

## 4. A Case Study in Journalism Ethics: The *Calgary Herald*

### 4.1. Purpose

From Day One of the eight-month strike at the *Calgary Herald* in 1999, many of its journalists said that wages and benefits were not the issues that drove them to seek union certification: one of their priorities was editorial integrity. This is not to obscure the fact that a seniority clause and wage grid, standard in most union contracts, was one of the main issues the *Herald's* negotiators would not agree to. However, there were other issues and their stories have never been adequately told. This study addresses issues of journalistic integrity and the way many rank-and-file *Herald* journalists thought there must be some way to balance off an erosion of journalistic standards by editors bent on cutting costs to meet the corporate aim of increased profits. For some at the *Herald*, joining a national body of journalists that represented many of the most respected newspapers in Canada was the only solution.

### 4.2. History

This is not to suggest the perceived assault on journalistic integrity began the day Conrad Black's Hollinger acquired the *Herald* in 1996. The author suggests, rather, that it had a longer history of baby steps. Historically, the *Calgary Herald* was considered the flagship newspaper of the Southam newspaper chain and a highly desirable place to be a journalist. The *Herald* prided itself on being able to bring superior journalistic resources to bear on any given issue or event to better serve its readers and community.

It was Calgary's journal of record, but, first and foremost, it was an editors' newspaper. Reporters participated in the process by writing stories, but the ultimate decisions about what was in them, what was featured most prominently and what was downplayed rested with editors. Editors had the power to add material from other *Herald* journalists or from wire stories, or to cut as they saw fit. Stories were first edited by city desk editors. If the story was to run on the front page, it was then handled by a second set of editors: for some reporters, it was like filing stories into an abyss. Although some editors would consult with reporters about changes to a story, most would not. For a reporter, it was an odd experience to have a mistake written into a story by an editor and have it appear under your byline in the newspaper the next day. The editor's defence was often that, because the story needed so much extra work, it was nearly inevitable that a mistake could be edited into it. There was a process to correct mistakes, if only to avoid lawsuits by demonstrating there was an absence of malice: it required anyone aware of the mistake to bring it to their superior's attention. Usually the reporter was required to write a correction. The author has first-hand knowledge of occasions on which, even when a correction was written to identify an error as an editing error, it was changed so the correction said: "On such and such page, it was wrongly reported..."

Corrections such as that left reporters in the unenviable situation of explaining the darker workings of the newsroom to the sources involved in the story, a practice that damaged the reputation of the reporters and of the newspaper. A prime example of a

junior editor's meddling involved obtaining Alberta government cabinet documents, leaked from a cabinet minister's executive assistant for a story. The leaking of cabinet documents is a firing offence, but the assistant took the risk because his minister was coming under increasing criticism from other elected officials able to advance only their side of the story. The documents provided an opportunity to present another perspective, broadening the debate. Unavailable any other way, the documents were accepted on condition of anonymity. When the story was presented to the city desk, the editor who handled the story knew the source for the documents and inserted the executive assistant's name. When the story appeared, the cabinet minister was hauled on the carpet by the Alberta premier to explain why his assistant should not be fired immediately. In the event, the assistant wasn't fired, but the relationship between a trusted source and the author in whose ethics he had faith was damaged irreparably. The *Herald* had a policies and procedures manual in the form of a newsroom guide that, in theory, set out mechanisms for dealing with disputes between employees and managers in a civilized manner. In actual practice, if a reporter got into a dispute with an assistant city editor, for example, over the way a story was handled, the reporter nearly always lost. That was the newsroom culture.

The *Herald's* publisher from 1982 to 1989 was the late J. Patrick O'Callaghan who was an outspoken advocate of a free and vocal press. O'Callaghan was lionized in Canadian journalism lore as a publisher who believed that journalists should use the power of journalism to help the less fortunate, to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. O'Callaghan once said, as publisher of the *Edmonton Journal* when there wasn't a strong opposition in the Alberta government, it was the *Journal's* responsibility to fulfill that role. One *Herald* journalist, formerly of London's Fleet Street, said: "I was inspired to work for the *Calgary Herald* because of its high standards of ethical journalism."<sup>1</sup>

Kevin Peterson became the *Herald's* publisher after O'Callaghan.<sup>2</sup> "Peterson believed that a cause worth supporting should be supported: he did not believe a cause should be supported because the community backed it. His beliefs did not go unnoticed at Southam Inc."<sup>3</sup> Former *Herald* managing editor Gillian Steward saw the beginning of the newspaper's downward spiral after O'Callaghan left. The newspaper was making a substantial profit, but she said that head office in Toronto wanted its return on revenue doubled, which meant an increase of up to 30 per cent to ward off a takeover of the company by Conrad Black. "Padding the bottom line became more important than covering the news well. Padding the bottom line became more important than the newspaper's responsibility to the community. Reporters, editors, photographers and librarians were viewed as expendable costs rather than as valuable resources." Steward quit her job on principle in 1990.<sup>4</sup>

Peterson came increasingly under the influence of a number of consultants and marketing researchers who convinced him that one of the ways to boost sagging circulation and the effects of a long recession was to accommodate readers who didn't have the time to fit reading the newspaper into their daily schedule. Under Peterson's managing editor Crosbie Cotton and assistant managing editor Steve Roberts, the manner

in which news stories were presented in the newspaper underwent a radical change. At some point before, after, or during the writing process, each writer was compelled to insert three bulleted statements – titled “the issue, what’s new, what’s next” – before the lead sentence of their stories. As a result, when the stories appeared in the newspaper, the first thing readers would encounter after reading the headlines was the three bulleted statements. That presentation, it was argued, would provide readers with enough information to choose to read or not to read the story.

