

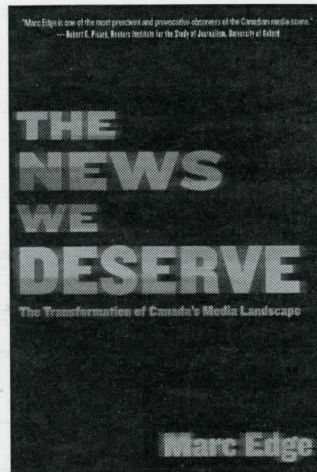
# JOURNALISM WITHOUT EDGE

*Eric Spalding*

In *The News We Deserve: The Transformation of Canada's Media Landscape*, Marc Edge argues that the media in Canada no longer have the necessary resources to provide the news that citizens need. Today, journalists have to do more with less and are not as able to engage in in-depth reporting as they used to. Meanwhile, Canadian audiences appear to be apathetic towards the decline of reporting in their country. Are they indeed getting the news they deserve?

In his book, Edge employs a political economy of communication approach, focussing on the conditions of production for news. There is no analysis here of content or audiences. The focus rather is on the newspaper owners whose actions in his view have led over the past few decades to a reduction in the diversity of voices in the media. The author studies the cases of such former news magnates as Conrad Black (Hollinger) and the late Izzy Asper and his son Leonard (CanWest) and their practice of buying up and consolidating newspapers and TV stations with the short-sighted goal of enriching themselves and their shareholders. As with any business, salaries are the largest expense, so owners lay people off from their new acquisitions, which ensures short-term profits. These cuts, however, leave Canadians with substandard media, and the surviving journalists bear increased workloads and constant deadlines. Under these circumstances, the news media are hampered in their capacity to moderate a public forum in which a vigorous debate of ideas can occur.

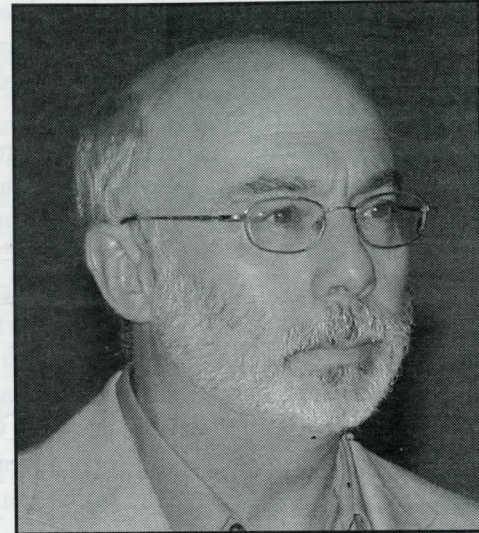
Over the past few decades, Canada has become one of the developed countries with the least diverse media in the world. Edge, who lives in a suburb of Vancouver, describes as an example of media concentration the situation in BC's largest city. There, Postmedia owns four of the six English-language dailies, namely *The Vancouver Sun*, *The Province*, *The National Post* and *24 Hours*. Under such conditions, journalists who wish to practice their craft in BC's Lower Mainland have few alternatives, and some of them are understandably wary of covering stories in a way



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New Star Books

that might displease their bosses. Moreover, Postmedia has been on the edge of bankruptcy for years, crippled by debt accrued as a consequence of overambitious and costly investments. It has tried to save money by having its dozens of large and small newspapers across Canada operate on smaller budgets with reduced staffs. For instance, since October 2016, *24 Hours* has not had its own newsroom. This commuter daily now publishes stories generated by reporters from its sister papers. Moreover, since the publication of *The News We Deserve*, Postmedia has laid off additional employees from its Lower Mainland newspapers. In 2010, the *Sun* and *Province* together had a staff of 200. As of May 2017, the number of employees was down to 70, according to David Beers in *The Tyee* (dated April 1, 2017).

Edge himself wrote for *The Calgary Herald* and *The Province* for fifteen years, but he was laid off in 1993. As a consequence of this background, he brings to *The News We Deserve* an evident enthusiasm for journalism and a pronounced concern for its current state in Canada. His style, moreover, reflects a journalist's ability to write accessibly. Indeed, on the whole, Edge's prose is clear and he maintains a certain narrative momentum throughout his book. He is addressing lay readers who are not necessarily familiar with the political economy of communication. For instance, he explains the rather byzantine financial machinations that led to current circumstances in a manner that is understandable to someone without an MBA. And he is methodical in explaining the government inaction and public indifference that have led us to the "news we deserve." As such, his book is a worthy contribution to the conversation we should be having about the precarious state of Canadian reporting today.



Marc Edge

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