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Policy Options

Open Markets, Open Media?
A Report from the Vancouver Roundtable
on Free Media





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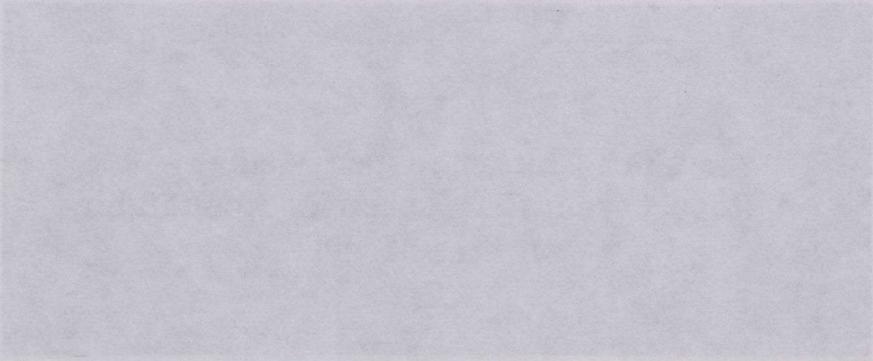
Open Markets, Open Media?
A Report from the Vancouver Roundtable
on Free Media

A Report from the Vancouver Roundtable on Free Media
 March 21, 1997

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

On March 21, 1997, the International Media and Policy Alternatives Centre (IMPAC), in conjunction with the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union (CEP) hosted Open Markets, Open Media? -- a one-day roundtable on the state of the media in the Asia Pacific region. The roundtable, which was supported by the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development, was held at the Sutton Place Hotel in Vancouver.

Open Markets, Open Media? brought together members of the media, academics and other knowledgeable individuals to address the question of how to move towards a free, open and independent media in the Asia Pacific region. The roundtable was held in Vancouver at the Sutton Place Hotel on March 21, 1997.

OPEN MARKETS, OPEN MEDIA?
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction:

On March 21, 1997, the International Media and Policy Alternatives Centre (IMPAC), in conjunction with the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union (CEP) hosted **Open Markets, Open Media?**— a one-day roundtable on trade liberalization and the media in the Asia Pacific region. The roundtable, which was supported by the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development, was held at the Sutton Place Hotel in Vancouver.

Open Markets, Open Media? brought together members of the media, academics and other knowledgeable individuals, to address the question of whether trade liberalization is leading to freer, more open and independent media in the Asia Pacific region. Participants were asked to address this question from a variety of perspectives, including:

- Factors which may be contributing to the development of free media in the region;
- Factors which may be limiting this development;
- The role of journalists, media ownership, and Canadian foreign policy in supporting free media.

Based on their deliberations, participants identified options and strategies for policy change. The day's discussions were "off the record."

The roundtable was designed as a "stand-alone" event. However, the discussions and outcomes will be used to inform an agenda for a larger, international symposium being planned by IMPAC, the CEP and other partners for Nov. 19, 1997, as part of the People's Summit on APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation), to be held in Vancouver.

Participants

The roundtable was designed for a group of no more than twenty journalists and academics. Over 50 journalists were consulted in the development of the participant's list. Invitations and reading packages were sent to seventeen journalists and two academics. All but one were present for the roundtable.

Considerable effort was made to have representatives from both Indonesia and Mexico present at the roundtable. Due to timing, availability and cost, we were unable to have secure a Mexican participant. Efforts were also made to contact "owners of media" and encourage their participation. Although considerable interest was expressed in the roundtable theme, only one media owner was able to attend. For a full list of participants, please see Appendix A.

At the closing of the session, participants were asked to fill in evaluation forms. Thirteen completed forms were received and are summarized in the section entitled: Participant's Feedback.