Many of the journalists were appalled by the new format. Some stories were not issues, while others were events that then had to be turned into issues. Many journalists resisted providing the three bulleted items, which put some editors in conflict with the writers, because if the writers didn’t provide the bulleted items, the editors had to. Management was married to the concept, so when they became aware of the rift in the newsroom, Roberts responded by making the format a “performance issue.” If the writers didn’t become good employees, they would be shown the door. That decision increasingly placed the rank-and-file *Herald* journalists in a position of occupational hypocrisy. It was their job to venture into the various institutions in society and expose corruption and mismanagement, be it in government, the education system, health, the judicial system, the armed forces – virtually every level of journalistic endeavor – but when they saw it in their own newsroom, they weren’t supposed to say anything.

The worst part of the exercise was that readers told us they didn’t like the format which they found patronizing and insulting to their intelligence. As the *Herald’s* circulation figures continued their downward spiral, Peterson resigned and a national search was conducted for a new publisher. Ken King, then-publisher of *The Calgary Sun* with an advertising background, eventually received the job in February 1996. King was succeeded at the *Sun* by his Editor, Lester Pyette, who became publisher.

One of the first things I asked King about was the future of “the issue, what’s new, what’s next” format.<sup>5</sup> He said that everything was on the table at the *Herald* because the newspaper had alienated itself from the Calgary community. He didn’t believe that Calgarians didn’t have time to read newspapers: they would read a newspaper if it was a good one. King was also asked in the newsroom the same day about his style of leadership as publisher. He said: “I’m a businessman. I could run a hospital. But you don’t want me performing any of the operations.”<sup>6</sup> Within a short time, managing editor Roberts was let go and several months later, “the issue, what’s new, what’s next” was all but gone. A few months after King moved into the publisher’s office, Conrad Black acquired the Southam newspaper chain, including the *Herald*.

King and Cotton, meanwhile, overhauled the *Herald’s* management team, appointing Joan Crockatt managing editor in April, 1996 to replace Roberts. Upon the announcement, the publisher said: “Joan Crockatt, along with Editor-in-Chief Crosbie Cotton, has been asked to meet the challenge of building one of the great newspapers in the country,” said King. “Calgarians deserve a great newspaper.”<sup>7</sup> Lorne Motley, formerly of *The Calgary Sun* was appointed news editor. Cotton and Crockatt appointed Roman Cooney city editor in May, 1996, and he, in turn, appointed Don Campbell as

assistant city editor. Former *Calgary Sun* news editor Peter Menzies, who had been at the *Herald* for several years, was named editorial page editor, responsible for opinion, comment and letters pages. Also by October, 1996 the *Herald* had added four columnists to its pages: Peter Stockland former editor of *The Calgary Sun* hired by King and, from eastern Canada, Giles Gherson on national economics, Andrew Coyne on national affairs, and Barbara Amiel, a journalist who was also Black's wife. King explained the new conservative columnists complemented the *Herald's* other columnists including liberal Catherine Ford and Robert Bragg, who had left-leaning political views.

King also aligned the *Herald* with the Calgary business community and entered into partnerships with the Calgary Flames hockey team, the Calgary Stampeders football team, the city of Calgary's Expo 2005 bid, and enhanced the newspaper's existing sponsorship of the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede. It didn't matter that through the partnerships, King might have been risking putting his newsroom in violation of the journalistic ethic, which maintained a separation between the outside interests the newspaper had arrangements with and the need to avoid conflict or appearances of conflict in its news coverage. He claimed the *Herald's* reporters would not lose their objectivity. "All the arrangements that we have made have clearly qualified that the news of the day supercedes all else. Frankly, those companies and organizations and charitable institutions would have no less. To attempt to write anything but direct facts would be a transparent and gross dereliction of our jobs. Our agreements and sponsorships have, I am told, immense value to the community and to those organizations. That value is created singularly by the credibility that we offer our readers every day."<sup>8</sup>

King also became a familiar face in the newsroom and senior editors could be heard walking through it repeating King's mantra of "fairness, accuracy and balance" that would be reflected at the *Herald*. He described it as: "Are the facts right? Are the quotes in context? Is this story being told fully and not with bias on behalf of the writer, be that either personal or political or with any other agenda? It's a very difficult assignment. When I refer to fairness accuracy and balance, I'm not talking about boosterism. I'm not talking about cheerleading. We do, in fact, have roles and obligations in those areas, too. The greatest acid test is the response you get from people who are in the news."<sup>9</sup>

The problem, many believed, was that the previous leadership team had alienated Calgarians through their reinvention of journalism and disregard for opinions of the *Herald's* readers. It was the rank-and-file journalists who resisted "the issue, what's new, what's next." Yet subsequent to King's arrival at the *Herald* its writers – including award-winning journalists – felt accused of bias or distortion of facts. Nonetheless, a management team was put in place that was fully prepared to advance a new agenda.

As discussed in Section 2.2.1, 93 former *Herald* staffers were contacted for this paper and invited to share their recollections to better tell the story of what happened to the newsroom's integrity in the years that followed. For those who did so, reliving that chapter of their lives was clearly a painful experience. The picture that emerges would appear to run against the grain of many of the accepted standards of ethical journalism,

allowing bias, and even disregard for intellectual honesty. The following illustrates some of the experiences of staffers.

