them? North American Free Trade is condemned by workers across the continent. Workers say forbidding companies from reducing environmental and labor standards to attract new business is a meaningless clause. Simply bringing more jobs to Mexico won't raise the standard of living in the *maquiladora* districts, where the American and Canadian plants establish business. The media see it differently. Jobs are to come, the headlines often say. But simply creating jobs isn't enough. Slavery created jobs, but it is morally reprehensible. And continuing to subject workers to poverty wages and dismal

working conditions is a dubious moral achievement, even if it creates more of the same low-level jobs.

Foreign aid continues to be billed by the media as altruistic, when in fact it is more about drumming up business for the Good Samaritan country providing the cash (and the conditions). Yet it's really not a secret, or should not be, particularly to the press, that that is the case. President Kennedy said in 1961: "Foreign aid is a method by which the United States maintains a position of influence around the world and sustains a good many countries which would definitely collapse or pass into the Communist bloc." President Nixon was more blunt in 1968: "Let us remember that the main purpose of American aid is not to help other nations but to help ourselves." ²¹

Right-wing regimes are the main recipients of aid, which comes in the form of low-interest loans, rarely grants. Even mildly progressive, let alone left-wing, regimes often have aid reduced or eliminated, Hayes says. And those countries with the greatest 'success' in increasing exports are the very countries that have accumulated the most massive debts, such as Brazil, Mexico and South Korea. ²²

All this affects international working conditions. The worldwide labor movement, however, only represents part of labor issues. Back at home, the labor movement continues. So too do complicated problems of economics that beg for deep analysis and explanation by the fourth estate, since these situations almost define the average person's status. Adequate explanation is not always forthcoming.

The news media manifest a marked pro-business, anti-labor bias. During the Reagan administration, the rich received massive multi-billion-dollar tax cuts, one of the greatest giveaways to wealthy individuals and corporations in U.S. history. ²³

This was done in the name of promoting investment, stimulating the economy and ultimately bolstering the wellbeing of everyone. The same trend occurred in Canada under Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, though perhaps not quite to the same extent. Blue-collar, white-collar, and owners generally all hurt during the recession, of course. And accurately defining such complex economic trends is difficult. But the gap between monied interests and the average person continues to widen, without regular media comment.

Unfortunately for the average person, however, a widening gap between the haves and have-nots is harmful. No one should think any different. Worse, a handful of those enjoying handsome tax breaks in the '80s became involved in greedy and dangerous games of speculative investing. Corporate investors went wild, resulting in the October 1987 stock market crash. The poor investments were the fault of those who speculated wrongly; the public funds the mistake.

Over the last 50 years, according to former University of California academic Herbert Schiller, corporate power has steadily increased, and dramatically so. "Moreover, this consolidation of corporate power has taken place alongside a parallel decline in the influence of once important forces in American life -- independent farmers, organized labor, and a strong urban consciousness."²⁴

Not to suggest virtuous intent, or perfection, but the labor movement has from the beginning fought for social advances across society, from child labor, fair wages, shorter work weeks, etc. "If what was beneficial to labor was good for the country, the nation has suffered grievously in recent years."²⁵

Layoffs are sometimes portrayed as the fault of avaricious unions, not avaricious corporations. A special CBS report (Nov. 21, 1983) explained: "To a lot

of Americans the unions have dug their own grave by being greedy... Now things have caught up with them." ²⁶ When corporations seek ever more profit, they are portrayed as astute, not greedy. It is common to portray the interests of corporations as "national interests." Not so with labor.

As most reporters can attest, dealing with unions can sometimes be difficult -- largely because they don't trust the news media. But it is by definition a more democratic exercise. Elected union leadership routinely encourages the press to talk to the rank and file. And when average workers talk, they can often be counted on not to just speak freely about their working conditions, but to speak critically. Calling corporations for comment is a foray into the bureaucratic. Usually, if my experience in the business is any example, only one or two management representatives -- trained public relations officials at larger companies -- are allowed to comment to the media. Workers need not be told this because seldom would non-unionized employees speak frankly about the corporation for which they work. In fact, it's rare to find a non-unionized employee who would say one word to the media. Corporate information flow is hierarchal. That differs with unions. Unions aren't flawless, of course. Nothing is. Some leaders are selfish and corrupt, just as some CEOs are. But unions offer more than what we commonly read in the news sheets. Writer Roberta Lynch offers an idealistic but nevertheless insightful commentary on union strengths:

Media coverage of trade union activities is restricted to superficial reports of major national strikes. Yet there is in unions of every variety a wealth of experience worthy of wider public attention. Local union members who know more than epidemiologists about cancer patterns. Union stewards who blow the whistle on secret hazardous waste disposal. Women in chemical factories who know first-hand the potential for causing birth defects of many commonly used manufacturing substances. Unions that face unscrupulous and

high-paid consulting firms brought in not to negotiate with them but to break them. Unions that have joined in alliances with environmentalists to help clean up the air and the water. The list could go on. The fact is that labor unions are on the whole among the most democratic institutions in American life. The local union represents one of the very few arenas in which ordinary people can come together to define their own concerns, to develop new skills and understanding, and to glimpse a sense of their own potential.²⁷

In the United States in 1984, organized labor accounted for 18.8 per cent of the workforce, substantially down from the post-war peak of 35.3 per cent, which is still dramatically lower than that of other industrial countries, like Britain and Australia, for instance. The 1957 Taft-Hartley Act required that all union officials in the United States sign a card affirming they were not members of the communist party. Many unions purged their organizations, either under government pressure or willingly.²⁸ McCarthyism, a form of ideological witch hunt which frequently targeted innocent people, was supported by the press at the time. Meanwhile, unions must also contend with a weakening influence in the expensive game of politics today.²⁹

General union numbers have plummeted from their heyday in the 1950s, dropping from a high of perhaps 40 per cent to below 20 per cent. But the public is not aware of this. *Washington Post* reporter Thomas Byrne Edsall writes:

The decline of labor went largely unnoticed, particularly in the media... As the power of organized labor in the United States fell, the interest of the press shifted elsewhere. In a direct reflection of the importance attached to the trade union movement, the assignment to cover labor -- the labor beat -- on many newspapers, which had been a high-status assignment in the heyday of labor's prestige... has been relegated to much lower status, and in many case has been eliminated altogether.³⁰

Yet, public support for unionization is still significant. According to the *Gallup Report*, public approval of labor unions has generally fluctuated between

55 and 75 per cent since the 1930s, bottoming out in 1981. ³¹ Still, relying on the news of information, the general public is ill informed about unionism. A majority of respondents (70 per cent) believe the United States employs a greater percentage of unionized workers than other countries while, in fact, it employs among the lowest of the industrialized nations. Japan operates with higher unionization, for instance, albeit not always a powerful form. Also, 83 per cent of those surveyed thought strike activity occurred more than the actual two per cent annual rate. ³²

Leaders in the Field

The widely influential *Washington Post*, like most papers at one time or another, occasionally feeds readers a polished ideal of modern journalism. The *Post's* ombudsman Richard Harwood, who first took the position in 1970 when he was the paper's national editor, went on to run the company's *Trenton Times*. In the late 1980s, Harwood was back as the *Post's* ombudsman, writing such treatises as his caustic column on the Newspaper Guild (representing 1,400 employees). He denounced the union, which should come as no surprise, since he served as a company negotiator for seven years. A week later, the supposedly critical ombudsman -- a position intended to investigate independently on behalf of consumers -- assured readers with his thoughts on journalism:

A certain kind of virtue, by accident or by design, is overtaking us. The prosperity of our great media empires has made them more or less invulnerable to economic subversion or bullying tactics by big government, big labor or big business... you can be reasonably certain these days that the news brought into your homes is not propaganda that has been bought and paid for by a lobbyist, politician or advertiser. ³³

Washington Post labor reporter Peter Perl attended a \$325-a-day seminar on busting unions, where he said he was surprised to learn that four of the 30 participants were from his paper. The founder of the firm running the seminars told Perl the *Post* was a "leader in this field." ³⁴

Management has ultimate say over what is published. Reporters mostly write without supervision, choosing quotes and wording, deciding what is important, and offering some interpretation of the events they cover. But editors often decide what is covered, where the story runs, if it is followed up, and sometimes indicate the "slant" they want before a reporter actually leaves the office on assignment. Editors sometimes indicate who should be interviewed (or rarely, who shouldn't be). It is precisely with controversial stories, or ones in which editors are most interested, that they will involve themselves with most. Like any story, labor coverage is not free of this influence.

In some cases this anti-labor bias is heavy-handed and deliberate. Local publishers and their editors are themselves employers dealing with their own workers -- often unionized -- in the less than happy circumstances that surround the process of collective bargaining. It is no surprise, then, that they should approach labor relations stories from a management perspective. And when these same publishers, as is often the case, are social companions with the very employers in their community likely to be embroiled in labor disputes, class loyalties can be expected to prevail. ³⁵

A *Los Angeles Times* survey found that 54 per cent of editorial writers sided with business in business-labor disputes while only seven per cent sided with labor. ³⁶

Today, fewer workers manage more production, and the gap between the rich and poor has widened substantially, but this is rarely portrayed in the news media. If it is mentioned, it comes via one story, not a campaign or even an in-

depth exploration. TV shows who invite experts to discuss minimum wage rarely allow someone, trying to support a family on minimum wage, to have equal air time as do the relatively wealthy "experts" who pontificate on the lowest hourly wage. And news reports "routinely understate" joblessness, since they don't question government statistics which exclude discouraged workers who have given up searching and part-time workers seeking full-time employment.³⁷

Michael Parenti says in *Inventing Reality*, workers' well-being is considered secondary to the well-being of corporations.

Every year more than 14,000 workers in the United States are killed on the job; another 100,000 die prematurely and 400,000 become seriously ill from work-related diseases. Many, if not most, of these deaths and injuries occur because greater consideration is given by management to profits and production than to occupational safety and environmental standards. Yet these crimes are rarely defined and reported as crimes by the news media.³⁸

News media regularly focus on wages during strikes, discussing issues like job safety, vacation, health benefits second. And they discuss working conditions less, in general, when workers aren't striking. Yet corporate financial successes are often reported. "Rather than focus on the well-being of workers, mass media are busy doting on the fortunes of corporations."³⁹

Criticizing big business, or even pointing out simple but honest deficiencies, instills instant caution among editors, who know well how quickly corporations threaten lawsuits.

Shortly after the *Dallas Morning News* disclosed the dire straights of a floundering bank, the newspaper's management fired the reporter who wrote the article, Earl Golz, and forced the resignation of the editor who okayed it. But blaming the journalists for the bad news did not prevent the bank from failing within two weeks. Afterwards, neither journalist was rehired.⁴⁰

A Short History of Press Unions

Printing trade unions are among this continent's oldest. New York City printers reportedly organized a strike in 1776. Though early attempts at organizing a typographical union encountered varying success, one was formed in 1869. When Canadian locals joined in 1869, the union called itself the International Typographical Union, a name it still uses. The ITU originally covered the entire industry, but several trades withdrew into their own unions around the turn of the century: pressmen (1889); bookbinders (1892); photo-engravers (1900); and stereotypers (1902). Lithographers organized separately in 1882. These six unions dominated for many years in Canada and the United States. Early in the 20th century, some journalists were welcomed into the ITU, but in 1932 when journalists crossed typographers' picket lines, they were expelled. So in 1932, U.S. journalists formed the American Newspaper Guild, a loose association which didn't garner much power until later in the century. It changed its name to the Newspaper Guild in 1971, and has become a more varied, less craft-oriented union including everybody from reporters, photographers, middle-management editors, librarians, circulation employees, business office workers, advertising department members, and even maintenance crews. Weakened trades jurisdiction have melted what were once distinct lines between various crafts. Lithographers merged with photo-engravers in 1964, then joined the bookbinders in 1972, forming the Graphic Arts International Union, whose membership is primarily in printing outside the newspaper industry. Pressmen and stereotypers merged in 1973 to form the International Printing and Graphic Communications Union. Both ITU and

the Newspaper Guild are becoming more diversified, and there has long been chatter about merging the two. ⁴¹

The Kent Commission says the development of Canada's labor movement has roughly mirrored that of our southern neighbors.

The history of organized labor goes back to the eighteenth century with the emergence of craft unions based loosely on the old European guild system. But the distinctly American trade union, organized to protect workers from employer abuses such as unsafe working conditions and substandard wages, grew up in the postbellum period as the country began to industrialize. Yet laws were not passed to recognize workers' rights until Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930s. ⁴²

Only after decades of labor strife in the United States did the U.S. Congress in 1935 pass the Wagner Act, which finally required private sector employers to recognize and bargain with their employees. That year, Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*, originally called *The Masses* (though industry executives refused to allow the title) featured "the pathetic Tramp being run through the cogs of a giant machine." It wasn't specifically about labor but did convey a sympathetic portrayal of the working person. ⁴³ And Chaplin was hounded as a communist sympathizer by the FBI in return.

Movies and television offer revealing insight into labor's portrayal in the mass media. William J. Puette, in his book on labor coverage *Through Jaundiced Eyes: How the Media View Organized Labor*, says workers rarely receive positive play in drama or in the news. Puette says the first film directly about unions was *Black Fury*, which displayed Hollywood's ambivalence at the time toward organized workers. "The film's ambivalence toward labor unions, as it turns out, was no accident." The original script, entitled *Black Hell*, was drastically rewritten when

the National Coal Association complained. Originally it "described a plot by mine owners to infiltrate the union, force a strike, and use hired goons and scabs to break the union." Hal Willis of Warner Brothers ordered the rewrite, saying: "we should bend over backwards to eliminate anything unfavorable to the coal industry." ⁴⁴

The anti-union trend on the big screen worsened. "After the war, the long years of red-baiting kept Hollywood entirely away from labor films. Ideals that had been admired as social liberalism in the 1930s were abhorred as bolshevik communism after the war." ⁴⁵ In 1954, *On the Waterfront* -- which features young longshoreman Terry Malloy (Marlon Brando) innocently following the direction of a corrupt union -- was produced. It won an Academy Award. That same year, blacklisted director Herbert Biberman joined with other banished moviemakers, and "struggled to produce *Salt of the Earth* against nearly overwhelming opposition that delayed and finally crippled its release and distribution." *Salt of the Earth* tells the true story of a strike by Local 890 of the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers Union in Bayard, New Mexico, which was expelled from the Congress of Industrial Organizations for alleged communist influence. It also showed how the company treated its Mexican-born or descended workers worse than its anglo workers. ⁴⁶

Puette provides many examples of unflattering movie portrayal of unions, finding *Salt of the Earth* and *Norma Rae* (1979, starring Sally Field) as the only two movies directly focusing on unions to portray them in a truly positive light. *Matewan* is an example of another movie, which Puette fails to mention, however, which also portrays unions positively. But his point remains.

Negotiations and the Law

When newspapers cover labor-management disputes, they delve into an issue of historic concern for the corporations that own them. Workers and management are no strangers to work stoppages or collective bargaining. Needless to say, media corporations share the same interests as any major corporation when it comes to bargaining with employees. In Canada, all jurisdictions share similar bargaining procedures. Either management or union notifies the other of the wish to negotiate. If they disagree, either party may request a conciliator from the labor ministry. The right to strike or lock out comes when the collective agreement expires, or in Ontario, when conciliation is exhausted. British Columbia forbids strike breaking, as does Quebec, in that people recently employed at a plant or employees from other plants may not work at a striking site. Since Jan. 1, 1993, Ontario also bars anybody except current management and non-unionized workers at a specific site from working during a strike; outside workers may not be employed.

Chain ownership has had a significant but differing effect on member papers. Head office policy determines the extent of control, quality and as a byproduct, morale, at certain newspapers.

These differences in approach have a determining impact on the atmosphere of labor relations and, consequently, on productivity. Until recently, when Southam president Bill Ardell announced his company would reduce its workforce by 20 per cent, it was commonly said in newspaper circles that one of the major chains (Southam) has taken a broad, liberal approach to labor relations, showing a greater concern for long-term results than for short-term benefits.⁴⁷

An extension of that view holds that:

In summary, management organization structures, with regard to labor relations, are relatively self contained at each paper, except perhaps in the case of newspapers in chain ownership where the policies of the chain's head office, whether loose or stringent, may have a determining effect at the local level. ⁴⁸

Work stoppages in the newspaper industry roughly mirrored the rest of Canada after World War Two, though it was higher than the rest of industry in the 1970s (during that time, newspapers accounted for one per cent of all person days lost, but comprised just .2 per cent of the total labor force). According to Gerard Hebert's volume on labor relations for the 1981 Royal Commission on newspapers headed by Tom Kent, the proportion of person-days lost to person-days worked peaked at .54 per cent immediately after the war, and shrunk to its lowest of .1 in the 1950s. In 1960 and 1970, the ratio climbed to .4, and it set a new record between 1974 and 1976 when it reached .5 per cent. ⁴⁹ A few notable newspaper strikes include the typographers strike which started Nov. 8, 1945, at the two Winnipeg dailies. The strike never ended, and the ITU essentially died there. Typographers staged a seven-month strike at *La Presse* in Montreal, from June 3 to Dec. 28, 1964. And the ITU started the biggest strike in Canadian history around the same time, hitting the *Toronto Star*, the (now defunct) *Toronto Telegram* and the *Globe and Mail*. It only ended on paper three and a half years later, though most workers had either been rehired or found other work. Major work stoppages occurred in the 1970s, courtesy of rapidly introduced technology that threatened jobs. Strikes hit Vancouver and Montreal in 1970 and 1971. On Oct. 25, 1976, the *Ottawa Journal* was ordered on a lock-out after a work slow down, before settling with the Guild, then the pressmen and then ITU (which never returned to work). In Montreal, the two largest French-language dailies *La Presse*

and *Montreal-Matin* were shut down for seven months between Oct. 1977 through May 1978. *Le Soleil* in Quebec City went out for 10 months during the same period, from Sept 1977 to July 1978. The *Montreal Star* closed from June 1978 to February 1979, and never really recovered before shutting permanently. Pacific Press's two Vancouver papers shut down from November 1978 to June 1979.

"It is usually said that journalists, especially in Quebec, have a greater interest in the professional aspects of newspaper production, including participation in management decisions."⁵⁰ Professional clauses, with respect to bylines, are usually included in collective agreements. But other than in Quebec, they don't usually stretch much further. At *Le Devoir*, however, a joint committee of management and journalists has great say over the paper's orientation. And a strike was called at *La Presse* in 1978 because management appointed a sports editor without consultation with the union.

Labor costs, the single biggest expense for newspapers (second is newsprint), comprise between 40 and 50 per cent of a paper's total expenses. If the printing is contracted out, however, the percentage falls to between 25 and 30 per cent.⁵¹ "The major problem the newspaper industry and its employees have had to face over the past 15 years or so, technological change, has had a direct impact on labor costs."⁵²

"A second major bargaining issue during the 1970s was the right of journalists to have a say in the operations of a newspaper. The problem is less directly related to labor costs, but does have a direct bearing on freedom of information and the public's 'right to know.'"⁵³ Guild contracts often deal with issues unique to journalists, such as being allowed to remove a byline if the copy

has been altered substantially or if the author disagrees with the changes. The *Winnipeg Tribune* is an example of a paper that refers to this with brief language while the *Montreal Gazette* delves into detail, allowing slightly more editorially independence. Other commitments found in all Guild contracts are the commitment on the part of the employer to provide legal assistance if a journalist is in trouble or if there is pressure to reveal sources.⁵⁴

Contractual wrestling is a difficult procedure for both sides of the negotiating table, particularly when wording bears such power. Descriptions present another dilemma for labor, not in the contract but in the news. Labor coverage dictates certain interpretations through journalistic cliches. Traditionally, labor leaders were often referred to as "chiefs," "bosses" or "kingpins," connoting a distinct image of organized crime. CEOs are dutifully referred to by their proper titles. Union leaders are more apt to be labelled "cigar-smoking" or "burly" than corporate leaders. The organized crime theme is common in television and movie portrayals of unions. But organized labor likely has no more connection with organized crime than do supposedly legitimate corporations, which obviously have a lot more money to attract nefarious interests. Thankfully, titles such as "kingpin," when referring to union leaders, appear much less often. Reporters are becoming more conscientious about details. But one semantic bias still common on news sheets is in referring to company bargaining proposals as "offers" and union proposals as "demands" -- which carries certain manifest connotations.

As Albert Zack, director of the AFL-CIO department of public relations, noted in 1977:

Every union proposal is called a 'demand' and every management proposal is called an 'offer.' Every strike is calculated in lost wages.

never in the lost self-esteem that would result if the workers had caved in to management demands and tolerated unfettered management domination of their lives. Every strike is a strike against the public interest, or inflationary, or pigheaded, in the opinion of the press.⁵⁵

Consequences of strikes can also be counted in days, as coverage of school strikes in Ontario in 1993 prove. Rarely did criticism of strikes fall on school boards, which sometimes called for greater cutbacks than needed under NDP Premier Bob Rae's controversial, non-negotiated Social Contract. Other inequities exist. Union members' salaries, because the union system is open, are usually available for inclusion in stories. So too are union-local presidents' salaries, but less often are corporate executive salaries -- almost always much higher -- disclosed. Calculations are sometimes made to indicate how much more a union leader makes over the rank and file. But rarely do stories include how much more a CEO makes, a figure sure to be substantial in comparison.⁵⁶

Labor beats have generally been diminishing, while business coverage has increased. In the 1940s, for example, the *San Francisco Chronicle* used two labor writers. Now it has none, though management says labor is handled by its three-person economics team.⁵⁷ The *Globe and Mail* had for a while foregone any labor reporter, though now one has been re-assigned. Former *Wall Street Journal* labor writer John Grimes found that very often he would be the only labor reporter covering a labor issue, that general assignment reporters often handled the beat part time. But it's important to develop beat reporters with a strong understanding of labor issues.⁵⁸ One fact that cannot be denied, however, is that newspapers routinely employ more business reporters than labor reporters.

Positive union stories hit the mainstream media, of course. The *Windsor Star*, for instance, in September 1993 ran front-page stories two consecutive days extolling the benefits of a new Chrysler contract which, among other gains, provided an extra week of vacation every year for workers. The stories also reflected well on the corporation. And the media also provide positive stories from time to time on union initiatives in the community, such as anti-sexism seminars or donations to universities. Sometimes articles discussing working conditions offer certain insight. Profiles on poorly treated workers may periodically appear. The problem is not that pro-union stories are banned from the media, since they most certainly are not. It is that they are comparatively rare. And it is that an attitude of distrust pervades union coverage in general, a wariness that does not as often infiltrate business writing. Positive union stories wallow in the campaigns that follow virtually all development stories, company investment stories, and pro-business editorials. That seems less than fair. And it chafes journalistic principles.

Notes for Chapter 2

1. Martin A. Lee and Norman Solomon, *Unreliable Sources: A Guide to Detecting Bias In New Media*, Carol Publishing Group, New York, 1992, p. xiii.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 190-191.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 190-191.
5. William J. Puette, *Through Jaundiced Eyes: How the Media View Organized Labor*, ILR Press, Ithaca, N.Y., 1992, pp. 60-61.
6. James D. Squires, *Read All About It! The Corporate Takeover of America's Newspapers*, Random House, Toronto, 1993, p. 175.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 176.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.
10. In 1985, the AFL-CIO suggested several steps to deal with biased media coverage:
 1. Publicize labor's accomplishments better.
 2. Union spokespeople need media techniques training.
 3. Trade unions should try to better inform reporters about labor issues.
 4. The AFL-CIO should develop a pilot project to test the effectiveness of labor advertising.
 5. Interferences with workers to form unions should be rigorously publicized in order to develop public support for labor-law reforms.

Also, labor groups should conduct media monitoring. This is not unique to labor, however. Conservative groups have long since monitored the media -- more so than probably all other groups combined -- with organizations such as Accuracy In Media, which employs 22 people to monitor national news stories. (From Puette, pp. 143-144.)

The Honolulu Community Media Council, in 1989, established reporter guidelines:

 1. Remain neutral.
 2. Refer to labor leaders by their proper title.
 3. Do not play up labor disunity.
 4. Do not perpetuate popular misconceptions.
 5. Give coverage to positive labor stories.

Dialogue between media, labor and media councils usually help sensitize

the media and the community about labor issues.
(From Puette, pp. 147-148)

11. *The Press and Political Consent: A Question of Censorship*, Mark Hollingsworth, Pluto Press, London, 1986, p. 4.
12. Nick Russell, *Morals and the Media: Ethics in Canadian Journalism*, UBC Press, Vancouver, 1994, p. 32.
13. Russell, p. 32.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
16. Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes*, Random House, Toronto, 1965, p. xvii.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 144.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
21. As quoted by Hayes, p. 84.
22. Hayes, p. 101.
23. Michael Parenti, *Inventing Reality: The Politics of News Media*, 2nd ed., St Martin's Press, New York, 1993, p. 83.
24. Herbert I. Schiller, *Culture Inc.*, Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1989, p. 3.
25. Herbert I. Schiller, *Culture Inc.*, Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1989, p. 22.
26. CBS news, as quoted by Parenti, p.85.
27. Roberta Lynch, "The Media Distort the Value of Labor Unions," *In These Times*, July 15-28, 1981, p.17.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.
29. While in 1970 only a few Fortune 500 companies ran public-affairs offices in Washington, a decade later roughly 80 per cent did. Also in this period, business-action committee money replaced labor as the biggest source of PAC funds. In 1974, half of PAC cash came via unions; in 1980, it was less than one-fourth. (William Greider, *Who Will Tell the People: The Betrayal of American Democracy*,

Simon and Schuster, Toronto, 1992,
p. 48.)

