

Weekly press plays significant role in Canada

Collectively the nation's weekly press represents a national institution in a country which has far too few national institutions, declares the mass media report issued last week by the special Senate Committee on Mass Media.

Although it took much space to list the inadequacies of the dailies and the influence they pedal across the country, the report states that more often than not the nation's weekly press is the first, the most local, the most immediate medium for hundreds of thousands of Canadians.

"The weekly press complements all other media and in so doing plays a significant community role probably beyond the capability of any other medium."

Millions of readers
There are close to 900 weekly newspapers in Canada with an overall circulation around three million. "And heaven knows how many readers," the report states. The committee offered criticisms and some suggestions for the weeklies, referred to as the community press, in the lengthy report.

The pronounced emphasis on the local scene is understandably paralleled by a very marked degree of individualism on the part of both publishers and editors. At the risk of generalizing, Canada's weeklies do represent the more conservative end of the country's spectrum and rural weeklies in particular tend to reflect the more conservative leanings of their readership.

Editorials seldom take a partisan view of politics, a fact which the Committee couldn't comprehend.

"For all these reasons every weekly editor faces a continuing challenge to be both individual and localized without becoming parochial," the report says. "The simple fact is that a goodly number don't make it."

The committee suggests that the weekly newspaper can survive only if it has enough advertising but its survival really isn't very important if its pursuit of advertising becomes an end in itself.

Unlike the dailies where ownership was compared almost to the same as having a licence to print your own money, the report concedes the nation's weeklies are caught in a cost-price squeeze not entirely of their own making. Net return to the average weekly owner is less than the average bank loan charge.

Rising costs are a problem for all weeklies, but most especially for papers whose circulation is under 2,000. Improved production techniques with rising equipment costs are all part of the same parcel as attracting young people into the business, retention of staff and increasing wage demands.

Regional weekly newspapers were the first to adopt the most modern composition and printing techniques.

While in the past each weekly possessed its own printing shop, today this is no longer true. Owing to the fact higher investments are needed to acquire and operate an offset press at a profit, there has been a natural concentration and centralization of printing works. But basic composition and printing costs of a newspaper remain the same, what ever the circulation. As a result, the smaller the newspaper, the higher the proportional cost.

The average weekly's revenue according to Canadian Weekly Newspapers Association director A. Y. MacLean comes 72.5 per cent from advertising, even seven per cent from circulation, 15.5 per cent from printing and five per cent from miscellaneous sources. Sagging national advertising revenue is one of the most critical problems faced by the weekly publisher.

Raps weeklies
The committee rapped the weeklies for not showing greater sales effectiveness when they have such a good sales story to tell.

Circulation data of the weeklies is a confused and confusing picture, the report states and it must be sorted out in the best

interests of all. Two hundred and forty-seven weeklies belong to the Audit Bureau of Circulations which means most to national advertisers, but its critics point out it measures newspaper circulation, not quality.

One of the great virtues of Canadian weeklies, the report points out, is not only the fact they are Canadian owned but they are traditionally owned in the community they serve. One brief to the committee declares that since the reader is more familiar with those who are providing him with information, he can more readily make a critical assessment of that information. But, the report warns, this great tradition is beginning to erode and is in danger of disappearing.

Disappearing
One brief to the committee states it foresees the disappearing of a large number of regional weeklies within five to ten years, observing already there have been mergers of two or three weeklies in certain towns. The committee notes also that there is a trend to corporate ownership and the use of co-operative production facilities, which in turn creates a climate for further concentration.

The committee registered surprise that it makes economic sense for central offset printing plants to serve weekly newspapers within a 150-mile radius. Already Toronto Star Limited has 11, Inland Publishing Co. (Toronto Telegram) has seven and Thomson owns 14 weekly papers. The report warns that the time to act is now if Canada is to preserve its "little newspapers" from the giants.

There is an admission, however, that concern about fewer weekly voices is a two-edged sword since frequently daily newspaper publishers have the resources to upgrade a paper's overall quality.

Need for independence
The committee found the CWNA executive "surprisingly inarticulate" when it came to the problem of increased concentration within the weekly publishing field. Nevertheless the committee shared the concern put forward in a brief by the news editor of the Markham Economist and Sun which states that if it is necessary that daily newspapers remain independent then it is doubly so for the community papers.

The Markham paper is the last of the old weeklies on Metro Toronto's fringe to be independently owned and more important, independently operated. "There are times when we feel like a mouse surrounded by hungry cats waiting to pounce down and gobble us," the brief states but concludes with the resolve to keep going in spite of spiralling postal rates, lousy postal service, screaming wage demands and escalating production costs.

The committee comments that "we think that kind of spirit predominates in the weekly newspaper industry. And that spirit, along with the importance to this country of a vibrant weekly press, community owned and operated, deserves our support."