Former senior copy editor Sylvia General, whose primary job was dealing with the *Herald's* front page, said from the day King arrived in the publisher's office, the team of night copy editors was gradually stripped of any input regarding the stories which were to appear on A1 or A3. "Many articles were chosen simply on their 'sexiness' and the whim of a news editor and there was very little chance of discussing their play on the front page."<sup>10</sup> She said the *Herald* was always in a hurry to put out its news pages as quickly as possible (not uncommon in many newsrooms), but regularly kept track of how many pages various editors handled in a night. "The slower copy editors were constantly told to pick up their pace. There was simply no time, most nights, to rethink the play of a story, its length, its accuracy and its balance. As a result, many errors made it into the newspaper because of a lack of checks and balances."<sup>11</sup>

Worse, General said, was that a bias in favour of Alberta Premier Ralph Klein's provincial government crept into the newspaper after King arrived. "As copy editor of A1, I was told as long as we had one paragraph or so on the front page with Opposition comments, we were okay. The majority of the Opposition comments were neatly tucked inside and General said the editors knew full well from readership surveys that most readers wouldn't turn into the newspaper for lack of time in the morning."<sup>12</sup>

"Another problem we had was running incomplete stories – something that made many of us on the news desk uncomfortable and went completely against our editorial integrity. Through sloppiness and/or sheer mismanagement, there were many times when a story came in late (with no excuses) and there was little attempt to 'make it better' before it was published. As a result of a pending deadline, we ran stories that were full of unanswered questions and, on occasion, ran stories containing figures that were incorrect. To be fair, they were usually caught between first and second editions but, in our books, that was too late. First edition was often treated as a practice run and we thought that was being unfair to our rural readers. Many of us were left feeling unprofessional, but had no way of venting our frustrations without losing our positions. One of the senior copy editors did have the courage to stand up and voice her opinion on the play of a story and the judgment call of the news editor, and was immediately reprimanded in front of her peers," General wrote.<sup>13</sup>

Another of General's concerns was the newspaper's intellectual dishonesty. "We were forced to use bylines on stories that misrepresented the writer's connection to the newspaper, implying they in fact worked for our newspaper, as opposed to another news service. That was not only misleading and confusing to our readers, but outright wrong."

The misrepresentation General referred to is the practice of re-identifying Southam News correspondents as *Herald* employees. For example, a byline that runs in *The Daily News* in Halifax as "By Jane Doe, Southam News"<sup>14</sup> appears in the *Calgary Herald* as "Jane Doe, Calgary Herald" with an Ottawa place line.<sup>15</sup> Southam News employs many correspondents and assigns them to various corners of the world and when

any given number of them are re-identified as *Herald* staff on the same day, it appears the *Herald* devotes significant resources to have three correspondents in Ottawa and one in Washington.<sup>16</sup> That is simply not true. Lastly, General said: “On at least one occasion we were forced to run a story about the friend of the publisher who had just opened up a car dealership. The news editor just simply shook his head and told the copy editor to ‘just do your job.’”<sup>17</sup>

There are two problems with a friend of the publisher’s story. Firstly, it displaces news the journalist’s own judgment says can be more important to readers. Secondly, and particularly with car dealerships, it gives prominent advertisers unwarranted access to news space that money shouldn’t be able to buy. On one occasion, as the result of a direct order from the editor-in-chief, Crosbie Cotton, I was compelled to write a story about a used-car dealership that was opening up the street from the *Herald* building. It ran not as a business story, but as a news story on the front page of the city news section.<sup>18</sup> The initial source for the story? The newspaper’s advertising department. No amount of balancing the story’s elements in an attempt to justify it as ethical journalism can negate the fact that the line between news for its own sake and stories about advertisers had been deliberately crossed by no less than the editor-in-chief either as a result of his own judgment or a requirement by the publisher.

But, one “Friend of King” story – or FOKs as they came to be known – with the front section news team was a drop in the bucket compared to what was taking place on the city desk, where local stories were processed. No one doubts that a newspaper’s publisher has the power to influence, if not decide, what runs or doesn’t run in his/or her newspaper directly or indirectly through the people he or she appoints to its senior positions and the subsequent appointments they make.

“After Ken King arrived, and especially after I became night city editor, my nightly life on the desk became a constant struggle to preserve the few tatters of what I considered ethical behavior, to protect the people who worked under my nominal supervision, and to protect the *Herald*’s readers for the worst excesses from the people from the *Sun* who had gained control of the newspaper.”<sup>19</sup> The city desk said the selection and promotion of a cadre of former *Sun* personnel changed the tone and style of the newspaper by putting an emphasis on crime and fire stories.<sup>20</sup> “It had ethical implications in the treatment of both victims of crime (hounded for photos of lost loved ones, a particularly odious *Sun* specialty) and of staff, abused for hesitating to treat people so grossly.”<sup>21</sup>

“There were constant instructions from (city editor) Roman Cooney and his successor Don Campbell to remove or hold important local stories to make way for stories and photos about the charitable deeds and golfing triumphs of Mr. King’s car dealer and business friends. This was a nightly occurrence and a profound frustration to me. It was a much more serious problem than are ‘publisher’s pets’ at a normal newspaper – even Mr. King is allowed these, in my opinion. But it was the frequency and quality of the stories that had to be dropped from our tiny news hole that constituted the problem. Indeed, we created a whole section, on page B2, specifically to accommodate

this kind of drivel. Alas, it was often too small and more legitimate stories that had to go over the side to make way for dumb FOKs.”<sup>22</sup>

“NO dissent would be tolerated. NO alternative suggestions or models would be contemplated. Regardless, taken alone, the situation above is only the death of a thousand cuts. The real era of no ethics at the *Herald* began with two other King innovations that I believe were the logical results of the kind of ethical treatment outlined above.”<sup>23</sup>

The first was King’s journalistic mantra of Fairness, Accuracy and Balance (nicknamed FAB) and the second was deals for stories. The city desk elaborated on Fairness, Accuracy and Balance: “This was the decision ostensibly to correct left-wing bias by reporters; in reality I believe the reaction of Mr. King’s cronies to any apparent criticism of their activities.” (The FAB formula called for reaction on the other side of the story to be elevated from a position where it made logical sense in the narrative to the second or third sentence of any given story.) “This was insulting to old professionals who had always included responsible reaction in their stories appropriately and prominently. It was soon apparent that FAB really meant sabotaging and editorially attacking opinions with which the publisher disagreed, but not those that he viewed as legitimate. It gave rise to bizarre stories in which the reaction became the lead and the lead was buried under the reaction. It was soon abundantly clear to me that the rule applied only to sources that were environmentalist, social democratic, pro-consumer or the like. Of course, our first choice was to ignore them outright. We only included them if forced by competitive pressure. If we did, though, the reaction debunking it was right at the top of the story.”<sup>24</sup>

