

**Is Influence Illusionary?
The Effects of Ownership on Political Coverage In
Hollinger and CanWest Owned Newspapers**

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In August 2000, CanWest Global Communication Corporation purchased the largest newspaper chain in Canada, Southam Inc. from Hollinger International Inc. CanWest is owned by the Asper family who has an amicable history with the Liberals, dating back to the years when the late family patriarch Israel Asper was leader of the Manitoba Liberals. Hollinger's major shareholder at the time of sale was the conservative stalwart Conrad Black. This change in ownership had the potential to adversely affect Canada's media landscape as not only had ownership changed hands but the partisanship of the owners as well. Under Black's proprietorship many opponents, including Jean Chrétien, claimed that the *National Post* proliferated an ideology-driven view. The *Post's* emphasis on conservative interests afforded it the reputation as the "... catalyst and cheerleader for the emergence of the Canadian Alliance Party, an intervention into national life that is almost unprecedented for a newspaper in the post-war era."¹ Black was accused of using his newspaper chain for the promotion of his political and financial interests- having neither regard for the informational needs of his readers, nor for quality, objective journalism.

Black's critics were abundant and as vitriolic in their rants as Black was ruthless in his corporate downsizing. Former employee Claude Gravel claimed his resignation was based on Black's turning *Le Soleil* "...into nothing more than a publicity pamphlet."² Former *Ottawa Citizen* columnist Elaine Medline resigned, commenting that she didn't "... want to make any more money for Conrad Black."³ Noted writer Peter Newman opined, "There isn't the slightest doubt that he (Black) intends to use his newspapers to influence public opinion to back his conservative view of life,"⁴ while

¹ David Taras, *Power and Betrayal in the Canadian Media*, (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2001), 232.

² As quoted in Maude Barlow and James Winter, *The Big Black Book: The Essential Views of Conrad and Barbara Amiel Black*, (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing, 1997), 11.

³ As quoted in Barlow and Winter, 12.

⁴ Peter Newman, "Conrad Black's Private Agenda," *Macleans*, 17 June 1996, 34.

Hollinger President David Radler himself barked that “if editors disagree with us, they should disagree with us when they are no longer in our employ.”⁵

Critics of ownership concentration found little solace in the Southam sale to CanWest. Pointing to the high degree of press ownership concentration (over 95 percent controlled by six chains),⁶ opponents continued to fear the abuse of ownership power. Claims that the Asper family would disseminate their political views in an attempt to influence the public were abundant. Following the implementation of new corporate policies, many critics were appalled: “The CanWest definition of independence appears to be quite different from the way most journalists and citizens would define it. If ... commentary requires corporate approval in advance of publication, this (puts a) significant limitation on the independence of newspapers.”⁷ Changing from Black to Asper ownership did little to allay the concerns regarding the diversity of opinions in the media. In fact, when CanWest’s broadcasting holdings are included in the equation, many envisioned even greater opportunities to silence divergent views.

As of January 2005, CanWest owned 11 English language major Canadian daily newspapers- including the *National Post*, *Ottawa Citizen*, *Vancouver Sun*, *Montreal Gazette*, *Calgary Herald*, *Edmonton Journal*, and the *Windsor Star*. CanWest is also the proprietor of free daily papers in Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton and Ottawa, several weekly publications, the national Global television network, smaller local channels such as CH Hamilton, Montreal, Vancouver, a multitude of specialty television channels such as Prime TV and Men TV, and owns smaller radio holdings. CanWest’s must-run editorial policy only fueled the fires of those who contest the level of media ownership concentration in Canada. The late Israel Asper may have disregarded the complaints of his foes: “Our detractors come from our competitors ... aided by disgruntled current and former employees and by the exhortations of anti-business academics,”⁸ but one is hard-pressed to so easily discount the core of their arguments.

Acting as not only purveyors but gatekeepers of information, owners have an unrivalled opportunity to sway Canadians’ perception of their governance. Scholars and those in the media industry are not alone in their uneasiness with the current level of concentrated ownership. In a recent Ipsos-Reid poll, 78 percent of Canadians agreed that “Owners of Canada’s media have gone too far in trying to impact their own personal, political opinions into what their medial outlets say and what they report.”⁹ Nearly two thirds (62 percent) of Canadians believe that there is too much ownership concentration in the media industry and 68 percent believe that media concentration undermines

⁵ As quoted in James Winter, *Democracy’s Oxygen: How Corporations Control the News*, (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1997) 36.

⁶ Walter Soderland and Kai Hildebrandt. “Does Press Ownership Affect Content? A Pre and Post-Study of the 1996 Hollinger Corporation Acquisition of Canadian Newspapers.” Paper presented to the Meeting of the Association for Canadian Studies in the United States, San Antonio, (2001) 2.

⁷ Russell Mills, “Under the Asper thumb,” *The Globe and Mail*, 19 June 2002, A17.

⁸ As quoted in Hugh Winsor, “We’d like to hear Russell Mills do the talking.” *The Globe and Mail*, 18 December 2002, A6

⁹The Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, (26 November 2002), Transcript. 14

democracy.¹⁰ While many have vocalized their concerns, there remains little empirical evidence that the change in ownership has had a direct impact on coverage of national politics. The question remains, how often do owners permeate content with their own views?

Ownership's impact on news content has been examined in a substantial amount of studies, with inconsistent results.¹¹ This is not to say that ownerships' effects are negligible, only that several compounding variables and conflicting pressures on owners may serve as camouflage for influence. Columnists and editors have their own ideological positions, inevitably colouring their commentaries. Ideologically influenced personnel practices may determine which journalists cover which beats, and govern newsroom hiring practices in general. Furthermore, owners themselves must consider whether they opt to utilize their papers as vehicles for their partisan beliefs or whether they choose to seek mass appeal in their pursuit for profits. There are many competing theories regarding the influence that ownership has over content. This paper aims to examine these related theories, and determine if ownership has been at the root of CanWest's editorial decisions. A discussion of the history of the Canadian media landscape will serve to put the current situation in context, while a content analysis of several newspapers pre and post-CanWest ownership aims to verify whether the partisanship of the owners affected the coverage of non-sensational, political events.

One Owner, One Voice?

Diversity is an essential component in Canada's democratic pluralism. By reflecting several viewpoints and providing access to information, mass media can foster a relationship between diversity and pluralism. This relationship, in turn, empowers citizens to participate in the political process of the nation, in an informed and meaningful manner. The concept of diversity is generally deconstructed into two main segments; content and sources. Content refers to the substance of the newspaper- the opinions and information that helps a society achieve some level of self-understanding. Diversity of sources refers to the columnists, journalists, newswires and others who generate the content.¹²

Adherents to the social responsibility model argue that the burden of fair representation rests with the media. It is their belief that mass media should accommodate the interests of all individuals from all backgrounds; not only those of the advertisers and upper classes. Proponents of this model believe that the state should intervene in the

¹⁰ The Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, (26 November 2002), 14-15

¹¹ See, for example, David Coulson and Anne Hansen, "The Louisville Courier-Journal's News Content after purchase by Gannett" *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 1995 Spring, 205-215; Cecile Gaziano "Chain Newspaper Homogeneity and Presidential Endorsements." *Journalism Quarterly*, 66, no. 4 (1989) pg.836-845; Lydia Miljan and Cristina Howorun "From Attack Dog to Lap Dog? Newspaper Coverage of Liberal Scandals" *Fraser Forum* (2003 September) 33-34, 39, Walter Soderland and Kai Hildebrandt (2001).

¹² Ministry of Canadian Heritage. "[Media Cross-Ownership in Canada: Part VI: Findings and Suggestions.](http://www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/progs/ac-ca/progs/esm-ms/crios9_e.cfm)" (2002). Retrieved 26 January 2004,

media industry to ensure that the press is responsible to the public and will provide an unbiased account of pertinent information.¹³ This is not to say that the opinions of columnists, editors, and owners should be absent; but when news coverage is in question it should be reported in a largely objective manner. This unwritten contract, espoused in journalism schools, holds that "... since the fourth estate had now become a corporate enterprise in which more and more control is concentrated in fewer and fewer hands, owners should not colour news coverage to their own tastes."¹⁴ News should thus be reported in an empirical manner; informing the public on the events of the day and educating the masses on the impact and implications of the day's happenings.

Communication academics and enthusiastic students are not the only adherents to this belief. The Canadian Newspaper Association, composed primarily of senior executives and publishers contend in their statement of principles that: "The operation of a newspaper is in effect a public trust, no less binding because it is not formally conferred, and its overriding responsibility is to the society which protects and provides its freedom."¹⁵ Regretfully, these mission-like statements are not binding and do not ensure that press owners refrain from flexing their corporate muscles in order to disseminate their own views.

In Canada's market driven libertarian society, there is great resistance to further governmental intervention in the private realm. There is the oft-repeated individualistic argument, reminiscent of John Stuart Mill, that freedom of the press guarantees that owners are able to express their own opinions in their product. In essence, the argument proceeds along the lines that it is the owner who has bought the land and so it is the owner who should be free to enjoy the fruits of the labour. One would be hard-pressed to argue that this is not a right conferred upon owners through their purchase. The problem with this claim only arises when its usage threatens the informational and educational needs of the public- a responsibility that the press industry itself has claimed to bear.