30. As quoted by Thomas Byrne Edsall, *The New Politics of Inequality*, p. 150, as cited by Lee and Solomon, p. 188.

31. Puette, p. 5.

32. Ibid., p. 6.

33. Lee and Solomon, p.21, quotes Richard Harwood's role at Trenton Times as described in Howard Bray, *The Pillars of the Post: The Making of a News Empire in Washington*, p. 201. Harwood column in *Washington Post*, July 7, 1989.

34. Peter Perl, as quoted by David Moberg in *Union* magazine and adapted in *Extra!*, May/June 1989 (p. 187, Lee and Solomon).

35. Puette, p. 60.

36. *Los Angeles Times* survey cited in *A Workers Guide to the Media*, published by the United Auto Workers (Lee and Solomon, p. 188).

37. Lee and Solomon, pp. 188-189.

38. Michael Parenti, *Inventing Reality: The Politics of News Making*, 2nd ed., St. Martin's Press, N.Y., 1993, p. 10.

39. Lee and Solomon, p. 193.

40. Lee and Solomon, p. 197.

41. Gerard Hebert, *Labor Relations in the Newspaper Industry*, Vol. 5 of the *Royal Commission on Newspapers*, Tom Kent chair, Supply and Services Canada, Ottawa, 1981, pp. 8-10.

42. Puette, p. 13.

43. Ibid., p. 14.

44. Ibid., pp. 15-16.

45. Ibid., p. 20.

46. Ibid.

47. Hebert, p. 14.

48. Ibid., p. 15.

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

51. Hebert, p. 182.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 187.

53. *ibid.*, p. 192.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 193.

55. Albert J. Zack, "The Press Bias on Labor," *AFL-CIO American Federationist* 84, no. 10 (originally delivered in September 1977 to a symposium on business and the media at Georgia State University), 1977, p.4.

56. Puette, p. 67.

57. Michael Hoyt, "Downtime for Labor: Are Working People Less Equal Than Others -- Or Is Labor Just a Dead Beat?" *Columbia Journalism Review* 20, July-August 1981, p. 70.

58. Puette, pp. 64-65.

CHAPTER 3

Ads as News: A Case Study

As all forms of mass media evolve, controlled more and more by giant firms following proven marketing formulas, so too do techniques of persuasion.

Thus, the vast influence wielded by the double-edged sword of the mass media -- news and advertising -- is recognized and increasingly exploited. The cyber-wizardry of the newborn information superhighway is an example of the drive to use technology to tap new types of information flow. Corporations have been noticeably fleet with accolades in hyping the so-called information convergence, where television, cable and phone companies combine into a trillion-dollar industry, perhaps sensing a massive market in the making.

Likewise, the growing kinship of news and advertising reflects a commitment to marketing. Persuading the public to think a certain way is clearly the goal of advertising as well as government, corporate and union propaganda. According to marketing gurus Al Ries and Jack Trout, "positioning" a product or idea through advertising is billed as knowing "How to use Madison Avenue techniques to win the war for your prospect's mind." ¹

Proper advertising can work wonders, which some of today's most popular products indicate. Author Mark Pendergrast argues that Coca-Cola, which by the 1990s was selling almost 40,000 Cokes a second and was the world's most widely distributed product (sold in 185-plus countries, more than the United Nations membership), soared primarily because of its aggressive and massive advertising.

Though its taste proved popular (it was 99 per cent sugar water but originally included, among other ingredients, cocaine), Pendergrast contends in an exhaustively researched book that Coke would have died the death of most useless nostrums of the day -- born at an alarming rate during the late 1800s -- had it not been for heavy advertising. ²

The big players no longer appear content with just conventional ads and the influence they carry with the public and media management. Variations on the advertising/news theme are sprouting: in essence, the marketing of advertising.

First, we must ask what publications emerge in the first place, and why. Some serve readers first. Others serve advertisers first. In an ideal world, a balance might exist between conscientious news and advertising.

In a less than ideal world, which this is, the media owner may make his priority packaging the readers that the advertiser wants, a classic case of tails wagging dogs. There are media at each extreme: the *Wall Street Journal* has no need to bend towards advertisers as its readers are precisely the kind of people certain companies need to reach. Contrariwise, huge numbers of glossy magazines exist not just at the approval of the advertiser, but *for him* [sic]. American network television is in the business of making money, not by selling programmes to viewers, but by selling parcels of viewers to advertisers, and in such a situation it is the advertiser who rules. ³

Creative advertising techniques abound, and increasingly so. Today we have more "advertorial" sections in the media, for instance, particularly newspapers and magazines. Those hour-long nighttime infomercials flogging get-rich-quick courses demonstrate, however, the inclination is not confined to the printed page. Coined by advertising managers, the term advertorial refers to sections in which the number and type of ads dictate how much promotional "news" copy -- usually written by freelancers -- runs

beside it. This is done apart from the newsroom. In order to officially differentiate between this copy and regular editorial copy, the sections usually carry a different font and are often labelled "special advertising feature." They are not always labelled as such, however. On really big projects, regular reporters can be used and the "advertising feature" label dropped. ⁴ But in some ways that is beside the point, since some casual readers might not notice such distinctions anyway. ⁵

James D. Squires knows the advertising/editorial phenomenon well, something he became acquainted with as editor of the *Chicago Tribune*:

Advertisers were never allowed to influence news judgments, story tone or assignments, but the concept of marketing-driven editorial content -- in the form of regular sections containing complementary news and advertising information -- became a way of life. ⁶

"Many trade publications and local papers have long offered favorable editorial coverage to subjects who agree to purchase ads," Jonathan Alter wrote in *Newsweek*. "On TV, implicit deals for kid-glove treatment are an almost everyday affair." ⁷

According to Herbert Schiller:

The programming that is sandwiched between the commercials invariably is produced by the cultural industry to satisfy, or at least not upset, the sponsor. The consequence is that rarely is a program of serious social criticism broadcast. The airwaves overflow with personal crises and conflicts. The major divisions that characterize American society are glaringly absent. ⁸

Schiller also says, "The pervasive commercialization of television is a direct outcome of the cultural industry's appropriation of the medium of television for marketing." ⁹

Ads disguised as television segments are an increasing phenomenon, and can air as if they were news reports. Top anchors are often used. Sam Donaldson's voice, for instance, explains the wonders of a new chemical sensing device for airports that can detect plastic explosives. The piece was produced by the American Chemical Society. ¹⁰

A Love of Advocacy

Besides the advertorials, which many ad managers can verify is a growth industry, there is more focus on advocacy advertising -- another melding of advertising and news. Advocacy advertising is now used more by large corporations intending not to sell a specific product, but a philosophical slant, or perhaps just a general appreciation of a company. Governments, unions, and other groups -- when budgets allow -- also rely on advocacy advertising. It argues a point or an ideology and does not concern itself with being fair, though it does borrow a newspaper's authoritative position in order to provide credibility. And the message says exactly what the sponsor wants. Lobby groups know this well, from corporate PR wings to non-profit agencies -- even if advocacy advertising costs more than distributing press releases.

Many of the advantages of paid media flow from the high degree of control that the advertiser can maintain -- control over the message, the timing and the placement. This makes paid advertising, compared to free media, a tool of precision. It can be used to target specific audiences and to achieve strategic ends. ¹¹

Advocacy advertising very closely approximates corporate advertising. Other names for advocacy advertising include: issue, adversary,

controversy or even propaganda advertising. But one thing remains constant: such advertising focuses on controversy.¹²

As director of the Center for Research in Business and Social Policy at the University of Texas in Dallas, S. Prakash Sethi defined advocacy advertising as:

part of a genre of advertising known as corporate image, or institutional, advertising. It is concerned with the propagation of ideas and a lucidation of controversial issues of public importance in a manner that supports the position and interests of the sponsor while expressly denying the accuracy of facts and down-grading the sponsor's opponents.¹³

Advocacy and corporate advertising are not new. The American Telephone & Telegraph Co. may not be the inventor of corporate advertising, but it is one of the oldest users of it, arguing the benefits of the phone, phone etiquette, and the wisdom of allowing the company a monopoly on the national telephone network in 1908.¹⁴ Thomas F. Garbett in his book *Corporate Advertising*, says:

With the possible exception of some "public notice" advertising in newspapers of the 1800s, the AT&T campaign, which started in June 1908, gets the writer's vote as the real beginning of this whole form of advertising.¹⁵

"But advocacy advertising showed little growth until the mid-1970s, not only in the United States but in countries around the world."¹⁶ It soon became *de rigueur*.

"Today, one-third of all corporate advertising is directed at influencing the public on political and ideological issues as opposed to pushing consumer goods."¹⁷

Mobil Oil, which spends \$5 million annually on advocacy ads,¹⁸ provides a fine example of the trend in the *Washington Post*, as this excerpt illustrates:

Business, generally, is a good neighbor, and most communities recognize that fact. From time to time, out of political motivations or for reasons of radical chic, individuals may try to chill the business climate. On such occasions we try to set the record straight...So when it comes to the business climate, we're glad that most people recognize there's little need to tinker with the American system.¹⁹

The Advertising Council in the United States is the second largest advertiser in the world (behind Proctor & Gamble). Though supposedly a non-profit organization, the Advertising Council is funded and dominated by giant firms and so too plugs the free-market system as beautiful, compliments business, urges citizens to buy U.S. Savings Bonds, and encourages workers to be more efficient (but doesn't suggest firms pay workers more in return). Many companies and groups, including unions, use advocacy advertising as a hidden ace when looking to influence public perception. But the most wealthy then wield the most power, and the average citizen is effectively barred from competing in the advocacy-advertising arena.

Advocacy advertising costs a lot, often into the millions of dollars for nationwide blitzes. And these ads carry risks, such as: mixed public reaction; possible legislative and regulatory backlash; strong reaction from college-age and other young people who are the company's future customers; loss of some employee loyalty; mixed reaction from stockholders; and major board-level debates.²⁰

There can be only one valid reason for risking all these negatives. The level of pain that the corporation is experiencing from some particular public issue warrants the risk and the expense, an expense which it knows in advance will probably not be allowed as a business tax deduction. ²¹

The potential influence, however, often outweighs the drawbacks. The leverage of advocacy groups and advocacy advertising is so great that the federal government studied it in the 1991 Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, chaired by Pierre Lortie. The commission worried that advocacy advertising brandishes particular influence during elections. Some participants in the Royal Commission figured advocacy lobbying is simply freedom of expression. Others considered it nothing but propaganda: "It's distorting the debate and distorting the democratic process not to impose a spending ceiling on an organization created specifically to promote and advance a pivotal issue in an election." ²²

Though it is impossible to accurately determine the exact effectiveness of marketing, the public is enormously sensitive to it. "Every month new products appear for which there is no previous need, but which take their place in the market without much resistance. That is exclusively the result of propaganda." ²³ In other words, advertising creates the "need" for some products.

Newspapers as Advertisers: The Bill 40 Case

Added to the mix most recently is perhaps the most notable merger of advertising and news. It is advocacy advertising not simply by chambers

of commerce, or by single corporations, but by the daily newspapers themselves.

Ontario dailies took an unprecedented step in 1992 by running a series of full-page ads attacking the government's proposed labor law reform. The New Democratic Party, under Premier Bob Rae, sought to fulfil an election promise by introducing Bill 40, a law that would ban replacement workers during strikes and would make it somewhat easier for unions to organize.

The papers' new advertising raises an important question. Should newspapers be permitted to advertise like any corporation, arguing a self-serving point disguised as objective analysis; or should they be restricted, on the grounds that they hold a special position of trust and responsibility, from trying to manipulate the very public they claim to support? Should the single-largest shaper of public opinion simultaneously imply that they speak the truth on the average citizen's behalf, benefitting from a certain public trust along the way, and then simply argue its own goals, even if it's in the advertising pages? And at the very least, even if the corporations' profit-driven goals don't seep from advertising pages to news pages, does the trend nevertheless create a perception of bias with the public?

This chapter seeks to discuss the question partly through literature research but predominantly through interviews with journalists: from reporters and copy editors to managing editors and publishers. The interviews will be concentrated among the southern Ontario papers which were brought unsuccessfully to the Ontario Press Council -- *The Globe and*

Mail, the *Toronto Star*, the *Hamilton Spectator* and the *London Free Press* -- as well as the *Windsor Star* which was brought unsuccessfully before the Windsor Media Council. However, other relevant interviews will also be used.

The Labor Relations and Employment Statute Law Amendment Act, better known as Bill 40, became law Jan. 1, 1993. It amended Ontario's Labor Relations Act. In the end, however, it diluted the NDP's election promises. Labor Minister Bob Mackenzie faced hostile resistance throughout the process, in which the government met with more than 300 groups and read more than 400 written submissions concerning the proposed and controversial changes. The media were loud and rowdy on this issue. To understand the interest, indeed the outrage, one must study the document.

Much of Bill 40 fine-tuned existing law. Despite the hoopla surrounding Bill 40, despite the complaints of drastically overhauling the system, opposition hinged primarily on one point: the banning of replacement workers. The law prohibits anyone other than managers and other non-bargaining-unit employees who work at the same location from working at the site during a strike or lockout (as long as at least 60 per cent of membership voted in a secret ballot to strike). Work may still be shipped, however, to a non-struck plant. The anti-scab law mirrors legislation already in existence in several other provinces such as Quebec, where replacement workers have been banned since 1978.

Briefly, the other amendments included: ²⁴

- * Adding a Purpose Clause which reflects the law's objectives of better representing a changing workforce, encouraging collective bargaining, allowing workers to freely organize, and creating a more harmonious work environment.
- * Extending rights to organize to agricultural, domestic, professional and security workers.
- * Allowing picketing at relevant public places, such as entrances to malls.
- * Prohibiting anti-union petitions filed after a union applies for certification; eliminating the \$1 membership fee; and lowering to 40 per cent the percentage of workers needed to support a vote to organize.
- * Allowing part-time and full-time workers to bargain together.
- * Speeding up arbitration, grievance, and Ontario Labor Relations Board procedures.
- * Protecting employees when a company changes hands.

The required 55 per cent of employees needed to sign union cards in order to certify remains in place, however, as it was before the law was changed.

First introduced in the legislature June 4, 1992, before passing second and third readings, New Democrats based their ideas in part on the rapidly changing workforce. They argued that the old law, which had not changed significantly in 17 years, catered more to white males since it tended to concentrate on manufacturing and other full-time jobs traditionally occupied by men. The old law represented a skewed reflection.

Between 1975 and 1991: the number of part-time workers in the province almost doubled from 430,000 to 806,000 (making part-timers 17 per cent of the workforce); an additional one million women entered the workforce (making them 46 per cent of the total); service-sector jobs climbed from 63 per cent to 71 per cent, or more than one million new service workers; manufacturing jobs dropped almost eight per cent; in 1981, visible minorities comprised seven per cent of the workforce, while five years later that number had risen to 8.5 per cent. ²⁵

Nevertheless, business opposed any changes, calling Ontario's labor law already among the toughest in the world. Companies queued quickly to vent their anger toward the proposed bill when government ministers took a travelling Bill 40 road show across the province. Unions also stepped forward. They support the amendments and asked that they not be watered down.

Among the business representatives at Bill 40 hearings in Toronto were the Canadian Daily Newspaper Association, as well as the Thomson and Southam newspaper chains, which control 70 per cent of English-language daily circulation in Canada. On the same day Thomson corporate secretary Michael Doody spoke, so too did David Crisp, vice-president of Hudson's Bay Co. Both men serve Ken Thomson, who also owns the *Globe and Mail*, among other newspapers.

As discussed, Ontario newspapers went further than speaking at Bill 40 hearings. Virtually all ran editorials attacking the proposed changes, and many ran full-page, anti-Bill 40 ads created by the Canadian Daily

Newspaper Association. Often the ads ran for free, though in any case, they were ultimately paid for by the dailies themselves since the papers fund the CDNA, the industry's lobby and public relations arm. Founded in 1919, the CDNA (called the Canadian Daily Newspaper Publishers Association between 1954 and 1991) represents more than 80 English and French daily newspapers, incorporating 87 per cent (4.8 million copies) of the 5.6 million papers distributed daily across Canada. "The objective of the association is to combine the experience, expertise and dedication of its members to ensure the continuation of a free press able to serve its readers effectively."²⁶

The ads in question carried bold headlines such as "CONFLICT," "VIOLATED," "CLOSED" and "BANKRUPT." The Windsor and District Labor Council opposed the ads on the grounds that they were unfair and represented a conflict of interest, and subsequently brought the *Windsor Star* to the Windsor Media Council over the issue. As well, the Ontario Federation of Labor took four newspapers -- the *Toronto Star*, the *Globe and Mail*, the *Hamilton Spectator*, and the *London Free Press* -- to the Ontario Press Council.

The Ontario Press Council as well as the Windsor Media Council dismissed the complaints brought to them about the campaign, though they both chastised the papers for not alerting readers to the connection between the ads and the papers.

The Windsor Media Council ruled first, on Jan. 11, 1993, dismissing the complaint while chastising the *Windsor Star* for not making clear its

connection to the ads. The Windsor and District Labor Council complained that running the ad campaign "violated the newspaper's own ethical principles and those of the newspaper association of which the Star is a member." ²⁷ Nevertheless, the council sided with the paper, as the ruling, in its entirety, explains:

The Windsor Media Council has found today that the Windsor and District Labor Council complaint about a series of advertisements critical of proposed Ontario Labor Law amendments, should be dismissed. A newspaper, just like any other business, has a right to purchase through its national association, the Canadian Daily Newspaper Association, advertisements which support a particular point of view. To conclude otherwise would lead to improper restraints on freedom of expression. Such restraints could seriously limit the rights of any individual or organization to advertise a legitimate, although biased, viewpoint. The Windsor Media Council is not prepared to support the imposition of such restrictions on a business, on a union, on an association, or on an individual. Council observed that it would have also been perfectly proper for the Labor Council or any other group to run a series of paid advertisements in the *Windsor Star* expressing a different or opposing viewpoint on the proposed labor legislation. The basic right of freedom of expression for all must be protected and preserved here. Council went on to find that while the Labor Council complaint could not be upheld, it was regrettable that the ads did not make it clear that the newspaper publishing them had a direct interest in seeing the proposed amendments to the labor legislation fail. Because of the privileged position in which the media has [sic] been placed under the fundamental freedom of the press declared in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, a heavy responsibility was imposed upon the *Star* to assure that its actions did not constitute a conflict of interest or other breach of trust. In that sense the ads were less than straightforward, and the *Star* exercised poor judgment in not disclosing its self-interest in the ad campaign. ²⁸

Roughly 10 months later, on Nov. 8, 1993, the Ontario Press Council handed down a similar decision, rejecting the Ontario Federation of Labor's protest against what it saw as flagrant bias. OFL president Gordon Wilson

called the ads "an abuse of power" and a "blatant conflict of interest," that hurt the integrity of an institution:

Because the publishers' ads come from the daily and community newspaper association, they carry in them the weight and responsibility of the public trust... Their ads are designed to tip the balance of opinion toward the business self-interests of the newspaper publishers.²⁹

Though the Ontario Press Council also chastised the four newspapers named in the complaint for being less than honest, they sided with the industry. The full text of the adjudication is:

The Ontario Press Council does not believe readers were likely to be confused by advertisements criticizing Ontario government labor legislation that were placed in newspapers by the Canadian Daily Newspaper Association and the Ontario Community Newspaper Association in September, 1992. The full-page ads bore no relationship to ordinary news content. In adjudicating a complaint from the Ontario Federation of Labor, the press council said it sees newspapers as a business as well as a crucible of public trust. And it rejected the notion that they should refuse advertising that happens to reflect their corporate or business concerns. The council recognizes that the ads made dire predictions about the potential effects of the legislation but sees them as probably more honest than much advocacy advertising. It is satisfied that responsible newspapers have learned how to operate within a dual environment -- maintaining separation between advertising and editorial functions. It says they must be allowed to prosper in a business environment or they will disappear. And it believes they have a right and responsibility to shareholders and employees to participate in the democratic process. Given that newspapers pay fees to operate the CDNA and the OCNA, the council isn't concerned that many did not charge the associations for the ads. The council notes that not all Ontario newspapers included in the ads the fact that they are all members of the sponsoring association and regards this as a significant omission. But with reservation, it dismisses the complaint.³⁰

The media councils felt the papers had the right, as any corporation, to run their own ads. Thus the qualified dismissals. But neither council

addressed the possibility of subtly influencing coverage of the issue elsewhere in the paper, or even of potentially creating the perception of influence among the public.

This is worthy of consideration, since the CDNA's own statement of journalistic principles, adopted in April 1977, speaks against the phenomenon.

The newspaper should hold itself free of any obligation save that of fidelity to the public good. It should pay the costs incurred in gathering news. *Conflicts of interest, and the appearance of conflicts of interest, must be avoided. Outside interest that could affect, or appear to affect, the newspaper's freedom to report the news impartially should be avoided.* [emphasis added]

Since newspapers clearly had a financial interest in defeating the proposed legislation -- hence the clamor against it -- and since newspapers simultaneously ran critical editorials and ads, and since much (but by no means all) of the news coverage was negative, then it warrants more philosophical deliberation than the media councils accorded. This thesis does not address the legality of the issue, but how wise or fair it was.

First of all, not everyone can run advocacy ads. Nor can everyone ply significant political influence. "For many people, money explains almost everything about why democracy is in trouble, and exhaustive investigations are devoted to searching for hard evidence of bribery," ³¹ writes William Greider. He perceives the phenomenon as a lot more ambiguous than cynics imagine, though still threatening to democracy.

In a democracy, everyone is free to join the argument, or so it is said in civic mythology. In the modern democracy that has evolved, that claim is nearly meaningless. During the last generation, a 'new politics' has enveloped government that

guarantees the exclusion of most Americans from the debate -- the expensive politics of facts and information. ³²

As for the theory that advertising is open to everyone, and therefore to newspapers as well, Greider says prohibitive costs quickly render that idealistic hypothesis impossible. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, the average cost of a 30-second TV spot rose from \$57,000 to \$122,000 in the last decade, though the networks' prime time viewership shrank. Budweiser, for example, spent \$3 per barrel of beer on advertising in 1980, and \$9 only 10 years later. ³³ Full-page ads in daily newspapers cost literally thousands of dollars. For example, the *Windsor Star*, with a daily circulation of more than 85,000, sells full pages for roughly \$5,000; The *Toronto Star*, with a daily circulation of more than 500,000, sells full pages for around \$24,000 -- though prices vary according to contracts.

What about the big issues? Or the big products? How much advertising is needed to compete? "Chevrolet is one of the most heavily advertised products in the world. In a recent year, General Motors spent more than \$178 million to promote Chevrolet in the United States. That's \$487,000 a day, \$20,000 an hour." ³⁴

Prohibitive advertising costs aside, news coverage itself is not always balanced. When newspapers are so eager to defeat legislation that they run ads and editorials criticizing a law, society has reason to question corresponding news coverage. News coverage is a difficult thing to judge. People have a natural tendency to be offended by stories with which they disagree, and a natural tendency to claim opposing views are overly promoted in our media; or to claim simultaneously that reporters are

biased and uninterested. As Adam Gopnik says in the *New Yorker*: "The media are accused of being populated by fanatic ideologues, ready to twist any fact or blacken any reputation to suit their "agenda," and, at the same time, of being composed of jaded cynics who don't give a damn about anything at all." ³⁵

This "slanted-media" perception is true of everything from the Serbian-Croatian conflict to political parties, and from corporations to unions. Unless someone makes a detailed study, actually counting stories and headlines, and assessing their tone and prominence, proof of bias rarely emerges. Even when studies are conducted, opponents are quick to condemn survey techniques.

Nevertheless, one (rare) university study found Bill 40 coverage over 14 months in three newspapers and one magazine -- the *Toronto Star*, the *Globe and Mail*, the *Windsor Star* and *Maclean's* -- to be overwhelmingly negative toward the proposed labor law changes. Communication studies associate professor Jim Winter, of the University of Windsor and advisor to this thesis, conducted a study that was presented to the Ontario Federation of Labor on Feb. 20, 1993, in Ottawa. A panel of three researchers analyzed 136 stories -- every article that was collected from a CD-ROM index search of the topic -- discussing Bill 40 between September 1991 and November 1992. The panel assessed the stories through consensual agreement.

"Headlines, lead paragraphs, and overall stories were predominantly unfavorable to Bill 40," Winter says in a university press release. "Each

article contained an average of more than seven unfavorable paragraphs, compared with about four each which were favorable and neutral." ³⁶

Winter's study indicates that 71 per cent of the news stories and 100 per cent of the editorials analyzed were negative: a stark contrast to the 78 per cent of letters to the editor which favored Bill 40. Overall, 18 per cent of stories analyzed were favorable and 15 per cent were neutral. Stories in business sections were 85 per cent negative. The study indicates virtually no difference existed between the dailies and the magazine in their coverage: all were equally negative.