“As for the second, well, I remember clearly the first night I personally encountered it. A big story by (*Herald* Legislature columnist) Don Martin was coming in. We were told to get ready for a scoop on the government’s new policy on protecting the environmentally sensitive Whaleback region. As night city editor, I reacted as I always did to such a circumstance, by assigning available reporters to round up the usual suspects and put together some reaction to the story.” The city desk said he had one reporter call Liberals and the New Democratic Party, while another pursued reaction from the environmental community. A re-write desk was in the process of weaving the reaction into the main story for the first edition. “That’s when I was told there was a deal with the government and, in return for the scoop, there would be no reaction until tomorrow. I refused to take the offending reaction out of the story.”<sup>25</sup> Another editor took the reaction out.

The reaction by some editors on the news desk responsible for the front section to a similar scoop as a result of a deal with the provincial government was the same, former *Herald* copy editor Christine Mushka recalled. “My favorite example of an ethical dilemma relates to a Don Martin column. It ran across the top of the *Herald*’s front page trumpeting that, once again, the Tories were about to post a huge surplus. Trouble is, Martin made no attempt to contact the opposition. Editors who read the story on the rim and objected to a) a column running as a banner news story and b) its total lack of fairness and balance were told by Lorne Motley to just shut up and proof it for typos.”<sup>26</sup>

“When I raised the incident at a reporters/editors meeting with (promoted to editor) Peter Menzies he decided that in cases of a ‘scoop’ that we were afraid of giving away to the *Sun*, we would pull opposition comment from the files!... It was a blatant case of Martin and *Herald* management toadying to the Tories. The Klein folks regularly had money drop into their laps from higher oil prices, and yet the *Herald* made it seem as though they were being rewarded for their performance. Critical coverage of the use of those surplus monies is what Alberta readers deserved. Any useful debate on the surplus and where it should go was left to other media that day.”<sup>27</sup>

“This goes back to the *Herald*’s decision under Roman Cooney and Menzies to have the Legislature bureau reporting positions go empty for months. In a bid to save money, they just blatantly decided that the legislature and the provincial Tories did not need to be covered, as they were doing such a good job.”<sup>28</sup>

The *Herald*’s former managing editor Joan Crockatt, meanwhile, developed a reputation for heavy editing and extensive re-writes. The city desk editor said: “As night city editor, I had to have secret side deals with certain reporters that I would phone them at home and read them back stories Joan had edited. More often, though, the effect of a thorough Joan Crockatt editing job was that she would wander off to a fresh conquest. Someone on the desk would be left with the job of straightening out which changes made sense, which were factually correct and which were just stray thoughts to be checked later, and what had, in fact, been done by the reporter. Joan also drive-by edited pages, often in the most outrageous ways at the most inconvenient moments (i.e. 30 minutes before page deadline). It was standard operating procedure on my desk to keep all page proofs face down to keep the managing editor from seeing them.”<sup>29</sup>

The city desk editor says there was little that individual reporters could do to protest massive rewrites of their stories or of the nature of the stories they had been assigned. He recalled a newsroom incident which set the tone and the policy in the newsroom on the subject of bylines and requests for their withdrawal. “(City editor) Roman Cooney told a reporter, who wanted her name removed from a story because she was unhappy with the changes that had been made to it, that she was required to leave her name on the story. I felt partly to blame for this one because I had told her that, sure, removing her name would be no problem and then made the mistake of telling Cooney what I intended to do.”<sup>30</sup>

Former *Herald* reporter Brock Ketcham acted as night city editor for a period and saw the results of Crockatt’s rewriting first hand. “I remember the destruction wrought by King’s proxy, the managing editor, who would walk by a terminal at 11:45 p.m., spot a painstakingly crafted front-page story about to go to press; then sit down and mangle it. I remember a gifted young colleague – a magazine and book author – being reduced to tears in front of the entire news desk over what this butchery did to his credibility. I saw this happen, but I felt powerless to act.”<sup>31</sup>

Crockatt declined to comment on the heavy rewriting or any of the issues raised by others about “Fairness, Accuracy and Balance,” including using it to advance a political agenda except to say that the format was meant to address “fairly well-known” instances of reporter’s editorializing, or introducing their opinions, in news stories. As for the other issues: “I think much of the discussions around the *Calgary Herald* have assumed mythical proportions. I don’t have any inclination to look at the entrails of the strike at the *Herald*. I think people have moved on.”<sup>32</sup>

Meanwhile, in April 1998, Crockatt announced that city editor Roman Cooney had been promoted to news editor, responsible for news and features. His duties were to oversee newsroom operations and report to Crockatt and Cotton. Cooney’s assistant city editor Don Campbell was promoted to city editor. Lorne Motley remained as news editor responsible for news and production.

