

Preface

Since I first gave notice of motion in November, 1968, to establish a Special Senate Committee on mass media, the question I have been asked most frequently is what prompted me to propose such a Committee in the first place. I have, of course, had a lifelong interest in the media; and then too, anyone who has been active in public life soon becomes aware of the all-pervasive influence of the mass media. It occurred to me that there had never been a national accounting for the media. Most people agreed that freedom of the press presumes responsibility, but few had really stopped to assess that responsibility. It also occurred to me that Parliament might be the ideal instrument through which the people of Canada could determine whether they have the press they need or simply the press they deserve.

At first we considered a study dealing exclusively with print, but the inter-relation and inter-action between print and the electronic media is so extensive that to be meaningful it was necessary to broaden our study to include all forms of mass media. We have tried, however, to focus on the electronic media as they relate to the whole media spectrum.

Newspaper publishers, in particular, repeatedly told the Committee that they sought no special favours from government. We believe them. Certainly none are required. And yet in the United States, with an equally flourishing press, even while our Committee was meeting, Congress passed a Newspaper Preservation Act which to all intents and purposes legitimizes and extends press concentration. Its easy passage through both Houses of Congress has been popularly attributed, at least in part, to the fact that politicians looking to re-election must depend substantially upon the mass media in the very real world of practical politics.

The Canadian Senate, on the other hand, is structured in a way which allows it to take that detached view which I believe is apparent in this report. None of us doubt that the Senate can be improved. Indeed the press of Canada has been offering us advice in this regard for more than 100 years. We have been grateful for their counsel. But our first concern in approaching this report has not been the welfare of either the press or the Senate, but rather the public interest.

It should be noted for the record that from the moment the Committee was announced until these words were written, we have received the full co-operation of the mass media. Our relationship with the media has been cordial and upon occasion frank and confidential. That confidentiality has been respected.