

He Who Pays the Piper Calls the Tune: Investigation of a Canadian Media Monopoly

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Abstract

The Canadian Senate is concluding a national review on the state of the news media in Canada and questions are being raised about the need for new forms of regulation to protect diversity and a free press. This article examines a wealthy Canadian corporate empire which own significant media outlets. The Irving Group have been accused of censorship, predatory pricing, and draconian publishing contracts. The case study method is used to document examples of the way in which this company's monopoly media ownership is resulting in homogeneity of the news product and a decline in investigative reporting. The results indicate that the voice of the corporate world speaks loudly and the coverage of critical social issues is rare.

Introduction

"You must understand that New Brunswick is an Irving fiefdom. And as a Fiefdom should, it has its own House organ: the English language print media." So testified veteran political columnist Jackie Webster to assembled Canadian senators at their recent hearings on the state of Canadian news media. The Canadian senate's standing Committee on Transport and Communications was concluding a two-year study on the current state of Canadian media industries. During their stop in the province of New Brunswick, media scholars, journalists, politicians and members of the public came forward to give testimony about the Irving media monopoly. Accusations of censorship, predatory pricing, and draconian publishing contracts dominated the hearings. The senate's mandate has been to examine the appropriate role of public policy in helping to ensure that the Canadian news media remain healthy,

independent and diverse. The Committee's study was launched in the context of tremendous changes in the media environment in recent years— notably, globalization, technological change, convergence and increased concentration of ownership.

Literature Review/Theoretical Premise

This article explores a case study in media monopoly. The Irving Group of Companies is examined in light of the concerns over the impact of media monopolies raised by political economy theorists. Political economy is a theoretical position that looks for the economic dimension underlying social and political life. "Political Economy [is] the study of the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources."¹ For example, when applied to the media, this would involve an examination of the ownership and economic control of the media. Political economy theorists would seek to highlight the fact that, to quote the First Lord Thomson of Fleet, "[i]t is the business of newspapers to make money." A political economy perspective emphasizes the need to examine the ownership of the press, the economic influence on the press by its for-profit nature, as well as direct and indirect influences by advertisers and/or government. Political economy emphasizes that the media is directly or indirectly affected by the social forces of our society— social forces that frequently are the expression of dominant economic interests and power.

The issue of ownership of the media has always been of central interest for those pursuing a critical analysis. Ownership is important because it addresses the adage that "freedom of the press is for those who own one." As John Porter wrote in *The Vertical Mosaic*, his landmark Canadian study, "the existing pattern of ownership is conservative, supporting the status quo over a wide range of social and economic policies."² We can explore how much influence a media owner exerts on the content of the news, either directly through edict, or indirectly through the creation of an ideological climate that shapes the presentation of the journalists' work.

Canada's leading media scholar in the political economy tradition is James Winter, and one of his main focuses is on questions of ownership.³ Winter not only expresses grave concerns about the impact of private ownership on the media, but he places special emphasis on chain ownership, cross-media ownership, and the interconnection between media, economic and political elites. In his 1997 book, *Democracy's Oxygen*, Winter provides countless examples of the cozy, long-term links between media owners, their senior editors, and senior Canadian politicians. One of the consequences, he says, is the narrowness of the political discourse in the country's newspapers.

American scholars have also examined the consequences of ownership concentration for media content. Bagdikian notes that the lack of competition has resulted in a homogenous media product that serves the interests of a small number of owners. He argues that in the United States, the national news media have been remarkably inattentive to the growing economic and social failures induced by government policies benefiting large corporations and other powerful segments of society, at the expense of the

general population.

While Washington and the national media put on their blinders, locally- controlled media remained alert to local evidence of policy failures. Predictably, however, these local stories—on, for example, savings and loan failures or fraud in federal programs—seldom made their way into national news that most affects policymakers in Washington.⁴

Bagdikian maintains that owners have always wielded enough influence that stories involving their own interests are reported in their favor. But now when a large corporate owner intervenes, alterations in coverage and analysis affect reports reaching millions. John Hannigan echoes these concerns, about the consequences of “global megamedia empires” on the availability of information and ideas.⁵