One month later a significant editing travesty occurred at the *Herald*, but it was the reporters involved – whose names were on the story – who suffered the most. Former *Herald* reporter Laura Shutiak says it was entirely unethical of a senior editor to rewrite a story she wrote that included legal errors so serious that there was danger of a mistrial in May 1998. Shutiak was assigned to write a story advancing a conference on juvenile crime, which was originally slated to run on an inside page. “I spoke to one of the speakers, an expert on teenage girl crime, and included statistics from a two-and-a-half year old study. That study said violence by teenage girls had increased three-fold in 10 years. I got a call from a colleague on the Friday, my day off, saying she had been asked to torque my story and it would be the line story on Saturday.”<sup>33</sup> She was making reference to the study in the lead. (I explained that the study had already been reported in the *Herald*. She said that was what she was being told to do.) She kidded me not to look at the paper because I’d just be angry. Her copy of the story did include the lead, but about 10:20 p.m. on Friday the (computer’s) revision list showed another change to the story. References were included to the Isabel Cho (in Calgary) and Reena Virk (in Victoria) murder trials. The problem was that the Isabel Cho case was manslaughter and the accused were adults, not juveniles. Plus, the Reena Virk case (that was on at the time) was assault. The jury in the Cho trial was not sequestered as final arguments were not quite finished.”<sup>34</sup> The defence lawyer asked for a mistrial, citing the damaging *Herald* story by Shutiak and her colleague. The other reporter demanded the *Herald* print a correction, which is likely the only thing that saved the *Herald* from being cited for contempt. The other reporter received an apology, Shutiak never did.

The correction printed still says a lot about the two reporters’ names still associated with the story’s errors. No mention was made of the editing errors, with the wording as follows: “An A1 story in the May 10 *Herald* (‘Teenage-girl-crime triples in 10 years’) incorrectly stated there is a murder trial into the death of Isabel Cho, 19. Three women are charged with manslaughter in connection with Cho’s death. The same story incorrectly states there was a murder trial last week into the death of Victoria’s Reena Virk, 14.”<sup>35</sup>

Later, after Don Campbell had been appointed city editor, Shutiak was assigned by acting assistant city editor Suzanne Wilton to write a story with Crockatt's influence all over it about three Calgarians running in the "If I were Prime Minister" competition. Shutiak discovered, however, that the 10 finalists were being named the following day. "I suggested maybe it would be a better story on Monday, when they were actually named, but she said: 'No.' I pointed out that the year before a Calgarian won the whole thing and it wasn't important enough to make the paper, but she still wanted a story. I then went out on a possible drowning – 20,000 people were evacuated from Lake Sikome, STARS (air ambulance) was on hand, four fire trucks and a couple of police cars – all for a kid who was necking on the couch at his girlfriend's. But that story didn't see the light of day. Instead, we wrote about three kids who didn't even make the final ten. Why? Because Joan Crockatt was in Toronto for a week as a contest judge. I found that out from one of the contestants. It was shortly after my loud and unapologetic complaining on the contest story that I was reassigned to the police desk, indefinitely."<sup>36</sup>

The above isn't to suggest there weren't other major problems in the newsroom. The author was given access to 40 survey responses submitted to union officials in November 1998, outlining the issues editorial employees wanted to see addressed. They revealed major concerns regarding traditional labour-relations issues including an increased use of contract workers without benefits, part-time work, blurred managerial roles that increased employees' assignments and workloads, work weeks, shift scheduling and differentials, holiday scheduling, job security, job descriptions, forced retirements, overtime, the use of freelancers, wages, benefits, working conditions, grievance procedures, and concerns over the unfair application of the salary grid at every level in the newsroom. When all of the problems were put together, a bid to seek union certification was only a matter of time.

That occurred on October 1998, over the Thanksgiving long weekend, when 62 per cent of the *Calgary Herald's* newsroom staff signed petition cards authorizing the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union to seek certification with the Alberta Labour Relations Board as their bargaining agent for a first contract. The newsroom personnel had simply had enough. Events in the newsroom became tumultuous. Managing editor Crockatt was relieved of her responsibilities. In an open letter posted on the newsroom's bulletin board on October 27, 1998 Editor Crosbie Cotton acknowledged his role over the years and that the problems of part-time work, story rewriting and blurred managerial roles existed long before King's arrival at the *Herald*. "I fully acknowledge that there were grave concerns raised about the handling of some stories in recent times, concerns upon which definitive action has been taken and a new course set when they first came to senior management's attention. We will not repeat our mistakes."<sup>37</sup> Cotton urged the newsroom employees to work with management to resolve the outstanding problems, rather than by means of a union.

Former *Herald* publisher Ken King said he was completely unaware of the state of the newsroom conflict and wonders why reporters and editors didn't come to him with their concerns. "They would have had no greater defender than me. I would never have induced anybody to do anything unethical."<sup>38</sup> He also said he thinks that the issue of

journalism ethics is a red herring. He claimed there may be ‘revisionist history’ in the recounting of events that led to the formation of a union in the *Herald* newsroom. He said seeking union certification was nothing more or less than an attempt by a group of reporters to take control of the newsroom.

At the same time, however, King also acknowledged that he didn’t know about the heavy-handedness of newsroom managers who had their staff fearful for their jobs. He said he was unaware of the pure labor issues and many of the concerns about heavy-handed editing or the resentment over special treatment afforded his friends or car dealers. King thinks if a car dealer has an interesting or compelling story, there is no reason he or she should be denied access to a newspaper just because he or she may be a car dealer. He said he could not condone an editor telling a news reporter to contact the newspaper’s ad department as a story source or for assigning a story about an advertiser. He thinks that he may have been shielded from the state of newsroom dissent by his senior editors.

King acknowledged it was his idea to re-identify Southam news correspondents with a byline saying “for the *Herald*” or *Calgary Herald*. It is a decision he defends. “My view is that person is providing the information for us. The fact they were from Ottawa or Timbuktu, the absence of that knowledge is inconsequential. I suppose if that was inconsequential, you could ask that if it wasn’t inconsequential, why not leave it in? But I stand by that decision. I don’t have any qualms about that. I think that anything that is in the *Calgary Herald* is for the *Calgary Herald*.”<sup>39</sup>

As for the *Herald*’s political shift to the right, King said there was no direction given to him or influence by Hollinger president Conrad Black or Southam deputy chairman David Radler. “They never influenced any editorial position of any kind. They never once admonished me to do anything other than to produce a quality newspaper, nothing in content other than to have superior quality.” After that, King said his editors were in charge of the newsroom. “I fully support that the editors and managers have the right to make decisions.” However, he admitted mistakes were made and, if anything, he completely misunderstood the influence his office might have had over the decisions his editors made which may have led them to second-guess him. “I think things were done in my name because it was expedient,” he said.

