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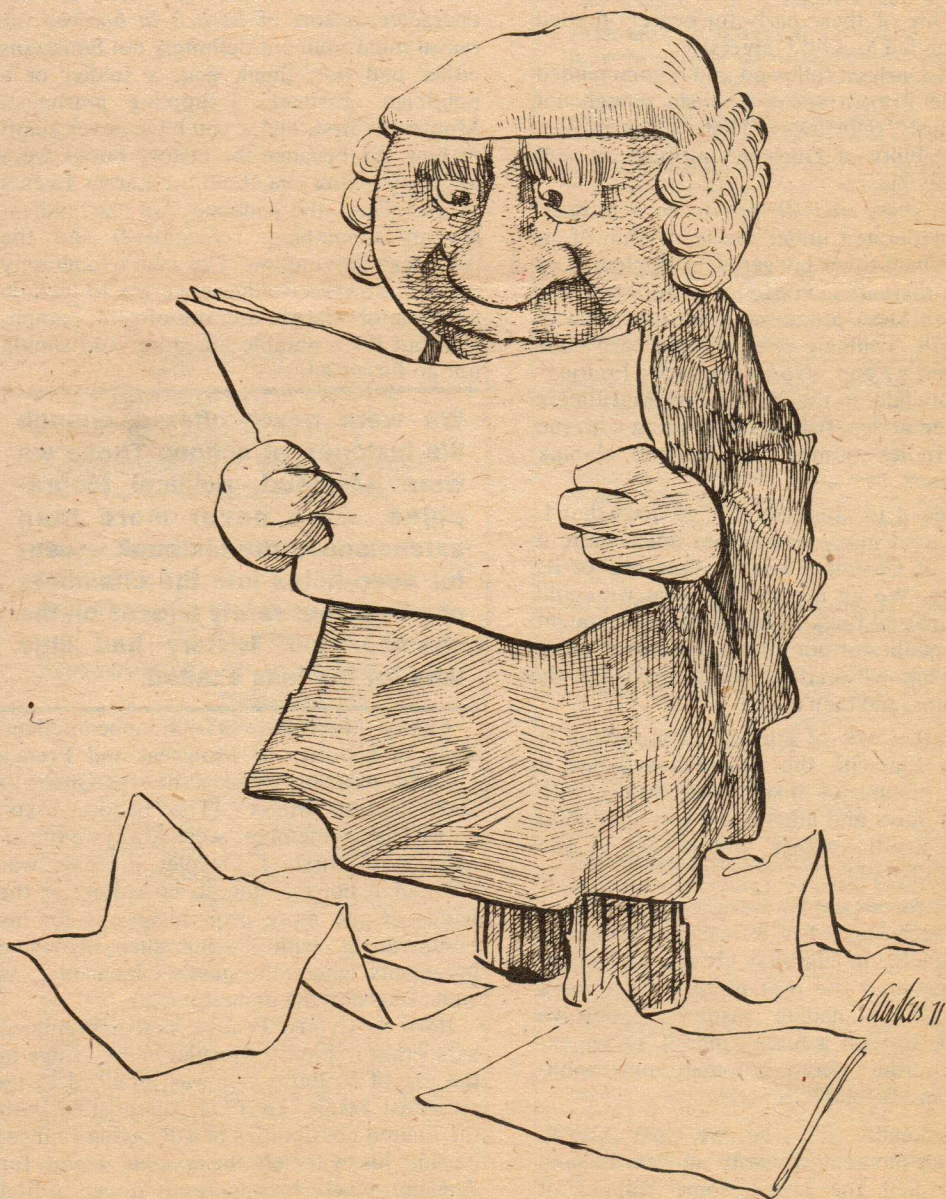
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TIPS FOR THE  
FREELANCER

SORE TUMMIES  
IN BRITAIN

# The trials of a pioneering publisher



# The untold tale of Fleury Mesplet

by GEORGE GALT

Consider these memories carried away from four years of high school Canadian History:

The French farmed the land for 150 years. They made friends with the Indians. Some of their missionaries were eaten alive by the Canadian blackfly.