Some media scholars have focused on the general pro-capitalist climate of profit-oriented media. As Hackett, Pinet and Ruggles note: “Newspaper monopolies, for example, are largely attributable to the economic realities of mass advertising and economies of scale in the newspaper industry.”⁶ Several authors have examined the decision making processes of large media organizations and have found that there are a number of economic factors that serve to shape the news product and direct it to a status quo orientation. “The imperatives of keeping costs down and profits up affect the newsgathering procedures, content, and form of daily newspapers in every market.”⁷ These factors include the cost-cutting measures so familiar to many journalist and media watchers where journalists are laid off. To replace the work of these people, the media rely instead on wire services. The use of wire services has the effect of reducing the amount of local news and importing coverage and perspectives from centralized news clearinghouses. The cutback in journalists usually means a reduction in investigative reporting, pursuit of non-traditional sources and the reliance on press releases and easy-to-locate officials and media handlers. Focus is restricted to the same institutions and sources and coverage tends to privilege pre-planned media events as opposed to spontaneous social problems.

Research Questions

The literature on monopoly media ownership indicates a series of questions that could be asked regarding the news product of a corporate media monopoly, in this case the Irving group of Companies. Is there evidence that the news product of a monopoly media organization is homogenous, with similar copy and views being expressed in the multiple holdings of the parent company? Is the news product identifiably pro-capitalist thereby reinforcing the corporate values of the parent company? Is the news product self serving so that the parent company influences the manner in which its own business ventures are reported on in the media outlets which they own? If the coverage is self serving, how much of this attributed to direct intervention by the media ownership and how much is due to internal censorship?

Research Design

This research is based on the case study approach. A case study is a holistic inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its natural setting. Researchers have used the case study research method for many years across a variety of disciplines. Social scientists, in particular, have made wide use of this qualitative research method to examine contemporary situations. Case study research provides the opportunity to gain an understanding of a complex issue and can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research. Case studies emphasize detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships. The leading scholar in the field, Robert K. Yin⁸ states that in this methodology, the case is an object of interest in its own right and the researcher aims to provide an in-depth elucidation of it. The merits of this approach include the possibility that case studies may generate anecdotal evidence that can illustrate general findings. Unlike random sample surveys, case studies are not representative of entire populations, nor do they claim to be. Drawbacks include questions about the transferability of the results to other case studies that may not share the unique characteristics of the case. Yin points out that generalization of results, from either single or multiple designs, is made to theory and not to populations. This article follows the model that Yin identifies as the “Critical case” in which the researcher chooses a case study on the grounds that it will allow a better understanding of a given hypothesis. A investigation of the media practices and product of the Irving Group serves to introduce readers to an important case study in media monopoly and a source of information regarding whether the claims of political economy media scholars are evident in this case. Given that the Irving Group have indicated an interest in moving into the American market, this case study may be of interest to American media scholars who would benefit from an introduction to a new player on the American media scene.

Background on the Irving Empire

Who are the Irvings and why this fuss about their media holdings? According to *Canadian Business* magazine, brothers Jim, Jack and Arthur Irving are the 4th richest Canadians after Ken Thomson, Galen Weston and former ebay president Jeff Skoll.⁹ The Irving empire includes over 300 companies¹⁰, has an estimated net worth of over 4 billion dollars¹¹, and employs 8% of the New Brunswick labor force¹² in operations that span forestry, transportation, and construction. The Irving group also owns the province’s three English-language daily newspapers, the majority of the community papers and four radio stations.

The Irving Group is a large, vertically-integrated collection of companies run by the three sons of the founder, legendary industrialist, K.C. Irving (1899-1992). These companies are limited in liability and publicly registered, but they are privately held, meaning that the public knows comparatively little about their dealings, and finding information about their operations is notoriously difficult. Labor lawyers in the province recall that there was even a case in which workers at an Irving-owned company failed in their unionization bid because they were unable to legally prove that the numbered company they worked for actually belonged to the Irvings.¹³ It is important to note that the rise of the Irving

Group was based not only on the hard work of K.C. Irving, his sons, and his thousands of employees, but also on the start the K.C. got from his own family and from New Brunswick taxpayers. In the case of his family, his initial foray into business was supported by his father, a successful merchant and lumber baron. In the case of the provincial government, most of the major initiatives have been supported by municipal tax concessions, cheap water, government grants, low-interest loans and protection from “nuisance complaints.”¹⁴ For example, in 1964, K.C. Irving got the New Brunswick legislature to pass a bill allowing, in words, “one of Irving’s companies to trespass and expropriate or use other owners’ land or ‘privileges’ without asking for government permission to do so.”¹⁵