King said he thinks it was a mistake for newsroom employees to try to resolve the problems at the newspaper by voting for union certification. He addressed the newsroom at one point encouraging employees to work with him to resolve its problems, rather than inviting in a union or by giving its negotiators a strike mandate. “If I write a book on my life, the chapter on the *Herald* will be ‘The enemy they never had.’”<sup>40</sup>

One reporter explained why she opted for becoming a union member. “I didn’t think about joining a union because of any perks I might get as a middle or senior employee. I wasn’t looking for more wages, more benefits or better working conditions. In my position, I already had all of these. Job security was not an issue for me. I didn’t even particularly like unions. But I felt being in a union would give us a buffer against

individual abuses being perpetrated by certain managers in various editorial departments. As a writer, I was most concerned about eroding editorial quality and how copy was being compromised – often rewritten to include ‘balance’, which on occasion meant making sure the Reform party’s position was placed high in the story regardless of context or flow. But I was also aware of issues involving other departments, including working conditions for the copy desk, photography department, and the often cavalier treatment of young editorial assistants. I was also aware that the majority of my professional colleagues across the country were covered by union contracts and we were not.”<sup>41</sup>

Former *Herald* reporter Joanne Ramondt, meanwhile, said she thinks that questions of journalistic ethics ought to be absolutely tied to seniority issues in union issues. “It is... more senior staff who will voice important opposition to unethical behavior in the workplace including newspapers. It is with the wisdom of experience that ethical considerations are honed. It was a set of unethical behavior, including the treatment of staff and the lack of professionalism around news judgment generally that made me support unionizing and, ultimately, the strike.”<sup>42</sup>

It is not the intention of this paper to exhaustively review the machinations of the bargaining process that got underway. It is, however, of use to note dramatic shifts in the top management of the *Herald* in the following spring and summer of 1999. Former managing editor Crockatt, who was removed from her job following the certification vote, returned as executive editor in charge of labor relations and as chair of the management unit bargaining committee. Ken King left the *Herald* to become publisher of the *Vancouver Sun* in May. He was replaced by Dan Gaynor, the publisher who led the fight against the successful establishment of a first union contract at *The Standard* in St. Catharines. Cooney also left the *Herald* in May. Crosbie Cotton resigned as editor-in-chief in July to be replaced by Peter Menzies.

The author’s own realization that the ethical dilemmas journalists faced at the *Herald* could become worse under Gaynor and Menzies took place on August 19, 1999. On that day, he received the 398-page Department of National Defence final report on the closure of Canadian Forces Base Calgary, obtained under the Access to Information Act after more than one year of waiting. He was ordered to write a story about it for the next day’s paper by acting assignment editor Mario Toneguzzi. After protests that it was not possible to read almost 400 pages in one day, an appeal was made to the assignment editor Tom Olsen who said: “You don’t have to. I covered the Alberta Legislature for CBC and, on budget day, no one ever read the whole budget. You just pull something out of the budget documents and do a story on it.”<sup>43</sup> Appeals to the deputy news editor and the news editor Lorne Motley went nowhere. The author had to hold his nose and write a story knowing full well that if he was challenged on any element of it by the Department of National Defence, if not the Defence Minister, he was going to have to admit he hadn’t read the report.<sup>44</sup> It was nothing short of intellectual dishonesty and a considerable disservice to the *Herald*’s readers who deserved better. Intellectually dishonest journalism is unethical journalism.

Nothing could be done. Byline protests just didn't work at the *Herald*: that was the newsroom culture. Such protests just made journalists a bigger problem for managers. Several days later the author had an opportunity to bring his ethical dilemma to the attention of Peter Menzies who met with reporters and editors after being appointed editor-in-chief. He reiterated that the onus was on the reporters to do the best job possible in the time allotted by their editors. Those incidents made the author realize the new *Herald* didn't want or need conscientious journalists. They wanted an employee who would do what he was told. Moreover, he could be replaced by two young reporters for very probably the same salary and they would be glad just to have the job. In other words, the aim was to keep the *Herald's* newsroom costs down and to accommodate news merely as an unobtrusive advertising enhancement.

The author was talked out of resigning on principle on August 19, 1999, by Andy Marshall, the local union president, who said that it may be possible under a union contract to request that bylines be taken off stories to protest the ethics involved or lack thereof. "While rather token in its force, it can still send a powerful message," Marshall explained.<sup>45</sup> In fact, the collective agreement proposal that was in negotiation between the union and the *Herald's* negotiators sought two specific clauses within the contract that would have provided some measures to protect editorial and reportorial integrity by guaranteeing at least one avenue of protest. The author obtained two versions of the documents revealing which clauses the company and the union agreed to and which they did not.