Propose Review Board
Weeklies were included in the committee's proposal for a press ownership review board to implement means to limit concentration of weeklies to those instances in which the public interest would best be served; meaning no one anywhere would be hindered from beginning his own weekly.

The committee regretted more than a third of the country's English speaking weeklies do not belong to the Canadian Weekly Newspaper Association. It notes with concern that declining membership is primarily the falling away of smaller newspapers not able to meet the Association's fees and called for subsidies for this kind of membership.

Noted also was the growth of

suburban weeklies. "Without them there could be an information void which would be unhealthy for people living in the sprawling, high-rise megalopolis."

The committee also called for more and better relations between the CWNA and its French Canadian counterpart Les Hebdo. "This is regrettable because the French Canadian organization appears to be more sophisticated and advanced than are the English weeklies, although both groups are dealing with essentially the same problems."

Quebec, with fewer daily newspapers than other provinces, and only 20.8 per cent of the nation's weeklies, nonetheless have 37 per cent of Canadian weekly circulation. French language weeklies, unlike the CWNA favored a press council, and exhibited a far greater concern about press concentration, the report says, but it also points out this is partly the result of the wish to keep the weeklies in the hands of Quebec's French speaking majority.

Threat to dailies
In another facet of the report the committee notes that daily newspaper publishers have noticed that weekly papers are, and in many cases have the potential to become, very profitable enterprises. Weeklies, particularly in the large metropolitan areas, are beginning to pose a threat to the retail advertising receipts of daily newspapers and also their circulation.

This has resulted in the

development of a relatively new form of group ownership where publishers of large dailies also produce weeklies and the two types of papers compete for the advertising dollar. Four dailies — the Kitchener Waterloo Record, The Toronto Telegram, Toronto Star and Montreal's La Presse are involved in this type of group ownership.

Since 1964, the rate of growth of advertising receipts of weeklies has far outstripped that of any other types of newspapers or periodicals, the greatest part attributable to local retail advertising. Four factors are listed which contribute to the retail strength of the weeklies:

1. A growing preference of some retail advertisers for the selectivity of coverage provided by weeklies.
 2. Growth in circulation. The circulation growth of weeklies has been even greater than growth in advertising.
 3. Development of cost-reducing centralization of composing and printing operations.
 4. The application of new technology to reduce costs, primarily the offset process.
- The development of offset printing, the report states, has given renewed life to the "family newspaper."

To avoid confusion

The prominence given by the daily newspapers to the Mass Media report of the Special Senate Committee on Mass Media, and the clarion call telling media owners to improve their product, unfortunately neglected to include the section on the weekly newspaper business.

In order that readers do not confuse the report's findings with those of the weekly newspapers, this newspaper has prepared a summary of what the Senate Committee said about the community press and the important role it plays in the country's communication system.

The Senate Committee was headed by the Hon Keith Davey and included 14 other members. Object of the Committee was to consider and report upon the ownership and control of the major means of mass public communication in Canada and to examine and report upon the extent and nature of their impact and influence on the Canadian public.

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Consider increase fees for election workers

An increase in wages for deputy returning officers and poll clerks and the possibility of holding an advance poll will probably receive Esqueving Council's consideration next year.

At Monday's regular council meeting, deputy-reeve Tom Hill pointed out deputy returning officers and poll clerks could be working for less than the minimum wage. Polls are open from 10 in the morning until eight at night and vote counting often takes up an additional two to three hours. Deputy returning officers in last Monday's township election were paid a flat rate of \$20. Poll clerks received \$17.

Clerk-treasurer Delmar French suggested the advance poll. Deputy-reeve Hill said he thought such a poll should be held at the township office. This year's election cost the township a total of \$609.

Obituary

Mrs. Cripps funeral Nov. 23

After a short illness, Margaret Ada Cripps passed away in Guelph General Hospital on November 19. After living at 95 Agnes St., Acton for the past 27 years, she has been in Guelph for the past six months.

She is survived by her husband Stanley Cripps, now of Guelph; daughter Marilyn, Guelph; sons Bob Cripps, Guelph and Ron Cripps, Simcoe; sister Mrs. Ethel Morris, St. Catharines; and three grandchildren. She was predeceased by a sister Elsie Franklin and her parents, Charles and Ada Franklin.

She was born at Stratford in 1919 and was married in Guelph in 1943.

She was a member of Calvary Baptist church, Guelph, and was general secretary of the Sunday School there.

Funeral service was held at the Rumley-Shoemaker funeral home on November 23, conducted by the Rev. Reg Soell of Guelph assisted by a former minister the Rev. J. W. Boyd, Toronto. Pallbearers were Earl Presley, Georgetown; Harold Andres, Acton; Charles Ratcliffe, Stouffville; William Alger, Guelph; Don McLean, and Harvey Groat, Guelph.

Interment was in Fairview cemetery, Acton.

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