The Jesuits wrote their Relations. The domestic triumvirate of intendant, bishop and governor haggled incessantly. Whiskey was involved.

The seigneurs had male children and divided their estates lengthwise. (Everyone wanted a view of the river). The *habitant*, the common peasant, had to settle for a rented hut and use of the community mill and oven.

Then the English arrived, uninvited, and made themselves at home. More interested in money than the French, they organized cartels to exploit the beaver pelted hinterland. One of these early fur-bearers funded and founded McGill University.

Lord Durham followed and recommended that the French speak English, though not necessarily right away. History has proven the durability of Durham's attitude, as well as its myopia.

Some years later the provinces were hastily confederated under the leadership of an astute small-town lawyer who tumbled. And shortly thereafter, in accord with one of this man's reckless promises, a national railway was built, swinging open the big barn door to Rupert's Land, also known as the Prairies.

Meanwhile, in the distant east, Maritimers had been at sea, fishing and trading with the West Indies (lumber for liquor). Halifax was a port. . . .

No need to continue. It's obvious that I, like a great many others, am much more a victim of Canadian history than one of its scholars. We all memorized what we could of the official facts and never gave a thought to the quality of our knowledge or its future use. What we learned, we learned quickly for exams, and then forgot.

Why the lack of interest? The fault, I'm certain, lay with the dead-pan syllabus, a formal picture of history top heavy with politics, laws and edicts, and too unmindful of the predicaments and labors of the common people.

Why, for example, were we not offered more accessible heroes, ordinary figures who excelled in everyday life and who might have rendered the past more supple, more believable? Canadian history, it always seemed, was on a forced march, under exclusive orders from colonial lawyer-politicians and Britannic generals.

Occasionally, it's true, we went AWOL and dealt momentarily with an item beyond politics and the army, some snippet of social history, such as what varieties of wheat grew best in Saskatchewan, or who founded the Ryerson Press. But these excursions were infrequent, probably because they checked our advance, and there was, after all, the usual scholastic deadline for

our laborious campaign to win a nation from a colony.

Well, I don't presume to have a cure for the torpid schoolbook version of our history. Possibly, though, a bigger dose of biography would help. It seems to me that we were never offered enough life-histories at school, and that those we were assigned, political biographies, were never more than extensions of the textbook, useful peep-holes into the chambers of power, to be sure, but rarely a focus on the chambermaid. History had little time for the less exalted.

All of which may explain why, when I recently stumbled into one of the more modest of Canadian biographical corners and explored, I was astonished, non-scholar that I am, at how fascinating the biography of a lower-ranking citizen can be.

Here, by chance, was a genuinely colorful character, a sort of *héro à la bohème*, no rascal mind you, but definitely not bourgeois either and not, thank god, a soldier or a politician. Instead, a tipling journalist, Montreal's first, and if you have never heard of him, it's because the history books were too busy telling you about the Larger Events of the Day, the Quebec Act (seventeen-seventy something, remember?) and the American Revolution. The man's biography remains unwritten, unless we are to include a couple of obscure and out-of-print pamphlets, but it's a notable life-story, and should not go forgotten. . . .

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Fleury Mesplet (1735-94) appears fleetingly in histories of Montreal and French Canada, probably because he was Quebec's first French printer. (The history texts, as we may remember, were always enthusiastic about "firsts"). Mesplet, it seems, was a bit of a boozier, and so he suffers at the hands of the more prim historians for his "unfortunate habit." But such frowning judgments ignore the man's inborn zest, as well as his difficult and erratic life.

Born in Lyons, France, and apprenticed as a printer, Fleury Mesplet came of age in the era of Voltaire and was attached to its reformist ideals. In 1773, dissatisfied with the limited possibilities of a decaying France, he and his wife left the *ancien régime* for England, where he apparently hoped to find more auspicious politics and better business.