Gord Wilson, Ontario Federation of Labor president, writes:

Imagine a World Series baseball final where the umpire works for one of the teams. This is what is happening in the province of Ontario now that daily and weekly newspapers are running a series of advertisements opposing Bill 40 to amend the Ontario Labor Relations act. The professionally dishonest ads herald a sad day for the newspaper industry in the province. Newspapers, the vehicles responsible for calling the plays of the day, have donned the powerful corporate uniform against the government and the workers of Ontario. ³⁷

Some newspaper editors quickly denounced the study of bias as biased itself, which brief newspaper coverage of the analysis indicates:

James Bruce, editor of the *Windsor Star*, said corporate bias didn't come into play when editors and reporters handle a story. "It just isn't done," he said. *Toronto Star* managing editor Ian Urquhart had felt such studies aren't scientific because they require a subjective decision on what is negative and what isn't. "I think our coverage was balanced and fair," he said. ³⁸

Following are some examples of lead paragraphs from the Bill 40 coverage: "The economic impact of the proposed changes to Ontario's Labor Relations Act could translate into 295,000 lost jobs throughout the

province, according to a study cited by Tory leader Mike Harris." ³⁹ Or, for instance: "Ontario retailers and newspaper publishers would be unfairly penalized by limits on the use of strikebreakers under proposed legislation, representatives of the two industries said yesterday." ⁴⁰ An example of a lead paragraph from a favorable story is: "Changes to Ontario's labor law are 'long overdue' and desperately needed to stop some employers who are determined to crush unions, the Southern Ontario Newspaper Guild says."⁴¹

And an example of an editorial, damning through faint praise, claims that the Ontario NDP government "denied labor will now unilaterally be setting the agenda in this province and insisted the controversial ban on replacement workers was necessary to prevent picket line violence." While calling picket-line violence rare, the editorial says: "Only time will tell what impact these kinds of wide-ranging reforms will have on the province's economy, because the perception that Ontario is a bad place to do business is pervasive, and once entrenched it's almost impossible to change that image." ⁴²

Surveying the stories analyzed for the University of Windsor study shows an overabundance of negative stories. Most stories included quotations from union sources, however, as well as corporate ones. But the stories tended to provide first paragraphs and headlines negative against Bill 40, before touching on arguments supporting the proposed labor-law amendments further down in the copy. ⁴³

Statistics can be misleading, critics say, and a quantitative study alone can not sufficiently portray newspaper coverage on a certain issue. Numbers should be coupled with words to more adequately represent social situations.

What Journalists Say

This thesis now turns to journalists, from reporters to publishers, in order to provide more anecdotal, qualitative analyses of the Bill 40 media phenomenon. Hopefully, it complements the quantitative survey. Respondents were recorded when discussing a list of 20 questions dealing with Bill 40. The questions focused on coverage of Bill 40, the ethics of newspapers running advocacy ads, the possibility of corporate influence of any kind, and other relevant thoughts on the topic. Though the interviewer attempted not to stray far from the question list, so as not to unfairly direct one person over another, all musings from respondents were welcome, no matter how tangential. Their thoughts provided much insight and anecdotes on a topic that rarely enjoys a high-profile. Some were guarded; others were refreshingly candid.

This is what they said:

What do you think of newspapers running their own advocacy ads, like the anti-Bill 40 campaign?

"I'm opposed to it to start off with," said **Gail Robertson**, an entertainment writer with the *Windsor Star* and the Guild president at the paper. "They were being very sensationalistic about the whole issue, that

Bill 40 was going to cause the ruination of business in Ontario. And I think because it was coming from a newspaper association, it gave those statements more credibility. When people see this, they think that maybe this has more truth to it."

Though Robertson noted that some charity ads are not paid for, she thought the Bill 40 advertisements were particularly misleading, given that she says they generally ran free: "They made it sound like the association was paying for them. I know at the *Windsor Star* we had proof of this that they did write off the ads. There was no charge for them. We brought this up, and they tried to cover it up... But we found out. We had staff who were able to give us this information. This was not secret information, it wasn't confidential information. They were written-off ads so it was pretty easy to find out about. That was the other thing, I don't think they [managers] really found anything wrong with it. It wasn't something they were really trying hard to cover up. They were supportive of it, including an editorial in the *Windsor Star* basically saying that Bill 40 was a way of forcing people to join a union. Things didn't really change that much. You still needed 55 per cent (of employees to sign union cards in order to certify). There weren't major changes other than the banning of scabs. That is really what it came down to, especially in the newspaper industry which has a long history of bringing in scabs. There's a (Southam) scab unit that travels around to various newspapers."

Andre Prefontaine, appointed publisher of the *Windsor Star* after the Bill 40 issue had faded, said the idea is perfectly fine: "I have no

problem with it. The content of the newspaper is two things: the editorial side and the advertising side. It is not because newspapers are newspapers that they should automatically be excluded from using a side. On the news side, the newspapers can express their voice through the editorial page, which theoretically reflects the position of the paper on certain issues. Or on the other side, why would they not be entitled to the same freedom that say labor unions have, government has, interest groups have? Are we excluded *de facto* from using advertising as a vehicle because we are newspapers?"

Lee Prokaska, workplace reporter with the *Hamilton Spectator* where she has worked for 14 years at various beats, said she understands why a business would want to dabble in the advocacy advertising business. Nevertheless, she feels uneasy about it when it touches a newspaper:

"As someone who works for a business, I guess there's no problem with it. If I worked for IBM I would have no problem with it if IBM ran an ad in support of Bill 40 or against Bill 40. However, we're in a unique business, and as a reporter, it makes me very uncomfortable, because although the public is smart, and realizes that every single reporter in the room doesn't buy into the corporate line, it does give the impression that the newspaper as a whole had a bias against Bill 40, which was true, and therefore the coverage of Bill 40 would be slanted. And that bothers me. And as a union member, that bothers me, because I thought there was a lot of things in Bill 40 that were important for organized labor and I think there was some over-dramatization of the potential fall-out of Bill 40 that

hasn't come to pass that a lot of people who had straighter heads were seeing at the time."

Collin Mackenzie, deputy managing editor of the *Globe and Mail* and a former city editor, Washington bureau chief for six years, and one-time assistant managing editor of *Maclean's*, is an editor who disagrees with running such ads since it is not loyal to the spirit of the press.

"I think they (the papers) were driven by nothing but self-interest. Newspapers in Ontario -- whichever index you choose to use -- are among the highest on the continent in terms of unionized employees and locations where there are unionized plants. And there's no question that the act makes it very, very difficult to publish during a strike."

Lorne Slotnick was with the *Globe and Mail* for a decade (as a general reporter, deskier and, for five years, as a labor reporter), and since 1989 has been a staffer with the Southern Ontario Newspaper Guild, and negotiates contracts and grievances at several newspapers. Also, he provided freelance consulting work for the Ministry of Labor in preparing information packages for the public, and for consultation on handling the introduction of the bill. Not surprisingly, he finds the advocacy-ad issue distasteful.

"I thought at the time it was a real abuse of their power," he said. "You look at the daily newspapers in the province. There are probably about 50 dailies in the province, and there are essentially only four owners of almost all those dailies: Thomson, Southam, Torstar, and the Sun, the Maclean-Hunter Sun.

"So what you have are those four companies getting together and saying we're going to use our power to try to stop a government bill. So I thought it was pretty scary actually, that you had this incredible power being brought to bear. There are really no other corporations that can, for as little money, have access to every household almost in the province.

"It was an incredible hypocrisy. What bothered me is not that they were campaigning against the bill. I understand why they're campaigning against the bill: it was against their self-interest. What bothered me about it is that they're doing this campaign but at the same time they pretend that they are neutral, fair and doing everything in the public interest, and that their whole business is run on public interest. That's the problem I have. It's not that they're corporations or that they're pursuing their self-interests as corporations. But that they pretend most of the time that they're not corporations, that they're not pursuing their self-interests."

Charles Bury, editor of the English-language *Record* in Sherbrooke, Que., was not privy to newspaper ads in Ontario, but as an editor and as chairman of the Canadian Association of Journalists, he is not offended by the concept.

"I don't think there's anything wrong with that," Bury said. "If it were the hospitals that had bought full-page ads, we wouldn't be having this conversation, you would think it was normal. If it were the automobile companies who bought full-page ads, we would think it would be normal. If it were the unions that bought full-page ads, we would think it would be

normal. Why not the newspapers? They surely have the right, if anyone else does, to express their point of view."

Media columnist for the *Globe and Mail*, **Rick Salutin**, a Toronto author and playwright, disagrees profoundly with the ads, since he thinks it sends a despicably unfair image to readers.

"I was amazed that they (publishers) were so insensitive that it wouldn't matter to them to at least look remotely professionally responsible by not running those ads," Salutin said. "I was amazed they ran them. It suggested that they don't give a shit what anybody thinks of them. It was actually a pathetic display of how shallow the commitments to professionalism and fairness are."

Mike Dunnell, a one-time managing editor of the *Windsor Star*: "As far as I'm concerned that was the corporation taking out an ad and like any corporation you are entitled to take out an ad providing it's in good taste. The same law would apply to Sears or anybody else. They have the same rights as anyone else."

Jim Potter, a copy/layout editor at the *Windsor Star* and editorial vice-president with the Guild: "It's a clear conflict of interest. The corporations have an interest in not having unions, like every business does. On the other hand, they have a duty to present news in a fair fashion and to treat people and groups equally, unions or corporations. It undermines perception of fairness."

Do you think running the ads might cause a perception of bias?

Prfontaine: "No, and I don't understand why you make that correlation. You underestimate the public's capacity to judge issues. If you take that direction, it really means you're saying that the public cannot judge. They're not smart enough... You should push your logic further on. The same logic you use to say the public is not able to judge between simple things like this, then they shouldn't be able to vote, because they can't distinguish either between which is the good party and which is the bad party. They shouldn't have referendums because they can't understand the issues. I believe people are smarter than that. I believe they understand the issues. And I think they also understand that newspapers do have an interest in certain things in society and they have a responsibility to defend those interests because they need to defend the right of the public to a free press."

Bury: "There could be, if there was any reason to think the coverage was twisted. I would think that most decent newspapers would not let something like that interfere with their day-to-day coverage. The news department, while it's beholden to its bosses, it's also beholden in this example to the local union members and to the readers. They're not just beholden to the bosses, they're beholden to the whole community. If they didn't cover the other side of that debate, if they only took the company line, and the company line became the news slant, that would be wrong. That would be shoddy journalism."

Bury says it's not just news stories that can be withheld, so too can ads. Interestingly, however, he admits that the type likely to be pulled are advocacy ads with which the paper disagrees: "It's a little-known fact that editors have a last say about the ads. If the editors think an ad is dishonest or misleading or too provocative, they have the absolute right to ban it from their pages.

"Sometimes it's big ones. Full pages. It's usually ads which aren't for products but for causes, as of this (Bill 40) type, actually."

For example, he recalls an ad from the anti-fur movement which portrayed a skinned fox and called it a product of the fur industry. "It's shock effect was thought to be stronger than the point they were trying to make should be. Most newspapers wouldn't run those ads," said Bury, who doesn't think the more common fur-industry ads that run in daily papers influenced the decision.

Salutin: "It's ludicrous that they should run their own ads. And they didn't charge for them, did they? It's just a fucking joke. It was ludicrous, it was really ludicrous that they ran those ads. It was actually one of the most debased gestures in the history of journalism."

Dunnell: "It could (create a perception of bias), but as an industry or group of people do you give up what you perceive to be a right in democracy because some people might feel that you're biased? I frankly wouldn't. And by and large the people who see bias in it already think you're biased. If I were running Southam I would say 'Well, to hell with it.'

This right of free speech or free expression that we corporately have is a hell of a lot more important than something else."

Potter: "The fact that they ran ads kind of clouds the issue. I think it would be the same thing if the daily newspaper publishers' association got picket signs and went out and circled Queen's Park. The fact that they put ads in the paper isn't as important as the fact that they are taking a position as a self-interested group when they should be a group that stands back from issues and reports on them rather than becoming participants in the fray."

How fairly was the Bill 40 issue was covered?

Robertson: "It was probably pretty superficial... I think a lot of the reporters didn't understand a lot of the reforms or changes. For myself, it was pretty confusing. There still was probably a bit of imbalance toward being negative," Robertson said. "Most of the editorials were written blasting it [Bill 40]. Certainly editorials, which are supposedly the position of the newspapers, anyone that I've read, made it seem like nobody would invest in Ontario."

Prefontaine (who watched a similar enacted in Quebec): "I think it was extensively covered. I felt the media in general covered this thing to death. Editorials, analysis, name it, you got it. I think there was a general view in the press that this was not a bad law, and it was reflected I guess more in the approach that reporters would take to it, and I think that in the

editorial pages, the papers did not agree 100 per cent with that law. And that was also the position that was taken in the advertising campaign."

Prokaska: "I think the bill was overly criticized. There seemed to be more negative stories about it than there were positive ones. On the other hand, it was a contentious piece of legislation and had it been a contentious piece of legislation in any other area, probably the opposing forces would have organized themselves in a similar way to the way business did, and probably a preponderance of reporting would have been on a negative side."

Prokaska felt editorials and columnists dealt superficially with the issue: "The same way they deal with everything else: quite knee jerk. 'Oh God, oh no. No scabs? Holy shit. Uh oh, the workers might get some power. That would be dreadful.'"

Slotnick: "I'm not a great believer in conspiracy theories in the media, and I'm not a great believer that coverage is dictated on high. That's just not the way the system works. Having said that, my understanding from talking to a number of people who were covering this at newspapers was that there was influence exercised in a way that wouldn't have been exercised in most other stories.

"We saw instances where the balance that was in reporters' stories was taken out from orders on high. We saw instances of that in some dailies and some weeklies. We saw situations where editors were ordered by publishers to play up opposition to the bill. So I think there were real

problems that went beyond the normal criticisms you can level at coverage. Coverage of anything is never perfect.

"I work on the staff of the Guild and many of our members were involved in this directly and talked to us about this. I did hear at the time, and I'm not able to confirm this directly, that at Southam the company and the publishers made a decision that every newspaper had to write an editorial against the bill."

At [Toronto area] Metroland papers, he said, editors were told to write editorials, many of which ran on front. A Metroland editor told him they were instructed to play up opposition to the bill, even though they don't usually cover Queen's Park.

"I saw some editorials and they were uniformly against the bill. Not a great surprise. But some of the ones I saw -- and again, I can't claim to have seen a huge number -- but I recall seeing a lot of factual errors in them... There were columns written from both sides of the issue. I saw columns, I recall, criticizing the newspaper ad campaign. I saw columns saying the bill didn't go far enough. There were lots of other columns vehemently opposed to the bill. With columns, however, you get into this issue of who's allowed to write columns. They tend to be to the right of the political spectrum, most of the columnists."

Salutin: "It probably falls within the general inadequacy of labor coverage. Labor coverage is just puny and an embarrassment. Even the people assigned on the papers to cover labor often don't understand the simplest things about labor."

"There's just an absence of familiarity with the basics, compared to the degree to which business journalists are to some extent bathed in the history and practices and personality and rhetoric of what they're doing. Of course, you'll have 40 of them to maybe one or a half of a person on the labor beat. So that's a reason for it. But that's also a symptom.

"Here you've got the labor movement: basically the most significant instrument of mass democracy in society. It's basically a democratic institution in which the members can potentially control the organization. I mean, name me another institution in society, other than government, I suppose, in which that's the case."

Dunnell: "I can't give you chapter and verse but as I recall it was fairly predictable, paint-by-numbers journalism. We knew the Bill was coming, we went to business, we went to labour but I don't remember any unusual efforts being made to prove or disprove it. But also bear in mind the context. At the time we were still in a deep recession, there was an increasing flight of business after free trade from Canada to the U.S., especially from Ontario. This was the first recession that really gutted the manufacturing base of Canada which is Ontario. So in that context, especially the flight of capital and industry, I think that perhaps that the coverage was somewhat wider (than it otherwise would have been). It was tied into wider issues such as free trade. But I think it was a legitimate questions to ask: "Is this going to increase the flight of capital?"

Potter: "The (Windsor) *Star*, I think, did a very poor job of presenting both sides of the story. This is the thing about having access to coverage.

I mean, we and other media outlets are quoting representatives from the small business association making the most outlandish claims: 'We're going to lose 290,000 jobs,' which I think is something like 25 per cent of the entire workforce of the province. It's absurd, really. And it was never challenged. I think the *Toronto Star* did a pretty good job but I know with our paper it was not fairly reported. First of all, we reported these outlandish claims and then we interviewed the labor leaders to say their side of it. We tried to give the impression of giving both sides their say but in fact we weren't taking a critical look at the statements of the business leaders. It really merited some analysis, rather than this: there's this side, there's that side, you make your decision. In that case, it clouds the issues because you've got all these statements intended to frighten people into opposing the bill. I think when people make statements like that, the media have a duty to go beyond just sort of letting the other side have its say.

"The coverage was really unfair. I remember talking to (*Star* labor reporter) Brian Cross at the Press Club. This was in January or February, and suggesting a year has gone by since Bill 40 came into existence. It would be a good story to see, 'Well, has it happened? Have we lost 300,000 jobs? Has the sky fallen?' And he did a story on that, and they tucked it back in the business section. I don't what the circumstances were that day that caused it to go in the business section but it certainly wasn't on the front page where all the initial claims were."

How honest were the ads?

Robertson: "I think they were totally dishonest. They were meant to do what the newspaper association wanted them to do. To tap in a little bit to that mentality, anti-union, that unions are the reason we have all of these problems. And to try to really cultivate that. A lot of the claims they made were really outlandish, and inflammatory, and not backed up.

"The statements they made, coming from my point of view, were pretty outlandish. I guess they thought they were fair. But there should have been something written explaining what the association is. I know their argument is they can put an ad in just like anybody else, and other people don't have to explain ads. But again it gets around to that credibility issue."

Prefontaine: "I think they were fairly honest. I think there is a legitimate concern amongst newspaper owners and newspaper operators that an anti-scab law, or a law-banning replacement workers, can create a threat to the very existence of newspapers... That is true in certain circumstances. It might not be true in all circumstances."

Prokaska: "I suppose in the terms of people who created them, they were expressing their honest fears, but as I recall... there was all this stuff about violence on the picket line, and businesses being killed and everything else, and I think that was way overblown. I mean, we've had strikes since then where companies have not been allowed to use scab labor. The Miracle Food Mart picket lines were fairly tame compared to a lot of picket lines that I have covered in the past."

Mackenzie: Though he didn't actually see any of the ads because he was on vacation during the period they ran, he said "to the extent that they pretended to be speaking for the public I suspect they were disingenuous."

Slotnick: "I think they were really distorted" with a number of "major factual mistakes."

"They were quite warped in the impression they gave, but also there were factual errors that you could actually point to," he continued. "There's one 'Bankrupt!' [In] which, of course, the message there really hammers you. But in terms of factual errors, it says here 'The NDP government's new labor law will take away the right of business and industry to depend on such essential services as electricity, water and transportation.' Well, that is simply not true. Essential human services are in fact exempted from the anti-scab law. The next one I see, '295,000 lost jobs?' The 295,000 figure became quite controversial during the debate about the labor law. It was based on one of the surveys done by one of the consulting companies... That 295,000 figure came from the question, how many jobs do you think would happen if X, Y and Z are done. X, Y and Z weren't even the things that were in the labor law. The thing was done way before the bill was introduced and they were just making some speculation about what might be in the bill."

The study on job losses wasn't even a study, according to Slotnick, but a short corporate opinion poll. Plus it was based on speculation on things that never turned out to be in the labor law.

"It says 'Say goodbye to your rights.' It says 'under the NDP government's new labor law, the right of workers to a secret ballot in voting to join a union, accept a contract or gone on strike will not be required.'

"The right of workers to a secret ballot in voting to join a union: that was not changed at all. In fact, for many, many years, there has been what's called automatic certification. If a union signs up 55 per cent or more of employees, there is no ballot. You're certified automatically. That was complete factual distortion to say that.

"And to accept a contract, well again, Bill 40 didn't make any changes on ratification votes. The law remained the same on ratification votes. A ratification vote isn't required by law, but if a union has a ratification vote it has to be by secret ballot. That was the case before Bill 40 and is still the case after Bill 40. And the same on a strike vote. There is no requirement in the law for a strike vote, never has been, and there is not now. But the law requires that if there is a strike vote it has to be by secret ballot.

"It says 'under the NDP government's labor law, unions can be certified without a vote.' Yes, that's true. It has been true for I don't know how many years, 20, 30, 40 years, probably. Maybe more."

Salutin: "They lied. It was a string of lies." Salutin thinks the ads used "those ridiculous" figures on job losses that emerged from a corporate poll which, as we see today, turned out to be false.

Potter: "They made these claims about huge job losses. My recollection was that they weren't very honest, but I can't say specifically other than those inflammatory claims."

Were corporate sentiments reflected in the news sheets concerning Bill 40?

Robertson: "Yeah, I definitely think so. Even though a lot of reporters might have tried to cover it more fairly, but you're still up against who's doing the assigning. And there's a trickle-down effect, how things are assigned, how you're supposed to go out and get the information, and even which groups you may cover. If you go and cover a chamber of commerce meeting you're going to get a different story."

"This is the ingrained feeling. You see it happening all the time in newspapers. Editors know what the people above them are thinking and they want to make sure they direct reporters in a certain way. Also, there's all the sacred cow assignments. When you go out, you know there's no sense in trying to buck the trend, because what's going to happen, they're just going to change your story or there'll be something done to it to tone it down. So, sometimes it just becomes an issue of frustration. A lot of people feel 'I might as well just do it the way they want it so it doesn't get changed.' Those beliefs are becoming more and more ingrained in reporters who normally might try to buck the system. But then it becomes a matter of: why bother?"

Slotnick: "Even in papers where there wasn't blatant interference, I think many reporters unfortunately get the message that to please your bosses, you better write the story that your bosses want. And that's the way a system works more often. If the editor knows the publisher is really hot to trot on playing up opposition to Bill 40, and the reporter knows the editor knows the publisher knows, then sometimes that seeps into the coverage without anybody saying anything."

Dunnell: "First of all, it was not the newsroom advocating anything. It was certainly our job to describe Bill 40 and to talk to people and get reaction and it was up to the editorial writers to decide whether it's a good idea or not but Corporate Southam ran these ads. That was one of those obvious things that they have pointed out that they have a vested interest. So I don't see any conflict. I don't see how the running of those ads influenced the news coverage. If you read our news coverage I hope you would find it fair, regardless of ads or no ads. Just as Sears or Freeds has an ad I don't think that should be reflected in the news pages. The analogy that I have used before is the separation of church and state. I don't know if you want to call it church or state, but there is an intellectual division."

What do you think the average person's view on Bill 40 is?

Robertson: "I think the average person would maybe look at it and think it probably doesn't play much of a role (in daily life). I'm sure it's not the be all and end all. If they were in business or in the union movement it would play a large role in their lives. Especially to average people

working in a non-union workplace, it's not really going to effect them. Anybody who works and knows what it's like to even come close to go out there after being on strike knows the anti-scab affect of it is a good thing. I think that's what I heard most about it and that's what got played up the most too... Most of the other issues the average person doesn't even know about or care about as far as organizing. Unless you're in that mode to be organizing you don't care about that 55 per cent, or whether the petition is before or after (card signing). Probably, the issue that got played up the most was the anti-scab (issue) and I think that's what most people could see. For the average working person in a union environment it was seen as a good thing."

Prefontaine: "The average person doesn't take a strong view either way."

Bury: "The average person probably couldn't say what it was, if you just asked them 'What is Bill 40?' The average person, however, if you explained it to them, would probably think, 'Oh, it seems like a good idea.'"

Prokaska: Anti-union people were probably against it, and pro-union supporters for it.

Mackenzie: Trade unions were pleased, management was not, "and I suspect other people don't really give a shit."

Slotnick: "The average person's view on Bill 40 is complete apathy... That's part of the reason the ad campaign didn't go very far. It was just whining by business on an issue that average people didn't care too much about."

Salutin: "I would suspect they think of it as special-interest legislation. It's because labor is a black hole in the information universe. People don't understand what it's about."

Dunnell: "In Windsor, I would think it would be positive. It's a blue-collar, industrial town and I don't think there's any doubt that Bill 40 gave labor more power than it had previously. Therefore, the average person being a labor member would think it's good. If you talk to labour leaders I'll bet that there was concern that the scales could tip too far. But they would never admit it, maybe not even to themselves."

Potter: "Most people don't care, frankly. I mean we didn't receive many letters to the editors or anything like that. I don't think they care. I imagine in the unionized work force they're in favor of it, if they got the correct information."

What are your thoughts on Bill 40?

Robertson: "I think Bill 40's time had come. It has probably helped the labor climate. I don't think it's as dramatic as it could have been," because it doesn't really make it easier to organize. If people don't want a union, she said, they won't join, law or no law. However, she feels workers should lobby down the road for more.

Prefontaine: "I don't especially like Bill 40. I think it is a piece of legislation which, if abused, and it can be abused, can actually threaten the viability and continued existence of certain media organizations and maybe not as much newspapers -- though some newspapers would be vulnerable:

Newspapers in a highly competitive market. We've seen papers die because of strikes. The *Montreal Star* is one example, the *Ottawa Journal* is another example, the *Montreal Matin* is an another example of papers that went on strike and never came back. The *Toronto Telegram*. Strikes are potentially crippling, because you cannot send your readers to another publication for a prolonged period of time with a smile on their face and their money in their hand... Strikes where you cannot publish can be disastrous. Bill 40 in my mind does create an imbalance. And the balance must exist between labor and management. And if you stack the deck in favor of one or the other, you're not doing a service to anybody. I'm sure the intent of the legislature was to correct what was perceived as an imbalance in favor of management, because they were able to bring in strike workers from anywhere across the country to help in the case of a strike. But I think they went too far the other way, where, for example, newspapers can't bring in anybody from anywhere else. And some small newspapers just don't have the number of non-unionized employees required to publish, so that if a strike happens, they're just out of business. I'm not sure that's what society in its wisdom wants."

