

Could use improvement, it appears.

In March, 1968, the Senate of Canada created the Special Senate Committee on Mass Media and told it to study the ownership, control, and influence of the mass media in Canada. The committee was chaired by Senator Keith Davey (left).

Its report, a half-million word and amply-tabled affair notable for its frankness and clarity as well as its thoroughness, was issued last December as a recommendation to the Government. The entire report is available from Information Canada, Ottawa, for \$13.50. Volume I, which contains most of the analyses and conclusions, costs \$3.50. These excerpts reflect some of the major themes of the study, which also includes a survey of public opinion of the media; reports on the farm, religious, and underground press; the Canadian Press news agency; and other subjects. Elipses are omitted in the editing.

[GETTING TOGETHER]



"THERE IS an apparently irresistible tendency, which the economists describe as the process of 'natural monopoly,' for the print and electronic media to merge into larger and larger economic units. This tendency could—but not necessarily—have the effect of reducing the number of 'diverse and antagonistic sources' from which we derive our view of the public world. It could also—but not necessarily—lead to a situation whereby the news (which we must start thinking of as a public resource, like electricity) is controlled and manipulated by a small group of individuals and corporations whose view of What's Fit to Print may closely coincide with What's Good for General Motors, or What's Good for Business, or What's Good for my Friends Down at the Club. There is some evidence, in fact, which suggests that we are in that boat already."

When it began its study, the committee found that there had never been an exhaustive study of the extent of media control by groups and conglomerates, so it commissioned Hopkins, Hedlin, Ltd., a Toronto firm, to make one. Their study makes up Volume II of the three-volume Committee report. The study covers 103 communities—the most important media outlets in the country, from which the vast majority of the population gets its news, information, and entertainment.

It found that "there are only nine cities with two or more competing newspapers. (In the U.S. in 1968, with ten times the population, there were 45

cities with two or more competing daily newspapers.)

"There are only five cities in the country where genuine competition between newspapers exists; and in all five cities some or all of these competing dailies are owned by chains.

"Of Canada's eleven largest cities, chains enjoy monopolies in seven. The three biggest newspaper chains—Thomson, Southam, and F.P.—today control 44.7 per cent of the circulation of all Canadian daily newspapers; a dozen years ago the total was only 25 per cent. Fully 77 per cent of the circulation of all Canadian newspapers is now controlled by chains."

On the average, the committee said, "media corporations are onto a very good thing indeed. If the brewing industry made profits half this large, and people knew it, we suspect there would be sit-ins in the beer stores. [The section on MAKING MONEY gives some highlights of the picture.] In most cases, these large profits are made possible by conditions of natural monopoly.

"In a few cases the corporations concerned are making genuine efforts to deliver quality editorial content and programming in return for their privileged economic position. But the general pattern is of newspapers and broadcasting stations that are pulling the maximum out of their communities and giving back the minimum in return. This is what, in contemporary parlance, is called a rip-off."

The committee cited several examples of high quality journalism produced by monopolies, but said that this is because these particular groups want to provide good service.

"And this leads to what may be the Committee's most fundamental conclusion: that this country should no longer tolerate a situation where the public interest in so vital a field as information is dependent on the greed or goodwill of an extremely privileged group of businessmen.

"We are not suggesting that the state should reward or punish individual newspapers on the basis of some 'official' assessment of their editorial performance. But the power to merge, the power to expand, the power to form large concentrations of media holdings, is another matter. We think the findings of this committee demonstrate that concentration of ownership has proceeded to the point where some form of intervention by the state is desirable and necessary.

"We urge the government to establish a Press Ownership Review Board with powers to approve or disapprove mergers between, or acquisitions of, newspapers and periodicals.

"The board should function as the Canadian