Media chain owners are members of an elite economic class. As such, their interests and fundamental concerns may not only differ from, but are potentially diametrically opposed to those of the "everyman". Critics from both sides of the political spectrum have vocalized their concerns about the lack of diversity in editorial commentaries. They view the threat of a capitalist ideology (and hence, the ideology of the owners) being promulgated to the masses as real and particularly detrimental to a free marketplace of ideas.¹⁶ According to Linda McQuaig, one should always bear in mind that

¹³ Arthur Siegal, *Politics and the Media in Canada* 2nd ed. (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1996) 26.

¹⁴ Christopher Dorman (as quoted in) Ministry of Canadian Heritage "Concentration of Newspaper Ownership: Part III: The Nineties Debate"(2002) www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/progs/ac-ca/progs/esms/prob5_e.cfm Retrieved 06 January 2004

¹⁵ Tom Kent (testimony) Proceedings of: The Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communications (29 April 2003) Transcript, 3

¹⁶ Lydia Miljan and Cristina Howorun, "Does Ownership Matter? The Effects of Ownership on the Coverage of Political Scandals in Hollinger and CanWest Owned Newspapers." Paper presented to the Canadian Political Science Association, Halifax, (2003), 2.

...all media outlets are owned by rich, powerful members of the elite. To assume that this fact has no interference on the ideas they present would be equivalent to assuming that, should the entire media be owned by, say, labour unions, women's groups or social workers, this would have no impact on the editorial content.¹⁷

Diane Francis, a Southam columnist associated with the political right, argues that because most Canadians live in a one newspaper town,

their window of the world is narrow, their information fed through a biased-cost effective focus ... The iron grip held by a handful of magnates is a problem in a country where balance, impartiality and independence from other tycoons such as big advertisers is sorely needed.¹⁸

Former Hollinger reporter Peter Calamai contends that under Black's ownership, newspapers were aimed at the wielders of power:

Black is a person who thinks that what matters is speaking directly to the people who have influence ... So you write your editorials for the Governor of the Bank of Canada and the Deputy Minister of Finance. The fact that you haven't helped most of your readers one iota to understand what the issues are is immaterial because they don't count.¹⁹

A content analysis conducted by NewsWatch Canada (1998), an organization affiliated with Simon Fraser University, confirmed these assertions. NewsWatch established that after Hollinger acquired the *Vancouver Sun*, coverage of poverty declined despite the increase of impoverished families in the Vancouver area. Furthermore, it was found that while most coverage continued to portray the poor sympathetically, stories that presented the poor as threatening or undeserving increased considerably.²⁰

These notions of a lack of representation and a silencing of diverse opinions, through their omission, are particularly troublesome. It is widely believed that owners advocate only one view- that which best serves the interests of the owner/publisher and members of their economic class. According to University of Calgary communications Professor David Taras, journalism produced for large corporations tends to result in sympathetic coverage of political and economic policies that favor the media owners. He further argues that "... when reporting on the activities of corporations and their bosses, the tone tends to be one of respectful distance."²¹ Readers are at risk of undue influence

¹⁷ Linda McQuaig, *Shooting the Hippo: Death by Deficit and Other Canadian Myths*. (Toronto: Viking Press, 1995) 12

¹⁸ Diane Francis, *Controlling Interest: Who Owns Canada?* (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1986).317

¹⁹ As quoted in J. Miller *Yesterday's News*. (Toronto: Fernwood Publishing, 1998) 78

²⁰ NewsWatch Canada. "Question the Sun!"

www.sfu.ca/mediapr/Releases/News/1998/July98/Sunstudy.html (29 July 1998) Retrieved 8 January 2004

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²¹ Taras, (2001)59

from corporate interests and can be easily misguided into believing that certain governmental policies or electoral platforms are not only in the best interests of corporations, but also themselves. This does little to foster debate and can even stifle it.

These concerns are amplified when one considers chain ownership. Cecile Gaziano's (1989) study on chain newspaper homogeneity and presidential endorsements found that newspapers were primarily homogenous in their endorsement patterns.²² Despite the uniformity in endorsements, Gaziano claimed that bigger chains were less restrictive of editorial freedom (with regards to presidential endorsements) and varied in homogeneity according to size, geographic scope and other characteristics.²³ Readers were thus not spoon-fed a one-dimensional view stemming from a far off corporate office, and were instead afforded an opinion that coincided with their geographic and presumably, regional economic demographic. While this may sometimes prove to be true of chains with individual holdings in geographically dispersed areas, the opportunity to disseminate a single view is heightened when a corporation has multiple local acquisitions.

The Canadian press landscape is saturated with media chains, yet some organizations have exemplified considerable degrees of press responsibility. When Southam owned both the *Vancouver Sun* and *Province*, reporters and editors were not allowed in each other's newsrooms. According to Senator Carney; "It was possible to put out two different newspapers, two different voices, with a centralized location, with centralized distribution, with editorial diversity because we were simply not permitted in each other's newsrooms."²⁴ This type of editorial independence continues in the broadcast industry; Rogers Media Inc. President Anthony Viner asserts that: "All of our media properties have separate editorial and newsrooms ... There is no common editorial policy. Each of our media products has their own policy."²⁵ Bell Globe-media Vice President Alain Gourd similarly claims that: "We do not believe in directing from the center ... each station has to be close to its market even if they contradict themselves, Ottawa contradicting CFCF Montreal"²⁶ for example. This degree of segregation has, unfortunately, become almost a thing of the past in the print industry particularly when one considers CanWest.

CanWest's "must run" editorial policy, launched in January 2002, has been controversial since its onset. This policy sees that "national editorials" are written in the company's Winnipeg headquarters and printed in 14 dailies (including the *National Post*) on a weekly basis. According to Geoffrey Elliot, CanWest's Vice President of Corporate Affairs: "Opinions contrary to the core positions of (these) national editorials are not run

²² Gaziano, 844

²³ Gaziano, 844-845

²⁴ Senator Carney, (testimony) The Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communication (19 June 2003) Transcript, 15

²⁵ Anthony Viner, (testimony) The Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communication (7 October 2003). Transcript, 3

²⁶ Alain Gourd, (testimony) The Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. (26 November 2002), Transcript. 39

in editorial space.”²⁷ Although letters to the editor and columnists are free to articulate opposing views, the average Canadian is likely to pay greater heed to the unsigned editorials, which give an aura of authority and credibility. It appears that CanWest has enforced a quasi gag-order on alternative views; silencing dissenting voices, limiting debate, imposing a self-interested opinion on Canadians and hindering diversity in their multiple holdings.

A contributing factor to the diversity of voices heard is in the diversity of sources themselves. Local newspapers tend to rely on local journalists to generate stories and report on matters of regional interest; from Mayoral races and criminal activities, to human interest stories and theatrical, restaurant and movie reviews. There is the belief that those who reside in the same geographical area as the readers are most in tune with the values and informational needs of their subscribers. Part of the attraction of a local newspaper is in fact its local emphasis; national issues are discussed with the resulting impact on the community in mind, readers can look for a review of the new restaurant in the entertainment pages, home teams dominate the sports pages, and local businesses are featured prominently in the financial pages. The problem arises when newspaper empires determine that a lone journalist at headquarters can more efficiently cover some areas for all of their holdings. CanWest exemplifies this threat to local independence and relevance. The “national editorials” discussed are only one of several displays of corporate disregard for local relevance. During the *National Post*’s birth, journalist Andrew Coyne covered the Canadian west, despite residing in Ontario. Newspapers such as *The Windsor Star* most often depict flora and gardening tips originally featured in *The Vancouver Sun*, in spite of the differences in soil, weather and native plant life. Local restaurant critics have become an anomaly, and movie buffs can expect to read a movie review from Winnipeg- not Ottawa, Montreal, Calgary or a local reporter.

Newswires provide invaluable services to the print and broadcast industries. A small newspaper in Thunder Bay simply can not afford to have correspondents stationed in Ottawa, Washington, or even Toronto for that matter. Instead, media outlets depend on the services provided through agencies such as the Associated Press for information of news events abroad or even at home. The risk is that the affordability of these information services may result in chain owners (always mindful of the bottom line) overusing these resources at the expense of local content. Following Hollinger’s 1995 takeover of Regina’s *Leader- Post*, Professor James McKenzie of the University of Regina discovered that there was nearly a 40 percent increase in wire material. Under Hollinger control, only one quarter of the *Leader-Post* was devoted to news, with local news accounting for only one eighth of the entire paper.²⁸ According to McKenzie; “Hollinger (had) put profit ahead of substance.”²⁹ .

²⁷ Geoffrey Elliot, “News Release- CanWest responds to calls by former directors, publishers, and editors of Southam for government to intervene in Canadian newsrooms.” Email addressed to “All CanWest Staff”, 7 June 2002, 2.