Labor leaders claim it balances things, because there's equal desire on both sides to settle. But Prefontaine feels the government should then make a law that workers can't work elsewhere during a strike. Newspaper chains may make money elsewhere during strikes, but Prefontaine feels it's unfair comparison to suggest workers should be able to as well.

"If you cripple the *Star*, you cripple the *Star*," he said, adding that anybody can do "intellectual gymnastics" to rationalize anything, as those arguments illustrate.

Bury: In terms of Quebec, where an anti-scab law exists: "There are circumstances where it's required. There are employers who are too vicious during strikes and lockouts, and need to be controlled more. On the other hand, there are some unions you could say the same thing about. So that kind of a law, will benefit some situations but harm others. Obviously, it's the product of a socialist government. The same thing is true in Quebec." Though it's born of socialist thinking, Bury said, he noted that the Liberal government has not changed it back. "It makes a strike more effective in most circumstances.

"I have mixed feelings about it. There are those businessmen that would say it would (scare off business) but the evidence is sparse. There's no reason to think it's hurt any business much. There are ways around it (such as interprovincial trade).

"For example, the *Journal de Montreal* locked out its pressmen a few months ago in a labor dispute, and had the paper printed in Cornwall (Ont.). It built a new factory in Cornwall to print it. It pays the guys less, but they're still making enough that they're happy to have the work. I know one of the guys who works there... If that plant had been on the other side of the border, they could not have printed it.

"Labor law has to strike a balance between the rights of the worker and the rights of the employer. And the employer has rights too: It's his or her factory."

Bury thinks labor law must satisfy everyone a little, and disappoint them too. Most people aren't part of organized labor, which raises unionized workers to an elite stratum, he thinks.

Prokaska: "There are a lot of things I really like about Bill 40 but there were a lot of ways in which it was not strong enough, and given that it was probably the only chance that labor is going to have for the next millennium to have a sympathetic government in power, it's unfortunate that it wasn't stronger and that a lot of compromises were made. However, I think that it was generally good."

Mackenzie: "It's a real pain in the ass, when you think about the contingency planning that we have to go into. We're in negotiations right now. I'm going to have to spend 40 hours a day here if we're going to get a paper out. So personally, I think it sucks."

As for what it provides the average person: "I've been on both sides of the union movement in this business. I think it's perhaps more explicit a tilt toward the union side than I would argue that a Tory government would have gotten away with tilting to the management side. But everybody seemed to be saying millions of jobs were going to be lost. Well that doesn't seem to have happened. So I don't think it's hurting the economy at all."

But he noted that he had more faith in the trade union movement when he was younger: "Their agenda is their members' self-interest, and

that's not necessarily the self-interest of society." His classic example: recyclable aluminum was kept out of the province because unionized workers wanted to protect glass-manufacturing jobs.

Slotnick: "Bill 40, despite all the hysteria, I think was a fairly moderate package of changes to the labor law. It essentially kept the labor-relations system as it has been in this province for the past 15 years. I wouldn't say it was minor tinkering. But it wasn't major tinkering.

"It certainly was of assistance to unions." He said he has seen more certifications and more union organizing since the law was implemented. And he figures it helps unions bargain contracts because the threat of a strike looms more ominously.

Salutin: "I think it was a very, very modest rectification of things. What it did is in general quite good. But it's so, so modest, there's much more that could be included. Especially in this situation where capital is in such total control, virtually total control, that anything that sets up counter-balances to it is beneficial."

Dunnell: "In my opinion, and I don't own any corporations, Bill 40 is a bad bill and I'm convinced that parts of it are unconstitutional. I had staff members approach me when it looked like push was going to come to shove the last time (during contract negotiations) and they couldn't believe certain aspects of that bill. And I'm convinced it's a bad piece of legislation. It's bad in itself and it's bad politically. (Ontario Premier Bob) Rae incensed business with the bill's initial form and he incensed labour by watering it

down. Politically he should have gone with the original. At least he would have had one set of friends.

"I don't want to sound like Archie Bunker but certainly in my way of thinking, the right to work if you wish is a fundamental right. This bill, if you were a member of a Guild -- and totally disagreed with the reasons they have for striking -- this prevents you from exercising your own will, from saying 'Well, I don't agree with you, I'm going to work.' The corporation can't allow you to do it. If that isn't undemocratic and unconstitutional, what is? There are certain things in that bill that are really terrible. It's a bad piece of legislation. If it was criticised I would think it was justly so."

Potter: "I agree with it. It's been great from labor's point of view. There's more unionizing going on in Ontario. It levels the playing field a bit more, to use a business term, during a strike. It's really important."

Conclusion

The credibility issue surfaced routinely during interviews with journalists, many of whom felt a newspaper has a certain responsibility -- to the public, as well as to preserve its own reputation -- not to abuse its position of authority and credibility. Running ads supporting one side of a debate certainly gives the appearance of bias, some said.

But not all respondents saw it this way. Opinions usually fell along predictable job-classification lines. In other words, all reporters disagreed with the idea of running advocacy ads, while most (but not all) managers felt it's acceptable.

The Bill 40 ad issue is an interesting case, in the same way a snowball gathers size and strength on its course down a hill side. Designed as most ads, to sway, not to offend, the anti-Bill 40 ad campaign did much more of the latter than was likely intended. It stirred controversy like a spoon in stew. And though journalists don't often speak critically about our media system, as most people don't about their professions, the interviews in this chapter reveal a concerned outlook on the matter of mass influence. The handful of journalists interviewed care about ethics, and about abuse of power. And, perhaps most importantly, many believe the community should be considered first -- especially with a powerful institution like the media -- and the corporation second.

Among other objections, some journalists criticized the papers for running the ads free of charge; for abusing power; for providing corresponding and often negative coverage of Bill 40; for running dishonest ads; and for becoming mired in an unnecessary conflict of interest. Management, on the other hand, pointed out that newspapers have the same rights as anybody; that the public is smart enough to decipher the intentions of advocacy advertising; that papers provided all types of coverage on Bill 40; and that ads are by nature one-sided.

All interviewed, including management, say advertising should be segregated from editorial content. This is an old and respected axiom. The *Chicago Tribune*, for instance, separated its advertising and editorial departments physically, as well as symbolically. It provided three sets of

elevators, two that went everywhere except the fourth floor and one that went only to the fourth floor -- home of the editorial department. ⁴⁴

The separation dictum, however, is sometimes more theory than practice. If a letter from an advertiser -- demanding soft treatment as a preferred client -- doesn't exist, neither does the influence, according to many corporate supporters. A free press is just that, after all, free. That is part smoke screen, however, since the influence of money is as insidious as it is pervasive, no matter the system it supports: health care, education, politics, or the media.

When controversial issues such as the anti-Bill 40 ads surface, journalists routinely cite the free-press issue as a defence. Media managers commonly relied in interviews on the free-press prerogative. Often managers would argue not whether running the ads was fair, or wise, but that it is the media's right.

Legality is hardly the point. The question of this thesis is precisely whether the affair was fair or wise. It asks an ethical question. After all, as the Kent commission reminds us in the opening of its report, freedom of the press is a right of the people, not of the owners. It was enshrined to better inform a citizenry, not to make a few people rich. Becoming wealthy should only be incidental. "Freedom of the press is not a property right of owners. It is a right of the people. It is part of their right to free expression, inseparable from their right to inform themselves." ⁴⁵

Famed American journalist A.J. Liebling once said "Freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one." ⁴⁶ This is a rather cynical,

absolute viewpoint, given that serious social issues sometimes appear in daily newspapers, and that citizens often convince papers to carry their concerns. How valid is Liebling's view? It seems rather poignant when applied to the anti-Bill 40 circumstance. Not only did the papers wield tremendous power, but they were supported with reservations by two media councils in Ontario. Their freedom, concerned with the ability to influence the readership as opposed to the readers' right to become well-informed, triumphed in this case.

There may be reason to question the legitimacy of the media council's decisions. The Ontario Media Council, for instance, did not entirely live up to what its chair, distinguished former justice of the Supreme Court of Canada Willard Estey, outlined as its fundamental goals. Estey says that "self-imposed discipline by non-government, impartial and independent agencies such as the press council" is crucial in protecting the public interest in a free but effective press. Estey notes the significance of "the public perception of the independence and impartiality of the adjudication mechanism." The council's constitution sets procedural rules for complaints, including one that requires "council members employed by newspapers must absent themselves from the deliberations when either the council or the inquiry committee is discussing complaints against their newspapers." ⁴⁷

One of the two professional members on the council's inquiry committee worked for the *Toronto Star*, named in the complaint, while the other worked for Southam, which owns the *Hamilton Spectator*, also

named. The council may be an ethical body, not a court, but it seems debatable for an inquiry committee to sit in judgement of itself. The *Toronto Star* representative even made a "submission" that mirrored his paper's defence. The inquiry committee, which is supposed to report to the council at large, kept no records of its submissions. ⁴⁸

In its decision, the Ontario Media Council said it "sees newspapers as a business as well as a crucible of public trust." It then said, however, newspapers should not have to refuse advertising that "happens to reflect their corporate concerns." That was not the question. The complainants did not suggest that papers should reject advertising that just happens to reflect their corporate concerns, but that the papers shouldn't run ads themselves -- since it damages credibility. In essence, the decision may have skirted the complaint.

The decision said newspapers have a right to shareholders and employees to participate in the "democratic process" and that "responsible newspapers" have learned to operate within a "dual environment" that separates advertising and editorial functions.

Yet the decision focused on the owners' alleged rights, not the people's. Again, that's not why a free press was enshrined into our constitution. The Kent Commission, like others before it in Canada, the United States and Britain, maintains the public trust is essential when dealing with an institution that carries the influence and power of the mass media.

It is generally agreed that the press has a responsibility to the public although there is little agreement on how to define it

and even less on how to put it into practice. The existence of such a responsibility is, however, the cornerstone of the Commission. Without social responsibilities, the press would be but a business like any other and the market its only law.⁴⁹

The Hutchins Commission on the Freedom of the Press established in the United States in 1947 the concept of social responsibility -- since the libertarian model of many diverse gazetteers was laid to rest by the huge costs and increasing concentration of ownership that defines our media today. In 1949 in Britain, the Royal Commission on Newspapers repeated the need for a public trust and the people's right to information. The legal principle of social responsibility was recognized by the Supreme Court of Canada as early as 1938, and gained ground with the social pressures of the '60s and the establishment of press councils and the Davey Committee. The Davey Report in 1970 reiterated the social responsibility criteria.

That is the crux of the debate: whether the media's privileged position guarantees them special consideration to make a profit or to better inform the citizenry. The debate on daily and weekly newspapers running anti-Bill 40 ads should not stray from that notion, since that is to sidestep the question, and to sidestep the responsibility that sets the media apart from any business.

While higher-echelon journalists argued that the media have a right just like anybody to run advocacy advertising, several journalists seemed to argue that is not the case when it fosters a conflict of interest, for the same reason politicians are not allowed to invest in companies they affect with legislation (while all others are); for the same reason police officers are

not allowed to join racist organizations (but others are); for the same reason jury members are not supposed to read about cases on which they are judging (but others are). Running advocacy ads is only a conflict of interest when the media run them, in their own interests, for they are the only ones supposedly calling the shots as fairly as they can.

Though some journalists argued differently, many of those interviewed for this chapter championed the social responsibility mandate. That may not bolster a corporation's primary goal, of course, but it helps the average citizen.

Notes for Chapter 3

1. Ries, Al, and Jack Trout. *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind*. 2nd ed., Warner Books, New York, N.Y., 1986, back jacket.

2. Mark Pendergrast, *For God, Country and Coca-Cola: The Unauthorized History of the Great American Soft Drink and the Company that Makes It*, Collier Books, New York, 1993, p. 10.

3. Eric Clark, *The Want Makers: The World of Advertising: How They Make You Buy*, Viking, New York, N.Y., 1988, p. 317.

4. *Newsweek*, for example, commemorated the 20th anniversary of Disney World with a special issue devoted to the theme park. Prepared by a "special publishing team of *Newsweek*," a slightly different banner over the cover picture of Mickey Mouse read "From the Publisher of NEWSWEEK." Why didn't *Newsweek* declare it an advertising supplement? "That wouldn't have been consistent with our objectives and those of the Disney people," said *Newsweek* publisher Peter W. Eldredge. "The Disney people didn't want to see that on the cover." See: Paul Farhi, "Hard News or Soft Sell?" *Washington Post*, Feb. 23, 1992, p. H1.

At the *Windsor Star*, a 94-page, six-day series of inserts commemorating Chrysler's successful minivan on its 10th anniversary in December 1992 was not labelled an advertising feature. A photographer and a reporter worked fulltime at a Chrysler plant during the project. The complimentary series attracted about 300 ads and reportedly brought in almost \$300,000 and featured a large Chrysler logo on all the front pages. Southam president Bill Ardell sent a rare memo congratulating the advertising-editorial teamwork. Management submitted the thick collection for a Western Ontario Newspaper Award as well as a National Newspaper Award. It didn't win.

It did, however, later win the Best in Business category of the annual Newspaper Advertising Executives Association, beating more than 100 submissions from major papers across Canada. See: "Star minivan section in top spot," *Windsor Star*, Sept. 21, 1994, p. A5.

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CHAPTER 4

The Corporate Connection

The debate on whether corporate interests influence the news is in some ways forever doomed to contention, an endless ideological joust. Those who wish not to allow that such a phenomenon exists may continually denounce such ideas as paranoid and ludicrous, free of any smoking gun. Cigarette companies still deny that nicotine is addictive despite years of overwhelming scientific evidence to the contrary. What makes the corporate-media debate even trickier, is that concrete scientific evidence is difficult to amass. Years, indeed decades, of sociological evidence has yet to convince media executives or any government.

That doesn't stop people, from academics to journalists, from worrying about possible corporate influence, in light of the media's tremendous power.

Ben Bagdikian, the former *Washington Post* senior editor turned academic, writes:

Whatever his title, the chief editorial executive selects his subordinates and transmits his values through them. New visitors to newsrooms are usually surprised by the lack of constant communication among staff workers and the apparent casualness of decision-making on news. In reality, the organization is suffused with the values of the executives, producing a unanimity, or near unanimity, enforced not only by the punishment-and-reward system but also by the iron demand of smoothly processing information in a limited period of time. ¹

As for media executives, a surprising number have indicated the subtle influence they hold over the news, though rarely in a forum (i.e., at a royal

commission studying the problem or in writing a column for a newspaper) that might alter their situation.

Acknowledged influence is more likely to appear fleetingly in an interview or perhaps at a major shareholders' meeting. Newspaper boss David Radler, for instance, told Peter C. Newman of *Maclean's* rather frankly that editors must follow head office instructions and opinions. Radler, who runs Hollinger Inc., and its 262 papers said:

I don't audit each newspaper's editorials day by day, but if it should come to a matter of principle, I am ultimately the publisher of all these papers, and if editors disagree with us, they should disagree with us when they're no longer in our employ. The buck stops with the ownership. I am responsible for meeting the payroll; therefore, I will ultimately determine what the papers say and how they're going to be run. ²

Radler does not hide his conservative slant or his wish for papers under his direction to generally think the same way. Many already do, anyway, he contends.

As Newman explains about Hollinger in his column:

The American link of the chain, which is chaired by Radler, has managed to collect a string of reactionary Republican papers -- and make them even more conservative. "One of the reasons their conservative owners let us buy them is that they felt more comfortable selling to us than to someone else," Radler says. "We now own seven papers in Mississippi and I know we got the *Meridian Star* over two higher bids strictly because we're so conservative. Our ideological reputation has been a real plus for us." ³

As candid as he is, Radler isn't the only media executive to espouse corporate, ideological control. *Los Angeles Times* publisher Otis Chandler clarified his position on diversity of opinion when he said: "I'm the chief executive. I set policy and I'm not going to surround myself with people who disagree with me... I surround myself with people who generally see the way I do." ⁴

Outspoken media mogul Rupert Murdoch told *Cosmopolitan* magazine that he exerts considerable control over editorial content: "The buck stops on my desk. My editors have input, but I make final decisions." ⁵ But those are unusually candid admissions on the part of media owners.

Unlike the audacious press barons of old, today's news execs prefer the velvet muzzle to the iron fist. They meet on a regular basis with editors hand-picked to fulfil the role of loyal gatekeepers. Editors decide what to feature on the front page, which articles to assign and not to assign, whether to cut, rewrite or kill a story. ⁶

Former *New York Times* managing editor Turner Catledge noted in his memoirs how he frequently repeated what publisher Arthur H. Sulzberger ordered as if they were his own initiatives because he didn't want to convey the impression that the big boss "was constantly looking over their shoulders. In truth, however, he was."⁷

Though he became publisher of the *Toronto Star* (Canada's largest paper) and president of Torstar Corporation, Beland Honderich nevertheless has commented on the negative aspects of chain ownership. In 1969 before the Davey Committee, he said:

The growth of newspaper chains is dangerous, because it gives a few people the power to determine what many newspapers will print. That the present owners of chain newspapers claim not to exercise this control in no way destroys the argument, for they have the power of effective control, and if they do not use it now, they or their successors could decide to use it at some time in the future. ⁸

Then in 1981 before the Kent Commission, Honderich added: "My reading of Canadian newspapers suggests that group ownership has tended to restrict the variety of opinion available to the public."⁹

Nick Russell, a journalism professor at the University of Regina, says that "Even if the newsroom is at arm's length from the commercial side of the business,

it is not immune from the vicissitudes of the whole operation." ¹⁰ One Colorado newspaper even carries a masthead motto which reads: "The *Aspen Flyer* is as independent as revenues permit." ¹¹

More than slash editorial budgets, which directly hurts the product (and hurts society as a whole by curbing information flow), corporate interests lurk behind the scenes in other ways. It's in what is *not* printed. Former *Chicago Tribune* editor James Squires wonders aloud about media covering themselves, for instance.

Imagine NBC News, with General Electric as its owner, doing tough investigative reporting on the company's role as a defense contractor, or its problems with environmentalists; *Time* magazine [aligned with Warner] taking on the entertainment business; or the *Chicago Tribune* [owner of the Chicago Cubs and connected with Canadian pulp and paper interests] writing critically about other baseball team owners, or lumber interest practices in Canada. And these news organizations are still run by people with journalistic backgrounds. They will contend publicly that they would never be deterred from a good story involving their parent companies. Perhaps not -- if it fell into their laps and could not be avoided. But they would avoid such stories if at all possible. ¹²

Noble writings

Journalistic self-criticism, naturally, is not often a high priority in the mainstream media, where noble writings on journalism most often dwell. Occasionally, publishers or editors pontificate on journalism. Their reflections are rarely deeply critical. Their jobs, after all, preclude criticizing the institution in which they work, just as any CEO or top manager must publicly promote their respective industries. Former reporter James K. Batten who assumed the chairmanship of Knight-Ridder in 1989, writes in the *Washington Journalism Review* in 1990 a carbon copy of what most of his peers would write:

Through my more than thirty years in the business, conscientious editors, publishers and corporate people have struggled to strike a wise and proper balance between the obligations to readers and communities, and to their newspapers' owners... It's not a perfect or painless process, but in Knight-Ridder at least, it works. Over the years we have become more convinced of this article of faith: ultimately, journalistic quality and financial success go hand in hand. ¹³

That's only true, of course, when owners are willing to temper profits in the name of producing quality journalism, according to Squires. "The reality today, however, is that most papers in the United States are owned by corporations whose management makes no distinction between their business and any other." ¹⁴

Academic researcher Warren Breed said 40 years ago that newsroom policy is usually followed, often rather painlessly, perhaps even unconsciously, by reporters. He says the publisher generally forms the policy of a paper, if not directly, through sway of editorial hierarchs. ¹⁵ Editors control details most of the time. But since they have generally risen through the ranks, like all journalists, they are well schooled in policy, whether they admit it or not, even whether they realize it or not. Thus they work relatively closely with the publisher, their boss. "So editors not only certainly know the publisher's policy, it is in their best interest to know it well and carry it out." ¹⁶

Reporters also adhere to policy, though in less obvious ways.

Policy, once formed, tends to perpetuate itself. It becomes part of the structure, to be viewed as a value or norm. If it conflicts with reality, rationalizations are found to support policy rather than reality. Policy gathers its own momentum, especially when it becomes challenged, as perhaps by a competing paper's policy. Newsmen retain various professional ideals, but apparently the in-group norms and social relationships exert stronger pressure in the direction of policy. The system of factors we have sketched makes it "natural" for the staffer to conform: he would be "different" if he did not. ¹⁷

Breed says most reporters deny any influence, and, in fact, often can't see systemic routine, such as that which dictates the types of stories their papers avoid altogether. It is not human nature to consider what is regularly avoided as adhering to any policy. ¹⁸

Yet ideal democracy demands much information. Journalist and author Michael O'Neil points out that "Count Vergennes once warned Louis XVI that sharing information was the first step toward sharing power." This, O'Neil says, is the theoretical essence of journalism: "The whole thrust of modern communication is to democratize knowledge and, therefore, to democratize power."¹⁹

To return to Otis Chandler, chairman of the executive committee of the Times Mirror Company, Los Angeles, journalism is robust as a private money-maker. He recites a common belief among editorial types that "successful newspapers do not have to let the business side into the editorial arena. They have the luxury of letting the editorial department be completely independent to cover the news as it sees it." When the papers are struggling, however, as the *Los Angeles Mirror-News* was before folding, Chandler admits that influence no longer remains confined vaguely to budgets, marketing reports and profit strategies: "Every line of advertising was so important," he said about the *Mirror-News*, "We really killed some news stories because we were trying to get the major department stores to advertise and we did not want to rock any boats."²⁰

Robert H. Giles, who edited two Gannett dailies in Rochester, the *Times Union* and the *Democrat and Chronicle*, before moving to the similarly Gannett-owned *Detroit News*, says "The bottom line requirements limit what we want to

do." Though he said he was generally given a free hand, that must be weighed against the invisible hand exacting more and more profits.

The Gannett Company has very aggressive and ambitious profit goals. Anybody who wants to work for Gannett and be comfortable ought to understand that. Al Neuharth (then chairman and president, Gannett Co.) clearly sets the pace, and the standard is that our profits will be 15 per cent better this year than last year. Everybody in the group, for the most part, is expected to contribute to that, which means the kind of news hole I think we require here to put out absolutely first-rate newspapers is not available to me. That's a frustration because of my own standards for good newspapers and the standards of many of the people I've hired or promoted here. ²¹

Speaking at the Canadian Association of Journalists annual convention in Ottawa April 9, 1994, Canadian media tycoon Conrad Black, whose interests extend through North America, Britain, Israel, and Australia, argued how a publisher should intervene with papers -- and thus make them better. In his usual entertaining way, he said this is done, in part, by ensuring that editors subscribe to a similar philosophy.

Much the best course, in my judgement, and the one that we try to follow, as do many others, is to hire editors with whom the principal shareholder, where there is one, is in general agreement, to minimize internal frictions. But the proprietor should exercise an influence. ²²

Black's main argument is that the publisher's personality should be reflected proudly in newspapers, and that a publisher should counter the occasionally overzealous, mean-spirited writings of journalists. Though he said at the convention that he likes most journalists, he has occasionally stated otherwise. In a submission, written in 1969, to Keith Davey's senate committee on newspapers, Black unleashed rather uncomplimentary salvos at the lowly scribe: "a very large number of them are ignorant, lazy, opinionated, intellectually dishonest, and inadequately supervised."

He quoted this passage of his in a keynote address to the primarily journalist audience at the CAJ, though he tempered his words.

These words, I now understand, are used to rouse journalistic faculties throughout Canada to a febrile state of hostility. The so-called profession, I added, "is heavily cluttered with abrasive youngsters who substitute what they call commitment for insight and to a lesser extent with aged hacks toiling through a miasma of mounting decrepitude." ²³

Black's point is that a strong publisher can produce a better paper than can a bland one.

As I have gradually risen through the ranks of the newspaper business, from editor of the *Eastern Townships Advertiser* -- an impecunious, half-tabloid, rural Quebec weekly with a circulation of 2,300 in 1966 -- I have become an ever more vociferous advocate of the publisher, especially the proprietor publisher. Not as a ravening, capricious despot or propagandist but as the needed countervailing influence to the proverbial working press.

What, other than the intimidation of money, asked a member of the audience, possibly qualifies a proprietor to direct the editorial policy of a newspaper in a society that purports to have a free press?

Well, as I said, I think the proprietor's duty is to encourage fair reporting. So if we're talking about a straight reporting function, journalistic comment, what qualifies him is his duty to produce a product that has integrity and is believable. If we're talking about comment, his duty is to provide some reasonable spectrum of variety. And if we're talking about the newspaper's own position on individual issues, just the actual editorials, which in practice have somewhat limited influence most of the time, the proprietor should work that out with the editor. In our papers, on the rare occasions that we disagree, we publish two editorials.

Why can't editors and journalists be trusted to do that themselves?

"Why can't proprietors?"

That's not answering my question, Mr. Black.

I think they can be trusted to do it themselves. But as I said at no doubt rather excessive and taxing length this evening, these

enterprises need balance, and when, in my experience, you leave the editors and journalists to do it all themselves, the result often is a very dreary and conformist and relentless view of a tendentious kind.

