

Peter C. Newman: *Maclean's*

Paul Kahl and Eric Eggertson of Canadian University Press interviewed Peter C. Newman, Maclean's magazine editor and author of *The Acquisitors: The Canadian Establishment, Volume Two*, in his room at the Bayshore Inn, in Vancouver. The gaunt author nibbled on room service breakfast while defending his involvement with the Canadian economic establishment he writes about.

One expects to find in Newman the pompous, overbearing qualities his Maclean's editor persona suggests. He is in fact rather reserved, almost shy. If he carries any pretensions or vanities about his success, he keeps them well hidden.

Do you now ever feel like one of those powerful men in their large corner offices that you first set out to document 10 years ago?

10 years ago? Well, first of all I don't have a corner office. Secondly, I don't consider myself part of the establishment. I believe that a journalist is a chronicler, is an outsider by definition. He's on the other side of the barricades whether he's writing about politicians or businessmen. I feel that very strongly.

Now at the same time, if you want to write about these guys, you have to have access to them, you have to talk to them, you have to get to know them. I don't see much wrong with that; it's part of my trade. And I guess partly because of that I get accused of being close to them. I am close to them, otherwise I wouldn't get some of the intimate stuff that I do.

How'd the idea to write about a Canadian establishment evolve?

I had been in Ottawa for 12 years and written about political power — my first books, *Renegade in Power* and *'Distemper of Our Times* which I believe are in most university courses on Canadian politics. Then I moved to Toronto in 1969 to become editor-in-chief of the *Toronto Daily Star* and discovered that here was this group of extremely powerful, un-elected, unaccountable group of about 200 people who literally ran the country.

And nobody had ever done anything about them, except there'd been a few articles . . . well, profiles of what they were like but they had a sort of Chamber of Commerce flavor that they were fantastic and the status quo must be preserved at all costs. Or, there were radical attacks on them that they were robber barons, gangsters, who should be put to the guillotine. And I didn't belong in either camp; I was just going to present them as they really are.

There was room for this and out of it came the notion that they are in establishment that they are a ruling clique. And of course it's true — now it's accepted.

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Peter C. Newman is author of *The Canadian Est*

Why do you think members of the establishment first allowed you to interview them and continue to do so?

Well, I'm not quite sure. If I were them I'd never speak to me at all. I think part of it is that it's a book. You know, a book is a different thing from a magazine article or a newspaper feature. First of all it has permanence. I don't pretend to be an historian, but there is an element of recording events, and trends, and people. So they know what I say about them will be the interpretation people have of them. So there's an advantage for them to talk to me to try and give me their version of the truth — which I don't accept. I don't accept anything unless I check it. But that's basically what they see.

Have you had many clashes with them on a personality basis or do you subdue your own personality just to get the interview and information?

the interview and information? There are people unhappy with what I wrote about them, but it isn't a hostile confrontation....there are a few who are very hostile. But I don't care; that's the way they are, that's the way I reported them. If they don't like it they have access to the courts, and of course some of them are taking it.

"I'm just a journalist who believes that what you do is give the evidence and let the reader make up his mind."

In an article five years back, the writer said you were creating icons for our society, that because of your childhood you're obsessed with security and think that it's essential for the country to know the people who are in control and to see them in a good light. He sees a lack of criticism in your work which he fears may be "culturally destructive."

You know, there were a lot of lawsuits with the first volume and a lot of lawsuits

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