

## Foreword by Vincent Mosco

Over the past two decades, Marc Edge has justifiably earned a reputation as a leading voice in Canadian media and journalism studies. It is no exaggeration to conclude that this has been a period of intense upheaval and crisis in Canadian media during which many of Edge's worst fears have been realized. However, *The News We Deserve* amounts to more than an expert chronicle of the decline and fall of Canada's once internationally respected print and electronic communication systems. It is as much a set of hopeful visions of what journalism excellence and a media service committed to the public interest and democracy can be, when it is properly managed and regulated. Striking the right balance between media criticism and proposals for change is difficult but essential and Edge's book is, among other things, an excellent guide to getting this right. His approach is to focus on the corrosive consequences of concentrated media ownership on democracy and the public sphere and to shine a light on attempts to challenge it with oppositional and alternative media. This makes Edge a consummate political economist.

Over the years Edge has demonstrated considerable strength in two areas of the political economy of communication. First, he is one of the foremost scholars of media ownership in Canada. Edge's

book *Asper Nation* is an excellent exemplar because it brilliantly dissects the family's rise to prominence in Canadian media, displaying the ability to sustain an in-depth treatment of one of the central issues of political economic analysis: the consequences of media concentration for democracy. Focusing on the structure and operation of power, *Asper Nation* combines all of the key elements of political economy. It demonstrates the ability to work with primary documents to chart the development of the Asper's media holdings. Building on this historical analysis, Edge is able to situate the family's ascent within the social totality of Canadian media across the major sectors of print, broadcasting and new media. The book also assesses media concentration within a moral philosophical context that gives prominence to the value of democracy or full citizen involvement in political decision-making. Finally, *Asper Nation* makes the case for political and policy activism to counteract the disturbing growth of media concentration in Canada.

Edge has also demonstrated strength in the analysis of alternative and oppositional media. For example, Catherine McKercher and I accepted a co-authored article from Edge for a special themed issue of the *Canadian Journal of Communication* on the topic of media labour. His excellent contribution focused on the importance of making use of the media in labour disputes with an assessment of a newspaper produced by striking media workers at a British Columbia daily. The article described the challenges faced by strike newspapers and the potential for incorporating this longstanding practice into contemporary media struggles. In this regard Edge's research contributes to overcoming a blindspot in media analysis, the systematic study of media labour.

*The News We Deserve* richly embodies Edge's commitment to political economy research in Canada and particularly to the roots of the current crisis, the unprecedented power that a handful of companies wield over both traditional and new media. My introduction to Canadian media corresponds with an event that, as Edge recognizes, shone a bright light on the origins of today's crisis. The 1981 report of the Royal Commission on Newspapers was prompted by one outrageous event — the simultaneous closing by two different

companies of newspapers in Ottawa and Winnipeg, giving each other a monopoly in these cities—and by years of concern over growing media concentration. It was an extraordinary document, in part because in the year after the Commission was called, it published numerous volumes examining the industry. At the time I was an American scholar asked to review the report for the *Journal of Communication*. The scope of the research and recommendations was remarkable, as was the extent of publicity the documents garnered. Sadly, as Edge has demonstrated, aside from educating the Canadian public about the extent of the problem, the report led to no policy action because a Conservative government swept into power and paid it little attention.

The long, slow decline signaled by the Royal Commission accelerated soon thereafter and Edge has been one of its leading storytellers. Print media in most cities is dominated by one company, Postmedia, which is nearing bankruptcy and mostly owned by US hedge funds that have bent the rules intended to restrict foreign ownership. Two companies, Rogers and Bell, rule broadcasting, telecommunications, and internet service provision, enabling a degree of concentration that would not be permitted in the US or in most other developed countries. Edge is particularly good at documenting the ties between Canada's media giants, pliable government agencies, and schools of journalism and communication across Canada. The nation's chief broadcasting and telecommunications regulator, the CRTC, has done nothing to slow the concentration process, save to require companies to make payments for projects it determines will serve the public interest. Some of these have involved payments to Canadian universities that have been happy to supplement their declining budgets and just as eager to return the favour by supporting the companies before the government, through research chairs, and in think tanks. Just as bad has been the performance of the government's Competition Bureau, which has done little to live up to its name and mandate. In Marc Edge, Canada has no better interpreter of how and why this sorry state of affairs transpired. It also has no one better to assess its significance and describe alternatives.

As his 2006 study of the *Castlegar Citizen* strike newspaper put out by journalists walking a picket line showed, Edge is a dialectical thinker. He has recently documented the potential for employee ownership with a review of *CHEK Republic*, by Diane Dakers, a 2014 book on how a television station in BC became an orphan of failed convergence. Rather than fade away into oblivion when the declining media giant Canwest Global shed CHEK, the station's employees bought it and built a coalition that did more than save a vital broadcast outlet. CHEK revived local programming and built a successful business. The best example of Edge's intense commitment to good journalism and the pursuit of alternatives to the failed monopoly model that has dominated the nation's media is his chapter "Can Canada's Media be Fixed?" Here he describes alternative ownership models and new forms of funding for independent journalists that offer genuinely new visions of how journalism can survive and thrive in a digital age. He concludes, in the dialectical spirit of Dallas Smythe, one of Canada's pioneers in the critical political economy of communication, that "there is no shortage of good ideas" for making Canadian media a model for democratic communication in the world today.

*The News We Deserve* forcefully demonstrates that Marc Edge continues to lead the way in the search for good ideas about how to critically assess Canadian media and how to change it for the better.

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