

Campaign for Democratic Media!

Excerpts from comments made in the summer of 2007 through the Campaign for Democratic Media's "Stop the Big Media Takeover" campaign

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Excerpts submitted to the CRTC for the Diversity of Voices
Hearing

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The local and regional media deficit

Alberta

“Knowing that ACCESS television is part of the same company as CityTV enables me to better understand why the two televised stations have similar programming, but this knowledge doesn't enable me to better appreciate this sameness. Similarly, knowing that the free Edmontonian newspaper 24 HOURS is distributed by the same company that distributes the Edmontonian newspaper the Edmonton Sun gives me the impression that a monopoly of the press and of the media is creeping up on Canada.”

“We are already seeing less local content, less diversity of ideas in our media, and less representation of minority communities. It is especially pronounced in Alberta, where only CBC and CKUA provide balanced and impartial coverage of issues from a variety of viewpoints.”

British Columbia

“I live in Vancouver. Leonard Asper controls The Sun, Province, Global, and the National Post. This is beyond ridiculous.”

“I live in Vancouver, the most media concentrated city in North America. There is an illusion of choice, Canada.com, Global TV, National Post, the Vancouver Sun, The Province, The Vancouver Courier; but all are owned by one company.”

“About 10 years ago, while I was studying Communications in my home country, Argentina, I read great things about the Canadian Broadcasting System, with its community channels and policies to limit media concentration.

Unfortunately, now that I live here, I realize this is not true. **In Vancouver, there are hardly any independent newspapers, and TV and radio are just plain horrible. There is nothing that interests, informs, or entertains me in radio, TV, and newspapers.”**

“I am truly tired of Can-West Global's domination not only of the local newspaper market (3 of 4 regularly available newspapers are owned by Can-West) but also more than one of our local television stations are coming from

the same source. As my observation is that these tend to be socially and politically conservative "news" sources, I worry that **our young people are being exposed to a very limited range of views, and the information content tends to be skewed.**"

"I find myself forced to search internet sources because the media here in Vancouver are so repetitive of virtually a single point of view and so unwilling to print diverse opinions. I know this to be the case not only because of what I read but also what I do not read, namely, my unpublished letters to the editor."

"A viewer and listener in Vancouver, particularly in radio, I have noticed a huge change for the worse. All stations are sounding the same, all have a "corporate" attitude, and all are driven by MONEY, rather than entertaining their listeners. This "corporate" radio, the result of these huge media conglomerates has caused a loss in broadcast creativity, accountability, and the true spirit of radio broadcasting."

"As a resident of the Greater Vancouver Regional District (BC), I am served important municipal, provincial, and national news by two major newspapers -The Vancouver Sun and The Province - that share an owner, a highrise building, and a conservative viewpoint."

"I am aware that news media invest far less in investigative journalism than corporations invest in public relations. It becomes even worse when only a few major corporations own all the entertainment and news media. I live in Vancouver where **1 corp. owns most of our media and is no longer creditable as an investigative news source.** I support a policy limiting concentrated and cross-ownership of the media in Canada. You should NEVER have let it get to the point it is at today."

"Many living in the (Vancouver market) are alarmed at the control Canwest exerts over our community. The two major dailies and the historically dominant channel 11, Global news, formerly BCTV, have become blatant in the bias.

You may say, so change the channel, but that does not change anything. When a media giant like Canwest puts forth their political slant, this becomes

the norm for other media as well. Who really wants to be out there swimming up river, particularly when those government officials or companies or organizations will refuse to return calls or submit to interviews if the media is too critical. We've seen great evidence of this after the sinking of the BC Ferry, Queen of Prince Rupert.