Outcomes:

In general, participation was brisk. A consensus emerged that Canada does have a unique and important role to play in supporting free and independent media in the Asia Pacific region as part of a broader agenda to strengthen human rights and democratic development. It was noted, however, that in several respects, the Canadian media experience was limited in the extent to which it could be used as a model for free and independent media. As one participant put it, "In Canada we are trying to protect a culture of democracy from a culture of monolithic thought, whereas [in a number of Asian countries], they are trying to introduce a culture of democracy into a culture of monolithic thought." But, as another participant said, there is much Canada can do to "nurture the process and protect from abuses."

It was suggested by several participants that since much of Canada's relations with the Asia Pacific region take the form of business contacts, representatives from business should be included in subsequent discussions on this topic.

Political support among Canadians was identified as a critical element to enable Canada to successfully carry out a program of this kind. In order to achieve this, it was agreed that Canadian media coverage of the Asia Pacific region needed to be enhanced, in terms of its quantity, focus and depth.

The day's discussions culminated in list of specific recommendations on how Canadian government, journalists', and civil society organizations can proceed in supporting free and independent media in the Asia Pacific region. (see attached Policy Options).

SUMMARY OF ROUNDTABLE PROCEEDINGS

Welcome and Introduction

Shauna Sylvester welcomed participants on behalf of IMPAC and drew attention to the link between the roundtable and the international symposium on the media in APEC to be held on Nov. 19, 1997. She highlighted the role of open media as an aspect of freedom of expression and human rights, and encouraged wide-ranging debate and discussion among participants.

Bill Saunders welcomed participants on behalf of the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers union, the largest media union in Canada with over 18,000 members. Mr. Saunders stressed the importance of using the APEC summit to focus attention on the relationship between human rights and world trade. He pointed out that the People's Summit on APEC would consist of as many as 16 "issues forums," including one on the media. He introduced the moderator, Tim Draimin.

Tim Draimin provided an overview of the process for the day's discussion. He then invited participants to introduce themselves and outline their expectations for the roundtable.

Morning Presentations:

Dr. Vincent Yang,
International Centre for Criminal Law Reform and Criminal Justice Policy
Former editor, Democracy and Law

Dr. Yang began by pointing out that "freer and more open media" did not necessarily mean independent media. He said that the Chinese government wanted to create a climate of law that would ensure a secure climate for foreign investment. A "gradual evolution" was taking place in the Chinese legal system, he said, and a similar evolution was taking place in the press, and that freer and more open media are being driven by economic reform. Until the early 1980s, the government controlled all agents of the press. Now there are commercial papers. His own journal, Democracy and Law, was launched with the support of a government loan. Dr. Yang stressed that there is a link between economic freedom and independence of the press. Trade and market liberalization, he argued, introduces the idea of fairness, equality, rights and freedoms. But trade and market liberalization are not the only factors leading to the freedom of the press. The political will of the government is also necessary. In 1990 the government introduced a statute on newspaper regulations, Section 7 of which defined the functions of newspapers as:

- 1) Education
- 2) Providing information and knowledge to the people
- 3) Entertainment

- 4) Helping the public express its opinion
- 5) Exercise a supervisory function on the government

Dr. Yang said it was important to look at the practical implications of regulations. For example, in the 1980s, the editors of a certain journal were told to criticize party officials as part of a government policy to "let the people know." From this point the press began to take on the role of watchdogs. There remains, however, a great deal of ambiguity in the role of the Chinese press. Although there is vagueness on how far one can go, the press in China is freer and more open than it was prior to the economic reforms.

Mr. Andreas Harsono,
Alliance of Independent Journalists, Indonesia

Using an overhead projector, Mr. Harsono gave an overview of the political and demographic makeup of Indonesia. He provided a table which outlined the various socio-political groups and their overlapping institutions (Muslim, Nationalist and Christian, and Military).

He said that historically, the print media had been critical of the government, and somewhat left-leaning. Since 1945 the press has become more liberal. The government adopted the Japanese licensing system. No foreign ownership shares is permitted in the Indonesian press. Due to military interference in politics there is tight censorship. Foreign publications are censored before being released for sale in Indonesia.