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Two outlooks

Lindsay Crysler, a former dean of the Concordia University journalism department and a long-time reporter and editor at several Canadian papers, has witnessed corporate influence. In an interview, however, he said it is a rather qualified form.

"I think probably whatever influence might come is sometimes influenced by bottom-line sort of philosophies," he said.

"For instance, if you expect your publishers to bring in 30 per cent return every year, they are going to be perhaps less adventurous because for one thing they probably don't have high editorial budgets to hire good journalists, and they may be more timid about tackling advertisers or about doing stories that might hurt advertisers. Southam, whose aggressiveness in terms of profits in the old days, anyway, were not quite so vicious, perhaps may have felt less pressure along those lines.

"However, my own experience over the years is that it depended more on individuals than it did on companies. My experience was pretty much all with Southam, except for working with a couple of independents. And I certainly worked with publishers at Southam who were worried about what a major advertiser might think, were worried about what establishment people in the city they worked in would think about a certain story or editorial policy, and so on. But I also worked for publishers and editors, sometimes in the same city, who would not have let those things sort of, let's say, color their judgement of a story

or a policy. And, in fact, I suppose the most fearless publisher I ever worked for was a person who was closer to the establishment than anybody I had ever worked for. He was actually a family member of the Southams. He lived in Ottawa, in this case, all his life and certainly was really well connected in the local establishment. But I never ever knew him to interfere with a story or to fret about a story as long as he felt all the journalistic principles had been followed."

Crysler said while papers sometimes bow to financial constraints, many examples exist of the opposite: "When I was at the *Gazette*, one of our people had done a very good series of stories outlining the vast holdings of the Weston family and had done some research that basically exposed parts of the company that were so tightly held and interwoven. There were just hundreds of companies involved and some of this information had never been printed anywhere. Some of their senior executives came around and were really concerned about all these stories. And of course, these stories indicated that all of this led to higher grocery prices and other things that perhaps weren't good for consumers. But the publisher who sat in on these meetings with us and these people never backed down and didn't change anything we did because of it."

Crysler said an occasional problem is self-censorship: "I think sometimes people do censor themselves or alter their actions because of something they think the publisher wants or they think the editor wants, or something like that. Sometimes you're second guessing the editor too -- what he might want in the paper or not want in the paper. But I don't know how serious or widespread it is."

One issue, he said, which the media fall short on is covering themselves and their profits.

An interesting example comes via a lone story in the *Globe and Mail*: It hit the front page, in neon black-and-white, like a fist to a jaw. Sudden, surprising, effective. The industry's secret escaped: newspapers make money, sometimes barrels of it.

How could this, an in-depth look at the financial success of the newspaper industry -- even during a stubborn recession -- make the front page of the *Globe and Mail*? That type of acknowledgement rarely suits the daily newspaper business. The common refrain differs: newspapers are treading water in a sea of red ink, particularly given the onset of increased competition and reduced advertising lineage.

Yet on Nov. 23, 1992, sitting snugly at the bottom of Page A1 of Canada's national newspaper, a story detailing delicious profits for newspaper chain after newspaper chain, sang a different tune, beat a different drum. This is not what newspaper managements often claim in public, of course. And the story was not repeated anywhere, not in a follow-up in the *Globe*, not on the wire, perhaps not in any other daily.

"I said even before they ran this on front page it was a career-ending story. There are some people who aren't very happy," said veteran *Globe* business writer Harvey Enchin who wrote the story. "There's stuff in the reports that they (management) didn't really want to talk about, that in fact their newspaper division made \$15 million. And here they are laying off people (or at least threatening to). But wait a minute: the paper made money!

"What industry has done better over the years than newspapers? None. They keep telling you they make all these investments (and thus, reduce profits

on paper). But why are they making these investments? So they can make a better product and reduce their costs."

Though no follow-up stories materialized, *Toronto Star* publisher David Jolley responded quickly with a letter to the editor in the *Globe and Mail*, again denying industry profits. Here is his letter in its entirety:

For a curious reason, Harvey Enchin did not make any attempt to elicit comments from the *Toronto Star's* staff about its financial position (Industry Pessimism No More Than A Paper Tiger -- Nov. 23). Had he bothered to call me he would have learned that advertising volumes at the end of September among *The Star*, *Sun* and *Globe and Mail* had declined by more than 25 per cent from levels in the late 1980s. He would have learned, too, that they were still in decline this fall -- during our busiest season. And, he would have learned that *The Star* will have to pay over \$40-million next year in depreciation and interest charges for its new plant in Vaughan, Ont. Clearly, the \$6-million earned by Torstar's whole newspaper division including the weekly and printing operations at the end of September falls well short of that requirement. Perhaps Mr. Enchin doesn't read the financial pages about the condition of business in Southern Ontario, or perhaps he doesn't believe that the newspaper industry only reflects what is happening to the economy.

The story is interesting in terms of the jolt it sent to the industry, both journalists and management.

Enchin said he was as shocked as anybody that his article detailing industry profits achieved such prominence. By mid-afternoon of the day it was published, Enchin had received a dozen calls from journalists outside the *Globe* congratulating him on his work. He said a series of events led to the fluke front-page coverage of the newspaper industry's profit. The story was processed on a Sunday night, it was a slow news day, and few editors were around. Management had assigned him a story on the alleged newspaper crisis and he was told to find a connection between the rash of newspaper takeovers, firings and shake-ups.

that included Doug Creighton's dismissal as publisher of the *Toronto Sun*, Conrad Black's purchase of 23 per cent of Southam from Torstar, and Southam's subsequent and almost immediate efforts to buy out Black.

But Enchin said he found no link, other than coincidence. And perhaps profit. Maybe the media rumblings were occurring because the newspaper business was a lot healthier than it had been claiming, not because it was moribund. Enchin said he contacted trusted media analysts (whom he declined to name) and asked their opinion, as well as studying annual and quarterly reports. As a veteran corporate-report reader, Enchin said he quickly saw that newspapers were actually faring remarkably well, given the recession. Profits may have been down somewhat from recent years, but they were nevertheless impressive.

So that's the story he wrote. He said he gave it first to the Report On Business editor, who found it so fascinating, she offered it to the front-page editor, who agreed to take it because it offered a radically different view than the standard. And so that's how the story made it to Page 1, becoming one of the very few front-page stories on exceptional newspaper profits to hit the front page of a major North American daily.

But he said it didn't take long for editors to be chastised over allowing that story into print, especially on the front page.

"I'm sure they (front-page editors) have been spoken to. I know the ROB editor already has been spoken to," said Enchin, the day the story ran. "Management was not happy that the story ran. And I can see why they wouldn't be happy. It's not what they want to publicize.

"The story they wanted wasn't there. But I thought I found a more interesting story."

The story management wanted took a more superficial look, dealing with the turbulent times of the daily Canadian paper.

"They say they're doing terribly and that everything was rough. But that wasn't quite true," Enchin said. "It was interesting to find that they're still in the black. But it's true some of their investments outside of newspapers aren't making money."

Enchin wasn't really surprised by his findings, since almost all daily papers operate monopolies. He said simply reading between the lines of some of the papers' corporate reports quickly revealed how relatively well the industry was doing, even in a recession. Torstar, he writes, "reported an \$11.8-million loss in the nine months that ended Sept. 30, 1992, compared with a profit of \$13.5 million a year earlier. But all that red ink bled from discontinued operations -- \$31.6-million worth. The ongoing business earned profit of \$19.7 million, up from \$16.2 million a year earlier -- and this during a period Torstar has called 'the worst economic times since the Great Depression.'"

But Enchin said despite all the obvious interest in newspapers, all the extra money available for major investments (such as the *Toronto Star's* \$400-million layout for a new press centre), all the unchallenged monopolies, the industry keeps claiming poverty as a need for further cutbacks.

But Enchin said they do this so they can cut the ranks, slash budgets, shut bureaus, and claim that wire copy is just as good and that diversity of opinion is

not threatened by turning to fewer news sources: "But I disagree. Certainly I think *Globe* readers would rather read *Globe* reporters."

"But I didn't have any axe to grind when I wrote it. I was given a story and I just didn't find what they wanted me to," Enchin continued. "That's why they're investigating this now, and when they find out who was responsible (for letting the article run), they're going to hang him out by his heels."

If he had to do it again, Enchin said he would have quoted a so-called media expert like George Bain or Robert Fulford in the story. But otherwise it would have remained more or less exactly the same. Judging by the reaction he received from his peers, he figures he was accurate:

"The journalist fraternity, or sorority, or whatever it is, has been very vociferous about -- I hate to say congratulating me -- but in acknowledging that the story made it. And now the truth is known. I think that's why I'm getting the calls, because people were stunned that this made it to front. And so was I."

This shock is indicative of one thing: that the corporate face of the media, especially its financial successes, is a sacred cow not to be disturbed.

"In contrast with their willingness to examine *individual* behavior in microscopic detail, the cultural industries -- the mass media in particular -- are remarkably reticent [sic] to examine their own activities," says Herbert I. Schiller in his book *Culture Inc.* He adds that takeovers receive light coverage and are usually portrayed as entrepreneurial jousting. "The smell of profits and the lure of global information dominance pervades the media-merger arena." ²⁶

Chatting at Length

Though the issue of ownership and corporate influence rarely hits the mainstream media, journalists have much to say about the issue, in the right settings. Interviews for this thesis indicate as much. Though opinions varied substantially on some issues -- such as whether corporate influence exists, with many managers saying no and many reporters saying yes -- everyone agreed on one point. A free press is necessary for true democracy, which presents the perfect place to begin.

How important is a free press to democracy?

Gail Robertson starts the discussion: "I'd have to say it's very important. Without a free press, you wouldn't have democracy. I guess what it comes down to is what the definitions of free press are and what the definitions of democracy are. I think everybody may have varying degrees of what they see as a free press. Some people might say what we have now is a free press and other people might think we're moving away from that totally free press."

Robertson said we don't have a totally free press now: "I think there are limitations. I don't know if we ever had a totally free press and I don't know if we ever would have what could be considered a totally free press. It's much like looking at objectivity. I don't think you could ever have anybody do anything completely objectively... You're still coming in with your own views.

"Compared to a lot of other countries we have a free press. I think there is right now an increasing problem with business and the whole corporate aspect creeping in."

Andre Prefontaine similarly supports freedom of the press, though he said people may hold differing versions of what constitutes the term: free press.

"It is essential," he said, about journalism's role in democracy. "I guess what is important in terms of your own work, is to define what you mean by a free press.

"Freedom is based on knowledge and lack of freedom is based on ignorance and fear, so obviously you want to have a system within society where you share knowledge as widely as possible. That's part of our responsibility."

As far as the press bearing a special responsibility, Prefontaine says, "I think the press is responsible to the public and accountable to the public." A press corporation might have more responsibility than, say, a soup company, he said.

Charles Bury says of a free press: "It is essential. There can't be democracy without a free press... The most important freedom is the freedom to know what's going on around you. Without knowing what's happening in your society, the other freedoms are not attainable."

Therefore, the media "absolutely" hold a special place in society, he said. And they have a responsibility to describe activities of society as truthfully as they can: "And as much as possible provide a balance between opposing points of view, as long as the opposing points of view represent significant segments of the population. And they should provide a forum for discussion of issues."

Lee Prokaska also champions the free-press theory: "I think it's very important. It's the only way to provide checks on potential abuses of power, it's the only way for members of the general public to be in touch with what's going on in their government because not everyone can take the time or afford the money to

get to the seats of power and observe themselves." The media, she said, should also note good things, as well.

Colin MacKenzie is one interviewee who doesn't lavish unyielding conviction upon the concept of a free press as the essence of democracy. "It's probably not absolutely essential, but the evidence would indicate it's tough to do without. But I wouldn't say it's the most distinguishing feature of it. I think representative government and free and fair elections and that sort of stuff are probably more important than a free press but a free press, however, goes to sort out some of that kind of thing by adding transparency.

"If you go back in history, self-censorship or explicit government censorship: self-censorship is more the case in the U.S. but explicit government censorship still exists in the U.S. and Israel, for instance. Both of those [countries] are relatively democratic."

MacKenzie says government is not so bad during peacetime, but that "It is during wartime. The whole policy of D-notices. Until very recently -- within my professional career -- the Home Office would issue what is called a D-notice for stuff that is arguably little more than embarrassing to the government of the day."

One example is the British-Irish conflict. "It's still illegal for an IRA person to appear on television... That ideal [of a free press] is not as complete as we would like to think."

Lorne Slotnick believes in the concept of a free press benefiting people. He's unsure, however, whether the private press serves that purpose. And he questions how legitimately the media challenge authority:

"Sometimes, the media hinder the extension of democracy and reinforce a perception of democracy that is somewhat limited... Quite often the media sell public events as entertainment rather than as areas which the public can participate in. The public is left, through the media, as spectators rather than participants."

Rick Salutin says the media are particularly important in a society such as ours where democracy in practice is much more sickly than its theoretical sibling. "Given the limited nature of the democracy that we've got, the limited nature of the free press -- the limited free press that we've got -- it's very useful. They're both half measures. The press we have isn't awfully free. It doesn't represent anything like the real range of opinion that ought to be represented in this society. But things would be a hell of a lot worse without it. I think the kind of very limited democracy we have functions best when the powerful forces within it are set against each other. That is, when the government, business and the press, say, are in conflict over things rather than when they harmonize their interests."

Mike Dunnell: "It is such a self evident truth that I wouldn't know how to go on about it. Without a free press there is no democracy, and to me, this is a self evident truth."

Jim Potter says democracy is inseparable from a free press: "I think it's essential, as essential as any other democratic institution like elected government and all that. Because, people need a free flow of information in order to make informed choices about government, politics, the economy, and all the issues governments deal with."

Do the media hold a special place in society?

Prokaska: "In some ways yes, because we are representing the general public at functions to which we are going. On the other hand, I don't think that allows the option of taking advantage and forcing ourselves into places where Joe Public would not be allowed to go ordinarily. So that while we do hold a special place because we are representing a whole bunch of people, on the other hand, I don't think that gives us any extra rights that the average citizen doesn't already have."

Mackenzie: "In the same way that telephone wires have a special place in society: they're a means of communication. I think we can be socially useful, but social utility is not what we're in the game for. I think many of the people who work for me and who are in the business feel a crusading instinct, sort of justice, truth and beauty, all those sorts of things. But in point of fact, what we're basically in business for is to make money. So, yeah, we've got a special place in terms of what we do, the service we provide to society, the service we sell to society, but I'm loathe to make too much of it."

Salutin: "Well, in the broad sense, the media is [sic] just a means of communication. The way information and ideas are paced back and forth so, sure that's important."

Dunnell: "Not as special as some people think, but yes, in our charter -- which is not one of the great documents of the world -- as far as I can reckon the press even as a business, or institution, is the only one mentioned by name. They don't say there should be freedom of transportation. The American declaration of independence and the American constitution, both documents are much higher

and more idealistic (and mention the press by name). Given the first amendment, it gives (the press) a special status."

Potter: "As opposed to any other corporation... Well, yeah. I think the media have to be free of influence. If it's going to gather information in a fair and unbiased way then I think it's clear that it can't be beholden to any particular interests."

Do the media have a responsibility to the public?

Prokaska: "Yes. Although, we're not elected, we're representing ourselves as the eyes and ears of the public, and as such we do have a responsibility to pay attention to public mood, to listen to the public when they talk to us, but not to the point where we're allowing the public to run us."

"We *are* the public... If we owe anything to anybody more than anybody else, it's to the public rather than political institutions or business monopolies, at least in theory."

Mackenzie: "I don't think we have a responsibility to provide coverage of anything we decide we don't want to provide coverage of. People are mad at the *Globe and Mail* these days, because we've cut back so hard on sports. I would argue that we don't have a responsibility to cover sports." Though MacKenzie said the media should act responsibly with information (i.e. make it as accurate as possible).

Slotnick: "The question is do they have a responsibility or should they have a responsibility? Do they have a responsibility? Not legally, they don't. Morally they might. But their real responsibility, in terms of privately owned media, is not

to the public but to shareholders. Morally, I guess they would say publicly they would have a responsibility. Should they have a responsibility? I don't know. It's a commercial endeavour, by and large, in this country, and part of a free press unfortunately is to say and do what you want whether it's responsible or not."

Salutin: "I think everybody has a responsibility to the public, actually. I don't think there's something special [for the media]. As citizens, everyone has a responsibility... Do the media have a responsibility to the public as opposed to the responsibility to their owners? They all say they do. I mean, of course they do. But it's rife with contradiction. And it's basically an unhealthy situation when you have this kind of monopoly -- private ownership -- of the means of communication. Even if they acknowledge this obligation to the public as well as to the shareholders, it's almost impossible for them to play it out. The minute any publisher or producer really tried to in a serious way he'd just lose his job."

Salutin said concentration of ownership affects the media: "It's the same thing as this point about when powerful forces are in conflict. It's better for the public good than when they're in harmony... The range of expression in the press has always been somewhat limited. The more outlets there are, the more competing ownerships, then the more chance there is for at least some range of opinion, however limited overall. The more concentration there is, the less opportunity there is."

Dunnell: "With every privilege there is a responsibility. And that goes as much for the press as with anything else."

Potter: "The press has a responsibility to be fair and as objective as possible. There's a lot of debate about whether you can be truly objective or not. But at least be fair and present all the relevant sides of the story or issue."

Potter was clear who he thinks the media are responsible to: "I would say the public, in the most general terms. It's almost like you're a public servant in a way. You're supposed to represent everyone or take everyone's interests into account."

How important is it to keep news pages free of corporate influence?

Robertson: "There's going to be influence. I guess, again, it's to what degree. Right now there's a shift toward more of a corporate influence, and what then happens is the balance gets out of whack and you have fewer points of view coming across. You generally get the corporate view. A lot of times that's not the total picture of what's happening... When you have big business having a greater say in what's covered, and tied into advertising. There is a feeling of how advertising is tied in to how things are covered. You could look at environmental issues not being given the same degree of coverage for fear that there may be a big spill and it may not get covered because it would make that company look bad. There's a concern right now that that balance is out of whack and the corporations are having too great an influence."

Prefontaine: "The newsroom should be able to operate outside of any influence from the advertising department or from any undue influence from corporations that would undermine responsibilities or the role the press has

toward its readers and society in general, so that all corporate influence is not bad. Some corporate influence would be very good.

"For example, Southam has had a distinguished history in this country of really promoting, as a corporation, the very highest journalistic standards, in opposition, let's say, to a Thomson [newspaper chain], who had a different approach to managing newspapers. Corporate influence was positive in the Southam environment. In the Thomson environment, I'm not sure you could so easily reach the same conclusions.

"All corporate influence is not bad. Corporate influence that would be self-serving, and which would ignore the responsibilities that a free press has within society, would not be positive."

Prefontaine said, however, that Southam management is changing, with Conrad Black and Paul Desmarais together holding the largest single share: "You would have to be blind to think Southam management has not changed. It's not the same people at all. It's not the same owners as before. Before it was a family owned company. Now the family does not control the company. However, I don't believe the standards have changed that much."

Prokaska: "It's really important (to avoid corporate influence). It's really difficult in some sections of the newspaper, and it's probably really difficult over all because as reporters we are all operating under an absorbed set of ideals or goals that probably have corporate influence in them. It's not like an editor or a publisher says to a reporter 'You will do the story this way,' favorably to a particular interest group. But you do over time absorb the philosophical basis of your paper, and that probably tends to slant what you're doing.

"Business has a lot of money to influence how the newspaper operates editorially. I know, not so much in my job right now, but many years ago when I was in the lifestyle section and I was doing a lot of fashion writing, I would often get calls from stores saying 'Well, we buy a lot of advertising, therefore we should have a story done about us.' And it's hard to explain to people dealing with the business side of the newspaper that that's not necessarily how you get in the paper. There has to be some news to it as well. You don't just pay your way in. That's something that I think some advertising representatives don't make clear and don't understand themselves.

"Corporations also have a lot of money to spend on public relations and they can churn out a lot of media information kits, and they know how to find an angle and they know how to present a photo op."

It makes it easier for editors to hand over nice packages, sent from PR firms: "And as times get tougher and staffs get smaller, that becomes more appealing."

Bury: "It's important to keep the news pages free from corporate influence. I don't see why you would want to keep the editorial pages free of corporate influence, since they're supposed to be open to all kinds of opinions. Certainly corporate opinions should be among them. You shouldn't exclude corporate opinions from the editorial pages, especially not those of the people who own the newspapers. I mean they too have a right to freedom of expression."

Bury said, however, corporations have an advantage: "Sure. It's easier to get there (laughs). They own the tools."

Slotnick: "It depends where you start your assumptions. Free from corporate influence? How do you keep an institution owned by a corporation free from corporate influence? You can't and you won't. They are corporations. They're owned by corporations and they operate not to serve the public and not to inform the public -- that might be a byproduct of what they do -- but they operate to make a profit and to serve the shareholders. I think our modern perception in North America of how the news media operate is a bit of a myth but there's part of the belief in newsrooms and even among management in newsrooms that they have to keep the newsroom somewhat pristine and somewhat away from corporate control, and I think that's a valid goal. I think it does serve the public better that way.

"When push comes to shove, newspapers and the private media are corporations and corporate control is there. Corporations will allow a certain amount of level of freedom from that corporate control but ultimately, they do have control."

Salutin: Freeing news pages from anything corporate is infeasible, he said. "It's simply impossible. I mean news is corporate. There's no way you can keep news free of corporate influence. You can fight it, but it's a rear-guard action. Yet it's a fight that has to be fought.

"The mentality is almost pervasive. You have an almost uniform mentality between CTV and CBC in the news. Not quite, but it's stunningly comparable because they're both corporate structures and they all live within the context of the assumptions of the society. And it's not just a matter of ownership; it's a matter of ethos and culture and dominant values."

Dunnell: "You have to define corporate influence because everyone who works for a newspaper -- I don't care if it is a small weekly or the *Toronto Star* or the *New York Times* -- they are working for a corporation. So any newspaper, even a very good newspaper, there is corporate influence in that the entity that publishes it is a corporation.

"The way I used to think about it takes a schizophrenic approach. There were two *Windsor Stars*: there was the corporate *Windsor Star*, and then there was the newsroom *Windsor Star*. This would come up often in labor negotiations when the *Star* was negotiating with unions. If the corporate *Windsor Star* was involved in a labor dispute, the newsroom *Windsor Star* wasn't. We would try to play it that way, that really the newsroom was a disinterested party, while in fact we had very much at stake and people were very much involved. We tried to put that aside and take the schizophrenic approach. But it is certainly vital to keep the bean counters and those kinds of people out of the news pages. I don't care who it is, advertisers, because that's why there is a first amendment and that goes back to your question of responsibility. You have a responsibility to tell the truth as best you see it."

Potter: "It's critical. You can't have the company dictating what goes into the news pages according to its own biases and interests. Because then you limit the flow of information to the public. That's basically interfering with democracy and the democratic role the media has."

Does everybody have equal access to the media?

Robertson: "People who have access are people who have the ear of the publisher and top editors, and also people who manipulate the media better. A lot

of times it comes down to who can manipulate the media.

"We see the newspaper business going more toward the business side as opposed to the news side. They're looking right now at the bottom line and cutting staff and making more and more profit. That seems to be the big issue here with more and more newspapers, is that we need to make more and more money.

"It gets around to business. When you look at profit being a goal, then advertising also becomes of greater importance. Right now that's what's happening in papers. Papers want to cater to advertisers. The big thing now are these special sections: Now newspapers are actively having even divisions in the advertising department set up to go out to do sections to promote companies. That gets us into the copy that companies buy. So probably it's business interests that are most often represented."

Women's issues, child care, social issues "are getting pushed aside, except in cases where reporters push those issues. But it's usually because reporters are pushing it, not because they're being assigned those stories. And they're usually not given as much time."

Prefontaine: Not everybody has a fair shot, he said. Structured groups, like labor and political parties do, because they expend energy seeking it.

Prokaska: "When it comes down to which stories get done, those groups which understand the media, and those groups that know how to present themselves effectively, know how to get coverage more than those groups who don't." Business, labor, the environmental movement, sometimes women's groups: essentially groups with "media smarts."

Bury: "Some people in groups become more skilled at using that access. So that you get interest groups who have trained professionals to get their point of view into papers, or on television or the radio and so on... So that these groups probably get more than their share of attention in the media. While unorganized groups, the unwashed masses, ordinary people, who are not organized, are under-represented."

Slotnick: "No, I think it's obvious that not everybody has equal access to the media, but I don't think that's a surprise to anybody." Some people are better organized, or even "more deserving of attention."

Mackenzie: "As with everything with human endeavour, some people through luck and serendipity get access, some people through dint of hard work and planning get access, some people buy their way in. But I would never pretend there's equality of access."

"You've got to be able to frame your message in a way that fits with the journalistic model. Therefore it's much easier for an environmental group to get its message in than it is, say, Ernst Zundel."

Dunnell: "No, but I don't know if it's necessarily the media's fault. Access to the media has been narrowed greatly in the last decade or two decades, as especially political parties became more and more politically aware and started hiring spin doctors and, in effect, lobbyists and manipulators. And I think there was always an inherent bias in newspapers towards the establishment. The old saying in the U.S. is that newspapers are owned by Republicans and written by Democrats. So, no, there's not equal access."

How important is it to maintain a perception of editorial independence?

