

8. Conclusions and Recommendations.

8.1. Conclusions

No single collective agreement at any of the Canadian newspapers examined was found to be sufficiently foolproof to address all of the ethical dilemmas that journalists faced at the *Calgary Herald* before seeking union certification.

It is tempting to speculate a collective agreement byline clause would have helped the journalists at the *Calgary Herald*, but the reality is that such a clause would have probably only helped win some small battles. It is equally easy to speculate that a clause requiring editors to consult with reporters after substantive changes to their stories would have solved even more problems. Similarly, a clause protecting sources would have resolved the author's predicament when an editor identified a source and such identification could have caused the source grievous harm. But all the conjecture about what could have happened at the *Herald* remains speculation.

In reality, it can be observed that many journalists at large daily newspapers regard community newspapers and small dailies as stepping stones to their larger metropolitan counterparts. Yet, from an ethical perspective, the author is struck by the contracts at two small British Columbia newspapers, the *Surrey Leader* and the *Langley Times*. Both newspapers have clauses in their contracts which stipulate that employees will not be required to write, process or prepare anything that distorts any facts or creates an impression that employees know to be false. That is to say, the journalists have clauses in their contracts that protect the truth. It is such a simple concept, but it has far-reaching implications. Given such protection, editors shut out of byline withdrawal clauses would have vehicles by which they could advance ethical arguments not contemplated in the vast majority of collective agreements.

Could such clauses have been used as grounds for protest by journalists at the *LeaderPost* in Regina when the truth, as they saw it, regarding CanWest's national editorials was corrupted? One can only speculate. But, as was noted earlier in this report, there is virtually no situation in media ethics which calls for withholding the truth and, as such, those clauses could provide powerful tools to journalists caught in ethical dilemmas. Pressing for such contract language is an action only journalists themselves can take. But, ultimately, a majority would have to decide whether such provisions are something they would like in collective agreements and, in the worst scenario, are worth going on strike for. It is difficult to understand how a socially responsible employer, publisher or owner would not want to embrace truth in journalism as an ethical value, but, realistically, not all employers, publishers and owners, in this study alone, appear to hold such values as dearly as others. After all, the great journalists say, it takes a great owner to make a great newspaper.

It would appear from this examination of 65 collective agreements, representing the collective agreements of more than 134 Canadian large and small metropolitan daily and community newspapers, that the gold standard in the newspaper industry is the

clauses which allow journalists to withdraw their bylines for ethical or other reasons. They are the clauses used most often by journalists at varying rates from newspaper to newspaper and were the clauses used by the journalists at both *The Gazette* in Montreal and *The LeaderPost* in Regina which raised ethical issues at both newspapers. Although it is not yet clear that the battle has been won in Montreal or Regina, the ability to take ethical stands with the backing of a union would appear to be a better alternative than not being able to take them at all. This is particularly true when former *Calgary Herald* publisher Ken King, who was loath to see a union in the newsroom, said a byline clause would have helped him.

But, as the London *Free Press* illustrates in painful fashion, a newspaper is only as good as its owner will let it be, despite valiant efforts by its journalists to do the best work possible. They have both a union and a collective agreement, but the journalists' professional ethics appear to be challenged daily by owners who appear to care very little about the London community and the notion of serving the newspaper's readers well. The same holds true for many journalists at the Southam newspapers who think their primary fidelity is to their readers. They have been told their primary fidelity is to their employer and have been threatened with dismissal if they withdraw their bylines in protest or speak out against corporate policy.

Much has been said in the literature about journalistic loyalty and where it should be placed. What the literature doesn't consider is journalists whose primary fidelity is to their wives, husbands, children or extended families. CanWest's national editorials may violate some journalists' ethical principles, but they are economically powerless to do much about it. It has been said the "good employee" subordinates the individual employee's ethical framework to that of the company. As the result of speaking to many Southam journalists over the course of this research, it can be suggested the "good employee" model can be abandoned and a "terrified employee" model advanced at some newspapers. Where it was suggested the "good employee" model constituted a threat to democracy, the author suggests that a "terrified employee" model applied to journalists will be even worse.

The journalists at the non-CanWest owned *The Toronto Star* and *The Globe and Mail* are not subject to such strictures. When their newspapers are held up against most of the other Southam newspapers, it is obvious a tone is set there by the sheer volume of their content that is critical of CanWest's national editorial initiative. The questions are whether their coverage is biased and whether they are just as guilty of limiting diversity as the Southam newspapers. Perhaps they are to a certain degree, but without that coverage, Canadians would be hard-pressed to know about an issue central to journalism, diversity of opinion and ideas, is threatened.

There is another factor that may explain the apparent bias of the *Star* and the *Globe*, as well. Journalists are not in the business of reporting on airplanes that routinely land safely: they are in the business of reporting on airplanes that slam into the World Trade Centre in New York in terrorist attacks on the United States. Many journalists see the national editorials as an attack on diversity of opinion and ideas. As such, the national

editorials are a news story and it is a news story most of the Southam newspapers aren't telling. That would certainly help rationalize the apparent one-sidedness of most of *The Star's* and *The Globe's* coverage. One can ask the question: What is a newspaper for? Is it for presenting the news, or is it to provide a platform for its owners?

The only reasonable conclusion that can be reached when asked that of the Southam newspapers is that they have become a platform for their owners and vehicles for censoring debate. Whether the direction comes from CanWest's head office or is at the initiative of individual newspapers, the resulting limitation on diversity of opinion and ideas is the same.

Much has been made of the right of newspaper owners to state their views via their newspapers. This isn't really an issue of rights: this is about power and CanWest has the power to compel their newspapers to carry its national editorials. In the end, it is about power over newspaper readers' minds. It was the limited ability of Southam journalists to withdraw their bylines and spark debate that has offered balance to the otherwise overwhelmingly formidable power of CanWest's owners. CanWest's defence that the "marketplace of ideas" will decide whether the initiative succeeds or fails is disingenuous: there is no marketplace of ideas in most one-newspaper cities it serves, including those in cities that have the tabloid *Sun* newspapers which appeal to an entirely different demographic.

Disingenuous, as well, is the claim CanWest seeks out alternative views and publishes them through the Southam network: they don't. Worse is the fact that CanWest intends to write one national editorial a week, or that it will define 52 positions the Southam newspapers will take over the course of a year. If the debate in its newspapers is constrained on each issue as it has been on the national editorial issue, there is a great threat not only to press freedom, but to a cornerstone of Canadian democracy.

8.2. Recommendations

There must be a federal inquiry into CanWest Global Corp.'s attack on press freedom and diversity in Canada. The Royal Commission on Newspapers had three commissioners, secretarial assistance, a legal counsel team, a director of research, a research staff of four, four writers, seven research assistants, three consultants, nine working in administrative services and three indexers, not to mention 29 others and the Communications Research Centre that worked on its eight supporting volumes.

If this researcher working alone and with limited means (compared to a Royal Commission) can determine the extent of CanWest's censorship on the national editorial issue and the threat it poses to democracy, a federal inquiry could effectively determine the extent of the threat posed by each of the editorials appearing in CanWest newspapers weekly. The threat is clear and present: the federal government must act decisively and immediately.