

Freedom of the press: A rare commodity?

The recent closings of major Canadian dailies in Ottawa and Winnipeg by newspaper giants Thomson and Southam speaks eloquently of the power that corporations wield in our society, even over so important a domain as the ostensibly free press.

Last August 28, Thomson Newspapers ceased publication of the *Ottawa Journal*, leaving Southam's *Citizen* the sole English language daily in the nation's capital. On the same day, Southam shut down its Winnipeg paper, the *Tribune*, providing Thomson's *Free*

are only the latest in a long series of corporate schemings dating back to the closing of the long-lamented *Montreal Star* last September.

The *Star's* closure, in itself an event that rocked Canadian journalism, was followed by Thomson's acquisition of the FP newspaper chain of eight papers, including the prestigious Toronto *Globe and Mail*. In the following eight months, Thomson, whose list of assets includes 123 daily and weekly newspapers in Canada and the U.S., has merged its Victoria paper with the FP Victoria paper, sold FP's Calgary *Albertan*, shut down the FP news service and now killed

Ottawa, Winnipeg, Vancouver and Victoria.

Is this concentration of media power somehow in the public's interest?

Anyone who thinks so must surely believe that Montrealers are better off now than when they had a choice between the *Star* and the *Gazette*. But what is truly remarkable about developments in the Canadian newspaper industry is not so much that the trend has been detrimental to the public good as much as that the public seems to have no say in it whatsoever. In Canada, the news media, guardian of democracy, and cornerstone of our political freedom, is just a business like any other, controlled by private corporations with no public accountability. Freedom of the press is just a commodity bartered to the highest bidder. And like any other sector of the economy, it is subject to the same trends of concentration.

So it is at best naive, and at worst dangerous to simply blame the newspaper chains. They're just businesses doing the best they can for themselves under the circumstances and have never made a secret of it. As a spokesman for Thomson put it: "As far as I know, it's not yet illegal to close down a newspaper."

The Trudeau government, though, does not get off so easy.

As early as 1970, the Senate Committee led by Keith Davey

reported of increasing concentration of newspaper ownership and called for the establishment of a Press Ownership Review Board "to represent the public interest in future mergers or takeovers of publications. Object: to ensure that the news business continues to be everybody's business."

Yet 12 years later, officials of the federal Bureau of Competition Policy say that little

past.

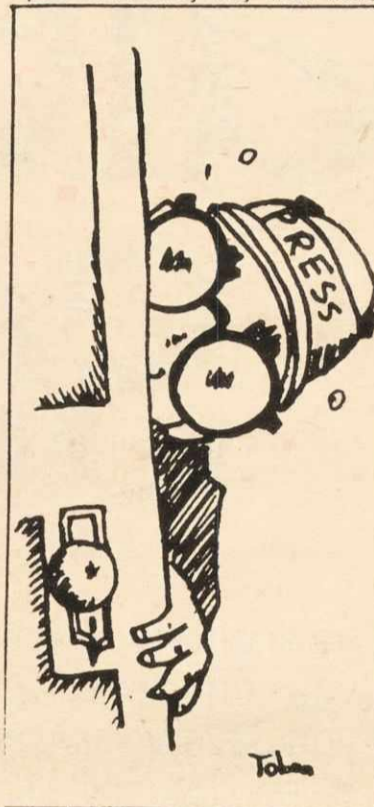
A proposed Competition Act, which one former member of the Davey Committee says would have blocked the takeover of FP by Thomson, was introduced three years ago but was never passed.

What the Trudeau government seems not to realize is that the publication of newspapers is more than just a business, it is a vital public service. The Government has recognized that other public services, such as health care and education, cannot be left to the whims of market forces and profit-seeking entrepreneurs. Electronic news media, i.e. the CBC, receives government support, but print media is left to fend for itself.

In 1970, The Davey committee reported that there were only five cities left in the country where competition between newspapers still existed, presumably Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal. Of those five, only Toronto, still enjoys a situation of competition among its newspapers.

Twelve years ago, the committee also suggested that the Government set up a Publications Development Loan Fund to see that: "the loudest voice in town won't inevitably become the only voice in town." If our government can come up with tens of millions to bail out a dinosaur like Chrysler, certainly it can spare a dime for our endangered papers.

Richard Goldman



action will likely be taken, that they are handcuffed by weak legislation and unfavorable Supreme Court rulings in the

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Press with a "free monopoly" in that city. Thomson also sold Southam its one-third interest in the *Gazette* and its half interest in Pacific Press, publisher of the two Vancouver dailies, the *Sun* and *The Province*.

And so, in one fell swoop, two privately-owned corporations unflinchingly flouted the public interest, creating press monopolies in two large Canadian cities and ending competitive ownership in two others.

Distressing though these moves may have been, they

off FP's *Ottawa Journal*. The public may want news, but you have to wonder if Thomson's not more intent on closing newspapers than on running them.

The final result of these months of corporate wheelings and dealings is that Southam and Thomson have carved up the Canadian daily readership and cemented their grip on virtually every market outside Toronto and the Maritimes. One or the other can now boast monopoly control of the English dailies in Montreal,

The pragmatic feminist

Feminism. The word has become a very meaningful and important part of our vocabulary. Just what constitutes a feminist? What does the word feminism mean? Feminism is basically a set of principles which embrace the industrial, political, social, mental and sexual equality of women with men. A feminist is an individual who advocates those principles and who acts in some way to carry on the struggle to ensure equality for all women.

Many individuals unfamiliar with the meaning of feminism hold the mistaken belief that all feminists are a mass of "loud-mouthed"-pole climbing and ditch digging, overly aggressive, "masculine", "uppity" women who want to become men. But no idea could be further from the truth! These individuals are completely unaware of the many faces of feminism which exist in society today.

Feminists are not just women. Men are feminists, too, and more and more men (and women) are becoming feminists as their consciousnesses are raised concerning the plight of women in our exploitative and sexist culture. With each new individual who joins the fight, the movement gains strength and the march for liberation moves steadily onward. The important thing to remember here is that a feminist is an *individual* who professes belief in and support for the *equality of women with men in all aspects of life*. Feminists range from radical positions, to moderate orientations, to more conservative positions.

There are leftist feminists who believe the road to equality for women lies in a socialist revolution. There are feminists who are fighting to gain equal rights through established legal and governmental channels (such as the National Organization for



Women and Status of Women Canada). There are feminist psychologists, psychiatrists and psychotherapists who help to raise women's own consciousness about who they are and their ultimate worth as human beings in a society which, only until a few decades ago, did not even consider women as persons (legislation was passed - both in the USA and Canada - to give women that status which they were wrongly excluded from).

Some feminists choose to pursue a career, be it in business, politics, education, or whatever, while others choose to be homemakers and enjoy their work (and it is work), but want it to be recognized as one of the many choices that a woman can make for herself and not as the only position women are fit for, are capable of, or were created for. Black feminists fight a two-fold battle against the combined forces of racial and sexist discrimination. (The contemporary Women's Liberation Movement grew out of the civil rights movement of the 1960's and early 1970's).

Women (and men) from all walks of life are joining the fight for liberation and equality of women in all aspects of society. Some are middle class, some are lower middle class, and many are poor (poor women must also fight dual-discrimination resulting from their sex and their low economic status). Some are married, some are not and some don't want to be. Some have children, some do not and some don't want any.

There are many more faces which I do not have room to mention. But as you can see, it is by no means a single concept or a single type of individual who is a feminist. There are many different individuals and groups who advocate numerous methods of working to establish women's equality. There is no one single road to any of the ends.