And again you may say; so what? **What we are now seeing within our regional media is politicians who no longer feel compelled to be completely truthful. And it's not just politicians, but industry of all kinds.** So what? This results in a form of **corruption of public policy.**"

"Standard Radio has taken over most of the small stations in the Okanagan Valley in British Columbia. It may appear that we have a choice of music but obviously **the news and what headlines are given importance is "Standard" across all stations.**"

"Where I live, in Vancouver, both major daily newspapers are controlled by Canwest, along with The National Post, Global Television and one of the two free daily newspapers. **Diversity of opinion is nonexistent.** If the problem were limited to Vancouver it would be serious enough, but **this is increasingly the picture across the country and it's unacceptable in a democracy.**"

"In BC, Canwest controls all three provincial daily newspapers: the Vancouver Sun, the Province and the Times-Colonist. The Globe offers a little relief otherwise there would be no alternate mainstream media perspective.

And thank goodness for independent media like the Tyee and columnists like Paul Willcocks who posts his political columns on his blog. However they have limited resources and cannot hope to cover the range of issues which require investigation and dialogue."

"Many years ago, the Victoria Times and Colonist were allowed to merge as part of a newspaper trade-off across the nation that lead to one major newspaper in many Canadian markets. There has been no public benefit from this, indeed, the major effects were a diminishing of public discourse and monopoly pricing of advertising services."

“We are already seeing less local content, less diversity of ideas in our media, and less representation of minority communities. This is most evident in Vancouver where the two daily newspapers, the Vancouver Sun and Province, have the same owner. **The coverage, or at times lack of coverage, is very one-sided and to the point where it can be misleading to the public.**”

“Recently I attended a rally to contest the implementation of 'The Gateway' program - a major project which, if implemented, will include the addition of new highways and rail yards to accommodate a four-fold increase in container traffic into and through the container port in Delta, south of Vancouver. At this rally, held locally in a Delta community hall, were opposition MLA's, John Cummins, the local Conservative MP, the provincial Green Party leader, plus other leaders of diverse environmental groups from BC. **The hall was packed, estimated attendance for the afternoon event was in the thousands. Unfortunately, there was no mention of this event in the Vancouver Sun or Province, nor any TV coverage on any of the major outlets that I could find. CBC Radio was the only major media to report on this rally.**

All of this was hardly surprising. The editorial position of the Vancouver Sun has openly stated its support for 'Gateway'. The local TV coverage, which has been sparse to non-existent, has invariably shown this project in a favourable light. It would be very difficult for any resident of the lower mainland to be aware of the major environmental issues of 'Gateway' when coverage of these issues have been subsumed into the supposed economic spin-offs of this project.”

“In BC almost NO ONE knows the extent to which control/profit from new Hydro initiatives are serving, on an obscenely profitable level, a few private interests, when in fact the money could be, and imperatively NEEDS to be in public accounts for healthcare and education. I had to rely on a friend, who's a pilot, who met a hydro maintenance worker in the bush, to get my information!!! How can an participatory democracy possibly function on this basis!!!”

“Last year I was involved in bringing a matter of public concern to the newspapers. The local paper (Victoria Times Colonist) is owned by a Canadian conglomerate, CanWest. There was another newspaper that is locally owned that reported on the story. It was interesting that the locally owned paper had a very different and much more personal approach to the story.”

“As someone who works with local community non-profits, both as a community volunteer but also as a professional, I have personally experienced the challenge of trying to engage the media in local issues, events and activities that I believe are important. **When contacting a media outlet, I am told that it is the head office in another part of the country that is responsible for establishing content and that local content is not a priority for them.** This is doing the local community a great disservice and arguably a great injustice.”

“We are already seeing less local content, less diversity of ideas in our media, and less representation of minority communities. This is especially evident in smaller communities like mine (Terrace, B.C.)”

Chatham, Ont.