²⁸ Ministry of Canadian Heritage, “Concentration of Ownership in Media: Part III: The nineties debate,” 2-3

²⁹James McKenzie (as quoted in) Ministry of Canadian Heritage, “Concentration of Ownership in Media: Part III: The nineties debate,” .3

Even more troubling than the increased reliance of owners on newswires is the emergence of CanWest News Services, a rival to Canadian Press. CanWest News Services provides content information for all of the company's dailies and broadcast news shows, in addition to the subscribers of the service, including Osprey Media (whose focus is on small, local papers such as *The Kingston Whig-Standard*) and TorStar (*The Toronto Star*). Although this service in and of itself does not pose a direct threat to the diversity of voices heard, it demonstrates that a single corporation is increasingly framing the content of the news. Newswire subscribers may be able to avoid the uniformity that is slowly infiltrating the large chains, but conglomerate owned papers can not avoid the pressures from headquarters to conform- a consequence of chain ownership articulated in the *Kent Commission's* final report:

... the concentration of the press has had even more pernicious effects. The conformity it tends to impose, the constant search for even the smallest savings, and the resort to tried and true formulas has resulted in the development of a dreary uniformity in the handling of the news ... the continuing process of ownership concentration has been accompanied by a reduction in the diversity of news and comment that is the vital element of a free society.³⁰

The Kent Commission, like its predecessor, the Davey Committee, was unable to prove conclusively that chain ownership is detrimental to the diversity of ideas. The Ministry of Canadian Heritage echoed this notion and took it even further by stating: "Mixed-media ownership does not pose a problem in itself, provided that in any given region there continues to exist a diversity of opinions, information and ideas flowing from broadcast and other media sources sufficient to ensure that residents have access to differing views on matters of public concern."³¹ Yet given the rise of media conglomerates in Canada, there are many areas and regions dominated by a sole corporation. Between 1996 and 1999, all of Saskatchewan's daily newspapers were owned by Hollinger.³² CanWest has devoured the entire Vancouver market- not only do they own the *Vancouver Sun*, the *Vancouver Province*, the *Vancouver Courier*, and the *National Post*, but also BCTV which has a 60 percent market share of viewers for the evening newscast.³³ This level of media concentration is unmatched in other industrial countries.

Nevertheless, there are academics and industry analysts who maintain that monopolies and chains provide beneficial economies of scale. They argue that competition breeds infotainment and trivial news as papers scramble for higher

³⁰ Ministry of Canadian Heritage. "Concentration of Ownership in Media: Part II: Government Inquiries Relevant to Concentration of Ownership in the Media." (2002). www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/progs/esm-ms/prin4_e.cfm Retrieved 6 January 2004, 7

³¹ Ministry of Canadian Heritage, "Media Cross-Ownership in Canada: Part VI: Findings and Recommendations", .1

³² Ministry of Canadian Heritage, "Concentration of Newspaper Ownership: Part III: The Nineties Debate," 7

³³ MP Jim Abbott (testimony) The Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, (November 26, 2002) Transcript. 22.

readerships. They claim “journalists are forced to break stories quickly to scoop the competition, and don’t take the time or do the extra research that is often required to provide a complete account.”³⁴ This line of thinking compels one to question whether the “Public Works Scandal” of 2000 would have materialized into the Gomery inquiry much sooner if journalists had access to more resources and time.

Some scholars go even further and contend that monopolies and large chains have a heightened freedom of the press as they are more resilient against the loss of offended advertisers or readers in the face of a controversial commentary or story. Romanow and Soderland have aptly pointed out that:

Those who challenged President Nixon at the time of the Watergate scandal were not local community radio stations or small-town newspapers. Despite threats, challenges to the President and his administration came from the *Washington Post* and the CBS network, media organizations of considerable size and scope.³⁵

Although substantial financial resources may afford newspapers greater investigative reporting capabilities, believing that this translates into immunity from political interference or a strengthened freedom of expression for journalists is woefully naïve. When Chrétien exercised his royal prerogative in an attempt to block Black’s ascent to British peerage, Black initiated a lawsuit against the former PM, accusing him of abuse of power. Chrétien’s public scorn for his portrayal in the *National Post* was mentioned as a fact in Black’s statement of claim.³⁶ According to acclaimed columnist Lawrence Martin “... every time I wrote something strongly negative about Mr. Chrétien, the Prime Minister’s Office was on the phone to David Asper... it’s hard not to conclude that the PM wanted a regime change at the *Citizen* and got one.”³⁷ The public, media barons, and journalists alike were quick to cry foul when in January, 2004 *Ottawa Citizen* reporter Juliet O’Neill’s home was invaded by the RCMP. They were searching for the source used in her November 8, 2003 front-page story regarding Maher Arar.³⁸

Peter White, a high-ranking Hollinger executive states that “... a newspaper is a private enterprise owing nothing whatsoever to the public ... It is therefore affected by no public interest whatsoever.”³⁹ The press has put itself in a position of contradicting itself; on the one hand it argues that it must fight in the name of societal good to ensure that Canadians’ freedom of expression is not trampled on, yet on the other, it argues that it owes nothing to a public which does not give it franchise. Owners and publishers are

³⁴ Taras, 1990, 16.

³⁵ Walter Romanow and Walter C. Soderland *Media Canada: An Introductory Analysis* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1992), 265.

³⁶ Murray Campbell “PM should take stand, lawyers for Black say” *The Globe and Mail*, 9 November 1999, A1.

³⁷ Lawrence Martin “Is this a PMO dagger we see before us?” *The Globe and Mail*, 20 June 2002, A17.

³⁸ For more details on this story, see Hugh Winsor “Security Law threatens reporters, not terrorists”. *The Globe and Mail*, 26 January 2004, A4; Jonathan Durbin, “That is so Orwellian” *Macleans*, 2 February 2004, 20.

³⁹ Peter White as quoted in Miller, 182

quick to defend their right to disseminate their views in their products, but are equally swift to limit the right of journalists to express themselves. This becomes very clear when one considers the degree of censorship that occurs within newspapers, a process that begins far before print time

One of the many theories put forth is that chain owners have a great deal of influence over the tone of their papers through their hiring practices. Considering that owners can not oversee every facet of operation, in every paper they own, this responsibility must be delegated to others. Daniel Chomsky argues, "...editors are carefully selected for this purpose. It is their responsibility to shape the content of news coverage on a daily basis."⁴⁰ Scholars argue that through the hiring of select editors and publishers, owners can ensure that the "desired" ideology and only this, is disseminated in the pages of opinion. Because editors are hired with the explicit purpose of perpetuating the beliefs of owners, critics maintain that this limits journalists' ability to exercise their freedom of expression. It would however, be hasty to assume that this is a feature unique to chain papers. Byron St. Dizier found that editors at independently owned newspapers were just as likely to share the same values as the owners and publishers. "At chain-owned newspapers, 49 percent of the editors said they never disagreed with the paper's owners, while 53 percent of these at independent papers gave such a response."⁴¹

Nevertheless, ideological views can swiftly become criteria for employment. Former *Ottawa Citizen* editor and son of the founder of the CCF party, Charles Woodsworth, was dismissed on the basis of his affiliation with left-wing politics. He claimed Southam terminated his employment on the grounds of his socialist views and affiliation with the CCF.⁴² Likewise, within one year of Hollinger's 1996 Southam takeover, ten editors of the chain's 32 were replaced.⁴³ Ken Whyte of the *National Post* "hand-picked every member of the editorial team" to ensure his management team mirrored his philosophy.⁴⁴ The Asper family, too has made its own partisan-personnel maneuvers; "... encouraging those who oppose centralized views to resign (*Halifax Daily News* columnist Stephen Kimber) or be reassigned (former *Gazette* editorial page editor Peter Hadekel)."⁴⁵ While former *Montreal Gazette* publisher Michael Goldbloom was terminated on the grounds that reports of the Middle East were not "Israeli enough." With regards to domestic coverage, CanWest started "... a firestorm of activity after it fired *Ottawa Citizen* publisher Russell Mills over the newspaper's criticism of the Prime Minister."⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Daniel Chomsky. "The Mechanisms of Management Control at *The New York Times*." *Media, Culture & Society*, 21, no.5 (1999) 587

⁴¹ Byron St. Dizier. "Editorial Page Editors and Endorsements: Chain-owned vs. Independent Newspapers." *Newspaper Research Journal*, Vol. 8, No.1, (1986) 66

⁴² Charles King "The Profits of Parochialism" in Walter Stewart (ed) *Canadian Newspapers: The Inside Story* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1980), 85-98, 87.

⁴³ Ministry of Canadian Heritage. "Concentration of Newspaper Ownership: Part III: The Nineties Debate" 9

⁴⁴ Michael Den Tandt "The Post was so Black and Whyte," *The Globe and Mail*, 3 May 2003, R5.

⁴⁵ Michael Posner, "Newsroom culture can be at odds with owners," *The Globe and Mail*, 16 January 2002, B17.

⁴⁶ Geoff Kirbyson, "CanWest boss upbeat on recovery." *Winnipeg Free Press*, 19 July 2002, B6.

One would be hard-pressed to argue that that only like-minded columnists and reporters are able to maintain gainful employment. Some scholars, however, assert that a great deal of self-censorship may be attributable for their regular pay cheques. “In commercial media, owners hire, fire, set budgets, and determine the overarching aims of the enterprise. Journalists, editors and other media professional who rise to the top of the hierarchy tend to internalize the values, both commercial and political, of media owners.”⁴⁷ The notion is that by acting as lap dogs of sorts, journalists will have greater opportunities for advancement within the corporation, and access to better stories. Although independent papers surely make use of similar practices, some argue that chain-owned newspapers, with their expanded readership and greater presence in the industry, pose a greater threat to the ideals behind freedom of expression.