Though K.C. Irving was not a business theorist, by his own admission, he did strike upon a central means of capital accumulation. Appropriate surplus value from labour, pour it into new and existing enterprises, and continue this process as your enterprises increasingly occupy the dominant place in the monopoly sector of the economy. Eventually the Irvings would be part of a joint venture to build and operate Canada’s largest oil refinery, and they would construct a deep water port in Saint John, called Canaport, to import and export crude and refined oil via supertankers. The Irvings built gas stations, so they needed construction capacity. They established or bought Ocean Steel, Irving Equipment Ltd., Strescon Ltd., Thorne’s Hardware, and so on, to keep the control and profits in the group. The Irvings had goods to move, so they bought or created trucking arms, like Midland Transport and Sunbury Transport, and shipping, including Kent Lines, and tug boat capacity, in the form of Atlantic Towing Ltd. To build ships, they acquired the major shipyards in Saint John and Halifax, as well as some lesser operations in the region. They bought both saw mills and wood land at bargain prices, and these acquisitions supported each other. If they were producing forest products, they should own a Pulp and Paper Mill, which they acquired. To retail their lumber, they established a hardware/lumber yard chain, Kent Building Supplies. They also established Kent Homes, a house prefabrication company that ships pre-built homes all over the region, and increasingly, all over the world. It was logical to produce newsprint, and to acquire the major customers for newsprint. So over a period of time they acquired the majority of the English-language newspapers. Other outlets for paper products such as Majesta paper towels, toilet paper and diapers followed.

Forbes business magazines’ report on the world’s richest people states that much of the family’s trust is rumored to be held in tax-haven Bermuda.¹⁶ K.C. Irving left Canada suddenly and established himself as a resident of Bermuda after a series of skirmishes with the federal government over income, business and inheritance tax policies. From 1972 until his death, K.C. would visit New Brunswick for “6 months, less a day” each year¹⁷ leaving his sons in control of the daily operations of the company although he remained as majority shareholder. His will stipulated that his three sons could only divide or personally inherit the family fortune if they became non-Canadians.¹⁸

The Irvings have been in the newspaper business since 1944 and currently own all three English language daily papers in the province: Fredericton Daily Gleaner, Moncton Times and Transcript and the Saint John Telegraph Journal, which also circulates provincially in a slightly modified form as the *New Brunswick Telegraph Journal*. In addition the Irving’s publishing arm, Brunswick News, has recently acquired ten subscription-based community weekly papers and several free community weeklies.¹⁹ The Irvings bought and then shut down two other community papers leaving only three

non-Irving weeklies in the province. Irving-owned Acadia Broadcasting has four radio stations. They also own a news Web site called canadaeast.com.

Discussion

New Brunswickers face classic problems of monopoly media ownership in which homogeneity and a narrow range of opinion are common features of the news media. For example, all three New Brunswick daily papers ran editorials praising the appointment of former New Brunswick Premier Frank McKenna as ambassador to the United States. While this editorial position may well reflect the view of each paper's editorial team, after 10 years as the leader of a provincial Liberal party that was soundly rejected at the polls at the end of his term, it is likely that many New Brunswickers share a different view. The three daily papers regularly take identical stances on current events. The homogeneity of the editorial position of the three papers means that people lose out on the ability to hear any other perspectives on many issues of importance.²⁰

Living in New Brunswick where the majority of the press is owned by a single large capitalist enterprise means that the voice of the corporate world speaks loudly and the coverage of labor focuses on confrontational and controversial events such as strikes in which labor is scapegoated. For example, recently all three papers ran editorials critical of the New Brunswick teachers in their contract negotiations with the government. Phrases such as out of touch with reality, outrageously high salary increases, dragging students into the dispute, and distasteful game of chess were peppered throughout the editorials. Irving-owned media coverage of unionized workers regularly include phrases such as irrational, unreasonable, ludicrous and greedy. This reveals a pattern of Irving coverage of labour issues that typically portrays labour as the active and disruptive party.