In June 1994, the news weeklies Tempo, Detik, and Editor were closed due to their critical stance towards the government during the APEC meetings. Over 80 journalists lost their jobs or bylines, five were imprisoned and one was killed. The state sanctioned journalists' union PWI said publicly that this action was "understandable." A number of younger journalists set up an alternative union and began to establish independent publications.

Currently, there are some "relatively independent" media in Indonesia, as well as "pockets of resistance" in "middle-of-the-road," and pro-government media. The six television stations are owned by relatives or close friends of the president. An "Open Skies" policy has permitted the broadcast of foreign networks such as CNN, BBC, ABN, ABC and STAR. However, the rights to all of these are also owned by close associates of the president.

The Indonesian government has maintained a strict policy of not linking trade with human rights. In reality, however, there has been increased access to multi-media, increased exposure to foreigners, and increased contacts with the West. Political power, however, remains concentrated in the person of the president, and there is the potential for instability upon his succession.

Mr. Frank Koller,
Canadian Committee for the Protection of Journalists

Mr. Koller began by making the point that there are many ways to tell a story. By Asian standards, Westerners often prefer the most direct method, whereas, Asians sometimes prefer less direct methods. He went on to detail the abuses committed against journalists in 1996, saying that the favourite ways to suppress journalists was through violence, taxation or criminal libel laws. Currently, he said, there are 16 journalists in jail. He identified three levels on which to focus efforts to support free media abroad:

- 1) Working journalists
- 2) National organizations
- 3) International organizations

As examples of international organizations, Mr. Koller listed: the Committee for the Protection of Journalists; the Canadian Committee for the Protection of Journalists; and the International Federation of Journalists. He described "IFEX" (the International Freedom of Expression Exchange), a project of the CCPJ which acts as a "clearing house" of information, and consists of 26 organizations, more than half of them in the South. IFEX uses e-mail alerts, and raises issues of openness and the importance of the media in civic discourse.

Mr. Koller went on to say that individual journalists must not only resist political restrictions, but also bribes. Also, good journalists often run the risk of bringing repression down on themselves, he said. One way to support journalists is to help them understand the demands and responsibilities of their jobs. He offered the following three policy formulations:

- 1) Continue funding training programs for journalists
- 2) Support new technologies in these countries.
- 3) Support organizations at the national level to work with other groups at the national level.

Research indicated that there is not much written on open media and trade. He suggested this dialogue is a good first step but we may want to look at what we can produce.

Recap of Morning Presentations: Mr. Tim Draimin

Mr. Draimin posed the question: "What are the levers at our disposal that expand the civil/collective rights in the context of globalization?" He suggested that we need to look at what can be done, keeping in mind the economic regime and the rights regime.

Discussion

A concern was raised that APEC is not a substantive organization, and therefore difficult to come to terms with from a civil society perspective. In response it was pointed out that APEC was a "process," rather than an organization, and that even though it was not possible to discuss overtly political issues, there were ways to get them "through the back door." For example, it was

argued, cultural input can influence the process leading towards more open media. The view was expressed that APEC is based on an "Asian model," and not meant to be institutionalized - it has been described as a "pleasant excuse to chat".

Discussion ensued around the significance of legal developments in China. Scepticism was expressed that most laws are applied with any consistency. It was noted that while senior officials seem to be immune from challenge, there was perhaps not a single active dissident who could speak freely. The opinion was expressed that China was not a good model for the argument that freedom follows trade. However, it was pointed out, the accuracy of financial information was viewed as important by both the government and the business community. It was noted that Canada, as a relatively small trading partner of China, was therefore limited in the extent to which it could affect change through government channels. The importance of facilitating a grassroots exchange was also raised.

Time frame was deemed important when trying to identify a process leading towards openness in society. Korea and Taiwan were identified as Asian societies where there appeared to have been a dramatic shift towards openness in recent decades. It was suggested that there is a relationship between trade and political change, which, in turn, could lead to openness.

The concern was raised that because of excessive concentration of ownership, the Canadian model was not appropriate for free and open media. The issue was addressed that the restrictions of Canadian press paled in comparison to press restrictions in some Asian countries.