Surveys conducted by NewsWatch in 1998 found that 45 percent of journalists admitted to sometimes or often censoring their writing out of fear of owner reprisal, while 55 percent admitted that self-censorship happened occasionally. An astonishing 52 percent claimed that direct pressure from owners influenced their reports and writing.⁴⁸ Owner interference in the newsroom can occur through such direct pressures but takes place most commonly through more subtle methods. Between January 1999 and August 2000 under Hollinger ownership, the *Ottawa Citizen* broke the story on the HRDC scandal, running 245 stories dealing solely with the financial mismanagement of the governmental agency, 77 percent of them demonstrating a clearly negative slant.⁴⁹ During this period Kathryn May and Rick Mofina penned 51 stories and were the most published reporters on this issue. Following the CanWest purchase, the number of stories decreased to 82 with an equally substantial decline in negative coverage (56 percent negative). Despite being the leading reporters on the story, under CanWest ownership, May and Mofina printed a combined total of only seven stories.⁵⁰

Despite evidence of ideologically infused content, some academics maintain that when political coverage is in question, newspapers are vigilant in their crusade for objective coverage. “Deliberately or even innocently alienating a portion of the audience through unfair and biased coverage of candidates and causes would be self-destructive.”⁵¹ According to Doug Underwood, “Today’s market-savvy newspapers are planned and packaged to ‘give readers what they want’; newspaper content is geared to the results of readership surveys.”⁵² The theory proceeds along the lines that a newspaper is first and foremost a business and thus seeks to maximize profits, achieving high returns for shareholders. As advertisers seek consumers and newspapers seek revenue, papers must acquire and maintain a high circulation in order to earn their 43 percent of Canadian

⁴⁷ Robert McChesney, *The Problem of the Media: U.S. Communication Politics in the 21st Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004) 100.

⁴⁸Ministry of Canadian Heritage. “Concentration of Ownership in Media: Part I: A Review of the Principle Issues,” (2002) 16.

⁴⁹ Miljan, Lydia & Howorun, Cristina “From Attack Dog to Lap Dog? Newspaper Coverage of Liberal Scandals” *Fraser Forum* (September 2003) 34

⁵⁰ Miljan and Howorun, 34

⁵¹ Doug Underwood, *When MBAs Rule the Newsroom* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), xii

⁵² Lance Bennett *The Politics of Illusion, 5th Edition*, (New York: Longman, 2003), 85

advertising expenditure.⁵³ Papers can not afford to ostracize readers with content that is overtly one-sided, or out of sync with the current value systems of readers. Engaging in such practices would be self-destructive, as readers presented with subjective reporting would eventually seek out different news mediums, with advertisers following swiftly behind.

With this in mind, it is of interest that the *Ottawa Citizen* lost 3,000 subscribers in the week following the partisan-based termination of former publisher Russell Mills in 2002.⁵⁴ If promulgating partisan rhetoric is part of CanWest's business plan, it is no surprise that in the 6-month period ending September 30, 2004 the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) reported that the *Globe and Mail* outsold the *National Post* by over 100,000 copies on a daily basis.⁵⁵ Under Hollinger ownership, the *National Post* lost over \$200 million,⁵⁶ a trend that continued when the Aspers seized the reigns of control. CanWest's newspaper and online revenue declined from \$644,010,000 for the August-February 2002 time period to \$599,497,000 for August-February 2003.⁵⁷ Yet, CanWest recorded a slight (1 percent) increase in newspaper revenue for the first quarter of 2005.⁵⁸ One questions whether this apparent turn-around is the result of a better over-all product, smaller overhead costs or the owners restraining from colouring the content with their own beliefs.

Evidently, there are numerous theories on how and if ownership impacts coverage. The findings from these studies have been inconsistent, and hence, inconclusive. These are not recent queries; Canadians have historically had their informational needs met by a concentrated and partisan press. Evaluating the coverage afforded to routine, non-sensational, domestic political events may be able to shed some additional light on ownership influences and the impact, if any, that a limited press ownership has on content.

Historical Background of Press Concentration in Canada

"In the 19th century, newspapers were small operations, locally owned and highly partisan, often relying on government patronage or party financial support."⁵⁹ During the 1860's, editor-politician George Brown of the then, *Toronto Globe and Mail*, set out to expand his assets and promulgate his political interests by launching the highly partisan

⁵³ Ministry of Canadian Heritage, "Concentration of Ownership in Media: Part I: A Review of the Principle Issue" (2002), 13.

⁵⁴ Keith Damsell "Aspers feel the ire of Southam readers," *The Globe and Mail*, 22 June 2002, A2

⁵⁵ CanWest Media Sales "Circulation Numbers"

http://newspaper.canwestmediasales.com/Display_Advertising/Circulation/ViewCirculations.asp (2004)
Retrieved 11 May 2005

⁵⁶ Keith Damsell "National Post to miss loss-reduction targets," *The Globe and Mail*, 25 April 2003, B2

⁵⁷ CanWest Global Communications Corp. "Segmented Information." *Interim Report to Shareholders for the six months ended February 28, 2003*, (2003) 10

⁵⁸ CanWest Global Communications Corp. "Scotia Capital Media Month" 5 May 2005, 21.

⁵⁹ Frederick Fletcher and David Taras "The Mass Media: Private Ownership, Public Responsibilities." In Whittington, M. and William, G. (eds.) *Canadian Politics in the 1990's*. (Scarborough: Nelson Canada, 1995) 297.

Western Globe of London, Ontario.⁶⁰ Likewise, William Southam laid out the foundations for the Southam chain through his purchase of the *Hamilton Spectator* in 1877 and the *Ottawa Citizen* in 1897. Both of these publications were Tory papers, and he swore that they would be Conservative.⁶¹ Reading a newspaper owned or managed by a politician was quite common, for example; Henri Bourassa ran *Le Devoir*, Joseph Howe controlled *The Novascotian*, and William Lyon MacKenzie was pivotal to the success of *The Colonial Advocate* and *The Constitution*. Newspapers played a fundamental role in mobilizing public support for various causes, including the development of political parties;⁶² thus throughout Canada's infancy, readers were spoon-fed partisan rhetoric under the guise of news.

By the turn of the century, the emergence of new technologies (i.e. the telegraph, mechanized printing) led to a further proliferation of newspapers and the arrival of two highly profitable and related markets; readers and advertisers. Competition for mass audiences led many papers to bankruptcy and successful owners were able to purchase these faltering operations at little cost. By 1920, the Southam and Sifton chains were well-established, spearheading Canada's movement toward concentrated chain ownership.⁶³ Despite the critical, influential, oft-cited but largely ignored recommendations put forth in the Senate Special Committee on Mass Media (The Davey Committee) of 1970 and the (Kent) Royal Commission on Newspapers of 1981, this trend has endured with little prohibitive legislation in its way. Currently, BCE Inc. owns *The Globe and Mail*, *Winnipeg Free Press*, CTV and its affiliated stations, Rogers media owns the flagship cable and internet company, the Toronto Blue Jays, several magazines including *Maclean's* and *Chatelaine*, numerous radio stations and a handful of television channels. CHUM has multiple broadcast holdings, in television and radio, including, MuchMusic, Bravo! and local channels scattered throughout the country such as CityTV (Toronto), RO (Ottawa) and VR (Barrie). Quebecor-Sun Media publishes dailies across the country, including the *Toronto Sun* and *Le Devoir*. TorStar has several publishing holdings, including Canada's highest circulating newspaper, *The Toronto Star*, and a plethora of community papers. In 1995, chains owned 88 percent of Canadian dailies, by 1999 the number had increased to 95 percent, accounting for 99 percent of the nation's circulation.⁶⁴

Hollinger Corporation's massive holdings expansions in 1992 and 1995-96 ultimately triggered a heightened renewal of criticisms towards the level of concentration of press ownership. In 1996 Hollinger spearheaded the acquisition of several Southam, Armdale and Thompson newspapers and in November 1998, Black oversaw the launch of the *National Post*, a competitor to the only other national daily; *The Globe and Mail*. In the eyes of many critics, Black's well-known ideology put him at odds with the principles of a free press. An editorial in *Canadian Dimension* highlighted the fears of many when it

⁶⁰ Siegal, 135

⁶¹ Hamilton Southam (testimony) The Standing Senate Committee on Transport and Communication. (June 19 2003) Transcript, 2

⁶² Siegal, 93.