Most problematic of all is the fact that the Irving empire is not exposed to investigative journalistic inquiry in the province's papers. Critical observers of the media can easily identify the self-serving nature of the Irving's media coverage. For example, all three Irving papers ran similar news headlines that defended their bosses from accusations of undue influence when it was revealed that they had given government ministers free plane trips and fishing junkets.

When the national media reported on the case of the then Canadian federal Industry minister Allan Rock, who made highly favourable policy decisions affecting the Irving empire after he went on a fishing trip hosted by the Irvings²¹, the national newspapers headlines read: "Rock faces new conflict-of-interest questions" (*Globe and Mail*, October 14, 2003), "Rock disregarded ethics ruling to advance Irvings' cause" (*National Post*, October 20, 2003), "New questions arise over Rock, Irvings" (*Toronto Star*, October 14, 2003). Yet a review of headlines from the New Brunswick papers reads: "Rock defends Irving trip" (*Fredericton Daily Gleaner*, October 11, 2003 pA3), "Audit of Irving deal shows no evidence of conflict" (*Saint John Telegraph-Journal*, October 18, 2003, pA1/A11), and "No Conflict in Fishing Trip" (*Moncton Times and Transcript*, October 11, 2003, pC3). Similarly, when it became

apparent that the New Brunswick federal Member of Parliament, Claudette Bradshaw, had also benefited from Irving trips the Irving papers covered the story with the headline: "Bradshaw free flight scandal overblown" (*Moncton Times and Transcript*, October 23, 2003).

The adage that you don't bite the hand that feeds you means that the readers of the New Brunswick papers are being given a very different spin on news than readers in the rest of the country. In this case, the story attracted enough national media attention that local people had access to alternative perspectives by examining the national papers. However due to the for-profit orientation of the media industry, which emphasises wire-service filler over investigative local news coverage, it is increasingly common for New Brunswick news issues to be neglected by the national media. When the provincial papers are owned by the local mega corporation, it leaves limited options to gain another perspective.

For example, Irving Oil recently negotiated a tax rate for their Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) terminal in Saint John, New Brunswick that gave the company a 25 year cap on the tax liability of the land which many observers say amounts to only 10% of the estimated value. The story was largely ignored outside of the province, though some newspapers were running headlines that stated "Decision to give N.B. gas plant a tax break could be based on wrong info" (*Canadian Press Newswire*, March 16, 2005) and "Hundreds protest tax breaks for Irving" (*Broadcast News*, April 13, 2005). However, the Irving-owned papers were lecturing their readers in editorials and news stories on the benefits of the deal and warning of the dire consequences that would result if the deal were rescinded. Headlines in the Irving papers included: "Benefits justify using tax cap" (*Moncton Times and Transcript*, March 18, 2005, pD6); "Scrapping deal would send bad message: Irving rep" (*Saint John Telegraph-Journal*, March 24, 2005, pA3); "Business leaders call deal a huge opportunity" (*Saint John Telegraph-Journal*, March 16, 2005, pA4); "Business owner fears impact if tax concession is rescinded" (*Saint John Telegraph-Journal*, March 26, 2005, pA3).

The decline in investigative reporting of local and regional issues by the countries' national papers has also resulted in a situation where the Irving-owned media can at times act as agenda setters for the rest of the media. In these cases the Irving-owned media's version of certain events is reproduced uncritically in the national media without reference to the vested interests that the Irvings have on a particular issue.

The owners of the Irving papers have also been known to actively interfere in the papers' editorial policy. The history of the Irving's ownership of the media is peppered with stories of journalists forbidden to name the Irvings as the ones responsible for oil spills and of Irving executives prohibited from speaking to the press. In one case, the editor of the Saint John paper was denied permission to report that an Irving-owned tugboat had run aground for fear it would result in an insurance hike for the company.²² When Neil Reynolds, libertarian and legendary Canadian newspaper editor, left the *Telegraph-Journal* in 1995 after a stormy reign as editor, he told reporters that the paper's owner, J.K. Irving, called him every day, telling him what he liked and did not like in the paper.²³