It was noted that news corporations appear to be shifting towards the delivery of entertainment products. In the context of free trade, freedom of the press tends to "metamorphize into the commodification of entertainment products."

The question of whether Western business interests were pushing for open societies in Asia was raised. It was suggested that, in general, this was not the case, but given the choice, business leaders would prefer an open jurisdiction to a totalitarian one. Business, it was suggested, was primarily concerned with risk. Most investors in China, and elsewhere in Asia, are Asian, and have little interest in openness. Singapore, it was noted, is instructing its Asian neighbours in how to control the media.

It was stressed that we need to look at the openings for pushing a free media agenda. If business is concerned about risk, then perhaps they need to look at the situation in Indonesia: Will there be another Albania if Suharto is overthrown? Also, business wants a free flow of information. Perhaps this can be used as an entry point into influencing APEC discussions.

Recap--Mr. Tim Draimin

Mr. Draimin noted that two main strands in the discussion seemed to have emerged: 1) the Change Process, and; 2) Issues of Strategy. He elaborated the following features and questions about each of these:

1) Change Process

The change process is not well understood, and in need of further study. It is not black and white, and it is culturally-specific. It's important to not be too close to it - take a few steps back and assess it. There is a question of time frame, ie. How long does it takes? What are the objectives of freedom of the press - are they changing and evolving?

2) Issues of Strategy

There is a need to understand the role of local actors, institutions and structures. There is a need to support intermediary organizations and institutions. How do we work with allies and how do we identify and neutralize opponents? How do we expand the space? We may need different ways at different times.

ASEAN and China have been identified as key power-brokers in the region. It is important to understand the tools to influence APEC, and understand the role of international business. What are the entry points? How do we achieve the desired ends in an Asian way? How can the argument be presented in economic terms? (e.g. - risk, international covenants, codes of conduct, change in corporate law, good offices of the government, aid program)

Mr. Draimin suggested that there was a question running through the discussion on APEC - Whose voice is legitimate? APEC was started by governments and controlled by governments. How do we listen to the voices of civil society who may have lack confidence in these processes?

Afternoon Presentations

Mr. Daryl Duke,
Friends of Canadian Broadcasting

Mr. Duke began by quoting from a Canadian documentary filmmaker, John Grierson: "Through information, a society is made better." However, Mr. Duke said, that as a society, we have lost sight of this ideal. A "new kind of market-oriented Canada" is emerging and a key question that needs to be addressed is: "Can news work for openness?" Mr. Duke noted that news was extremely easy to control. "We know what we see, but we don't know what we don't see," he said. He noted that ownership of Canada's media has been reduced to five or six major corporations that all reflect a "white, middle class, business philosophy." He noted that Canada is going through a phase of "commodification of culture." In Vancouver, he said, the media are ignoring 35 per cent of the population. He raised the question of how we can expect to protect journalists thousands of miles away, when we can't even protect our own. He said major events in Asia are being completely overlooked, citing the end of the Philippine insurgency as an example.

Ms. Gail Lem,
Communications, Energy, and Paperworkers Union

Ms. Lem began by asking the question of why reporters don't cover cultural events. She said there is a lack of news of day-to-day events, and that many stories about Asia are superficial. She said that the media are adopting the values of ownership. There is also a problem of self-censorship among many journalists.

Ms. Lem quoted from the Davie Commission and the Camp Royal Commission on Newspapers. Three newspaper chains control 72 per cent of newspaper circulation in Canada, and 60 per cent are owned by Southam, which is controlled by Hollinger. In three provinces, Southam owns all the newspapers. This raises a question of editorial control. Ms. Lem quoted David Radler of Hollinger- who said, "The best newsroom in the country has three reporters and two of them are selling advertising".

