

Maclean's New Editor - For Social Change

by Stewart Saxe
Canadian University Press

"I think this is where I can change the world more than anywhere else I could be," says Maclean's newest editor-in-chief.

"And it's fun - it's where I want to be and it's what I'm good at."

It's a long way up to the seventh floor of what Maclean's own writers would call the posh downtown Toronto location of the Maclean-Hunter building.

Up past the offices of the Financial Post, past the offices of Chatelaine Magazine, up past the offices of the more than fifty trade magazines turned out by Canada's super-publishing house.

The editor of Maclean's gets a corner office - medium size, comfortable - hardly overdone; about what you'd expect of a junior Ford vice-president.

The new man in the seventh-floor office is Peter Gzowski - a man who is hardly new to Maclean's.

In 1965 Gzowski was one of a group of high-ranking personnel that quit the magazine in protest over editorial interference by the publisher. Why is he back today?

"I wish reporters asking me that question would do a little more speculation on their own - what can I really say."

He's probably pointing to one thing he's adamant about - "I haven't compromised myself in the least."

"Before I took the job I talked to the publishers - particularly Ron MacEachern (Maclean-Hunter's vice-president in charge of consumer publications) - I'm not saying anything about those discussions - I'm editor now."

"It's really a question of whether you're editor of Maclean's or not - I am the editor."

But wasn't Charles Templeton the editor too when he quit only a few months ago with a big public flurry protesting the same kind of interference as prompted Gzowski's resignation four years ago?

"The air was cleared by the Templeton affair - I'm a different kind of editor - you have to know what your job is and what's really important."

Gzowski's vague about what his captainship will mean for the magazine. It'll be six months, maybe a year, before he feels he has really affected it.

"It's a long, slow process," he says. "It's evolution, not revolution."

"It will mean more shit-disturbing, more muck-raking, - I believe in much-raking journalism."

"And I hope it takes the world more seriously and itself less seriously," he says of the coming change.

Muck-raking to Gzowski is one of the ways a journalist brings about social change.

"I think anyone who isn't in favor of social change in this country is stupid," he says, "but the problem is often that they don't know the facts."

That's the journalist's role, he feels - the "exposition of truth."

"Rolling back the curtains, breaking down the barricades" is how a writer goes about social change. "You keep laying the truth on them."

"When the Luce organization turns on Vietnam it does more to change U.S. Vietnam policy than all the protest marches."

Gzowski feels that the U.S. is in Vietnam because it was misguided, misinformed and misled. He admits, though, that he can see economic reasons why they're there as well. "The war does benefit certain economic interests."

And, "the type of person who owns periodicals in the U.S. is generally part of this group."

But Gzowski feels "there are honest publishers in this country whose dedication is to the common weal."

"Publishers are villains, but not as villainous as people think them to be."

Much of the problem in news and information control, Gzowski says, come from what he calls "anticipatory censorship."

Writers have a tendency to decide with little basis that they should avoid certain topics. Often this stems from old rumors and mistaken remarks around the office.

Gzowski would like to see everyone write openly and freely - he believes

they'd really encounter very little difficulty doing so.

And he adds, "there is no built-in contradiction between a tough magazine and a successful advertising income."

Advertising control is usually useless anticipatory censorship too, he feels.

All of which may be quite important for a magazine whose books only very recently returned to the black ink. It was only a year ago Maclean's changed size to conform to Time magazine and hence be able to carry ads originally designed for Time.

And the French edition, still in the red, is to continue too, Gzowski says.

All together it's going to be quite a task for man who's just getting used to wearing a tie and who calls himself a radical. Radical in the sense that he's always asking why - always seeking the root of the question.

It should be worthwhile to see if the next year of Maclean's will produce the changes Gzowski's leadership would seem to indicate are coming.

And it will be interesting to see if Gzowski can escape from a comment he himself made in 1965:

"The elite," he said, "by and large protect their own, and their underlings know it."

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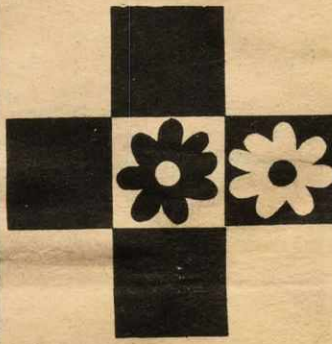
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