An incident during the 1997 Federal election provides some insight into the consequences of unsanctioned editorial action at an Irving-owned paper. In the weeks before the June 1997 federal election, the federal Liberal Party in New Brunswick was in electoral trouble. The province, like the region, was turning against the Chrétien Liberals. A few days before the vote the *Telegraph-Journal* took an editorial position in favour of Jean Charest's Progressive Conservatives. J.K. Irving, the eldest of the three Irving brothers responded by writing a letter, published on the front page on election day, repudiating the editorial, and arguing instead that Canada needed a majority government and that the Liberals had done a good job and deserved another term. The Irvings, starting with their father, K.C., tended to support the Liberals, and J.K.'s son-in-law, Paul Zed (M.P.-Fundy Royal) was one of the Liberal incumbents who would go down to defeat later that day, despite J.K.'s efforts. This case shows that when the paper's editors took a position in opposition to that of their employers' they were publicly dressed down.²⁴

For example, when the 27-month strike at Irving Oil concluded in 1996 with a humiliating defeat for the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers union, the company required a process of ideological re-education which was essentially a means for the company to control the hearts and minds of its now broken labour force. Returning workers at the refinery said that, in reality, the reorientation program was a combination "bitterness test" and "attitude alteration" exercise. Labour observers noted at the time that the Irvings were black listing the striking workers and the back to work protocol was identified as a "brainwashing" exercise.²⁵

The strike at the refinery was identified as a significant sign of the changing labour relations climate in North America and globally. The strike began as a result of Irving Oil Ltd.'s efforts to mimic the flexibility and restructuring of labour seen in the southern U.S. and elsewhere as part of the changing face of global commerce. Its conclusion was seen as an example of rollback, whereby once gained social/political/economic progress was being rolled back as economic instability and recession allowed for a climate in which corporate and governmental power could be more directly exercised.

Not surprisingly, the words "brainwashing" and "blacklisting" of strikers never appeared in the Irving paper's coverage of the strike. Instead, the New Brunswick papers published the names of the 37 striking workers who were fired by the company under the headline "Not welcome at the Refinery."²⁶ The re-orientation was described as a "back-to-work program" that was a "tough transition" for the men who "failed" and were "told to go home."²⁷

But it is interesting to note that the Irving's coverage of the issue was paralleled in the only national newspaper at the time, the *Globe and Mail*. The *Globe and Mail* allowed the Irving-owned media to set the agenda on the tone and coverage of the strike and its unorthodox back to work protocol and presented virtually identical coverage to the national audience. It is also interesting to note that the *Globe and Mail* even avoided covering traditionally newsworthy elements to the story when they followed the Irvings' lead and avoided covering New Brunswick N.D.P. leader, Elizabeth Weir's, attention-getting press conference in which she suggested that the N.B. government should call in the

Irving companies' loans if they did not agree to settle the strike. Thus when the national news media fall into line with the Irving-owned media's account of their own controversies, no one is provided with the range of opinion and perspective that is the heart of informative and independent journalism in a democratic society.

Research on the media coverage of their own companies also reveals that the papers routinely publish their own press releases as news stories. For example the *Saint John Telegraph Journal* prints an article entitled Refinery Hires 1,000 for Maintenance Project²⁸ which is almost identical to the Irving oil press release on that topic entitled 1,000 Tradespeople ♦ Turnaround' Saint John Refinery.²⁹

The papers routinely present the view that what's good for the company is good for the province. When Irving Oil maintained high production levels while replacement workers and management ran the plant during the 1994 refinery strike, the Irving-owned media heralded their accomplishment with laudatory headlines about this boon for New Brunswick's fiscal health. When strikers threatened to initiate a boycott of Irving products, this was proclaimed as a dire threat to the health of the provincial economy.³⁰

Finally, the Irving's coverage of their own empire is particularly marked by a strategy of defeatism where those who oppose the company are routinely portrayed as naive, foolish and irrational in their futile effort to challenge the Irvings. For example coverage of the closure of the Irving-owned Saint John shipyard and the decertification of five unions reveals examples of this classic response. The *Saint John Telegraph Journal's* news coverage and editorial on the story was filled with phrases such as "end of an era," "stalemate," "spin their wheels" and "going nowhere fast." The media stated that the Irvings' compensation package to the union "isn't going to get any better" and "like it or not, we believe they hold all the cards."³¹

A consequence of this discourse of defeatism is that the public "may begin to feel increasingly alienated and disconnected from the civic life of their communities. They may develop a sense that they are without relevant, actionable information and, therefore, powerless to control the course of their own lives."³²