Profit and the bottom-line are becoming increasingly important in determining what is covered. Ms. Lem suggested that when there is no distinction made between the social value of the news and the commercial role, we get the situation we have in Canada. She said that the Hollinger takeover of Southam happened without government concern and the result is a narrowing of voices. The CBC is the only alternative voice of mainstream news in Canada, but with budget cuts, programming is being eliminated across the country. The CEP and the Council of Canadians have mounted a campaign for press and broadcasting freedom. They are researching the paper contents after the takeovers, they have compiled a list of regulatory proposals to limit concentration of ownership and are challenging the Hollinger takeover in court.

April 3, 1997 has been named as Press Freedom Day. Canadian unions need to begin to build linkages with other media organizations and unions in other countries. She suggested that it was time to bring human rights back on the agenda and connect the right to freedom of expression to social justice.

Ms. Melanie Gruer,
North-South Institute

Ms. Gruer began by stating that Canada can and should protect press freedom abroad, for four reasons:

- 1) For the most part, Canada has a free press. It is constitutionally enshrined;
- 2) Canada has high standards of journalism and is known for its high calibre of reporting;
- 3) Canadian journalists do not relate to superpower interests. The Canadian media have the same directness as the American media without nationalist overtones.
- 4) Canada has a two-tiered system of private and public ownership without propaganda.

In summarizing Canadian initiatives, Ms. Gruer noted that the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade is involved in a project to protect press freedom in Bosnia through the development of an open broadcast network. Canada has also supported press

freedom in South Africa (80 percent of those journalists trained through this program went on to become heads of media agencies). The Parliamentary Centre, a Canadian NGO, is working on a project to support press freedom in the former Yugoslavia.

- Ms. Gruer provided some ideas that could in form policy formulation:
- Training programs are a good beginning, they continue to need funding;
- It is important to educate Canadian journalists about the conditions of their colleagues abroad. She said it is difficult for individuals journalists to change their practices when the structures around them don't change. Canada needs to work multilaterally. Even most democratic countries, she noted, have instituted restrictive press laws. Despite censorship however, it is becoming increasingly difficult to restrict the flow of information;
- We need to use the instrument of human rights to enshrine freedom of expression - although the government has taken the initiative, their efforts have been scattered;
- Canada is a part of an international fora i.e. the Commonwealth which can be used;
- We need strong press councils, good libel laws;
- News crosses borders and it is cheap and effective to support underground radio.

Discussion

The ownership style of Conrad Black was further discussed, being described as "subtle and difficult to attack." His style, it was argued, was to appoint people who share his viewpoint into key positions as decision-makers.

The question was raised as to what Canada could learn from Asian societies, since, in general, their media seemed to be "more politicized and less commercial."

The appointment process for media oversight bodies was called into question, and the concern raised that patronage played an inordinate role

It was noted that the lack of coverage in Canada of Asia was not unique, that there was a similar lack in regards to other regions, Africa and Latin America being cited as examples.

There was some concern expressed about which models of press freedom are appropriate to export beyond the Canadian context. Whose press freedom are we speaking about? (e.g. what kind of institutional framework are we going to promote to China?)

Discussion of Policy Options

The discussion moved to consideration of the question: What are the ways to expand the space (or stop the shrinkage of space) for free media/ expression/ dissenting voices? A menu of ideas was generated which is provided in the following section entitled "Policy Options".

Closing Remarks

Mr. Steve Lee,
Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development

Mr. Lee thanked everyone for taking the time to attend the roundtable and provide such a rich discussion. He also asked participants to consider why Canada should be promoting a free media, in Asia. He pointed out that the relationship between the media and society is complex, and asked rhetorically, which comes first, free media or a free society. He said that freedom of the media, and of opinion, and of journalists, has to lead somewhere. He acknowledged that many of the options at Canada's disposal for promoting free media were "highly interventionist."

Mr. Lee said that the Centre for Foreign Policy Development was interested in supporting a number of items on the agenda for the People's Summit on APEC. He said that this roundtable fit nicely into Canada's broader foreign policy interests.