⁶³ Fletcher and Taras, 297

⁶⁴ Soderland and Hildebrandt, 4

proposed that the consequences of Black's acquisitions would "... viciously narrow the range of public debate, advancing corporatist ideals while suffocating dissenting voices."⁶⁵ Under Black's control, the *Post* was accused of "... using its news pages to promote the Canadian Alliance in a way that is as flimsy as it is transparent."⁶⁶

In the summer of 2000, Black began to sell some of his newspaper assets to Israel Asper. By August of the following year, ownership had completely changed hands from Hollinger Inc. to CanWest Global Communications. The Aspers had now solidified their status as Canadian media moguls, joining the ranks with the Thompson and Rogers families. Established press barons, they too were accused of using their papers for partisan promotion, as Hugh Winsor of the *Globe and Mail* laments:

What need for a communication chief when the man who sets the editorial direction of newspapers with 60 percent of the total country is such a fan that he will not only take on your enemies, such as Conservative leader Joe Clark, but will be prepared to flagellate your tormentors in his own news rooms as well?"⁶⁷

Notwithstanding the wide range of criticism aimed at the Aspers and Conrad Black over their perceived heavy-handed influence in newspaper coverage, there remain some ardent supporters of their management styles. Amidst the allegations that Black quashed all dissenting opinions with an iron-fist, leftist columnist Mark Kingwell remarked: "I will say this about my editors at the *Post*... the only changes they ever demanded of me were factual or logical."⁶⁸ In September 2002, CanWest claimed that "Each of our metropolitan and local newspaper is a strong player in its own community. Each is relentlessly local in its coverage and fiercely independent in its editorial policy."⁶⁹ The change in ownership provides for an opportune analysis of the influences that owners, particularly overtly partisan owners, have over the editorial direction of their media holdings.

Evaluating coverage afforded to discrete, non-sensational political events between January 1999 and December 2003, allows for a content analysis of several newspapers under Hollinger, joint and CanWest ownership. As newspapers have traditionally endorsed political candidates in election time, it was felt that partisanship might be heightened during these periods, and perhaps uncharacteristic of day-to-day reports. Budgets are tabled on a near annual basis, and Throne Speeches are delivered with comparable frequency. These political events are somewhat mundane when compared with scandals and elections, possibly amounting to a more accurate representation of print coverage than more sensational times.

⁶⁵ Editorial, "This Publication is not Owned by Conrad Black" *Canadian Dimension*. (November-December, 1996), 4

⁶⁶ Warren Kinsella *Kicking Ass in Canadian Politics* (Toronto: Random House, 2001) 208.

⁶⁷ Hugh Winsor "Journalism 101: Currying Favour in the New World of Convergence". *The Globe and Mail*, 7 March 2001 A5

⁶⁸ Mark Kingwell, "The Right was usually wrong," *Toro*, March 2004, 78.

⁶⁹ Wilson Southam "Newsrooms are no place for head office," *The Globe and Mail*, 17 June 2002, A15

The study will seek to draw associations (i.e. Black owned newspapers and heightened negative coverage of Liberals) and establish causation (ownership determines the degree and tone of coverage). This study also seeks to address the previously noted concerns about chain newspapers' homogeneity in content, and questions surrounding editorial freedom at various newspapers. In light of the controversy surrounding CanWest's "must run" editorial policies, the diversity of editorial views will also be measured under the two ownerships.

Specifically, it is expected that if ownership influences coverage, the *National Post*, *Windsor Star* and *Ottawa Citizen* will have a more adversarial tone towards the Liberal federal government with Black as the proprietor. When Asper acquires the Hollinger papers, the papers not only engage in more favorable coverage of governmental priorities, demonstrating greater approval of policies than both the *Globe and Mail* and *Toronto Star*, but will also demonstrate stricter corporate control over published views. This will be tested in five ways:

1. Negative coverage of Liberal policies will be greatest in the *National Post*, *Windsor Star* and *Ottawa Citizen* when under Hollinger ownership.
2. Coverage of Liberal policies will be more in-sync with the control papers (*Toronto Star* and *Globe and Mail*) during the period when Conrad Black owns 50 percent of the *Post* and CanWest owns the *Windsor Star* and *Ottawa Citizen*.
3. Under CanWest ownership, coverage of Liberal policies will be more favorable in the *National Post*, *Windsor Star* and *Ottawa Citizen*, than during any other time period or in the *Toronto Star* or *Globe and Mail*.
4. An increase in chain-wide editorials, columns and op-eds will result in more homogeneous coverage in the *National Post*, *Windsor Star* and *Ottawa Citizen* under CanWest ownership.
5. The *Windsor Star* (and to a lesser extent, the *Ottawa Citizen*) will see a decrease in local coverage of these political events, under CanWest ownership.

Methodology

Quantitative analysis is the primary approach used in this study, and in testing the above hypotheses, a classic "before and after" research design was used, with content analysis as the principle research tool. Five newspapers were examined in this study; *The National Post*, *Windsor Star*, *Ottawa Citizen*, *Toronto Star* and *The Globe and Mail*, from January 1, 1999 through December 31st, 2003. The *National Post*, *Windsor Star* and *Ottawa Citizen*, comprise the experimental group, and were selected on the basis of their collective change in ownership and diversity in readers. Conrad Black owned all three papers for the first twenty months (the "Hollinger" era) of the study (January 1, 1999 through August 31, 2000). CanWest purchased 100 percent of the *Windsor Star* and

Ottawa Citizen (among other former Southam papers), and a 49 percent interest in *The National Post* in August 2000 (the “50/50” era). In August 2001, the Asper family acquired full proprietorship of the *Post*. The *Globe and Mail* and *Toronto Star* serve as an apt control group; particularly as neither changed ownership during the study period and the *Globe* had long served as Canada’s only national daily while the *Toronto Star* maintains the highest circulation in the nation.⁷⁰

Infomart was used to access CanWest publications (*National Post*, *Windsor Star* and *Ottawa Citizen*), the *Toronto Star* was accessed through Factiva and the *Globe and Mail* on CD-ROM was used to retrieve appropriate data. SPSS (Student Version 10.0) served as the software used for statistical analysis. Articles were retrieved through an “in lead” feature available on all three data sources, using the following terms to accumulate the sample; “federal budget,” “Speech from the Throne” and “Throne Speech”. Articles that focused on topics outside the scope of the study (i.e. American budgets, provincial throne speeches) were disregarded. A total of 1490 (n) articles were analyzed in their entirety, in terms of : length (word count), type of story (news, op-ed, editorial, column, letter to the editor, excerpt) authorship (journalist, wire service, unknown), headline tone (determined on a 5-point Likert scale from very negative towards the government to very positive), article tone (determined on the same 5-point Likert scale). Upon completion of the analysis, the Likert scales were condensed to 3-point scales.

All coding was performed by the author and is believed to be sound. Given the quasi-latent analysis afforded to headlines and the article text itself, and despite the best of efforts to remain consistent in applying the “rules,” there remained the possibility that the standards would shift throughout the enterprise.⁷¹ The assistance of three coders was sought to read and code the headlines and articles of a computer generated random sample of approximately 10 percent of articles, generally considered to be representative of the elements for this study. Miljan and Cooper (2003) achieved exemplary success in obtaining a diverse group of coders for their work on the value orientations of journalists and its influence on the news, selecting coders from geographically disperse locations, with various academic backgrounds and differing political leanings.⁷² Given the limited funding available for this study, emulating such a group was not feasible.

Focus was instead placed on partisan association and knowledge of current political issues. This was believed to be the best approach as it has been established that “... news reports an impartial observer would assess as fair and balanced- will be seen by partisans on opposing side of the issue as biased in favor of the other side.”⁷³ The author periodically re-coded a portion of articles, to test the reliability of the rules used in analysis and as a further contribution to the diversity of political values of the coders. The coders consisted of a male Liberal party-insider with an in-depth knowledge of current

⁷⁰ NAD Bank (2004). “Weekly Readership by Resident Market- 2004 Study”

⁷¹ Earl Babbie. *The Basics of Social Research*, 2nd Ed. (Toronto: Nelson Thomson, 2002).318.

⁷² Lydia Miljan. and Barry Cooper. *Hidden Agendas: How Journalists Influence the News*. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003) 101-102.

⁷³ Shimitt, K., Gunther, A. & Liebhart, J. “Why Partisans see Mass Media as Biased.” *Communication Research*, Vol. 31, No.6, (2004) 624.

political events, a female who considered herself to be well informed on current issues and who supports the NDP, a female who describes herself as a “red Tory” and views her knowledge of current events as “above average” and a male with no party affiliation who considers his political knowledge to be on par with the general population. Although not perfect, the author considered this group to be sufficient for this study’s purposes.

The coders were well versed with the guidelines for determining the attributes of the Likert’s scale and the author was available for addressing questions and concerns throughout the coding session. An inter-coder reliability test was conducted at the end of the session, which consisted of item analysis. Each coded case was cross-referenced with the original code, a process more tedious than simply looking at the frequency distributions, but more precise.⁷⁴ Using this formula, the inter-coder reliability for headline slant was approximately 88 percent (94 percent when attributes were collapsed) and 86 percent for article slant (90 percent when attributes were collapsed).

Results and Findings

Type and Direction of Coverage

It was thought that ownership influence may be evident in the slant and homogeneity of coverage. In the Hollinger period, all newspapers presented their readers with scathing reviews of Liberal propositions and policies. *The National Post* and *Ottawa Citizen* displayed a greater disdain for the government’s proposals with 44.2 and 42 percent of their total coverage classified, respectively, as negative. *The Globe and Mail* demonstrated somewhat comparable distaste, with 38.1 percent of their stories deemed as negative. *The Windsor Star* and to a lesser degree *The Toronto Star*, seemed to present greater restraint in their criticisms, with 35.1 and 33.9 percent of their coverage falling under the negative heading.