More recent developments include the resignation of seven leading columnists who ceased their relationship with the Irving-owned papers when they were forced to sign a newly-instituted freelance contract that gave the company the right to re-publish articles in any form, in perpetuity, with no extra recompense to the author. Columnist Jackie Webster labeled the contract "draconian" and political commentator Dalton Camp asked the Toronto Star not to sell his syndicated national column to the Irving papers.³³

Attention was focused on the Irving media monopoly recently when the Irvings took over the newly established free weekly paper *Here* in Saint John and Moncton. The urban-oriented independent papers were run by young writers in the province and offered a fresh collection of current events, music news and activism issues. Prior to buying out the indie papers directly, Brunswick News was accused of predatory pricing when they launched a similar paper called *Metro Marquee* and cut advertising prices by 25% to compete with *Here*. After the *Here* takeover, the company announced that it would merge the paper with *Metro Marquee* and expand into Fredericton. The new owners exercised their editorial control immediately by cancelling the sex column that is a standard element in most indie papers and not long after the new editor was fired for running a cover story on breast feeding. Greg Thompson, Conservative MP for Southwest New Brunswick, told the House of Commons this latest Irving purchase amounted to “media concentration at its worst.”³⁴

In a move that leaves some critics sceptical, the Irvings recently announced a \$2 million dollar donation to the province’s journalism schools for the launch of new endowed chairs: the Irving Chair in Journalism at St. Thomas University in Fredericton, and the Romeo LeBlanc Chair in Journalism sponsored by Brunswick News at Université de Moncton. While the universities receiving the new funds are overjoyed, concerns have been raised about the possible implications of new generations of journalism students learning from the very outset of their training who is paying the piper.

In 2005 a member of the Irving family took the helm of the Empire’s media holdings. Jamie Irving, great-grandson to K.C. and son of Jim Irving, was named publisher of the *Saint John Telegraph-Journal* and *New Brunswick Telegraph Journal* after having served as publisher of one of the companies’ community papers for a few years. Jamie, aged 28, studied journalism at Carleton and New York’s Columbia University.³⁵ While some argue that his journalism background spells good news for the development of a professional reporting culture at the Irving papers, others say that it is unlikely investigative journalism will ever be applied to family businesses.

New Brunswick is the only officially bilingual province in Canada, catering to the needs of two language groups the English and the French-speaking “Acadians.” The Irvings have also recently expanded their media operations to the Acadian press. Five French-language weeklies *Le Madawaska*, *La République*, *La Cataracte*, *L’Hebdo Chaleur* and *L’Etoile* are now Irving-owned. Charges of predatory pricing have been made as the Irvings compete for advertisers with the province’s French-language daily, *L’Acadie Nouvelle*. This has many New Brunswick Acadians concerned. Marie-Linda Lord, a journalism professor at the Université de Moncton, told the Senate committee that it’s critical for Acadians to control their own media voice in the province. Lord said the Acadian community should raise its awareness regarding concentration of media ownership in the province since the Acadian press is now seriously confronted with a high rate of assimilation. Since the Irving press has behaved like a “media predator,” Lord suggested that a media watchdog should be set up to point a finger at the newspapers when they don’t serve the public interest.³⁶

Acadians in New Brunswick have a particular concern about the way in which Irving-owned media cover

controversial issues affecting the province's two linguistic groups. In the 1960s, the province's first elected Acadian premier, Louis Robichaud, launched an unprecedented Equal Opportunity Program aimed at ensuring equal standards of government core services such as education and health across the province. Until this time, wealthy English areas had the money to hire good teachers and offer quality programs while poorer mainly French areas were often disenfranchised and under-served. The program, which has been heralded as tantamount to New Brunswick's own Quiet Revolution, also ended the practice of playing one municipality off against another in order to extract the lowest tax rates, which had benefited the Irvings. The program and its architect were consequently skewered in the Irving-owned press as "robbing Peter to pay Pierre." In particular, the Fredericton *Daily Gleaner* under the leadership of its editor and former-owner, Brigadier Michael Wardell, vilified Robichaud and directed his cartoonists to depict the premier daily as a moustache-wearing dictator, with a swastika on his arm and the caption "Little Hitler" written across the top.³⁷ The anti-French bias of the paper extended for years and is not forgotten by many in the province.