The first was a clause proposed by the union that would have stipulated an employee's byline or photo credit shall not be used over his or her protest. The second stipulated that a correction, retraction or apology for an employee's printed material would not be published prior to the employer making a reasonable effort to contact the employee. The company had not agreed to include those clauses on September 16, 1999.<sup>46</sup>

Significantly, on October 6 and 7, 1999, an 82 per cent majority of the union members voted to authorize a strike vote in support of their bargaining team's efforts to secure a first collective agreement for the newsroom. Also significantly, by October 29, 1999, the company had agreed to the second clause regarding the corrections and retractions, but would not agree to the byline or photo credit withdrawal clause.<sup>47</sup>

Former *Herald* reporter Mark Lowey, who was a member of the union's negotiating team, said the company's refusal to sign off on the byline clause was the straw that broke the camel's back. To put the negotiations in brief context, Lowey said the *Herald* team didn't want a collective agreement that was like any collective agreement that had gone before. "One of the reasons I joined the union in the first place was because the wage grid wasn't being followed. Junior reporters weren't being shown the wage grid. A seniority clause gets to the heart of the grid. But it became clear they didn't want a seniority clause in a contract, but it was the seniority clause that would protect people from the whims of management. I recall once that we had just held a

newsroom group meeting and I challenged Crosbie (Cotton) on some matter and he said: “If you don’t like it here, you can be replaced at any time.”<sup>48</sup>

“Then there was the whole issue of drive by re-writing that the removal of the byline would have addressed. But the removal of the byline wasn’t as big an issue as the seniority clause was. The ethics of it were that if you have seniority you have some protection in making an argument in the newsroom about a story’s news peg. Or, if it’s badly rewritten, you can ask that your byline be taken off it without fear of losing your job. Still, it infringed on their management rights. They wanted final authority over all of the bylines. At that point, we realized we weren’t going to change their minds on anything.”<sup>49</sup>

Former *Herald* managing editor Crockatt was involved in the contract negotiations. She thought raising the issue of removing bylines for ethical reasons or for heavily edited stories was fair. “You have to look at each situation individually. I’m not aware of any byline examples. I know that editors aren’t perfect. That’s why I think editors should attempt to contact reporters when changes are made to their stories. I can think of one example when we couldn’t contact a reporter and something got in that was incorrect, but those things happen. That’s why every newsroom has checks and balances, but if a reporter’s story has to be changed substantively to reflect context or accuracy, then the reporter’s byline should not be put on it. You don’t need a collective agreement to do that,” Crockatt said.<sup>50</sup>

What is ironic in discussions about a byline clause at the *Herald* is that, even though he opposed union certification, former *Herald* publisher Ken King said in a retrospective interview that such a clause would have helped him as publisher. King said had the newspaper’s journalists been able to use such a clause in protest, he would have been aware of the dissention long before the union certification drive and could have done something about it. Moreover, he said, such protests would have revealed that he was not responsible for any of the ethical dilemmas it is alleged was caused by the publisher’s office.

Regardless, on November 6, 1999, pickets went up around the *Calgary Herald* for the first time in 50 years after the newspaper’s doors were shut on its employees in what the union believed was an illegal lockout. Employees’ voice mail and access cards were de-activated. On November 8, 102 of the newsroom employees went on strike at 3 p.m.

The driving rationale for the strike was traditional labor issues, as was communicated to the employees by union officials on November 8, 1999. Over the course of nine months of negotiations, the *Herald* management had said no to layoff protection; no to recognition of length of service; no to guarantees of health and welfare benefits; no to movement through a wage grid; no to protection for part-time employees; no to provisions for expenses, equipment or on-call compensation; no to personal harassment protection; and no to protection against technological change.<sup>51</sup>

On November 13, 1999, publisher Dan Gaynor used the news pages of the *Herald* to explain to its readers the “real story” of the events and circumstances that led to the strike. He wrote about the changes in editorial content the previous management structure had moved toward, thereby demonstrating that the right to a free press belongs to those who own one. “The first was a change in news coverage. The acronym that crystallized this goal was FAB (Fairness, Accuracy and Balance). You will note that nowhere in this formula is there a place for advocacy. Advocacy is not the role of news stories. We believe we should present events as they happen – fairly and with a balance of views. It became clear to me that many, certainly not all of the journalists involved in this dispute were resisting this effort...”<sup>52</sup> “That is why seniority is so important. This union’s leaders seek seniority – job protection as they describe it – to insulate themselves from the forces of change. They want an environment in which they can continue their efforts to resist this new direction, free from the basic responsibilities of basic job expectations.”<sup>53</sup>

It’s clear that to provide the balance necessary so readers could make up their own minds about the truth of the strike would have taken the previous 11 pages and would have run counter to the *Herald*’s propaganda campaign. Barricades were erected around the newspaper to portray the strikers as a dangerous threat and Conrad Black himself waded into the dispute saying the strike was an “attempted left-wing coup d’état in the newsroom of the *Calgary Herald*, which serves a community that includes very few of the mindless socialists of the type that you would find convivial.”<sup>54</sup> The reporters and editors who resisted the newspaper’s degradation under a former left-leaning publisher and who were appalled by the ethics of King’s managers had become left-wing advocates according to Dan Gaynor and Conrad Black. This is how truth can be manipulated.

It is not the purpose of this chapter to delve at length into the eight-month strike, except to suggest that how the *Herald* covered its own strike would make a worthwhile study on its own. Rather, the intention is to reveal the options the journalists who remained on strike were given to end the strike.

On June 28, 2000, the 93 *Herald* newsroom workers still on strike assembled in a northeast Calgary hotel meeting room and were presented with two options: taking buy-out packages that would allow them to leave the *Herald* or going back to the newspaper with a contract that had no seniority clause. Accompanying the proposed contract was a five-page letter from *Herald* editor-in-chief Peter Menzies to the CEP’s national representative Dave Coles outlining permanent changes that had taken place in the newsroom as a result of restructuring during the strike. Among the most offensive were the productivity expectations of reporters and copy editors. “In areas of productivity, for example, reporters who are not capable of producing three assigned or enterprise stories in the course of a standard 7-hour shift without moving into overtime are deemed to be performing below standard. Decisions on bylines and content of stories are the sole preserve of the editors.”<sup>55</sup> Whether such standards are reasonable may well depend on circumstances, such as the amount of background research required to produce the article.