When headlines are analyzed, a similar pattern emerges. *The National Post* and *Ottawa Citizen* paralleled each other in their negative banners- 46.7 and 46.6 percent, at times using the exact same headlines, such as “John Manley: Guardian of Slogans,”⁷⁵ while editing the text of the story itself. *The Globe and Mail* demonstrated a near perfect correlation between negative articles (n=45) and headlines, with 39.8 percent (n=47) being deemed as such. These numbers are all higher than the *Toronto Star*’s 21.4 percent; considerably lower than the amount of negative articles that *Toronto Star* readers were privy to. The *Post* and *Citizen* do mirror each other in headline slant, perhaps indicative of shared ownership, but the *Windsor Star*’s headlines did not follow a similar pattern, 29.9 percent of their headlines were negative.

The *National Post*, under joint Hollinger-CanWest ownership, maintained its callous perception of the Liberal party with 43.6 of their coverage deemed “negative”.

⁷⁴ Stemple, G. (1989). “Statistical Designs for Content Analysis” in Stemple, G. & Westley, H (eds). *Research Methods in Mass Communication*. 2nd ed. (Toronto: Prentice Hall, 1989) 148

⁷⁵ Terrence Corcoran “John Manley: Guardian of Slogans.” *National Post*, 18 February 1999, C7; Terrence Corcoran, “John Manley: Guardian of Slogans.” *Ottawa Citizen*, 18 February 1999, A14.

The *Globe and Mail* and *Toronto Star* expressed less distaste for the government's agenda; decreasing their negative coverage from 38.1 to 32 percent and 33.9 to 26.7 percent, respectively. The *Ottawa Citizen*, now wholly owned by CanWest, decreased its negative coverage by nearly eight percentage points (42 versus 34.4 percent) while the *Windsor Star*, also a CanWest paper, dramatically cut its overall negative coverage to 21.1 percent from 35.1 percent.

Headline analysis painted a similar picture. The *National Post* sees no change in its negative banners, with 46.2 percent of their headlines classified as negative. Perhaps in an attempt to distinguish themselves from their national competition, the *Globe and Mail* significantly reduced their negative headlines, from 39.8 to 24 percent. Consequently, the *Globe* was much more aligned with the *Toronto Star* who also cut back their headline criticisms-albeit only from 21.4 to 20 percent. *Windsor Star* readers saw a comparable reduction in negative headlines- from 29.9 to 26.3 percent, while the *Ottawa Citizen* differentiated itself from the *Post* in this period by printing a reduced 40.6 percent negative headlines (versus an earlier 46.6 percent).

Under CanWest ownership, the *National Post* reduced their negative headlines from a previously consistent 46.2 percent to 37.3 percent, still considerably higher than the control papers and its CanWest cousins, but a substantial drop nonetheless. The *Ottawa Citizen* made a comparable drop in scandalous headlines- from 40.6 to 27.1 percent negative, higher than those in the control group but more aligned with the *Windsor Star* (24.1 percent). Previously, the *Post* and *Citizen* were indistinguishable or very close to one another in this domain. With regards to headlines, this is the first time that the *Citizen* has genuinely differentiated itself from the *Post*, and the first time they have resembled the *Windsor Star*. Despite the CanWest papers' sizable drops in negative headlines, it would be premature to attribute this to the Asper family's political beliefs, particularly as the article slants illustrate a much different picture.

While the *Globe* and *Toronto Star* decreased their negative coverage in this time period, all CanWest papers were increasingly critical. The *National Post* marginally increased their negative coverage from 43.6 to 45.1 percent, demonstrating remarkable consistency through all time periods. The *Citizen's* reprimands rose slightly, from 34.4 to 35.5 percent negative, while the *Windsor Star* increased their negative coverage substantially from 21.1 percent to 32.5 percent. Although the *Citizen* and *Windsor Star's* figures are lower than their original portion of negative coverage (42 and 35.1 percent, respectively), they suggest some intriguing developments. First, it is important to note that despite the Asper family's close ties with the Liberal party, these papers offered their readers heightened criticisms of the government. This may demonstrate that the owners had little influence over news coverage, and in the *Post's* case, may also be indicative of targeting a niche market, an already-established demographic that management hopes to retain.

It is noteworthy that this is the first time that the *Windsor Star* and *Ottawa Citizen* have mirrored each other so closely in their coverage- in not only articles, but also headline slants. Given their different geographical locations and reader demographics,

this is a potentially troubling indicator of chain-induced homogeneity in coverage. In order to further evaluate the slant of coverage and test the degree of uniformity in the former Southam papers, articles were further evaluated by type of story and tone.

During the Hollinger period, the *Toronto Star* and *Globe and Mail* offered their readers parallel assessments of Liberal policies in their reporting. Both papers demonstrated nonpartisanship in their accounts; 76.6 percent of news articles were neutral, 20.3 percent demonstrated varying degrees of negativity and 3.1 percent were positive. The Hollinger papers, on the other hand, were strikingly different in their treatment of governmental affairs. Over one third of news articles in the *National Post* were negative (36.4 percent); *Ottawa Citizen* and *Windsor Star* readers were not offered much better, 29.1 percent and 27.4 percent, respectively, were coded as negative. A comparably scant 59.1 percent of *Post* articles were classified as neutral, the *Citizen* and *Windsor Star* faring slightly better at 64 percent and 66.1 percent respectively. Notably, Hollinger papers allowed for some favorable assessments- 4.5 percent of the *Post*'s news reports were positive, as were 7 percent the *Citizen*'s and the *Windsor Star* printed some approving reports (6.5 percent).

Figure 1- News Article Slants

				NEWS ARTICLE SLANTS					
				PAPER					
PERIOD				National Post	Ottawa Citizen	Windsor Star	Globe and Mail	Toronto Star	Total
Hollinger	SLANT	Negative	Count	32	25	17	13	13	100
			% within PAPER	36.4%	29.1%	27.4%	20.3%	20.3%	27.5%
	Neutral	Count	52	55	41	49	49	246	
			% within PAPER	59.1%	64.0%	66.1%	76.6%	76.6%	67.6%
	Positive	Count	4	6	4	2	2	18	
			% within PAPER	4.5%	7.0%	6.5%	3.1%	3.1%	4.9%
Total	Count	88	86	62	64	64	364		
		% within PAPER	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

				NEWS ARTICLE SLANTS					
				PAPER					
PERIOD				National Post	Ottawa Citizen	Windsor Star	Globe and Mail	Toronto Star	Total
50/50	SLANT	Negative	Count	8	8	2	3	1	22
			% within PAPER	33.3%	42.1%	12.5%	23.1%	10.0%	26.8%
	Neutral	Count	16	11	14	10	9	60	
			% within PAPER	66.7%	57.9%	87.5%	76.9%	90.0%	73.2%
	Total	Count	24	19	16	13	10	82	
			% within PAPER	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

				NEWS ARTICLE SLANTS					
				PAPER					
PERIOD				National Post	Ottawa Citizen	Windsor Star	Globe and Mail	Toronto Star	Total
CanWest	SLANT	Negative	Count	25	20	12	10	12	79
			% within PAPER	35.7%	21.1%	18.5%	14.1%	15.0%	20.7%
	Neutral	Count	44	75	52	61	68	300	
			% within PAPER	62.9%	78.9%	80.0%	85.9%	85.0%	78.7%
	Positive	Count	1		1			2	
			% within PAPER	1.4%		1.5%			.5%
Total	Count	70	95	65	71	80	381		
		% within PAPER	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

During the CanWest period, the *Citizen* demonstrated its greatest proportion of neutral news pieces (78.9 percent). This is a substantial increase from their weak showing in the 50/50 period, where only 57.9 percent were classified as the same. In the absence of any “positive” articles, this hints at greater objectivity in reporting, or fear of owner reprisal. *Windsor Star* readers were essentially told the same tale- with 80 percent of their

stories deemed neutral and 18.5 percent classified as negative. The *National Post* remained stable in their slant throughout the entire study, in this period, 62.9 percent of their news pieces were classified as neutral. It should be noted that the *Toronto Star* and *Globe and Mail* demonstrated relative consistency in their levels of “neutral” reporting- 85 and 85.9 percent, respectively. It is clear that the partisan beliefs of the Asper family did not affect the slant of news coverage in any meaningful manner. Nonetheless, the fact that the experimental group, and specifically, the “local” papers put forth quite similar news accounts suggests that their collective ownership may have impacted their content.

Editorials are largely viewed as the forum for the owners to express their opinions, and it is here that one sees the greatest disparity between, and influence of, owners. Editorials in the *Toronto Star* during the Hollinger period were fairly neutral; 52.4 percent being classified as such. A comparatively scant 33.3 percent of editorials criticized Liberal policies, while 14.3 percent were actually favorable in their assessment of legislation. The *Globe and Mail* was much more critical of governmental policies- 60 percent of editorials were negative, 35 percent fell in the neutral range and 5 percent were positive. None of the Hollinger papers showed any measure of support for Liberal proposals, and all were particularly harsh when evaluating budgets and Throne Speeches. Two thirds of *Windsor Star* editorials (66.7 percent) were negative, while 33.3 percent were coded neutral. The *Ottawa Citizen* demonstrated even greater disapproval, with 77.3 percent of their editorials falling in the negative range and 22.7 percent classified as neutral. The *National Post* clearly had no interest in mincing words- an astounding 90 percent of their editorials were exceptive in their assessments of governmental policies.