Prefontaine: "It's critical that we do maintain a perception of editorial independence." But Prefontaine said the question is impossible to answer unless the term 'editorial independence' is clarified -- since its definition can vary from person to person.

Prokaska: "I covered courts for years and one of things judges kept saying was that justice must not only be done it must be seen to be done.

"Members of the public are looking for bias. They have their own interests and they're looking to see if the newspaper is representing a certain stance, and they're offended if it's contrary to their own stance.

"It doesn't look good if I have an NDP sign on my lawn during an election... And in some ways, while my freedom is therefore curtailed, it's important to me as a reporter to maintain that separation."

Bury: "It's quite important, because the more people think the newspaper is a forum for free expression, the more they'll use it that way, so therefore the more representative it will become of the entire community, and not just those interest groups that have the skills and money to make their points."

Slotnick: "The public expects that they're getting balanced coverage. The public expects that the media will give them both sides of the story, that the media will not be biased and will be fair. The public tends to react badly to media institutions that are unfair and blatantly biased.

"In order for a newspaper to penetrate most households in the community, it has to be perceived by the public as being fair to everybody."

Mackenzie: "If one is seen to be pursuing an agenda as explicitly say as the [Toronto] *Sun* quite often does, or CFTO news in Toronto, then that really does diminish the product and is fundamentally dishonest.

"Our last publisher couldn't understand why, if writing a nice story about Harry Rosen would mean that he would buy two pages of ads, we wouldn't write a nice story about Harry Rosen. We explained to him that yes in the short term that would give us an extra \$10,000 that week, but the corrosive damage of basically being seen to be for sale would cost far more down the road.

"He explicitly asked why we felt so uncomfortable about doing a nice story about Harry Rosen and we had an answer for him." That was Dave Clark, "the year-long Campbell Soup guy."

Mackenzie said he figures the media should provide a perception of editorial independence: "I think there is an implicit contract with the reader that says 'What you are reading here is some relatively fair-minded cut at the truth.' I don't think anyone with any real intelligence expects us to be Biblical and infallible."

But people expect the *Globe* to be better than the *Sun*, for instance. "The *Sun* plays jokes a lot. They play April Fool's jokes."

"They're far more engaged in partisan arguments," as in supporting the police, for instance, he said.

Salutin: "There are definitely moments and situations where journalists are told what to do and what they can't do. But the much more pervasive form of control is when they just behave within a context. First of all, they're selected. The really independent anti-corporate people just get weeded out at some point and don't get the jobs. So that the people who have the jobs in many cases feel that

they're perfectly independent. But there is also the element of direct control and you find people very high up in media management who will acknowledge directly that they won't offend corporate ownership. It's not so uncommon."

Dunnell: "It's vital. How true we are to it varies from paper to paper and person to person. But in an ideal world, the fact that advertisers or corporations are there would not enter into your mind. But the world is not ideal."

Perhaps the most telling of all responses, however, are those responding to the simple question:

Have you ever witnessed any type of corporate influence and if so what?

Robertson: "Oh Yeah! (Laughs) Well I could give one example from the *Windsor Star*. Recently there was a column that was written about Chrysler and the incentives or perks given to management. This column was pulled by the publisher. Now the feeling of most people who found out was that it had been pulled because of the influence Chrysler had on the paper, advertising influence. At the time we ran a very lucrative special section on Chrysler, to the point where we had a photographer and a reporter based in the Chrysler building covering it, doing this special section. It was really treated like an editorial or news product when really it was an advertising product.

"What was interesting about this column [being pulled], is the column ran in the first edition and had gone through all the normal channels like the editorial page editor and the editor. There were some questions and it was held for a little bit but then it did go in the first edition. But then the publisher read it, I guess, and it was pulled from the final edition. To me, it really sent a chill up most

reporters' spines, that something could be pulled at that late stage without any real reason. It wasn't libellous. It was nothing that was inflammatory as far as a racist remark, or a racial tone. Basically it just upset people at Chrysler Canada, or at least the business side of it.

"And that's just how we tend to cover a lot of other things too. Even the budget. We still tend to go to the chamber of commerce. It's usually a group of middle-aged men sitting around examining the budget. And we still do that.

"There's always an underlying thought that there's a real slant [from managers], that some of the union leaders are nothing but goofs, and that may be true, but there's probably a lot of business people that are goofs too. But they tend to get more play and more positive coverage than a lot of the union issues. Now, I think in Windsor we probably cover labor well from the labor reporter's point of view. But again it still comes around to what things get assigned, and what editorials are written, and what he's given time to do as well."

The Chrysler example is perhaps the most blatant example of this sort, according to Robertson, but not the only one: "An example, along with the Chrysler issue in Windsor, is the whole aspect of the casino coming to the city. Right from Day 1 it has been almost like the *Windsor Star* has been the cheerleader for Casino Windsor. I could probably count on one hand the number of stories that have had any negative aspect to them. Even when there is a negative aspect, there's a large amount of space given to explain why the negative things are there.²⁷ There's been really nothing said too much about how originally we were supposed to have a European-style casino, with no drinking, very small scale, very touchy-feely homey style, that wouldn't disrupt the city. Now I see the

flashing casino sign. It just has Las Vegas blaring from the sign. And there may not be anything wrong with all this but we haven't really reported that 'Hey, wait a minute, this is a far cry from Day 1.' We're also being told all the time how wonderful this is. The whole issue of jobs is becoming top priority."

The casino avoided any environmental assessment, she said, though the media really only mentioned this when lawyers opposing the project demanded government action. It was mentioned and then it was gone. When it's a big industry at stake, Robertson said, environmental assessments don't seem so important.

"That's definitely another aspect right here in Windsor that's a clear example of corporate influence basically overshadowing everything else," she said.

Prefontaine: "Let me see -- I've worked for three newspaper chains in my day, and I have never to this day seen an example of a corporation picking up the phone and saying write this, or don't write that. And I have worked for Power Corporation, I've worked for Hollinger, and now I'm working for Southam. It doesn't happen. The notion that some people have that somebody somewhere is pulling levers and strings is a misguided one. And it reflects an ignorance of how corporations work and what are the true objectives of corporations."

Asked if newspapers might sometimes not wait for a call, Prefontaine said: "You mean self-censorship, or a pro-business slant in management? No, I can't say I've ever seen that. Really, you're talking about a very wide-spread sinister plot. There's no proof or demonstration in our society that any orchestrated group, whether it be business, or labor organizations or political parties, have ever concocted plots to control the media in such a devious way."

There's no conspiracy, he said. Nor is there such a system. "Such a system, because it would pursue such an underhanded goal, would be in my mind equivalent to a conspiracy against the system.

"You work in a newsroom. I mean this is just so unrealistic. This is painting a portrait that someone who has no knowledge of a how a newsroom operates would come up with."

Bury: (Laughs) "Yes. Sure... Advertisers will often threaten to, or sometimes will, pull advertising if there are stories critical about them. Occasionally a newspaper will buckle under to this, and not run stories that are critical of advertisers.

"It's common that advertisers bitch about coverage. It's uncommon -- but does happen once in while -- that newspapers do what they're told by advertisers. That happens at some newspapers some of the time. It doesn't happen at all newspapers and it certainly doesn't happen a lot of the time.

"In Sherbrooke, we had a car dealer by the name of Beaucage who was convicted for shoddy retailing under the Consumer Protection Act, and he threatened to pull his advertising from any media which discussed his case. The French-language newspaper in Sherbrooke, *La Tribune*, reacted badly, didn't do what they should have done, and softened up the story. And the only story they ran about it initially was "a car dealer," without naming him. And they only did that because it had been on television, and the television people had identified him -- he was also a TV advertiser -- so the cat was out of the bag. The *Tribune* made a mistake I believe by not correctly identifying him. The *Record* correctly identified him, but it didn't matter to us because he wasn't an advertiser in the *Record*. But

we would have anyway. We have in other cases. It comes up at every newspaper. An advertiser hears that you're going to be writing something about him and feels that his influence as an advertiser should control the news columns as well as the box he bought. But at good newspapers, they don't allow that extra influence." Bury also said papers occasionally censor themselves.

Prokaska: "We have a number of big-name furriers in Hamilton and every time we have an anti-fur story -- it doesn't even matter if it's Hamilton-based, or if Bob Barker wouldn't do the Miss America pageant any more because of furs -- our bigwig furrier called and screamed and yelled and threatened to pull his one-third page ad, and stuff like that. And I think that filters down to have an impact on the way we cover things like anti-fur demonstrations. We don't cover them the way we used to. We cover them in three or four paragraphs. We don't even mention where they were, which is really annoying to the reporter who had to go and get screamed at by the furrier about why I was there and how come I didn't call ahead and warn him that these people were coming -- as if I'm somehow their friend.

"Over time, it's just got to the point where we just try to avoid doing them now, because it's not worth the effort. It's not worth the crap we get."

Mackenzie: Corporate influence is inherent, he said. "Money is one of the markers. If Bell Canada wants to get its message out, it's far easier for them to do than the people protesting against a hike in rate increases.

"By definition, especially at the *Globe*, we're a newspaper that covers business religiously. So companies get their say in our paper lots and lots of times. Other groups do too, but clearly business gets more than other interest groups.

"In terms of Thomson's interest, no they don't tell us, because they own the Bay, to write stories saying Wal-mart's going to fall on its face."

But, Mackenzie pointed out, "We run 40 pages a day of business news," and generally favorable coverage. So it's likely, he said, that happy stories on most big companies will appear.

Slotnick: "It happens more often in smaller papers where you often have big advertisers who will exert influence. Or maybe more often, that papers will be reluctant to do anything that would offend big advertisers. That's certainly a form of corporate influence.

In fact, however, the pro-business philosophy actually drove Slotnick from his job (technically on leave) at a very large paper: "I covered labor and I got into a very bad disagreement over coverage of labor. I quit the *Globe* over that. They wanted to change the whole focus of the labor beat away from unions. In fact at one point, they wanted unions basically shut out of the paper. And I disagreed with that. I talked publicly about it. I wanted off the beat so they took me off the beat. And then they basically kind of froze me out of the place for a few months and then I left.

"At the time, what they wanted to do was to change the labor beat into what they called a workplace beat. The focus was supposed to be, as they put it to me, on good things happening in workplaces and how companies are adapting to free trade. It was supposed to be an upbeat, positive type of thing with no or little emphasis on conflict. It was pretty nuts from any point of view. It was ideology not news. I thought it was something no self-respecting reporter would do. And, in fact, nobody at the *Globe* even wanted to touch it, and they had to go outside to

hire someone for the beat. So they hired someone from outside, and she was a big flop, and they went back to the old labor beat. And they called it a labor beat again."

Salutin: Has he ever witnessed corporate bias? "Endlessly. The only people who are ever quoted, the point of view that's quoted, is a business point of view on economic questions.

"The current take on almost everything is that we can't afford it. In the sense that we can't afford the money. We can't afford schools. We can't afford health care. Can't afford social services. Can't afford daycare. That definitely is a business point of view. You could just as easily ask can we afford to have shitty schools, and sick people? Can we afford not to have decent daycare? It's always influential in the way questions are asked."

Dunnell: "Sure there are influences. You would be a fool or a liar to say otherwise. Every newspaper has sacred cows and everyone knows what they are... They're usually, not harmless, but good causes. For years the *Toronto Star* was hammering away at the homeless. You knew, if you were working on the assignment desk, and there was some meeting with a society dealing with the homeless, that you better cover it. And if you were laying out the page, you made sure it got good play. But that's benign.

"The real way that corporate influence impacts upon the news department is two ways. One, through the choice of the publisher. And the other is through finances. And they're related. The head office appoints a publisher in a corporate or chain situation, or even at an independent like the *Toronto Star*. He has to maintain a certain profit and he's told what that profit will be or he won't be there.

How he translates that has a tremendous impact on news coverage. It's not so much sins of commission as omission. That's the real corporate influence. It's not 'Let's keep Joe Blow's name out of the paper because he's an advertiser.' Real corporate influence is: 'We're going to cut staff. Or we're going to cut how much we spend.'"

Potter: "There's the obvious example: Gord Henderson's [*Windsor Star*] column critical of Chrysler executives receiving huge bonuses while the workers were not getting very much in terms of increases."

Potter said he suspects the column was pulled for the wrong reason: "I think because they sold ads to Chrysler, section-front ads. Pretty lucrative ads. And also the publisher himself is an executive and is probably more sensitive to that kind of criticism than someone else. But the thing is, there's a more overriding corporate influence than a publisher coming down and pulling a column. That's not very usual. It's more the way that the newspaper is budgeted and set up.

"We've lost 15 per cent of our workforce in the newsroom in the last year or so. And that's an economic decision made by the company. They would say the company remains more profitable. But the fact is it's a business decision and it affects the way news is covered and gathered.

"It means reporters can't take trips out of town often to cover stories. They might close a bureau. We have less news space to fill, because of cutbacks, therefore people have less to read. There's less information in the newspaper."

Potter said less time is spent investigating stories, digging into background, etc. "That's another factor. Less time is spent. They're doing more in less time."

Potter says news and staff shrinkage is a form of corporate influence that adversely affects what people read. Quality drops. Bigger headlines, bigger pictures, more flash, less substance, less criticism and analysis become the norm. And Potter thinks prominent stories criticizing corporations are rare.

"If you look at our business section... it's not critical at all. Business stories so often aren't held to the same standards of news gathering that normal stories are held to. With a business story, you interview the CEO, get his point of view, and that's it. You don't interview anyone who might have an adverse interest to what this person is doing, like the people who work for him, or the unions. The business section is pretty uncritical of business.

"News coverage in general is. We do stories that are critical of business but it's more when they fuck up on their own terms. When they are bad businessmen. But not other than that. A lot of those stories are impossible to avoid. The Reichman thing with Olympia and York. How could you avoid that? But do they get into how this affects everyone else? Not very much. How does a corporation like Olympia and York become a black hole of capital? How does that affect people, creditors, that kind of thing?

"We don't do any investigating at all of anything, basically."

What does it all mean?

Many journalists provided concrete snippets -- examples of corporate influence they have witnessed. Added up, even with those who saw none, a case blossoms. It certainly illustrates that something is afoot, at least sometimes, and that journalism may not always be as free as mythology holds.

The debate on corporate connections centres around the issue of news pages and their freedom from influence. Any influence, particularly systemic. That is, neither business nor government nor any other organization including unions should warp the news unfairly, that diversity of opinion thrives, and that the media tackle the biggest institutions without fear of reprisal or lost revenue -- on behalf of the public. That is the key: that the public is served first. All interviewees, including those from management, admit that not all groups are represented evenly in the media. Those with organized, media-savvy lobbies are the most successful. Not all agreed, however, that corporations influence the news, or even that the financial goals of media corporations affect how they gather news or what they print. Other journalists, however, see much influence. Either way, the topic drew interesting discussion.

How to make money and report the news fairly? That is the question. At least, part of the question. The more significant question in terms of this thesis and society is: how best to serve the public with a free press? The Davey Report dictum still seems wise, given the context of marketplace journalism:

The only reliable rule appears to be that good newspapers usually happen when (a) the operation is financially secure and (b) people who care more about journalism than about balance-sheets control the editorial product.²⁸

The preceding interviews show that many journalists are concerned about the media, and hold rather lofty goals in terms of its responsibility and success. But the range of opinion betrays how vague and controversial the topic remains, even among journalists. Though many admitted they saw (and lived through) corporate influence, and detested it, some saw it simply as a fact of life and nothing to be too concerned about. Some figured it common; others deemed it rare. At least one saw

virtually no corporate influence whatsoever. This makes change complicated and difficult -- which coincidentally serves the status quo.

Arguments appeared, views surfaced, and opinions enlightened. Conrad Black's point about publishers making their papers strong through their personalities, for example, is a fascinating one. Even he criticizes chain papers for often being bland, though he avoids linking the blandness to formula-driven profiteering. The journalists interviewed provided much to consider, such as Harvey Enchin on the perils of writing about media profits and Lindsay Crysler discussing the weight of executive personalities anchoring the press.

The definition of a free press confused a few journalists. The notion is subjective, obviously, and open to debate. But freedom refers to all influences, government, corporate, budgetary, philosophical, societal, practical. The importance of editorial freedom varied between journalists interviewed, though most labelled it essential. The theory seems difficult to achieve in practice, though that is hardly a surprise. Swimming against the current, against entrenched traditions (in any institution), is something only a few end up achieving. Other profound media issues also sparked concern among those interviewed. Responsibility is a characteristic that most felt was indispensable for the mass media. Some interviewees, however, figured responsibility need only come in somewhat limited doses. The theory of equal access to the media evidently is largely mythical, according to everyone interviewed (one participant refused to even answer the question, branding it plainly obvious and an insult). With perhaps one exception, all saw some sort of negative corporate influence, citing either specific examples they have witnessed at their own papers or generalities they consider

inherent in the system. Sometimes, respondents willingly provided both. And all provided insight.

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Notes for Chapter 4

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3. Newman, p. 68.
4. Otis Chandler, quoted in Michael Parenti, *Inventing Reality: The Politics of News Media*, 2nd ed., St Martin's Press, New York, 1993, p. 44.
5. Rupert Murdoch, quoted in Lee and Solomon, p. 96.
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8. Beland Honderich, cited in Kent Royal Commission, p. 114.
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13. As quoted by Squires, pp. 131-132.
14. Squires, p. 132.
15. Warren Breed, *The newspaperman, news and society*, Columbia University PhD thesis, 1952, p. 66.
16. Breed.
17. Breed, p. 66.
18. Breed, p. 165.

19. Michael J. O'Neil, *The Roar of the Crowd: How Television and People Power Are Changing the World*, Random House, Toronto, 1993, p. 79.
20. Otis Chandler, as interviewed by Goodwin, p28.
21. Robert H. Giles, as quoted by Goodwin, p. 31.
22. Conrad Black, in a speech to the Canadian Association of Journalists' annual convention Scrum '94, at the Chateau Laurier in Ottawa, April 9, 1994.
23. Black, CAJ speech.
24. Black, CAJ speech.
25. David Jolley, publisher of Toronto Star Newspapers Ltd., "Star publisher replies," the *Globe and Mail*, p. A28, Nov. 26, 1992.
26. Herbert I. Schiller, *Culture Inc.*, Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1989, p. 38.
27. In an unpublished paper for a 1993 graduate course in communication studies at the University of Windsor, Jacqueline Smrke says her content analysis indicates that casino coverage was overwhelmingly positive.
28. Special Senate Committee on Mass Media, 1970, Keith Davey chair, as quoted in Royal Commission on Newspapers, Tom Kent chair, Minister of Supply and Services Canada, Ottawa, 1981, p. 18.

CHAPTER 5

Future Shock: Thoughts on Improving the Media

Perhaps this thesis can be considered a modest, mental depth charge. Its intent is to look deep and hit hard, as journalism should; its purpose is to analyze one part of our information system in order to stimulate thought, and to offer suggestions to help the news media perform better on behalf of the public. It assumes that freedom of the press was enshrined as a right of the people, not as a lightly regulated industry. It accepts that journalism fuels democracy, for only an enlightened population can understand not just the subtleties of daily events, but of long-term social, political and economic trends. And it considers promoting greater equality among the citizenry an exemplary goal for the media.

In seeking this end, the thesis first examines an array of relevant literature, positive and negative. Opinions vary greatly, but democracy welcomes that. Or should. And it relies on discussions with journalists of all levels to round out the dialogue on democracy and editorial freedom. Finally, in this chapter, it offers recommendations and possible solutions to consider, as well as personal thoughts on the news media. Experience, literature and interviews with journalists form the basis of these final interpretations.

Ideals in Perspective

Interviews can be enlightening. They help put issues into perspective. In this case, they provide more than some specific examples of undue influence; they also illustrate that many journalists are concerned about it.

As *Windsor Star* reporter and guild president Gail Robertson said about the anti-Bill 40 advocacy ads, which she thinks represent a conflict of interest:

They were being very sensationalistic about the whole issue, that Bill 40 was going to cause the ruination of business in Ontario. And I think because it was coming from a newspaper association, it gave those statements more credibility. When people see this, they think that maybe this has more truth to it.

Windsor Star publisher Andre Prefontaine, however, provided an opposing view on newspapers running advocacy ads:

Why would they (newspapers) not be entitled to the same freedom that say labor unions have, government has, interest groups have? Are we excluded *de facto* from using advertising as a vehicle because we are newspapers?

On the question of the media supporting democracy, Charles Bury, editor of the *Sherbrooke Record* and chairman of the Canadian Association of Journalists, summed up the feeling best:

It is essential. There can't be democracy without a free press... The most important freedom is the freedom to know what's going on around you. Without knowing what's happening in your society, the other freedoms are not attainable.

On the importance of the media serving as watchdogs, *Globe and Mail* media columnist Rick Salutin said:

It's the same thing as this point about when powerful forces are in conflict. It's better for the public good than when they're in harmony... The range of expression in the press has always been somewhat limited. The more outlets there are, the more competing ownerships, then the more chance there is for at least some range of opinion, however limited overall. The more concentration there is, the less opportunity there is.

And on possible corporate influence, Hamilton *Spectator* labor reporter Lee Prokaska noted simply: "Business has a lot of money to influence how the newspaper operates editorially."

Through all the literature and interviews, one fact seemed obvious: journalism in practise falls short of the ideal. And though it sparked much debate, virtually all respondents said at least some corporate influence exists. A few felt it rather small, others felt it overwhelming. The influence cited during interviews ranged from shrinking budgets to superficiality. The media get mad, sometimes remarkably so, but how often do they vent anger at major structural inequalities?

As writer Adam Gopnik says:

The reporter used to gain status by dining with his subjects; now he gains status by dining on them. But because his aggression still has to thrive within the old institutions of the commercial press, whose whole point and historical achievement was the suppression of political thought in the interests of an ideal (or at least an appearance) of objectivity, the new culture has forced on the reporter a double life. The media now relish aggression while still being prevented, by their own self-enforced codes, from letting the aggression have any relation to serious political argument, let alone to grown-up ideas about conduct and morality. ¹

Using interviews and literature as a qualitative gauge, corporate influence appears to surface primarily through finances and accepted journalistic principles -- not through direct commands on specific articles. It is a subtle phenomenon, missed by some, denied altogether by others. Direct advertising influence seems rare, though both the literature and interviews turned up a few such occasions. Most journalists thought influence creeps through the economics of the business: how much is spent, how much staff is employed, and how much a media outlet dares risk lawsuits, offending advertisers and other monied interests, and complicating business goals. Management, for obvious economic reasons, some said, appears unwillingly to flex its muscle too far.

Both the literature and the interviews, depending on the opinion (which varied greatly), show that the media certainly offend people, and with some

regularity. But the media's legendary wrath more often grips sensational stories, personal crises, high-ranking personalities, and individual instances of street crime and accidents. As a general rule, the media avoid controversy in terms of business interests, which bear indirect but far-reaching effects. Regular comment and discussion on complicated, societal implications is too scarce. Earlier analyses indicate that the news media routinely use a fiscally conservative approach (yet economics hold the key to social justice among citizens).

For instance, in Ontario in the 1990s, as in much of Canada, talk of economics remains obsessed with deficit cutting. Shearing social programs comes across as inevitable, when other options -- including a temporary acceptance of the deficit, a return to higher corporate taxes, lower interest rates, job-creation initiatives such as tax incentives for creating work -- are awarded significantly less attention.

It is not as though promoting consumerism doesn't have a benefit: it helps stimulate the economy. When it is at the expense of more important matters, however, social issues for instance, then it serves the wealthy as opposed to the average person. That is counter-democratic.

Though the media are often portrayed as the fourth estate, separate from the ruling elite, the directors of the press indirectly comprise part of the system's ruling power. The media too seldom investigate corporations or business in general,² partly because -- unlike public institutions -- private business operations are not open to the public, partly because it requires much time and energy, and partly because the media are not in the business of making an uncomfortable

environment for the very system that awards them profit. The media, however, argue differently, according to Herbert Schiller.

Can the prevailing belief that private ownership is synonymous with and guarantor of a free press be taken for granted? Assuredly, the press will not question this proposition. It is their bedrock defence. It is also the hammer with which the media establishment pounds away at alternate press institutions in other countries, socialist or capitalist. According to the free-press catechism, it is private ownership and private financing -- advertising -- that provide the bases of freedom. Support coming out of state revenues -- ultimately derived from the population -- is regarded as tainted and potentially tyrannical.³

As author Todd Gitlin observes, "If journalists didn't at times bend their interests toward those of their sponsors, they would be the only professionals that didn't bend because of the preferences of the people who pay their bills."⁴ As a continuation of this model, according to Michael Parenti:

Many editors insist they are nobody's puppet. Infused with notions of professional integrity and personal autonomy, they will vehemently deny they are objects of corporate control. Indeed, editors are accorded a certain degree of independence -- if they demonstrate their ability to produce what their superiors want: copy that generally does not challenge the interests of those of wealth and power. Editors perform without daily interference from their superiors because such interference is not necessary. An editor who has to be reined in every day by the publisher will not last long as editor. But we must not mistake this kind of conditional autonomy for actual autonomy. There is no reason to believe that compliant editors could seriously oppose their publishers even if they wanted to. Since many news editors and broadcast producers share the world view of their superiors, they seldom experience any ideological dissonance. They are free because they are in perfect agreement with their bosses and therefore give no causes for being called to account.⁵

Editors, of course, occasionally disagree with their publishers and can win some arguments, as long as they occur relatively infrequently and do not challenge fundamental issues. And publishers must demand profit. There is no shame in that. That is their job, after all. The question is what becomes most important. A.