“I have already witnessed **a drastic makeover of the local Chatham Daily News (after it was recently purchased) that limits not only the local sports and community stories, but as well much of the previously covered provincial and national news.**”

Kitchener-Waterloo

In Kitchener-Waterloo ... there is one daily newspaper, The Record, which is owned by Torstar, which also publishes the Toronto Star, and one broadcast T.V. station, which is run by CTV. Rogers, which runs the local cable monopoly, cablecasts a channel about local affairs as well as a number of the local radio stations (there is no local CBC station, only Toronto CBC radio). If the CRTC re-regulated (what is somewhat euphemistically called “deregulation”) so that Rogers, for example, was allowed to own the one broadcast TV station and the newspaper, there would be even less diversity than there is now.

London, Ont.

“(In London), **the only daily newspaper, several radio stations and local T.V. outlet are all owned and controlled by Sun Media/Quebecor,** and tend to reflect its conservative, consumer culture ideology both in content and commentary. As an alternative, I rely upon the CBC, NewsWorld and the internet for critically objective, unfiltered news and information... as well as quality arts and entertainment programming far more relevant to my Canadian

sensibilities than the ubiquitous eye candy we're being force-fed by Gollywood wannabes."

New Brunswick

"I live in New Brunswick and am often teased by outsiders about living "in the province of Irving"! What a lot of people are telling you about too much media control has already happened here over the past decades. **Virtually all the newspapers in the province (at first all the English language newspapers, and now most of the French newspapers) have been taken over by the Irving family and its minions.**

So you can understand that we never hear anything negative about Irving wrongdoings (except once in a while from the much neutered CBC), such as wide-scale clearcutting, ignoring environmental laws, petroleum spills, etc."

Newfoundland

"I have pretty much given up on most forms of mass media. Between the radio and TV, I find the diversity of opinions incredibly small. As more and more independent broadcasters are bought up by massive companies, the messages you find in the mass media are becoming incredibly washed out and single minded. **People all over the world spend their lifetimes listening to music and watching programs that have nothing to do with their culture or lives, and are simultaneously being convinced that "local" somehow is not as good as what's being portrayed all over the world.**"

Saskatchewan

"In Saskatoon, the ability to listen to any radio that isn't owned by the Rawlco media group is strictly limited to our national public broadcasting Corporation and community radio (which is continually struggling to find enough funding to continue, despite outstanding programming)."

"In Saskatchewan, virtually all of the major daily newspapers are controlled by 4 'media groups.' It is clearly apparent based on the stories that they frequently cover that they have the intention of persuading the public that the current provincial government has failed the province. When one examines the government's record, it is clear that the media is not portraying them fairly."

Sault Ste. Marie

“Our news casts, for Sault Ste. Marie and area, are filmed out of Sudbury, Ontario, and we are feeling less and less involved in what is happening in our own community.

There is also much less money available for local programming. In the past, we would be able to put a proposal together, gather a team of volunteers, and be provided with assistance and equipment to create a local show. This is now strictly controlled, less available, and same few shows run over and over again, because of the limited funding and resources available. So much air space is wasted, when we could be generating local, positive, and innovative programming.”

Windsor

“I do not want the perspectives in news and other programming and print media to be limited to those that a few corporations wish to promote, although I feel that this is increasingly happening (witness **when Conrad Black took control of the Windsor Star -- the editorial perspective was changed radically to a heavily ideological right-wing, pro-American and pro-corporate message and is still unrepresentative of the Windsor community,** despite change to CanWest ownership).”

Homogenous programming creates silences, absences

“As a female professional born and raised in Canada, with ties to the Chinese and Vietnamese communities, I want a choice in what I see on TV, hear on the radio and read in the newspaper and on the internet. ... We are already seeing less local content and less diversity of ideas in our media. And **there has NEVER been sufficient representation of minority communities** in its many varied aspects. ... Our future lies in true pluralism, where **one voice representing the queer (community), or only one voice representing the Asian community, is not enough**. We need to have access to multiple points of view.”

“I feel that **there has been progress with some local content directed towards minority groups, however in the mainstream media there is still misrepresentation of these same groups**. The greater Canadian audience watches these mainstream television channels, and listens to these radio stations, and reads these newspapers and are not given an apt idea of what challenges and barriers these minority groups face on a day to day basis.