Wrap-up

Shauna Sylvester closed the session by thanking the participants, speakers and the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development for their support. She outlined the process for how the ideas raised in the roundtable will be carried forward into the development of the International Symposium. She also said a summary of the discussions will be submitted to the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development and distributed to interested participants.

Special recognition was extended to Paul Baylis for his work in coordinating the roundtable, Tim Draimin for his role as facilitator and Steve Lee for his support.

POLICY OPTIONS

What are the ways to expand space (stop shrinkage) for free media/expression/dissenting voices?

1) Canadian Government

- Use trade linkages to promote Canadian values through "Constructive Engagement." X
- Take advantage of entry points provided by APEC. eg. "Free flow of Information" should be interpreted as all kinds of information. Business can be brought into the discussion by emphasizing "transparency." ✓
- Take advantage of "unused levers." eg. Canada's linkages with the public broadcasting system and regulatory commission of Malaysia. ✓
- Offer governments alternatives to "public embarrassment." These could include proposing workable alternatives to the status quo, or flexible approaches to regulation. ✓
- Raise the public profile of these issues. Explore options, such as labelling and boycotting, that will draw attention to the rights context at the point of production. ✓
- Support educational scholarships and language exchanges. ✓
- Encourage journalists to cover non-official stories in the context of APEC, eg. child labour, worker's rights. Ensure maximum access to APEC information and meetings. Provide detailed and timely briefings to the press. ✓
- Help expand electoral processes abroad and actively protect journalists. ✓
- Expand the flow of relevant information to government officials. ✓

2) Journalists and their Organizations

- Undertake basic training programs in accuracy, responsibility and ethics. ✓
- Support the development of new technologies within partner countries as a way of keeping touch and fostering links. ✓
- Encourage and facilitate South-South linkages. ✓

- ✓ • Engage in union to union linkages.
- ✓ • Build links with existing networks and partner organizations.
- ✓ • Explore the possibility of developing an exchange program for media executives.
- Develop internal education for Canadian journalists' organizations.

3) Business

- Enter into a dialogue with business; get business support for transparency and freedom of information.
- Encourage Canadian businesses to follow the same ethical standards abroad as they do at home.
- Explore the possibilities of tools such as a fair trade mark, and codes of conduct.
- Target egregious examples of ILO convention violations.

PARTICIPANT'S FEEDBACK

1. What did you find useful about this session?

'On the ground' information from Asian journalists about press structure and politics in their countries.

The exchange of ideas and different perspectives.

The wide range of ideas covered, particularly Tim's drawing out of specific strategies on how to proceed, especially targeting the actors.

The opportunity to network with other journalists interested in Asia and the fact that our ideas might somehow influence government policies.

The opportunity to exchange and hear the views of a group of very thoughtful and knowledgeable people.

2. What changes would you recommend for future sessions?

More opportunity to ask questions of the foreign guests directly.

Inclusion of business persons. So much of Canada-Asia relations are based on that as a starting point that we need them to be more involved.

The focus was too exclusive. I'd like to see involvement of people from other APEC countries, specifically the non-Asian part of the Asia Pacific, who were not represented at all.

More representation of journalists from Asia.

More representation from 'ethnic' Canadians, those in the media and others. More opportunities to debate recommendations in smaller groups.

The addition of top media and business people from Canada and abroad.

3. Do you have suggestions for resource people, workshop themes or potential participants for the Nov. 19 International symposium?

a) resource people/participants:

Gwynne Dyer

John Miller, Chair of Ryerson University's Journalism Dept.

Oon E. Seng, General Secretary of the National Union of Journalists of Malaysia.

The Institute of Press at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing.

More representatives from ASEAN.

Antonio Ma Nieva, General Secretary of the International Organization of Journalists, and the former president of the Philippine Journalist's Union.

b) themes

Business 'risk' and human rights issues--a way to tap into economic discourse to advance press freedom, etc.

Links between journalists and labour.

The question of whether 'Asian values' and free media are contradictory.

Other aspects of culture and the media, ie. the novelists, the directors and producers of film and television shows, the theatre producers and actors in Asian countries.

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