Roy Megarry, then publisher of the *Globe and Mail*, owned by Thomson, said in an infamous speech to a Canadian press group,

maybe we are fast approaching the time when the publishers of mass circulation newspapers will finally stop kidding themselves that they are in the newspaper business and admit they are primarily in the business of carrying advertising messages. ⁶

Some of the points stressed in this thesis illustrate the media tend to lean toward superficial coverage. Time and space say much about this, but so do attitudes. Light, entertaining journalism costs less, is appealing to marketers, and offends few. Therefore, in-depth analysis, context and explanation suffer somewhat as a byproduct.

Wonderful, in-depth stories appear in the media. Conscientious journalists, reporters and editors, see to it. Informative treatises on everything from alcoholism to child abuse help educate society. But the greater tendency steers away from structural critique, particularly given the nature of the public consciousness: to focus on what is repeated most often in our information-overloaded society. Topics like poverty, widening income gaps, urban decay, do not receive sustained high-profile coverage. Government deficits and development do, in contrast.

If mass media tend to see economic issues from a relatively similar perspective, then that hurts the public. CEOs of companies, and of the media, have a job to make as much profit as they can for their various corporations. That is to be expected. In an ideal world, a corporation's influence would not be reflected in the news. Yet the media's prevailing economic mind-set tends to keep debate on the issue rather narrow. That is dangerous, given the widening gap between the haves and have-nots around the world.

The increased income gap is largely a result of a complacent society. Yet it is hard to rally against such an unjust trend when the public is not really aware that it is happening. Though some relevant stories emerged, the media nevertheless did not help quite enough on that front. ⁷ But it is their duty. Author Michael Parenti cynically notes: "Not wishing to say anything that might embarrass the rich, media commentators seldom if ever pointed out that the [U.S] tax cuts failed to create a trickle-down prosperity for all, as promised by the administrators." ⁸

Questioning what we have now, looking toward a fairer, but unclear, future, requires more than 15 inches or three minutes. It takes in-depth analysis. The system in practice therefore deserves study. . . and change, for if a flawed societal system can be improved, it should be.

Change is a four-letter word to institutions. Change to corporations understandably means honing competitive edges, developing new products and increasing reliance on technology (improved efficiency aimed at increased profits), and on regularly evolving marketing strategies, not on making society better for as many people as possible. Nevertheless, some journalists interviewed indicated their interest in serving the public. So does this thesis.

Enough Analysis: How to Better Things?

Changing our information system to favor people and promote democracy is not a simple step, but a complicated tango, given the media's important contribution to shaping the current status quo. Systems naturally produce protective crusts, like glaciers. But even the vast expanse of glaciers can be

melted. So too can our social systems. Yet we must try to propose the fairest system. And that requires study. And creativity. And, above all, an open mind.

Ben Bagdikian suggests solutions to the problem, which stick to the basics of competitive capitalism -- but of true competition. "The threat does not lie in the commercial operation of the mass media. It is the best method there is and, with all its faults, is not inherently bad," he says in his concluding chapter of *The Media Monopoly*.⁹ "The answer is not elimination of private enterprise in the media, but the opposite. It is restoration of genuine competition and diversity."¹⁰

As with the Kent Commission, his solution would change the law, so that media monopolization is deterred and competition encouraged. When independent owners join the game, more voices are heard -- an important characteristic of democracy. Bagdikian says huge multinationals should no longer be allowed to dictate the rules by buying most smaller competitors (though in reality, it continues, as proves the CRTC's decision in late 1994 to permit the Rogers takeover of Maclean Hunter). Besides, single-media owners are more likely to take pride in something that belongs to their community. Far-away shareholders care less about the quality of their products than about the quantity of their profits, as is sardonically summed up in *Unreliable Sources*: "The world according to mass media is not supposed to make sense; it's supposed to make money."¹¹

Contrasting somewhat with Bagdikian's suggestions is academic radical Noam Chomsky. Though Chomsky doesn't outline with any great detail his suggested solutions, his distrust of a capitalist society appears to run too deep to allow that any thing of merit in the system is salvageable. He strongly advocates change in western society, warning its citizens to "undertake a course of

intellectual self-defense to protect themselves from manipulation and control, and to lay the basis for more meaningful democracy." ¹² But his overall implication is that our capitalist society should be disbanded in favor of a more egalitarian, social libertarian one. "A sociopolitical system with significant popular engagement remains a concern for the future: a hope or a fear, depending on one's evaluation of the right of the public to shape its own affairs." ¹³

He does, however, suggest a theoretical media model championed by some Brazilian Bishops, which seeks democratic communication, yet which would shock most businessmen. ¹⁴ In a telephone interview from his home in Lexington, Mass., Chomsky clarified his suggestions somewhat for a more representative press, though it appeared that even he was unsure of what exact steps to take.

The Brazilian bishops' initiative was an effort to introduce public involvement and management and control into the functioning of the information system which is naturally a large step toward democratization of the whole society. ¹⁵

Chomsky said that type of system requires "a lot of organization" and pointed to local and regional radio stations in the United States and Canada, as well as in Italy -- where a journal boosts its broadcast cousin -- as models for the future.

In communities that have that (community-based media), the public can become directly involved in helping shape the directions of inquiry and reporting and there's give and take between the popular groups and the media that give them opportunity to participate, to present their views, interact with others. ¹⁶

Explaining that community-based media would allow citizens to skirt the relatively narrow parameters of discussion set by the establishment, Chomsky feels such a system might even succeed in rallying people to help shape their own society. Community-based media,

would also offer the public a way to become directly involved. I mean, there's only one way to figure out what you believe and what you think and to gain understanding. And that's through interaction with others. You can't do it as a passive consumer. That way you're just being indoctrinated, and this would offer people a way to get beyond just passive consumerism or some form of indoctrination -- in fact, business indoctrination -- because that's what controls the media. ¹⁷

But Chomsky's reform model of the media approaches Bagdikian's more than one would expect. Chomsky doesn't dismiss advertising as a means of funding the media, though he stresses that the *influence* must be constrained.

They could have advertising or not have advertising if they choose, but if they're reliant on advertising for survival, they're in big trouble. And the reason is that if you rely on somebody for survival, they'll tell you what to do... So other sources of support have to be found. Of course, that's the *major* difficulty. ¹⁸

But then, nobody said creating a democratically controlled information system would be easy.

The democratic socialist view holds, says Robert C. Picard in *The Press and the Decline of Democracy*, that "press freedom no longer means merely the right to publish but also the public's right to have access to the press and to a full accounting of the events and opinions of society." ¹⁹ This view echoes what Chomsky advocates.

Though Picard believes in the democratic socialist approach to media management, he approximates Bagdikian's solution more than Chomsky's. He sees sudden and radical change as precarious. His point is well taken: "Even the slightest intervention made for the purpose of repairing the damage of economic competition will require additional intervention to compensate for further damage."

²⁰ In other words, any new system must also include checks and balances against its power structure, whatever that may be. The employers of a community-based

system theoretically should not be a threat, if they truly heed what the community advocates (though even here there's room for abuse). The inescapable trend of outsiders attempting to influence the media will always continue. Again, with the aim toward ideal democracy, any new information system must be designed to minimize distortion.

Picard notes that democratic socialist policies surface to varying degrees in Western Europe, systems he suggests North American media follow -- but only to a certain degree. An immediate societal about-face, he maintains, is not plausible. Nor does it fit.

I do not believe that the democratic socialist approach could be fully implemented in the United States. The European newspaper industries and political ideologies differ so greatly from those in the United States that it would be ludicrous to expect that European solutions and political forms would solve the problems of our press and meet with the approval of U.S. citizens. ²¹

Picard thinks that advocates of limiting ownership concentration, like Bagdikian, often unknowingly advocate a social democratic system themselves. And he says the numbers of those that do are growing. "There is great opportunity to promote the democratic socialist approach and to introduce its principles into public media policy in the United States." ²² Picard advocates the democratic socialist approach, which includes state subsidies, since he believes it opens avenues of expression.

Under such an approach, the state acts both to ensure the ability of citizens to use the press and to preserve and promote media plurality. Ultimately, ownership under such a system would be public and not-for-profit, through foundations, nonprofit corporations, journalist-operated cooperatives, and other collective organizations. ²³

Picard outlined his position in 1985, however, before the 1990s trend toward greater corporate concentration and control, and the move away from government influence. Promoting socialist systems seems almost futile now, though that is not a comment on whether they are appropriate. The phenomenon is now fewer, but bigger, transnational corporations demanding neo-conservative economic policies. The contemporary trend toward the global economy simply means that the power opposing egalitarianism is even stronger. Adversity, however, does not necessarily mean people should simply abandon loftier goals, say Clifford Christians, John Ferre and Mark Fackler:

Given the countless demands on the press of late and the urgency of the hour, propounding a new theory of news media ethics may appear naive and irrelevant. But rather than dismiss theory as the dead hand of scholarship, we are reminded that in the 1920s, when Walter Lippman was faced with a situation of moral scepticism and collapsing norms similar to today's, he responded with *A Preface to Morals* (1929)... It refused to deal with all the immediate questions that Lippman confronted in his daily journalism. *A Preface to Morals* sounded a rallying cry for broad explorations beneath the turbulent surface, becoming a best seller with six editions in its first year. ²⁴

Meanwhile, Robert Picard suggests that to ensure as many diverse media as possible, government should intervene by limiting concentration of ownership, ensuring that different groups express their views, and by implementing tax breaks to help the smaller media survive.

One European system worthy of study is the Swedish structure, if just for its rare approach, which recognizes the extreme importance and influence of the media. Sweden accepts that the press is essential to democracy. In the 1970s, three government agencies began: The National Council for Cultural Affairs (Statens Kulturrad); the Swedish Film Institute (Svenska Filminstitutet); and the

Press Subsidy Board (Presstodsnamnden).²⁵ The intent was to help media survive and to ensure diversity of opinion.

In most countries, as a matter of principle, government intervention in the press has been considered undesirable. So, too, in Sweden. In order to avoid the risk of government manipulation and to protect freedom of expression, the newspaper industry was left to its own devices...²⁶

This, according to Olof Hulten, who was involved in long-range planning at the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation. But in the '70s, closures became the norm, and fear for the survival of a diverse press skyrocketed. Selective support from the government was introduced, and increased in subsequent years. And the regulatory bodies began helping to ensure diversity in the media by pinpointing obvious shortcomings, though reporters were still free of direct influence.

Government assistance is motivated by a widely shared conviction that the government must play an active role in order to guarantee a certain modicum of diversity and multiplicity in the Swedish press... Thus, freedom of the press is conceived in relative terms. From the point of view of real freedom of expression the existence of a diverse and independent press is valued more than the ideal of letting market forces determine press structure, with newspaper closures and concentration of ownership the inevitable result.²⁷

Hulten says that while the framework is still flawed, the tricky system of hands-off government intervention is working, though at a substantial cost to the taxpayer. "Recent years have witnessed a lively debate on the volume and character of press subsidies. (But) they have put a stop to the epidemic of closures; indeed, they have even stimulated some new entries."²⁸

The More Media the Merrier

Even those who support the media-as-mega-money-maker system sometimes realize not only the benefit for readers of having more media but of the restrictive effect national advertising imposes on smaller, less affluent media.

Media investors, however, see the real problem as infringing on their chances of making money, not on diluting democracy. "We're not sure any city can support two profitable newspapers indefinitely," analyst Bruce Thorp, of Lynch, Jones and Ryan in Washington, D.C. says in an article entitled "Where Newspapers Compete."²⁹

Or as E.F. Hutton Co. notes in an essay for newspaper investors: "We think it clear that advertisers will be unwilling to pay twice for access they believe they can get more economically and efficiently from one newspaper."³⁰ As Ben Bagdikian notes, this was proven in Washington and elsewhere.³¹

As soon as one paper's circulation begins to dominate, "advertisers tend to withdraw their support from the weaker paper, and it begins a downward spiral," said Elise Burroughs in a 1981 article titled *Modern Marketing Makes Its Mark*, in *Presstime*.³²

Providing for true competition doesn't only follow the ideals of capitalism and democracy. It creates better products. The real loser when papers or other media fold are the citizens of that city, including those who read the competition. Papers without competition easily grow complacent. As Philip Meyer says in *The Newspaper Survival Book*, a second newspaper

keeps the staff of the first paper honest and alert. It provides a second chance for interest groups and points of view that get shut out in the first paper. It serves an oversight function with its vested interest in pointing out events and circumstances that the first paper overlooked. And, without question, newspapering is more fun when there is competition.³³

As *Time* magazine noted about the early 1980s circulation war between the *Dallas Morning News* and the *Dallas Times Herald*:

Locked in a struggle to become the best in the booming Southwest, both papers are rapidly piling up prizes as well as profits. At the same time they are proving, as the *Times Herald* put it in a nationwide help-wanted campaign, that there's more to Dallas than the Cowboys and Who Shot J.R. . . . Clearly in a competition like the one between the *Morning News* and the *Times Herald*, the real winner is the reader.³⁴

Daily newspaper competition, however, is going the way of the dodo. The Canadian government was so concerned about the trend of competing newspapers closing that it appointed a Royal Commission headed by Thomas Kent in 1980 to study the problem. It offered many suggestions to curb the trend and to encourage greater diversity of opinion in the media, as did the Davey Commission in 1970. Yet their advice died with their reports. Certainly, daily newspapers offered few words of encouragement for it. In fact, they attacked it.

The Road to Democracy

The opening line of the 296-page Kent Commission report summed up the commission's sentiments: "This Commission was born out of shock and trauma."³⁵ It referred to a string of newspaper closings, including the *Montreal Star*. The *Star*, established in the 1860s, was far and away English Montreal's most popular paper when it suffered a "crippling" eight-month strike in 1979. It never recovered. But was the strike solely to blame, or was its demise part of the owners' master plan? Academics, critics, citizens wondered aloud. But they were perhaps even more startled with the closing of the *Winnipeg Tribune* (90 years old) and the *Ottawa Journal* (95 years old) -- two respected papers -- on the same day, Aug. 27, 1980. The move handed the Thomson and Southam newspaper chains one more monopoly each, in their respective cities. Six days later, the commission was

founded. Charges were subsequently laid under the Combines Investigation Act, though they did not lead to any convictions.

The Kent Commission nevertheless predicted that "the years ahead will see more" of the same, and referred to the '70s as a fateful decade. It recommended that laws be created to prevent too much concentration of ownership among the media, to provide a tax credit and other incentives for independent owners, and to establish an independent national press panel to monitor the press, very much in line with the Swedish set-up. But the government never followed up. The Kent Commission was not the first government advisory group Ottawa ignored. The Senate Committee headed by Keith Davey in 1970 proposed similar ideas (as did the O'Leary Commission on Publications in 1961), though to a substantially lesser degree. These commissions felt freedom of the press was not meant as a formula for unchecked control of our news flow. In the eloquent words of the O'Leary Commission:

There is need to remember that freedom of the press is not an end in itself, but only a function of general intellectual freedom; to remember that no right includes a privilege to injure society granting it; to understand that a great constitutional doctrine cannot be reduced to a mere business convenience. ³⁶

In a mass of literature with surprisingly few concrete suggestions and few step-by-step procedures for molding a more representative media, the Kent Commission report remains one of the best examples of specific suggestions to remedy the bias of today's information system (though shortcomings emerge here, as well). "The structure of the newspaper industry that has now been created, that existing law and public policy have permitted, is clearly and directly contrary to the public interest." ³⁷

Though the remedies contained in the Kent Commission report, both by the Commission itself and intervenors, would go far in helping to create a plurality of ideas and a more responsible press, it must be noted that mere competition itself doesn't necessarily resolve the problem of corporate influence within our existing corporate structure. Two corporate, advertising-supported newspapers may not be a substantial improvement over one. Nor do the Kent recommendations deal with the practicality of implementing their suggestions, given the realities of our political and economic structure. After all, the recommendations did not even make it to the legislature. So some critics contend that even the following proposals may not be adequate because they do not address broader social problems. Critics such as Noam Chomsky think a societal overhaul may be necessary, though proposing such options is beyond the scope of this thesis. That said, increasing competition and enforcing greater editorial independence, combined with alternate sources of funding, might create greater diversity of opinion.

The Kent Commission's suggestions to the industry:

1. Journalists should be trained better, and should seek qualifications, including degrees, beyond bachelor of journalism degrees.

A journalist's job demands much. As Robert Entman warns in *Democracy Without Citizens*: "For their part, journalists must endure the manipulative efforts of their sources while coping with conflicting pressures to generate accountability, remain objective, and contribute to the bottom line of their employers." ³⁸ A complex role almost necessarily requires complex training and study.

(As an aside, heightened competition for jobs in our increasingly specialized society seems to be forcing people to pursue their educations further. As little as 30 years ago, average reporters started their careers as copy clerks, and worked their way up, without worry of earning a university education. Within the last two decades, it has become almost impossible for a young person to start in the business without a degree of some sort. And since competition for journalism jobs has grown more intense still, and with the prolonged recession and technology eating jobs with a voracious appetite, many would-be journalists are pursuing master's degrees rather than face unemployment after collecting undergraduate diplomas. It would seem their reasoning is pragmatic rather than philosophical -- namely to exchange their diploma for a job, as opposed to learning for learning's sake -- but if the end result serves to improve journalists of the future, then the craft will benefit and the trend is welcome just the same.)

2. More educational travel exchanges, fellowships, and learning programs should be implemented, and independent study encouraged. For example: the prestigious Atkinson or Sinclair foundations in Canada, the Nieman foundation in the United States, and the Gemini foundation in Britain exemplify this ideal well -- allowing journalists to study abroad -- but must be expanded.

3. Regional press councils should be created to discuss and promote ethical issues, and should be given true clout. "There is today, even more than in 1970, a 'communication vacuum' between people and press, a vacuum that lively and dedicated press councils could do much to fill." ³⁹

The Davey report suggested forming a national press council in 1970, but the Kent Commission felt the needs of citizens across Canada vary too greatly to

be monitored by one cross-country body, and that the press councils should be able and willing to respond to regional needs. The danger here, however, is that press councils can become rather toothless self-regulation, as opposed to active participants in systemic press improvement.

4. In-house training programs are also worthy.

Papers today sometimes offer in-house workshops, though they tend to be superficial one-day affairs, and often concentrate solely on better writing -- which is a commendable effort, but does little to make the press more representative or responsible.

5. Creating ombudsmen is important. The *Washington Post*, for example, inducted someone from a rival newspaper as its ombudsman. But ombudsmen can only help if the media are committed to listen -- and learn -- from what the public says.

Worthy of consideration are recommendations made to the Kent Commission regarding government:

- 1. Competition should be encouraged by strengthening anti-combines legislation, so as to prevent further concentration in the future.**
- 2. Existing chains should be broken up, so that we revert eventually to one newspaper (or one medium), one owner.**
- 3. Cross-media ownership should be disallowed.**
- 4. Subsidize newspapers that would otherwise fold and create tax incentives so that new media have a better chance of beginning in a game played only by giants.**
- 5. Create a publicly owned newspaper chain (the Kent Commission, however, discarded the notion of a "print CBC").**
- 6. Create a regulatory agency.**

7. Require printing plants to print on contract for a variety of newspaper publishers, so that expenses can be limited in what is the most costly part of newspaper production: printing.

And, of course, enshrine these suggestions into law, and *enforce* them. "We propose a Canada Newspaper Act designed to secure for the press of Canada the freedom that is essential to a democratic society from coast to coast." ⁴⁰ Other ideas include: providing tax incentives for new media and strongly suggesting that they devote more of their revenues to providing information, protecting journalists from corporate influence, provide matching grants for establishing news services in Canada and for Canadians around the world. ⁴¹ In fact, putting those suggestions into law might be better than simply strongly suggesting it, though that raises serious questions of infringement on autonomy.

Create outlets and you create diversity, or so the theory goes. Of course, Chomsky would not be convinced. Virtually all mainstream media today are extremely similar, he maintains, so simply creating additional outlets is not enough. That is why chain ownership must be significantly curtailed altogether, he says, to help reduce a formulaic approach to the product. The *Kingston Whig-Standard* was for years considered -- relative to other Canadian papers -- a quirky publication, with its devotion to long articles and expensive investigative pieces. But when Southam bought it, its stand-out style changed somewhat, according to journalists at the 1994 Canadian Association of Journalists convention, as Southam slowly implemented a successful corporate formula.

Though perhaps an extreme, Klaus Pohle's 1984 study of the *Lethbridge Herald* provides a telling example of how the quality of an independent can fall if

a chain disregards quality while implementing a financial and philosophical formula. Thomson Newspapers acquired the paper in 1980, as part of the takeover of FP Publications, when, Pohle writes, the *Herald* "enjoyed a good reputation in the industry for its commitment to quality journalism, spent a great deal of money in pursuit of what it deemed excellence, and was held in high regard by most of its staff and readership." ⁴² Its circulation was only 25,000, rising at about four per cent a year, but it boasted an editorial budget of \$1 million and a staff of 40 (including a full-time investigative reporter and the first full-time consumer affairs reporter in Alberta). The "Thomsonization" soon began, however, by significantly cutting budgets and initiating layoffs, reducing staff from 175 to 119 (from 40 to 28 in the newsroom). ⁴³

At the same time, there was significant change in news content. Whereas previously, there had been an attempt to go beyond the basic reporting of local events and provide in-depth coverage of local issues, there was now a much greater emphasis on things such as garden parties, church bazaars, recipes and beauty tips. ⁴⁴

Although follow-up surveys indicated less reader satisfaction, the circulation did not drop dramatically, since it was the only paper in town. ⁴⁵

The Crusading Pen

Besides ownership, much can be done with journalistic attitudes. By the nature of the business, individual journalists must consider many ethical factors. Canadian academic Nick Russell says they include: fairness, citizen's privacy, naming names and revealing sources, boundaries on sex and violence, the use of offensive language, chequebook journalism, freebies, conflicts of interest with their private lives, pack and celebrity journalism, and what is relevant information for the citizenry. ⁴⁶ He says:

People are born moral. This is not to say that people necessarily behave well, but simply that they -- we -- have the ability to judge. We are not amoral, though we can choose to be immoral. We can judge our behaviour. We can judge our own judgement. Journalists have to use that judgement constantly. Their working lives are filled with decisions. Their behaviour constantly involves decision-making -- which stories to cover, whom to interview, which questions to ask, what to lead with, whether the story is fair, where a story is placed in the paper, how big to make the headlines, what TV footage to use. And those decisions constantly impact on the lives of others. ⁴⁷

The numerous daily decisions confronting journalists deserve consideration, for they impact on the news. As well, individual journalists -- as the interviews for this thesis show -- often consider that they have moral obligations themselves, which makes sense. The Janet Cooke scandal (in which the 1981 Pulitzer Prize for journalism was returned for the first time because it was revealed that Cooke's winning *Washington Post* story on an eight-year-old heroin addict was a fabrication) is probably the most-publicized such invention. It is by no means the only unethical move ever committed by a journalist. The question of individual media ethics has been around a while. Sometimes ethics are adhered to, occasionally they are not. A variety of media ethics books, available through most libraries, provide a sound starting point for anyone interested in refreshing their commitment to the craft, and hence to the citizenry. ⁴⁸

Yet this thesis looks further than what individual journalists can do. As it says at the outset, it scrutinizes systemic problems, and considers structural solutions. That complicates matters.

the individual journalist may be motivated by the most admirable personal principles, while working for a vast, multinational corporation driven by profit. They are not ideal bed partners. Are media owners the greedy profiteers they are sometimes made out to be? It is risky to generalize, but human nature suggests some may be, while others are more benevolent and a few positively altruistic. ⁴⁹

As discussed, financial constraints impose certain restrictions on the news. How could they not? Large media chains tend to dictate pre-defined set-ups to their news outlets, through budget cuts and restructurings, that by nature lean away from in-depth, investigative journalism. This practice does not indicate a conspiracy, only smart business. Yet it still restricts our news. Plus, this phenomenon is increasingly familiar in the 1990s, when many firms answer a drop in revenues with a drop in budgets, so that shareholders and owners can maintain their investment. Project Censored Canada, started in 1993 as a partnership between the Canadian Association of Journalists and Simon Fraser University's School of Communication, identified what it sees as Canada's top 20 under-reported stories for 1993. It likewise outlines the top 10 reasons, also labelled under-reported, it feels this subtle form of censorship exists. Most have been discussed in this thesis: ⁵⁰

1. Shrinking newsroom budgets.
2. Concentrated ownership and journalistic self-censorship.
3. Influence of advertisers.
4. Infotainment.
5. Reliance on official and institutional sources.
6. Threats of legal action.
7. Pack journalism.
8. The culture of journalists.
9. Technology (for example, TV networks tend to run less news from countries without sufficient technical facilities or satellite uplinks).
10. Conventional definitions of news.