[...] As we see, there are several South Asian newspapers, radio, and TV media available for this group of Canadians. However, it has been quite the struggle to make it to the mainstream media, where hearts of all Canadians can be touched.

[O]wnership and domination within the local media hinder the voices of youth such as myself, who struggle between two identities. We need media which creates Canadian programming that all Canadians can understand and identify with. This requires policy which forces more media diversity, proper representation within these media, more resources and financial support, increased outreach to minorities, youth, and women.”

“Canadian audiences are increasingly turning to media sources from outside the Canadian mainstream - whether through the Internet, cable and satellite services or through local, volunteer-run media projects and info-sharing networks - as a direct response to the lack of choice now offered by traditional print and broadcast media in this country.”

“It is ironic that, in this information age, the Canadian media becomes more of a vehicle of capitalism than a provider of information.”

“Canadian media is at risk of becoming a “box-store,” where every station broadcasts sights and sounds that are no different from any other station. Due to common ownership of local radio stations, television stations etc., there is no true diversity and no fostering of creativity. The theme songs of the local news at 6:00 are all the same, the morning shows of the commuter radio talk shows sound alike. More importantly, because of concentration of ownership, **I believe news media is becoming lax in the manner in which they pursue stories. I believe that this is due to centralizing the process in which information is gathered.**”

“There is a dearth of choice on TV these days. It's not worth watching anymore. And as for radio talk shows? Same old cookie-cutter, right-wing claptrap. There is less and less debate!”

“Whatever you do, don't sell to Rogers Communications! They are the "BIG Brother" of Canadian Media. **My cable television, internet connection, home phone, cell phone, and magazine subscriptions are all "brought to me" by Rogers. What's next? Rogers Video holograms on my front lawn?** They have an enviable business model to be sure?..... but eventually, if not already, the end-user will pay more for less.”

“Gone, or so it seems, are the days when each paper, each station, each magazine offered a different analysis allowing the citizenry to access a diverse range of opinions and analysis which, in my estimation, is what 'fertilizes' a democracy making it possible for it to grow and flourish.”

“I have been a student of the media for going on 10 years and have witnessed a **steady decline in quality and diversity.** [...]”

Voluntary and self-regulation of industry by industry has shown time and time again not to work. The belief that voluntary codes will be enough to keep the various newsrooms of a single conglomerate separate is an act of willful ignorance. What is more, **the line between the advertising side of the business and news has steadily eroded over the past 20 or more years.**”

Dissatisfaction on the front-lines of Canada's media

“As an Aboriginal artist working in both TV and stage productions, I value the contributions of local media and independent media. There is a rapidly growing Aboriginal arts industry in Canada that will lose out and be silenced if the control of the media falls into fewer and fewer hands - hands that are at the service of shareholders and not the wide audience, the people of Canada.”

“As a journalism student, I am being taught in school that the concentration of media control is something I will just have to learn to deal with. I'm being taught that it's just a sad fact of life, that sometimes you just shut up about something important or you risk getting fired because your message doesn't 'jive' with the owner of the paper.

This is the reason I've decided that, after three years of schooling, I don't want to be a journalist. It's not worth selling my soul. The only medium that offers any freedom is the small-owned online media - specifically BECAUSE it isn't owned by a few rich people with their own agendas.”

“I work in a community radio station in North York (Toronto). And over the last few years, I have seen an increase in pressure for local media coverage as the ownership of media has become more concentrated. While this is our mandate, it is terrifying to see the level of media ownership in this country.

Please don't let the 'market' dictate what is on air. Your free market policies will ignore marginalized voices and art that struggle to be heard. Right now more than ever do we need a strong CRTC to ensure diversity in Canadian media.”

