

financially strengthened some newspapers, so they're better able to serve their employees and communities. Chain ownership may in some cases have resulted in a decline in editorial quality; but there are also instances where chain ownership has upgraded it. In other words, there is simply no correlation between chain ownership and editorial performance. There are some great newspapers in Canada and there are a number of distressingly bad ones. But in no case does their quality or lack of it seem to have much to do with where their shareholders live.

In terms of public policy, though, this isn't too relevant. What matters is the fact that control of the media is passing into fewer and fewer hands, and that the experts agree this trend is likely to continue and perhaps accelerate. The logical (but wholly improbable) outcome of this process is that one man or one corporation could own every media outlet in the country except the CBC. The Committee believes that at *some* point before this hypothetical extreme is reached, a line must be drawn. We're not suggesting that the present degree of concentration of media ownership has produced uniformly undesirable effects; indeed, it may be that the country would now have *fewer* "diverse and antagonistic" voices if all these media mergers of the 1950s and 1960s had not occurred. But the prudent state must recognize that at some point, enough becomes enough. If the trend towards ownership concentration is allowed to continue unabated, sooner or later it must reach the point where it collides with the public interest. The Committee believes it to be in the national interest to ensure that that point is not reached.

Would such intervention operate in defiance of economics? The short answer is that it would and it wouldn't. Much of the trend towards media monopoly stems from the stunningly persuasive fact that big newspapers and big broadcasting stations are more profitable than smaller ones. But there are other mergers, lots of them, which appear to confer no benefits of scale. They occur simply because a man gets richer by owning five or ten or fifteen profitable newspapers than he does by owning one.

So there's no reason why a government which acted to stem the tide of media monopoly would find itself, like King Canute, with the waves lapping disobediently at its feet. Anyhow, doesn't the whole Canadian proposition operate in defiance of "economics"? We believe the thing can and should be done, and done quickly. In a later chapter we will suggest how.

But checking the media's monopolistic tendencies is only a small step towards promoting the kind of media the country needs and deserves. Suppose, for instance, that the government decreed tomorrow that control of every newspaper, TV station, and radio station in the country must return to "independent" operators: would it make any difference to the kind of newspapers we read, the kind of programmes we hear and see?

Not likely. No matter who owns the shares, a lousy newspaper is still a lousy newspaper. As Osgoode Hall Law Professor Desmond Morton recently observed: "It doesn't matter whether the North Bay *Nugget* belongs to Roy Thomson, Max Bell, or a local drygoods merchant. They are all, without a