The Irving media monopoly could be coming to a media outlet near you. The company has stated that they have a mandate to expand the media division outside of New Brunswick and have reportedly "kicked the tires" of a few newspapers in the region. Maine is one of the areas in which Brunswick News CEO, Rino Volpe, says he wants to explore purchasing print and radio outlets.³⁸ The Irvings are already known to the citizens of New England. Irving Oil opened its first site in Bangor, Maine in 1972 and now the company has 800 Irving retail gas and 'Mainway' convenience stores throughout Atlantic Canada, Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont, with home heat and wholesale operations in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and Massachusetts. Irving Oil's Marketing Office is located in Portsmouth, New Hampshire and their US headquarters of the Irving Equipment division are in Burlington, Massachusetts. In Maine, the company owns several saw mills, and has 27 logging contractors and more than 40 trucking contractors working in the Maine north woods. It owns 1.5 million acres in Aroostook County, ME making it the state's largest single landowner.³⁹ In 2001, Irving Woodlands was named the Corporate Landowner of the Year by the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. However, the Irving forestry operations in Maine have also been the subject of considerable criticism by American environmentalists who find fault with the company's reliance on clear-cutting, herbicide spraying and converting the forest to fast-growing plantations.

Conclusions

Previous Canadian governmental investigations into newspaper ownership have taken notice of the Irving media monopoly. In 1969 the Davey Committee, examining the concentration of media in Canada, noted that "Mr. Irving has created a private empire of New Brunswick, complete with its own official press." The committee report called New Brunswick a "journalistic disaster area"⁴⁰ and recommended the formation of a government publications development fund "so that the loudest voice in town won't inevitably become the only voice in town." Aside from the creation of some press councils, none of its recommendations were adopted. A 1970s effort by federal anti-trust authorities to disassemble the Irving family newspaper monopoly in New Brunswick also failed. In 1981, a Royal Commission chaired by Tom Kent focusing on the daily press stated that too many newspapers were owned by large conglomerates with interests in many areas other than publishing.⁴¹ The commission recommended

that regional monopolies like the Irving empire in New Brunswick be dismantled. In 1982, the Liberal government directed the CRTC not to issue or renew licences for businesses belonging to owners of daily newspapers. The directive had an impact on the Irving group, but was repealed in 1985.⁴²

At the conclusion of the current senate hearings, committee member and former broadcaster, Senator Jim Munson, told the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) that it may be time to establish a media watchdog to ensure the public is being served by New Brunswick's Irving-owned newspapers. Munson said that after hearing the testimony, he was left a little worried about the limited variety of media coverage available to New Brunswickers who aren't getting a diversity of news and opinion. He stated that the Irving press should be doing a better job reflecting the different linguistic perspectives in the province. He encouraged the development of healthy media competition featuring strong investigative reporting and emphasized the important role of the CBC as an alternative source of information to the Irving press. When informed about the dramatic cuts to local CBC programming, he stated "Whoever gutted the regional programs in Atlantic Canada has to have his or her head examined. It's not always about money."⁴³

Monopoly media in New Brunswick has resulted in a situation where the population is left with generic news content in which contextualized and critical discussions of important social and economic issues that affect the lives and livelihoods of neighbours and families are addressed in a skewed and self-serving manner. The Irvings control all of the English-language daily papers in the province, and now they also own the majority of the weekly community papers. This gives the giant corporation an unparalleled venue to promote its own interests as well as insulate itself from inquiries and criticism.

Policy analysts state that Canada is lagging behind most of the developed world when it comes to regulating media ownership. European countries faced with similar challenges caused by monopoly media set concrete limits on media concentration so that, by law, no person or company may own or control all of the media in a single area and companies and individuals are restricted in the percentage of the media market they can own. In some nations, whenever a merger enables a company to control a specific press market or strengthen its already controlling position, a national government cartel office is required to intervene to prevent the merger. Currently, the European Commission is proposing legislation to restrict the reach of big media corporations and control the spread of cross-media ownership. In addition, other countries have put in place press subsidy schemes whereby a diversity of newspapers, not always supported by private corporate advertisers, are provided public financing.⁴⁴ Media watchers are calling on the Senate committee to make decisive recommendations along these lines. They fear that unless they do so, the consolidation and convergence within the monopoly media will have successfully undermined society's formation of a free and independent press and brought us full circle back to a system where freedom of the press is for those who own one.

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