“As a young journalist, I want to be sure that Canada's media remains a place where the public can hear a wide range of voices. A few giant media corporations controlling journalists will only hurt the spread of information.”

“I applied for work to be a journalist at a local paper simply because of a lack of technology news. I offered my expertise and experience in the field of technology and internet related news and was turned away because

"technology isn't real news". It took less than two weeks before technology was a new section in the very same paper.

While I had expected that perhaps they may have found someone else locally to write about the news, I was sadly mistaken because all the stories in there were simply the occasional news item from the Canadian Press and Associated Press - many were ranging from 1 week old all the way to being up to one whole year old. Many of the stories I read were incomplete or one-sided or even missing crucial aspects of the story.

The newspaper is familiar with my skills as every time I submitted a comment or correction, it was always published. I have a 100% acceptance rate for voluntary short "local opinion" pieces. 99% of the time, I already know about the story before it even gets to the paper - yet here I am, unemployed because it was probably cheaper to replace me with someone who may even have less experience than me to write the stories with only certain perspectives."

"I have been preparing and hosting a weekly program [...] giving an Arab/Muslim perspective on current events for more than 10 years.

No other community has been talked about, specially after 9/11, in the mass media more than ours. Unfortunately this coverage tends to be uniform, predictable and coarse with no nuances, as most journalists repeat the same imported clichés. The Canadian situation of our community is unrecognized, often described and judged by what happens with our neighbors in the South, or across the Atlantic.

Our program is just one hour a week standing up against a tsunami of misinformation echoed from coast to coast, by media giants concentrated in the hands of a few. And the situation is not getting better as we witness less local content in general, and less diversity of opinions on all issues."

"This concentration of media ownership is costing people their jobs. It's shortsighted and irresponsible to support these mergers in a country where unemployment is always a major concern. **I myself work in the broadcasting industry and am employed by a company that is involved in one of these transactions and I and all my colleagues KNOW that we're in danger of being laid off.**"

"Since graduating with a diploma in broadcasting in 2001, I have worked in several sectors of the radio industry; campus/community, multicultural,

private and public. There are different pressures affecting these sectors, but there does seem to be **a trend towards syndication, automation, and downsizing.** I feel this is resulting in less local content, and and fewer jobs for Canadian media workers.”

“I see a need to increase funding to and awareness of **campus, community and Reserve stations.** This tier does not have the recognition it deserves within Canadian media, which is more than unfortunate seeing as these are the stations that cater to the needs and desires such a huge population. **These stations represent people of colour and First Nations people, poor and working class people, queer and trans communities, youth, community-based and "underground" music, arts and culture, "3rd language" populations, people living with HIV/AIDS, psychiatric consumer/survivors, people living with disabilities and women.** This is true for music, arts, spoken word and news programming.”

“I am a volunteer radio reporter for a community radio station. In this role I have made contacts in the community I wouldn't normally make, and I have told stories of people from all walks of life. Our equipment is low budget, we take the bus, and we all share computers to edit. **What we do is an essential service to people who aren't beautiful or tragic enough to make mainstream headlines, but whose voices are those of our fellow citizens.** I have interviewed MLAs, homeless people, local musicians, visiting academics, handicapped people, immigrants, students, and striking workers. We let people speak for far longer than a sound bite between expensive advertising - we let people tell their stories at their own pace. **Without more, much more, of this kind of broadcasting, the grassroots, small town, person-to-person democracy that Canada does best will be lost to media forms that try to please everyone everywhere and in the result mean little to anyone anywhere.**”

“From 2001 to 2005 we had an official opposition in British Columbia of just two MLAs. If ever there was a time we needed an active and vibrant press, it was **while the government of the day undertook a huge restructuring of our social welfare system encompassing everything from child welfare to union busting.** But it was during this time that the press gallery at the Legislature actually shrank as Canwest Global merged their Vancouver and Victoria workforces. As a result, the public was not well informed as to the scope of the changes taking place.”

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