In the 50/50 period, the *Toronto Star* printed only two editorials, both of which were deemed neutral. The *Globe and Mail* and *Windsor Star* ran three each- two falling under the negative heading and the third, classified as neutral. This was consistent for the *Windsor Star* and demonstrated only minute changes in slant for the *Globe*. The *Ottawa Citizen* penned a comparably robust nine editorials, significantly more than the control papers and its CanWest owned cousin, the *Windsor Star*. Here, one notes a substantial drop in criticisms, with only 33.3 percent falling under the negative column. This time round, the editors bestowed praise on the Liberals, printing a positive editorial. The *National Post*, now jointly owned by Hollinger and CanWest, experienced a similar, albeit not nearly as pronounced, shift in opinion. Running a comparable eight editorials, the *Post* exercised some restraint in their commentaries with 75 percent, as opposed to the previous 90 percent, deemed negative.

Given the criticisms aimed at the Asper family for their partisanship, one would expect an absence of vitriolic editorials in their papers during the CanWest period. Yet, the *National Post* increases its portion of disapproving editorials to 95.5 percent- higher levels than ever witnessed before. The *Windsor Star*'s editorials echo the *Post*'s- raising from their consistent 66.7 to an unprecedented 92.9 percent negative. The *Citizen*'s negative commentaries rose from 33.3 to 77.8 percent- not nearly as exceptive as the other CanWest papers, but much more critical than the *Globe* (58.3 percent) and *Toronto Star* (40.9 percent). Seemingly, the Aspers did not allow their Liberal ties to permeate

content, but the agreement amongst the CanWest papers beckons for further investigation into ownership influences.

Figure 2- Editorial Slants

EDITORIAL SLANTS

PERIOD				PAPER					Total
				National Post	Ottawa Citizen	Windsor Star	Globe and Mail	Toronto Star	
Hollinger	SLANTS	Negative	Count	18	17	8	12	7	62
			% within PAPER	90.0%	77.3%	66.7%	60.0%	33.3%	65.3%
		Neutral	Count	2	5	4	7	11	29
	% within PAPER		10.0%	22.7%	33.3%	35.0%	52.4%	30.5%	
	Positive	Count				1	3	4	
		% within PAPER				5.0%	14.3%	4.2%	
	Total	Count	20	22	12	20	21	95	
	% within PAPER	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

PERIOD				PAPER					Total
				National Post	Ottawa Citizen	Windsor Star	Globe and Mail	Toronto Star	
50/50	SLANTS	Negative	Count	6	3	2	2		13
			% within PAPER	75.0%	33.3%	66.7%	66.7%		52.0%
		Neutral	Count	2	5	1	1	2	11
	% within PAPER		25.0%	55.6%	33.3%	33.3%	100.0%	44.0%	
	Positive	Count		1				1	
		% within PAPER		11.1%				4.0%	
	Total	Count	8	9	3	3	2	25	
	% within PAPER	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

PERIOD				PAPER					Total
				National Post	Ottawa Citizen	Windsor Star	Globe and Mail	Toronto Star	
CanWest	SLANTS	Negative	Count	21	14	13	7	9	64
			% within PAPER	95.5%	77.8%	92.9%	58.3%	40.9%	72.7%
		Neutral	Count	1	4		5	11	21
	% within PAPER		4.5%	22.2%		41.7%	50.0%	23.9%	
	Positive	Count			1		2	3	
		% within PAPER			7.1%		9.1%	3.4%	
	Total	Count	22	18	14	12	22	88	
	% within PAPER	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		

Content Sources

In order to determine if CanWest's papers were saturated with chain-wide editorials, columns and news pieces, the source of content was evaluated. Under Asper ownership, 11.3 percent of articles in the *National Post* stemmed from other CanWest papers or CanWest News Wire Services. This is a notable increase from the 7.7 percent during the period of shared ownership, but is comparable to levels enjoyed under Hollinger's tenure (13.9 percent). During the final time period, the *Citizen* picked up 6.5 percent of their Throne Speech and federal budget stories from other Southam/CanWest papers; comparable to levels witnessed under Hollinger ownership (4.6 percent). It is important to note that although CanWest owned the *Ottawa Citizen* outright during the 50/50 era, they did not pick up any articles from CanWest News Wire Services or even Canadian Press (CP).

Figure 3- Hollinger Era, Content Sources

SOURCAT * PAPER Crosstabulation

			PAPER					Total
			National Post	Ottawa Citizen	Windsor Star	Globe and Mail	Toronto Star	
SOURCAT	In House	Count	113	102	16	87	88	406
		% within PAPER	68.5%	77.9%	20.8%	73.7%	78.6%	67.3%
	CP	Count	3	1	20	8	7	39
		% within PAPER	1.8%	.8%	26.0%	6.8%	6.3%	6.5%
	CanWest Papers/ Wire Services	Count	23	6	38			67
		% within PAPER	13.9%	4.6%	49.4%			11.1%
	Left	Count	1	2		3	5	11
		% within PAPER	.6%	1.5%		2.5%	4.5%	1.8%
	Right	Count	10	4	2	6	1	23
		% within PAPER	6.1%	3.1%	2.6%	5.1%	.9%	3.8%
	Neutral	Count	15	16	1	14	11	57
		% within PAPER	9.1%	12.2%	1.3%	11.9%	9.8%	9.5%
Total		Count	165	131	77	118	112	603
		% within PAPER	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The *Windsor Star* showed no marked difference in their reliance on wire services for content. In the final study period, the *Windsor Star* picked up 39.8 percent of their articles from other Southam papers, a decrease from 47.4 percent when originally purchased by CanWest, and 49.4 percent when owned by Hollinger. CP contributions remained high through all time periods, accounting for 26, 36.8 and finally 26.5 percent of Thorne Speech and federal budget articles. The absence of CanWest News Wire Services as a content source for the *Globe and Mail* or *Toronto Star* is a predictable development. Their use of CP was only slightly higher than some of the experimental papers, and much lower than *Windsor Star* in every case. Only 6.8, 12 and 6.6 percent of the *Globe's* articles stemmed from CP, while the *Toronto Star* retrieved 6.3, 20 and 8.8 percent of their stories through this service. The *Windsor Star* aside, the experimental papers demonstrated only marginally higher wire services use than the control group, and showed no meaningful differences under Hollinger or CanWest ownership.

The hypothesis that under CanWest ownership, the *Windsor Star* and, to a lesser degree, the *Ottawa Citizen*, would realize a decrease in local coverage of these political events was tested by looking at the amount of stories penned by “In House” journalists, editors and columnists. The *Globe* and *Toronto Star* were generally consistent in the amount of “In House” content they printed. The *National Post* and *Ottawa Citizen* both saw a surge of “In House” copy during the second time frame- 79.5 and 81.3 percent, respectively- but returned to Hollinger era levels in the final time period- 66.2 and 68.4 percent. The *Windsor Star's* “In House” content is comparably scant at 28.9 percent during the final period. This, however, is a substantial boost from the 15.8 percent they printed when first acquired by CanWest or the 20.8 percent during the Hollinger period. The *Windsor Star* may not be able to boast about the in-depth coverage their journalists provide to national events, but under CanWest ownership, readers are being offered local views, more so than during the Hollinger period.

Figure 4- 50/50 Era, Content Sources

SOURCAT * PAPER Crosstabulation

			PAPER					Total
			National Post	Ottawa Citizen	Windsor Star	Globe and Mail	Toronto Star	
SOURCAT	In House	Count	31	26	3	18	10	88
		% within PAPER	79.5%	81.3%	15.8%	72.0%	66.7%	67.7%
	CP	Count	2		7	3	3	15
		% within PAPER	5.1%		36.8%	12.0%	20.0%	11.5%
	CanWest Papers/ Wire Services	Count	3		9			12
		% within PAPER	7.7%		47.4%			9.2%
	Right	Count	1	1		2		4
		% within PAPER	2.6%	3.1%		8.0%		3.1%
	Neutral	Count	2	5		2	2	11
		% within PAPER	5.1%	15.6%		8.0%	13.3%	8.5%
Total	Count	39	32	19	25	15	130	
	% within PAPER	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Figure 5- CanWest Era, Content Sources

SOURCAT * PAPER Crosstabulation

			PAPER					Total
			National Post	Ottawa Citizen	Windsor Star	Globe and Mail	Toronto Star	
SOURCAT	In House	Count	94	106	24	96	102	422
		% within PAPER	66.2%	68.4%	28.9%	78.7%	81.6%	67.3%
	CP	Count	5	5	22	8	11	51
		% within PAPER	3.5%	3.2%	26.5%	6.6%	8.8%	8.1%
	CanWest Papers/ Wire Services	Count	16	10	33			59
		% within PAPER	11.3%	6.5%	39.8%			9.4%
	Left	Count	2	4		3	2	11
		% within PAPER	1.4%	2.6%		2.5%	1.6%	1.8%
	Right	Count	13	4	2	1	4	24
		% within PAPER	9.2%	2.6%	2.4%	.8%	3.2%	3.8%
	Liberal	Count		1	1		1	3
		% within PAPER		.6%	1.2%		.8%	.5%
	Neutral	Count	12	25	1	14	5	57
		% within PAPER	8.5%	16.1%	1.2%	11.5%	4.0%	9.1%
	Total	Count	142	155	83	122	125	627
		% within PAPER	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

This study further investigated the ideological backgrounds of contributing authors, predicting that under CanWest ownership, Liberal-friendly sources would be more prevalent. *The National Post* did not print a single article by a Liberal party member, strategist, Senator or elected politician, which dealt with federal budgets or Throne Speeches throughout the study period. While this may discount those who are strong supporters but are primarily associated with other organizations, this demonstrates that there were no changes in the amount of space afforded to identified Liberals. Likewise, these same people were silent on these matters in the pages of *The Globe and Mail*. The *Toronto Star* ran a lone column penned by a Liberal (MP Roy Cullen), accounting for .8 percent of their coverage during the CanWest era. The *Windsor Star* published a guest column penned by Liberal strategist Warren Kinsella in the CanWest era (1.8 percent of coverage), while the *Ottawa Citizen* ran a piece by Lloyd Axworthy

(.3 percent) during this same time period. Having the Aspers holding the reigns did not result in greater commentaries from their Liberal allies.

