



Summary of the Report

an Newspaper Act

in of a Canadian Newspaper
ld stop any further significant
n of the ownership and control
spapers. The act would es-

hts Panel associated with the
uman Rights Commission to
implement the commission's
islation.

dit to encourage newspaper
ough more of their profits into
itorial content and a surtax to
panies providing inadequate
tent.

stment Incentives

ital cost allowances for public
v newspapers or in takeovers of
spapers
ld have to be 60 days' public
e a newspaper is closed or sold.

ership Guidelines

spaper Act would prevent
chains from owning more than
newspapers with a combined
of more than five percent of
an daily circulation, measured
basis. The newspapers would
distinctly different geographic

owners would not be able to
rol a television, radio, or cable
in the same area.

would be forced to sell its 40
ewspapers or the Globe and
five years

Brunswick Irving family would
either its Moncton and Saint
newspapers of its radio and

television holdings in either centre.
-The Armadale Company Limited in
Saskatchewan would have to sell its
Saskatoon or Regina newspaper, because
of its ownership of another media outlet.

Freedom Of Editor

newspaper would have an editor-in-
chief under contract and an adequate
editorial budget to fulfill a newspapers'
obligation to the community

-The editor-in-chief would report annually
to a seven member advisory committee -
including members of the public - that
would set standards for the newspaper and
relay annual reports to the Press Rights
Panel

The Press Rights Panel

-A chairman and two other members
report to Parliament through the justice
minister

-The panel would give guidance to in-
dividual newspaper advisory committees
and report if the newspapers were comply-
ing with the new legislation.

-It would review all sales or rule if future
newspaper sales are necessary under the
regulations laid down to prevent cross-
media ownership.

-There would be a review every five years
of newspaper concentration and the panel
would have the power to order further
sales.

Suggestions to the In- dustry

-A national training foudation to give a
broad variety of courses, seminars and
workshops for journalists. It should be
funded by the industry. Newspapers should
should offer formal in-house training
programs.

by Peter Michalyszyn

The newspaper is not the last bastion
of free speech, in spite of the self-
righteousness of Canadian editors and
publishers who claim they alone uphold the
good, the true, and the beautiful - and so on
and so forth.

The last bastion of free speech is the
people. Given that premise, the
recommendations made by the Kent Roayl
Commission on Newspapers amount to no
less than an attempt to regulate the quality
of information available to the people.
They need good information to form the
opinions that they need if free speech and
democracy are to have any meaning at
all. Well, who could argue with that?
Who, but the newspapers. But then, one
would expect complaints from the closely-
knit leadership of the Canadian newspaper
industry - characterized by monopolies,
high profits, and mediocre papers.

My reading of the Kent Commission
report focuses on accountability and not on
monopolies. Reject as radical and political-
ly impossible the notion that proprietors
be forced to divest themselves of compet-
ing media holdings that might someday
pose conflicts of interest of undue influence
over the masses. Governments are not
interested in dismantling huge corporate
empires; their record on anti-ombines
islation is the testament to that.

discharge their responsibility to
the public honestly and objective-
ly, as they see fit. The basic
contention of this Commission is
that legislation is needed to
protect this freedom of the press
from owners to whom a par-
ticular newspaper is merely one
business among other businesses."

Newspapers - whose primary goal is
and should be to inform the public - are too
important to be considered property rights,
solely for the use of owners. They are too
important also to be considered
mouthpieces for the "divine right jour-
nalism" practiced by many in Canada, the
evangelistic "We are the last bastion of free
speech in a democratic society" stuff that
the Kent Report elicited from publishers
across the nation. Canadian
newspapers have had their chance to be
self-regulating. They have in many cases
abused both their property rights and their
self-righteous press freedoms. We hear
their self-criticisms - that they're admitted-
ly flawed, that they're terribly vulnerable to
errors of both judgment and fact, and that
they carry a massive burden of responsibili-

Newspapers are too important to be considered the
mouthpieces for 'divine right' journalists or evangelistic
'We are the last bastion of free speech' stuff that the Kent
Report elicited from publishers across the nation.

Besides, in not one of the cases of
over-lapping media ownership (Such as
Southam's, INC's part interest in Selkirk
Communications Ltd, which owns CJA
radion in Edmonton and *The Edmonton
Journal*.) can collusion be seen to influence
public opinion. Neither can the existence
of newspaper chains or the lack of
newspaper competition be blamed as the
root of mediocrity. The issue, as ex-
pressed by Southam president Gordon
Fisher, is: "Newspapers are the way they
are because their owners, publishers, and
their senior editors make them that way."

Mr. Fisher can get away with saying
that because in most cases Southam papers,
which include the *Edmonton Journal* are
mediocre to good, and the Kent Commis-
sion admits that Southam does operate a
good wire and correspondence network.

But Thomson papers, excepting the
Globe and Mail, are called "homogenous
mush." K.C. Irving papers in the
maritimes, as well, are rated poorly, and it
is such papers that the Kent Commission
recommendations threaten, not the
Southam papers or the independents.

At this point, free enterprisers might
say newspaper owners, publishers and
senior editors - those who determine the
course and content of the paper - can do
what they please with their property
rights.

But the Report says:

"The freedom of the press, proper-
ly understood, is the freedom of
those with the actual responsibili-
ty for the distinctive content of
newspapers - for it's news and
other editorial material - to

ty. But if their goal truly were to be the
"conscience of a the community," to use
Gordon Fisher's phrase, they would not
balk from rules and regulations that
essentially imposed accountability. If their
"Fine, high conscience" were intact there
would have been no Kent Commission in
the first place.

The real issue is accountability. If we
can agree that newspapers serve an
essential role, and that they must be
accountable to the public, then any other
details are superfluous. Once it is clear
that newspapers have abused their respon-
sibilities - and not one publisher would
argue that some haven't - then it is clear
the traditional guardians of responsible press
haven't worked and it is clear that
regulation is in order. The nature of
regulation is secondary. True, many good
newspapers in Canada complain that they
should not submit to the complete round of
Kent Commission proposals. One
such complainant is Toronto Star publisher
Beland Honderich. Mr. Honderich did not
respond to the Royal Commission with
greedy accusations of property theft or
paranoiac fears of a Liberal government
takeover. He suggested rather that "The
desired solution is not the butcher's meat
axe but rather the surgeon's scalpel." In
other words, he advocates selective regula-
tion.

Regulations are negotiable. The
responsibility of newspapers to represent
the interests of people beyond the owner,
publisher and senior editors is non-
arguable. Freedom of the press is the right
of the people, and government is the
people. Thus, government must ensure
that the people have a free press. Any move
by the people to improve their information
is a good move. The Kent Commission is
essentially a good document.