One of the most significant factors must surely be the lack of resources for necessary but expensive and time-consuming investigative reporting. During the 1990s recession, newspaper companies attempted to maintain or to regain their traditionally high profit levels by slashing newsroom staffs, placing an even greater pressure on reporters to reprint news releases and act as "stenographers with amnesia." In contrast with some of the old family-owned independent newspapers, multi-media conglomerates are more likely to regard the media they own as cash cows to be milked for their profit potential. News departments are not regarded as directly revenue-producing, and owners have little incentive -- especially when they enjoy a local monopoly -- to spend money on journalism beyond the minimum needed to attract audiences and advertisers.⁵¹

With that in mind, news media might do well to remember the analytical approach to journalism, before largely abandoning it. The "McNews" strategy, favored by an increasing number of papers such as *USA Today* and the *London Free Press*, counters the principle of profound information. Little can be put into context, explained, analyzed. Besides, the short-and-flashy mentality serves a marketing function, not a journalistic one. Media might also contemplate reducing the number of cute "feel-good" stories while increasing the lengths of important reports. Journalists, too, should remember their inherent but forgotten responsibility to *explain*. Say Lee and Solomon:

Piled-up facts do not ensure insight: a key omission can make an entire story misleading. A phone book, or a list of yesterday's stock market closings, or a newspaper's front page might contain lots of factual information -- but perhaps no significant truth.⁵²

Reporters, editors and publishers might benefit from being a little more daring and critical when warranted. That is easier said than done, but worth the effort in the long run. Ideally, journalists should not be afraid to try something different, or attack what their peers do not. *Los Angeles Times* journalist David Shaw said as a result of influence from news agencies, such as wire services and

Ted Turner's Cable News Network, and from huge and powerful media such as the *New York Times*, that,

the tendency to conformity can be all but irresistible... There are far fewer *enfants terribles* than *enfants timids* in the contemporary press corps," who are working in a cleverly crafted environment that has become "both more corporate and more conformist."⁵³

Any new media system, based on small-time capitalism or in the community, would still face practical limitations. Yet they would likely best serve the public if they were courageous enough to discard the shield of mere-facts objectivity on critical issues requiring explanation, and take up the lance, revive the old role of crusading journalism. With that power comes serious responsibility, of course, which cannot be forgotten. That makes things trickier, for the media must not abuse power by attacking needlessly. In order to fulfil its stated role as the fourth estate, however, the media might more often consider the little guy, even if it is not the sexiest story in town. As hard as it may be, ideal media dig deep and long for the real facts, decipher and define, criticize society when need be, serve as a watchdog not just on government but on big business and the elite, present the unmanipulated truth and encourage open and diverse discussion. Peter Desbarats, dean of the graduate school of journalism at the University of Western Ontario, advocates this.⁵⁴

Desbarats thinks codes of ethics can help, such as that of the Canadian Daily Newspaper Publishers Association which in 1977 offered such simple but important advice as: "Each case should be judged in the light of common sense and humanity."⁵⁵ Fairness and balance should replace "objectivity" as the operative word in North American journalism. But codes of ethics must be put into practice, not on a dusty shelf. After all, if rules of conduct are not enforced, they

form hollow words. The anti-Bill 40 newspaper ads, after all, showed that codes of conduct may be violated. The Kent Commission writes: "That this [CDNA] principle is ignored more often than observed does not affect its validity." ⁵⁶

Desbarats holds that individual journalists have banished some of the flagrant corruption that once went hand in hand with the profession. In the old days of journalism and ethics (when governments, businesses, sports teams, etc., were known to pass along the odd envelope to favored reporters) "Deception was fine if it worked, and if you didn't get caught," he says in his *Guide to Canadian News Media*. ⁵⁷ In the '50s at the *Montreal Gazette*, where Desbarats then worked, an editor explained to him that "it was permissible to accept anything that one could eat or drink, but that cash payments should be avoided. This was considered to be unusually high-minded at the time." ⁵⁸

"Although North American journalism has become, on average, more accurate, responsible, and responsive, it seems to many observers that progress has lagged behind the requirements of contemporary society." ⁵⁹ This is an important point, if slightly misleading. What Desbarats fails to clarify, is that while journalists have generally become more aware of such ethical predicaments as accepting bribes, some have missed the greater malaise of potential corporate and systemic bias. Though many journalists strive to remain ethical, they are often still blindfolded when it comes to seeing the deeper dilemmas of the system, since they are rarely told explicitly what to write. Then again, reporters need not read a memo to know that they musn't criticize their employer, or chain ownership, or to understand that profiles on local people and businesses should by and large be complimentary. Chomsky says the margins of discussion are set: "Reporters can

write what they like. But if anything escapes the parameters set out by ownership and advertisers, it will be weeded out and the people will either be forced to shape up or to leave." ⁶⁰ Journalists, that means, are just as indoctrinated by the system as anybody. Some say more so. ⁶¹ Hence, you get reporters who honestly do not see the major failings of the media and therefore do not think to even try writing about it -- not that such a piece would likely see the light of publication. Besides, criticizing from within opens one up for peer criticism.

To achieve the goal of improving social systems, according to Robert Miraldi in *Muckraking and Objectivity*, journalists need to be more than just "neutral technicians."

And why not? What is there in the definition of journalism that says a reporter cannot -- no, should not -- sort out the facts and not only say what they mean but what should be done about them? This is called, and condemned as, advocacy. One is not supposed to step over the boundary, even if the facts lead in that direction. ⁶²

Miraldi, a veteran reporter, ends his book with a question he says we must continually ask ourselves: "What function do journalists have in democracy and whose interests are they seeking to serve?" ⁶³ If it is not people, then something is seriously awry.

Ed Asner, who starred as a tough, old-school newsman at the mythical *Los Angeles Tribune* on the TV series *Lou Grant*, knows a few journalists who follow a credo of writing the truth even if it offends the powers that be. Yet he writes in a foreword to *Unreliable Sources: A Guide to Detecting Bias In News Media* that he worries for the future of their ranks.

For five years on television, I played Lou Grant, a crusty city editor for the mythical *Los Angeles Tribune*. He was a tough journalist -- from the old school. For him, the only job was informing the public

through the *Trib's* stories, even if those stories -- the truth -- offended the rich and powerful... But I'm worried. I fear the Lou Grants of this world are a dying breed, a species failing to adapt to a rapidly changing environment. I don't want the Lou Grants to become the dinosaurs of American journalism. ⁶⁴

"Journalism is nothing if it is not personal. The greatest newspapers of history have been the personal creations of great editors," claims Peter Desbarats.

⁶⁵ This would remain especially true with editors at independent papers, where publishers are perhaps more likely to have pride in the paper and are much less likely to be influenced by the rather rigid business model sought by chain ownership. Bagdikian agrees, calling for the return of supposedly dedicated, undaunted journalists such as Scripps, Hearst, and Pulitzer (even though they merit pertinent criticism themselves).

"Reporters must become comfortable with introducing their own 'voice' more often in writing the news... Journalists should learn to use 'passive voice' descriptions to explain what they, as expert witnesses, have come to know about the workings of a situation," says Lance Bennett in *The Politics of Illusion*. ⁶⁶

Winnipeg Free Press columnist Frances Russell summed up the attitude with a valid suggestion: "let's pretend we're on assignment in Lebanon or Poland or China." ⁶⁷ Terms such as 'propaganda,' 'elite,' and 'class difference' are allowed when we speak about foreign countries. Why not here?

Don't Take It Lying Down

Citizens have a role too. Despite the suggestions for government, the media, and journalists themselves, change won't happen unless citizens demand it. "The media are unlikely to take up the challenge of a sweeping reform program," advises Bennett. ⁶⁸ Therefore, people should start with Chomsky's advice and "undertake

a course of intellectual self-defence." ⁶⁹ As Bennett says: "An important part of the general college curriculum should include instruction in 'reading between the lines' in the mass media and evaluating the daily information flow more critically." ⁷⁰ If the population realizes that distortions can occur in the media, and mobilizes itself for a better future, our present system might change. But what can average citizens do? They can call for change, or yell for it, if they wish. Public pressure helps.

"We face a formidable task of reinvigorating the First Amendment and promoting glasnost in this country," say Martin Lee and Norman Solomon ⁷¹. And they are right.

Perhaps we should more often promote alternative media, which offer much that the mainstream overlooks. Pop-culture commentator Douglas Rushkoff says,

By working outside the system, many media activists believe they can stay truer to their ideals. Underground artists and writers can utilize mainstream cultural icons like Bart Simpson, the President, or Amy Fisher much more purposefully and pointedly than can their overground counterparts because they are not encumbered by the pressures of a corporate environment or mass-media censorship. ⁷²

Alternative media are more plentiful than many realize, particularly magazines. ⁷³ Some small local radio stations, such as university-based ones, offer an alternative. So too do theatre, and film and art and flyers, etc. Read them. Watch them. Use them. Alternative media offer additional voices. Though citizens would do well to explore varying outlets for freedom of expression, relying on only alternative media is insufficient. After all, they are engulfed by major, daily media, in terms of budgets and time and accessibility. So we should also think carefully when our newspaper or television tells us something.

Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) founder Jeff Cohen, provides some common-sense but indispensable advice for average citizens: "The first thing to do is snap out of the mode of passive consumer. When you watch TV or read a newspaper, be alert and sceptical. In other words, don't take the media lying down. Be conscious of who the sponsors and advertisers are." ⁷⁴ The business community buys the majority of ads, not unions, or minority groups, or anybody representing the average person. Cohen says the media listen if complaints are loud and sustained enough because media owners want the listeners, or readers or viewers. And he suggests that we support the rank-and-file journalists who swim against the current in standing up for Jane and Joe Average. Write letters supporting, or criticizing, specific stories.

The press is "not aggressive enough, particularly when it (comes) to covering wealthy, conservative elites," ⁷⁵ and only with a craving for better journalism can we expect to get it. "Informed, non-hysterical letters can matter," Cohen continues, as can calling media outlets and asking why more women or ethnic minorities are not used, and why corporate and government sources are used far more than average citizens. Groups could also be set up to monitor and lobby the media. Cohen says we must demand that media quote people more than corporations. If corporations start complaining, Cohen predicts, and refuse to co-operate in the future, leave an empty chair on the TV set, or mention that they refused comment in the story. They will likely return to debate in future media reports. But presenting the public's point of view remains the root of democracy.

Media-improving Surgery

The media are in line for some democracy-promoting surgery. Media critics have pointed out distortions, with their well-documented examples and lucid explanations of the media game, or the manufacture of consent (to borrow Walter Lippmann's term from the 1920s). But what kind of operation must be performed? A fair, pluralistic media system is what we should ultimately strive for, since it would probably lead to a more democratic society. But wholesale change appears unrealistic, given the current state of affairs. News media must be independent. Laws prohibiting concentration of ownership would remove some corporate influence, though many individual owners might still feed their sacred cows with complimentary coverage and undue attention. But the capitalist system is closest to the democratic ideal when independent media thrive.

Change must start somewhere. Any revolution begins with that first cry of dissent. Martial law was lifted in Poland because of public pressure. Then the government begrudgingly agreed to legalize the Solidarity Party which, in turn, led to democratic elections in that country. Though we would not want violence, why should we avoid similar revamping? It would be a shame if nothing changed at home because radical solutions -- when they are the most just -- seem nonviable to the ruling minority.

A socially minded democratic society represents what ideal democracy is supposed to promote: more equality, a fairer distribution of wealth, effective social programs, greater public influence of key industries like banks, and above all, greater democratic input from the population. Media reform would do its part in achieving that end. The more open the media become, the more voices will be

heard. And the more change is apt to proceed. Bagdikian's legislated solution is a good starting point, as long as we don't forget exactly that: it is a place to begin, not end. Bagdikian illustrated time and again throughout *The Media Monopoly* the influence chain ownership has. Of course, some argue that idea is but a dream. The media would be quick and hostile in claiming unfair treatment, since other businesses are free to grow as they please. The ideal, then, might be to limit concentration in every sector (which coincidentally would create more jobs).

In considering new anti-merger legislation, the soundest approach for Congress must be one that covers all industry, rather than one that singles out the mass communications business for special standards. The revision of the anti-trust laws, proposed by Senator Kennedy in 1979, although subject to criticism on its basic premise of bigness being bad, at least would treat the media business the same as any other, ⁷⁶

says author Benjamin Compaine.

It can also be fairly argued that the plan of limiting concentration of ownership in the media, an idea still considered avant garde, is just as idealistic in Canada and the United States as Chomsky's view of social democracy. To no avail, several special government committees have proposed government intervention on both sides of the border. The Kent Commission and Davey Committee proposals were never adopted into policy. Nevertheless, obstacles are poor excuses for quitting. So far, only special committees and a relatively few individuals have demanded that some control of the media be shifted from a few and handed back to many. If people adamantly demand something as a group, as evidenced in Eastern Europe, government accommodation is possible. Chomsky remains optimistic in terms of disbanding centralized power:

There are a lot of opportunities to organize and to build alternative centres of power and break down the ones that exist. They're not

graven in stone. History didn't come to an end. There have always been throughout human history, illegitimate centres of power, illegitimate forms of authority. It has always been possible to struggle against them and overcome them. But it doesn't happen by itself, people have to do it. ⁷⁷

A well motivated people have the power to change their world. Step by step, barrier by barrier, influence by influence, justice within the media is attainable. But the elite are not always in it for the people. Sometimes, they are in it for the power, or are perhaps placated by it. So the chore of starting change is up to the mavericks in society, which is where media reformers, among others, come in.

Conclusion

Why the pressure on the media to act responsibly? Because of their might, prestige and special democratic function in society. Canadians spend considerable time reading their daily papers: an average of 44 minutes a day (and even more watching TV). ⁷⁸ The influence is substantial, as Martin Lee and Norman Solomon point out:

The power of the media to shape public opinion can be fantastic, despite what journalists often claim. For instance, when pollsters asked Americans what they thought was the most important problem facing the country in September 1989, barely more than 20 per cent said drugs. Then after the media conducted a dedicated build up to U.S. President George Bush's war on drugs, and only two months into the campaign, well over 60 per cent of Americans figured drugs was the country's main ill. ⁷⁹

According to the Maclean's/CTV annual poll, published in January 1994, the proportion of Canadians identifying government spending or the deficit as the most important problem we face doubled from 11 per cent in 1992 to 22 per cent one year later -- after the media began covering the issue regularly.

Media campaigns don't preclude any other coverage, as one-time stories in any daily newspaper show. But common media themes help set social agendas.

As Harold Laski writes in *The American Democracy*:

The real power of the press comes from its continuous repetition of an attitude reflected in facts which its readers have no chance to check, or by its ability to surround those facts by an environment of suggestion which, often half-unconsciously, seeps its way into the mind of the reader and forms his premises. ⁸⁰

Democracy is reason enough to want the media to serve citizens by being as hard-hitting, investigative, profound, and wary of the establishment as popular myth holds. The power of the press demands that it act responsibly, if it is to fulfil its role in a democratic society.

In weighing the academic and popular literature -- from philosophers, academics, journalists, editors, publishers, advertising texts, governments -- and personal interviews, something appears awry with the news media. Granted, some leeway exists in portraying social issues, from women's rights to teenage runaways. But those topics still don't enjoy the media play that governments and business do. Fleeting stories and statistics on social inequalities appear, and disappear, like a magician's assistant. But they hardly consume the front pages, and certainly not with the regularity of economic issues.

The margins of debate within the media are most narrow on economic issues. Unfortunately, economics dictate much else. Economics define our system. It's well and good to occasionally highlight the danger of AIDS and the lack of adequate funding; or the plight of the homeless, and their need for shelter; or the barriers women face in upper management; or the most flagrant cases of cultural racism. But all such sporadic achievements of the fourth estate are rendered

pointless when the debate revolves again and again around economics -- and the media virtually unanimously endorse the conservative fiscal approach. What's the point of calling for better education or improved social conditions on one hand, and then repeatedly calling for more social cuts, less government, and more tax breaks and freedom to corporations on the other? The two are incompatible. Thus, the current system survives.

If the media system becomes more democratic, and better informs its citizenry, the major divisions which characterize our society stand a better chance of being corrected. And only when the media more earnestly join the fight to demand equality -- and the necessary changes in the status quo, including economics above all -- is it likely to succeed. Our media can help. And our journalists often seem willing to assist. The question centres on what the current structure promotes.

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Notes for Chapter 5

1. Adam Gopnik, "Read All About It," *The New Yorker*, Dec. 12, 1994, p. 86.

2. The trend is not absolute, of course. Examples of seriously attacking corporations exist, as the *Windsor Star* showed in early January 1995. A series of front-page articles criticizing seemingly disproportionate rate hikes by Trillium Cable, a local monopoly, helped encourage the company (along with public anger) to reduce the planned increase.

3. Herbert I. Schiller, *Culture Inc.*, Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1989, pp. 166-167.

4. Todd Gitlin, in Ronald K.L. Collins, *Dictating Content: How Advertising Pressure Can Corrupt A Free Press*, The Center for the Study of Commercialism, Washington, D.C., 1992, pp. ix-x.

5. Parenti, p. 38.

6. As quoted by Squires, p. 135.

7. For a rare media analysis of the problem of growing income gaps, see Madelaine Drohan, "Income inequality is widening in Britain, The U.S. and, to a lesser extent, Canada," *The Globe and Mail*, Dec. 17, 1994, p. D2.

Drohan discusses how "hefty pay increases are causing 'real offence'" in Britain, describing the trend for corporations to pay their highest executives exorbitant sums while finding ways to reduce jobs and keep average employee raises to a minimum. She highlights one case which did attract a media campaign. British Gas chief executive Cedric Brown's salary jumped 75 per cent to L475,000 (\$1 million Cdn.), which an enraged public blasted. It perhaps hints at how the public might react if it was made more aware of the greater trend, instead of simply Brown's salary.

"It does not matter that his increase looks positively modest compared with the 303-per-cent raise given the chief executive at Scottish Power PLC, the 619-per-cent pay hike awarded the chairman of North West Water Group or the truly stratospheric 3,717-per-cent given Peter Wood, the head of Direct Line Insurance (which brought his earnings last year to a cool L18.5-million -- \$40 million Cdn.)," Drohan writes.

8. Parenti, p. 83.

If the American Congress had not changed a letter of its tax laws since 1970, nine out of 10 Americans would be paying less tax today. Yet the U.S. government would be annually collecting almost \$70 billion more. Corporations and the wealthiest 10 per cent of the population have enjoyed tremendous tax cuts. (*The Decline in Progressivity and the decline in Revenue*," Citizens for Tax Justice, Feb. 23, 1990.) Interestingly, the public seems somehow aware of this. According to the Gallup Poll, 85 per cent of Americans felt tax laws were fair in the early post-war years (when they were progressive). In 1984, Gallup reported that 80 per cent believed the contrary. (William Greider, *Who Will Tell the People: The Betrayal of American Democracy*, Simon and Schuster, Toronto, 1992, p. 85)

9. Bagdikian, p. 223.

10. Bagdikian, P. 224.

11. Lee and Solomon, p. 333.

12. Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions*, in the preface.

13. Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions*, p. 21.

14. Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions*, p. 21.

15. Noam Chomsky, personal telephone interview, Oct. 27, 1990

16. Chomsky interview.

17. Chomsky interview.

18. Chomsky interview.

19. Robert Picard, *The Press and the Decline of Democracy: The Democratic Socialist Response in Public Policy*, Greenwood Press, Wesport, Connecticut, 1985, p. 137.

20. Picard, p. 147.

21. Picard, p. 147.

22. Picard, 148.

23. Picard, p. 67.

24. Clifford G. Christians, John P. Ferre, P. Mark Fackler, *Good News: Social Ethics and the Press*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993, p. 17.

25. Olof Hulten, *Mass Media and State Support in Sweden*, Uddevalla, Sweden, Bohuslaningens Boktryckeri AB, 1984, p. 52.

26. Hulten, p. 55.
27. Hulten, p. 56.
28. Hulten, p. 57.
29. Bruce Thorp, as quoted by Gene Goltz, "Where Newspapers Compete," *Presstime*, Washington, D.C., November 1986, p. 38.
30. O'Donnell, Patrick and E.F. Hutton, *The Business of Newspapers: An Essay for Investors*, New York, 1982, p. 2
31. See Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly*.
32. For a more detailed elaboration of how mass advertising tends to limit media outlets, see Ben Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly*.
33. Philip Meyer, *The Newspaper Survival Book*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1985, p.173.
34. Janice Castro and Anne Constable, "Shootout in the Big D," *Time*, Sept. 7, 1981, p. 51.
35. Thomas Kent, *Royal Commission on Newspapers*, Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1981.
36. O'Leary Commission on Publications, 1961, cited in *Royal Commission on Newspapers*, Tom Kent chair, p. 235.
37. Kent, p. 225.
38. Robert Entman, *Democracy Without Citizens: Media and the Decay of American Politics*, Oxford University Press, New York, N.Y., 1989, p. 125.
39. Kent, p. 226.
40. Kent, 237.
41. Kent, 238.
42. Klaus Pohle, cited in Ross E. Eaman, *The Media Society: Basic Issues and Controversies*, Butterworths, Toronto, 1987, pp. 104-105.
43. Eaman, pp. 104-105.
44. Eaman, p. 105.
45. Eaman, p. 105.

46. Nick Russell, *Morals and the Media: Ethics in Canadian Journalism*, UBC Press, Vancouver, 1994, *passim*.

47. Russell, p. 3.

48. Some media ethics books worthy of consideration include: Nick Russell, *Morals and the Media: Ethics in Canadian Journalism*, UBC Press, Vancouver, 1994; Clifford G. Christians, John P. Ferre, P. Mark Fackler, *Good News: Social Ethics and the Press*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1993; Lambeth, Edmund B., *Committed Journalism: An Ethic for the Profession*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1986; Goodwin, H. Eugene, *Groping for Ethics in Journalism*, 2nd ed., Iowa State University Press, Ames, Iowa, 1987.

49. Russell, p. 5. He adds in a footnote (pp. 205-206) that while it is fashionable to dismiss group-ownership in media as necessarily deleterious, Mary Vipond, for one, suggests chains may sometimes be beneficial. See *Mass Media in Canada*, Lorimer, Toronto, 1989, p. 86.

As well, Canadian academics Walter I. Romanow and Walter C. Soderlund question the prevailing academic belief. They say there is no overwhelming evidence that chain and conglomerate ownership appreciably affects editorial content or even the quantity of editorial content. There may be variations of quality and content in Canada and the United States, but they say it is not clear that this has any relationship to ownership. See *Media Canada: An Introductory Analysis*, Copp, Clark Pitman, Toronto, 1992.

50. Donald Gutstein and Robert Hackett, *Project Censored Canada: Researching the Nation's News Agenda*, 1994 Yearbook, a joint project of the School of Communication, Simon Fraser University, and the Canadian Association of Journalists, Burnaby, B.C., 1994, pp. 5-9.

Project Censored Canada began in 1993, the 17th year of the United States' Project Censored, started in 1976 by Carl Jensen, a communication professor at Sonoma State University. In the spring of 1993, *Regina Leader-Post* reporter Bill Doskoch and other members of the Canadian Association of Journalists decided it was time Canada started its own Project Censored, since it seemed to them many newsworthy stories also went under-reported. They teamed with the School of Communication at Simon Fraser University. The first list of Canada's Top 10 under-reported stories were announced at the CAJ annual convention in Ottawa on April 7, 1994. For information or to submit stories, contact Project Censored Canada, School of Communication, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C., V5A 1S6, (604) 291-4905.

51. Donald Gutstein and Robert Hackett, *Project Censored Canada*, p. 6.

52. Lee and Solomon, p. 15.

53. David Shaw, as quoted by Lee and Solomon, p. 15.

54. Peter Desbarats, in *The Silent Revolution*, p. 2.

55. Peter Desbarats, *Guide to the Canadian News Media*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Toronto, 1990, p. 232.
56. Kent Commission, p. 228.
57. Desbarats, p. 176.
58. Desbarats, p. 175
59. Desbarats, p. 177.
60. Chomsky interview.
61. Noam Chomsky has long argued that like academics, journalists are the most indoctrinated of all, since it is their jobs to inform others.
62. Robert Miraldi, *Muckraking and Objectivity: Journalism's Colliding Traditions*, Greenwood Press, New York, N.Y., 1990, p. 152.
63. Miraldi, p. 165.
64. Edward Asner, foreword, *Unreliable Sources*, p. xi.
65. Desbarats, p. 225.
66. Lance Bennett, *The Politics of Illusion*, 2nd ed., Longman Inc., New York, N.Y., 1988, p. 203.
67. Frances Russell, in *The Silent Revolution*, p. 78.
68. Bennett, p. 187.
69. Chomsky, *Necessary Illusions*, preface.
70. Bennett, p. 188.
71. Lee and Solomon, p. 338.
72. Douglas Rushkoff, *Media Virus! Hidden Agendas in Popular Culture*, Ballantine Books, New York, N.Y., 1994, p. 179.
73. Some examples of alternative media, on the left, are: *Canadian Dimension*, *Canadian Forum*, *This*, *Z*, *Fuse*, *Our Times*, *The Nation*, *Utne Reader*. And on the right: *National Review*, *The American Spectator*. For a look at alternative media systems, see John Downing, *Radical Media: The Political Experience of Alternative Communication*, South End Press, 1984, for examples of past and present systems used throughout the world.
74. Jeff Cohen, as quoted in *Unreliable Sources*, p. 340.

75. Cohen p. 343.

76. Benjamin Compaine, *Who Owns the Media? Concentration of Ownership in the Mass Communication Industry*, Harmony Books, New York, N.Y., 1979, p. 331.

77. Chomsky interview.

78. The Canadian Daily Newspaper Publishers Association (CDNPA) Research Newsletter, June 1988, p. 1.

79. Lee and Solomon, p. 240.

80. Harold Laski, *The American Democracy*, Viking Press, New York, 1948, p. 670.

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