Guest columnists associated with the political right were offered more space than their left-leaning counter parts in every newspaper. In the *National Post*, right-wing guest columnists accounted for 6.1 percent of coverage under Hollinger ownership, 2.6 percent under shared ownership and 9.2 percent under CanWest. Maude Barlow had the opportunity to express her opinions during the first time period- accounting for .6 of their total coverage. One does not find commentary from her left-leaning contemporaries again until the CanWest era, when 1.4 of the *Post's* coverage stems from the left. *Ottawa Citizen* readers were offered no more variety than *Post* subscribers.

Authors associated with the right wing accounted for 3.1 percent of coverage at the *Citizen* during both the Hollinger and 50/50 eras. This number decreases slightly during the CanWest period (2.6 percent), but not in any significant fashion. *Windsor Star* readers were offered a comparable amount of right-wing columns- 2.6 percent under Hollinger, none during the 50/50 era and 2.4 in the final study time. Articles stemming from left-leaning parties and organizations accounted for only 2.6 percent of the *Citizen's* coverage during the final time period; an increase, to be sure, of their absence during the 50/50 era, but comparable to the 1.6 percent under Hollinger control. The *Windsor Star* was perfectly consistent in their publication of columns authored by those on the political left. Throughout the entire study period, they did not publish a single column from an identifiable leftist group or personality.

Overall, guest columns and letters to the editor stemming from right-wing individuals accounted for 3.4 of the *Globe's* coverage of Throne Speeches and federal budgets, while comprising 2 percent of the *Toronto Star's* coverage from January 1999-December 31, 2003. Left leaning individuals scribed 2.3 percent of the *Globe's* coverage and 2.8 percent of the *Toronto Star's* reporting. Although the control papers were seemingly more accommodating of different views, given the minute statistical differences, it is difficult to claim with any certainty that CanWest- or Hollinger, for that matter- were attempting to silence their ideological opponents.

Discussion and Conclusion

This analysis of routine political coverage yielded some unexpected findings about ownership influence; both undermining and reinforcing the arguments set forth by columnists and theorists.

Under Hollinger ownership, the *National Post*, *Ottawa Citizen* and *Windsor Star* allowed ideological biases to penetrate the news reports of political happenings. The *Globe and Mail* and *Toronto Star* ran parallel assessments of Throne Speeches and federal budgets during the Hollinger era, with 76.6 percent of their stories deemed neutral. During this same time frame, only 59 percent of the *Post's*, and 64 and 66 percent of the *Citizen* and *Windsor Star's* news articles were classified as neutral in tone. Despite the fears of Asper's critics, by the final time period when CanWest had

entrenched their proprietorship, their local holdings were demonstrating news coverage akin to those of the control group. During the CanWest era, 78.9 and 80 percent of news articles in the *Citizen* and *Windsor Star*, respectively, were classified as neutral, compared to 85.9 percent in the *Globe* and 85 percent in the *Toronto Star*. Whether the changes at the local papers were the result of ideologically based ownership interference in the newsroom, a desire to attract a greater circulation, self-censorship on the part of editorial staff or staff reallocation remains to be seen. Nonetheless, the *Citizen* and *Windsor Star* readers were ultimately afforded greater neutrality in their news reports than under Black's ownership.

While the *Post* maintained its captious reporting practices with 35.1 percent of their news stories deemed as negative, this may be more indicative of demographically targeted reporting practices, in essence, paying credence to Black's assertion that "... newspapers are a service industry and you've got to give the people what they want or you're not going to be in business."⁷⁶ With this in mind, it is interesting to note the absence of leftist authors in the *Windsor Star*. Windsor has traditionally served as a strong support base for the NDP party, a point reflected in the electoral endorsements the *Windsor Star* doled out prior to its Southam purchase. Despite the Asper's family pledge to foster a culture of diversity and Windsorites' association with the NDP, guest columns and letters to the editor from identifiable left leaning groups remained conspicuously absent from the news pages of the *Windsor Star*.

Given the criticisms aimed at the CanWest "must run" editorials and the Asper family's Liberal connections, the findings surrounding the editorial sections were unforeseen. Under Hollinger's ownership, 90 percent of the editorials were negative, while 77.3 and 66.7 percent of the editorials appearing in the *Citizen* and *Windsor Star* revealed discontentment toward the Liberals. When CanWest acquired ownership of the Southam papers and half of the *National Post*, the editorial slants make a dramatic turn. In the 50/50 period, the *Windsor Star* remained consistent in their faultfinding, with 66.7 percent of their editorials deemed as negative. The *National Post* decreased their anti-Liberal rhetoric significantly to 75 percent, while the *Citizen* demonstrated the greatest ideological shift- applauding the Liberals' efforts in an editorial and decreasing their inflammatory commentaries to 33.3 percent. Ironically, this change in editorial direction occurred under Russell Mills' tenure as *Citizen* publisher- a position from which he was dismissed for his criticisms of the Liberals.

It appeared as though the Aspers were showcasing their partisan stripes, yet when they acquired full ownership of the *Post* and had ingrained themselves into the institutional frameworks of the *Windsor Star* and *Ottawa Citizen*, another surprising development took shape. During the CanWest period, editorials in the *Post* and *Citizen* returned to, and even exceeded, the levels of negative bantering witnessed in the Hollinger era, with 95.5 and 77.9 percent classified as negative. The *Windsor Star* takes on a near volatile voice as they increase their share of negative editorials to 92.9 percent. During this same time period, editors at the *Globe and Mail* and *Toronto Star* penned 58.3 and 40.9 percent, negative commentaries, respectively. Although the motivations for

⁷⁶ As quoted in Barlow and Winter, 131.

the shift in editorial direction at the CanWest papers are not certain, there are some probable explanations.

With regards to the local papers, the public's perception that the Aspers were currying favour from the Liberals may account for this over-compensation of sorts. Attempting to eschew these opinions and regain lost readers, the Aspers may have engaged in aggressive faultfinding in their commentaries of the Liberals' agenda. Subsequently, it was during this time that CanWest decided to limit their national editorials to occasional pieces from their original multiple weekly commentaries. One might be guardedly optimistic and view the heightened Liberal attacks as a signal that CanWest has backed away from a centralized editorial policy and restrained from overtly influencing commentary. The homogeneity in editorial and news slants may suggest varying degrees of chain-wide conformity, but with the Aspers holding the reigns of control some positive developments were also realized.

Under CanWest ownership, the regional impact of governmental policies and relevance that local reporters bring to a story had not been lost. In fact, *Windsor Star* readers were increasingly offered more community voices in their coverage of federal affairs. In the final time period, 28.9 percent of articles dealing with Throne Speeches and federal budgets stemmed from "in house" journalists. Although the other CanWest and control papers demonstrated considerably higher levels of "in house" reporting, this was the highest proportion of Windsor-based coverage during any of the time periods, a marked improvement from previous times (20.8 and 15.8, respectively).

In essence, this paper demonstrates that under Hollinger ownership, the Southam papers were more prone to ideologically tainted news coverage, than under CanWest ownership. Neutral accounts of the news were more prevalent under Asper ownership, although, this too suggests a level of ownership intervention. The Aspers may have allowed partisanship to play a role in their personnel policies, terminating prominent publishers and columnists with overt animosity towards the Liberal government, but the end result was more objective accounts of routine, national political affairs. A heightened degree of homogeneity was noted, perhaps indicative of self-censorship and the internalization of ownership values on the part of journalists, but this did not result in less local coverage or translate into more admirable depictions of the Liberals. In fact, the increasingly scathing editorials suggest that the Aspers had opted to reserve their philosophical influences for other matters and allowed critical commentaries to dominate the editorial pages.

Under CanWest ownership, the pursuit for mass audiences, self-censorship and ideological-driven personnel practices allowed for greater objectivity and conformity in news reports to prevail. Whether this is beneficial to readers, and democracy in general, can only be judged by whether one places greater value on newspaper individualism or bias-free reporting practices. Although this neutrality may not prevail in more sensational climates, under CanWest ownership, readers can expect bias-free reporting in the day to day happenings of Parliament hill.

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