As for copy editors: “Copy editors are expected to be able to, at a minimum,

process 8-10 pages per shift. On busy days and nights, if they cannot meet the standard of processing 10-15 pages per shift without incurring overtime, copy editors are deemed to be performing below standard. Copy editors must sign each produced page and proofed page they are involved in. This enhances accountability.”<sup>56</sup>

For those who cared about journalism ethics, their readers and the editorial product that would be produced with such performance standards, the choice presented to them – compromising their ethical standards and returning to the *Herald* or leaving with a buy-out package – was immoral. Journalists could forget about having the time to read and understand 400-page documents before writing about them. More than ever, the purpose of the *Herald*'s employees would be to fill the white space around the ads as quickly and cheaply as possible with readers short-changed in the process.

After 236 days on strike, 85 of the 93 journalists opted for the severance packages and walked away from the *Calgary Herald*.

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<sup>1</sup> Craig, Susanne. “The real reason *Herald* staff are hitting the bricks.” *The Globe and Mail*. November 16, 1999. p. A14

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Steward, Gillian. “Shame on Southam.” *The Globe and Mail*. November 10, 1999. p. A21

<sup>5</sup> By the author.

<sup>6</sup> Ken King to Bergen, newsroom conversation.

<sup>7</sup> “Crockatt aims to capture ‘spirit of Calgary.’” *Calgary Herald*. April 17, 1996. p. A1.

<sup>8</sup> “King catalyst for change: Readership on the increase.” *Calgary Herald*. October 14, 1996. p. A12.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> General, Sylvia [e-mail] communication to Bob Bergen [Cited February 11, 2002]

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Bryden, Joan. “Chrétien the ‘wrong guy to pressure.’” *The Daily News*. February 28, 2002. p. 19.

<sup>15</sup> Bryden, Joan. “PM awaits results before judging.” *Calgary Herald*. March 12, 2002. p. A4.

<sup>16</sup> Trickey, Mike. “U.S. vows to never forget Sept. 11.” *Calgary Herald*. March 12, 2002. p. A5; Naumetz, Tim. “Chrétien dismissal called ‘cold.’” *Calgary Herald*. March 12, 2002, p. A5; Mofina Rick. “Police group urges tougher sentences.” *Calgary Herald*. March 12, 2002. p. A6; Naumetz, Tim. “Doctors urge decriminalization of marijuana.” *Calgary Herald*. March 12, 2002. p. A7; Beauchesne, Eric. “Upbeat consumers ready to spend: survey.” *Calgary Herald*. March 12, 2002. p. C1.

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- <sup>17</sup> Op. Cit. General.
- <sup>18</sup> Bergen, Bob. “Used-car superstore mirrors U.S. trend.” *Calgary Herald*. June 24, 1997. p. B1.
- <sup>19</sup> [Confidential e-mail] communication to Bob Bergen [Cited November 14, 2001]
- <sup>20</sup> Such stories are, in fact, a quick way to fill newspapers relatively easily. The stories often come prepackaged in the form of news releases from police and fire officials that provide a constant stream of information that can be updated or filled out with interviews. A veneer of originality is applied by obtaining pictures of victims or their families under the guise of providing a public service to readers by providing personalized reports about events in their community. In reality, crime stories are a quick and cheap way to fill the white space around the ads.
- <sup>21</sup> Op. Cit. [Confidential e-mail] communication to Bob Bergen [Cited November 14, 2001]
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> Mushka, Christine [e-mail] communication to Bob Bergen [Cited December 15, 2001]
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup> Op.Cit. [Confidential e-mail] communication to Bob Bergen [Cited November 14, 2001]
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup> Ketcham, Brock [e-mail] communication to Bob Bergen [Cited January 14, 2002]
- <sup>32</sup> Crockatt, Joan [Telephone interview] Interviewed by Bob Bergen [May 2, 2002]
- <sup>33</sup> Torquing a story means putting a twist on a mundane story – making more of it than may be warranted – that will allow it more prominent play. A line story is the main featured story on the front page.
- <sup>34</sup> Shutiak, Laura. [e-mail] communication to Bob Bergen [Cited April 15, 2002]
- <sup>35</sup> Correction. *Calgary Herald*. May 10, 1998. p. A2.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>37</sup> Bergen, internal *Calgary Herald* document.
- <sup>38</sup> King, Ken [Interview] Interviewed by Bob Bergen at the Pengrowth Saddledome, Calgary [April 30, 2002]
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>41</sup> Confidential [e-mail] communication to Bob Bergen [Cited February 14, 2002]
- <sup>42</sup> Ramondt, Joanne [e-mail] communication to Bob Bergen [Cited February 11, 2002]
- <sup>43</sup> Newsroom conversation. August 19, 1999.
- <sup>44</sup> Bergen, Bob. “Final cost of CFB closure will never be known.” *Calgary Herald*. August 20, 1999. p. A1.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>46</sup> *Calgary Herald*. Proposed Collective Agreement. September 16, 1999.
- <sup>47</sup> *Calgary Herald*. Proposed Collective Agreement. October 29, 1999.
- <sup>48</sup> Lowey, Mark [Interview] Interviewed by Bob Bergen [March 28, 2002]

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Op. Cit. Crockatt, Joan.

<sup>51</sup> Letter to employees, November 8, 1999 from Andy Marshall, president of CEP Local 115A and John Webster, president of Graphic Communications International Union Local 34M. [Private paper]

<sup>52</sup> Gaynor, Dan. "What the Herald strike is really about." *Calgary Herald*. November 13, 1999. p. A3.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Mickleburgh, Rod. "Black decries newspaper strike a 'left-wing coup' attempt." *Globe and Mail*. January 31, 2000. p. A17.

<sup>55</sup> Menzies, Peter. Letter to Dave Coles from Peter Menzies. June 19, 2000. [Private paper]

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.