With business, at least, he was to be disappointed. There were few commissions for an unknown French in London. What England did offer, however, was the prominent American diplomat, Benjamin Franklin,

and Mesplet, with his natural nose for opportunity and sharp eye for politics, scrambled to arrange a meeting. The American sage seems to have liked him. On Franklin's advice, and with his letter of introduction, Mesplet sailed for Pennsylvania in 1774.

The connection with Canada begins in Philadelphia with Mesplet's printing of the historic pamphlet "*Aux Habitants de la Province de Québec*", a plea from the newborn American Congress to the Quebec peasantry to join the fight for freedom.

That marked the beginning of Mesplet's long involvement in the American Revolution. The Americans, we know, badly wanted French-Canadian complicity in their war against the British. They sent secret letters to Quebec, and they sent spies. They sent official emissaries, led by Benjamin Franklin, and they sent the military, led by Benedict Arnold and Ethan Allen. They also sent Fleury Mesplet.

It was the spring of 1775. American forces under Benedict Arnold and General Montgomery had invaded the province, taken Montreal and laid siege to Quebec City. But for their failure to win the Quebec fortress, Canada might well have been annexed. In the deciding winter battle Montgomery was killed and Arnold wounded. Their troops scattered back to Montreal. Congress, disappointed, dispatched Franklin to canvass Montreal's mood and discuss the possibilities of union. At the same time, they commissioned one Fleury Mesplet to set up shop there and establish a newspaper under Franklin's guidance. It was to be the first French-language press in the province.

As it turned out, Franklin may well have had a shrewd eye on the future when he had counselled Mesplet to emigrate from London two years before. A French printer was just who the Americans needed to fly their flag in Quebec. Once in America, Mesplet was the obvious nominee.

So, pocketing a fat loan from a friend and the meagre \$200 advanced by Congress Mesplet set out on one of those pioneer treks which are almost beyond imagination today. It is 400 miles from Philadelphia to Montreal, airport to airport. It must have been immeasurable more by wagon and raft. Certainly it was more arduous - the early printing presses were heavy machinery even by today's standards and were necessarily accompanied by weighty reams of paper and sets of type.

As well as the press, the ménage included Mesplet and his wife, all their personal belongings, a large stock of books, and two assistants. They made it almost intact. Only miles from Montreal, in the rapids at Chambly, the party suffered a serious swamping. Much of the precious paper and book stock was spoiled.

It was the first of many mishaps. Before Mesplet had even the time to set up his equipment, Franklin had left Montreal, judging the province an unlikely convert to the revolutionary cause. He probably was right.

Quebecers were rankled by the American military presence; a smallpox epidemic and the influx of ballooning Congressional paper money had made Uncle Sam unwelcome. Within days, Franklin's fellow diplomats followed his south, leaving Mesplet stranded and without his promised sponsorship.

Soon afterward, the American troops were evacuated. British ships had been reported sailing up the St. Lawrence, heralding the end of the short-lived American invasion. Worse for Mesplet, British suspicion remained very much alive, and although they were only bystanders, he and his assistants were quickly detained in Montreal as political prisoners. Victims of a war-wary administration, they were held without a hearing for a month.

Problems multiplied. On release from jail, the printer's editorial assistant concluded that the whole venture was a bad gamble and decided to cash in his chips. He demanded all his back wages and a ship's passage to France. Mesplet complied, but he must have done so with reluctance, if not despair; his budget was tight, and printing personnel were practically non-existent in a city which had yet to produce its first book.

Somehow he managed to subsist for the next two years on a variety of job-printing orders. Although a sound craftsman, he had little education apart from his apprenticeship, and the loss of his editorial worker must have been a heavy handicap. Not until 1777, two years later, did he risk a fully independent publication, the *Almanach*. It was the first broadly circulated pamphlet published in Montreal, and was popular enough for Mesplet to make it an annual item.

The absence of any native press in the old colony of Quebec may seem strange to us now (it seemed close to heresy to the Americans), but it reflects accurately the French printing tradition. Unlike England, France had a rigorously controlled and censored press, and the French Crown barred printing presses from the colonies, including Quebec.

It was not until the British conquest in 1759 that this restriction was automatically lifted and newspapers were allowed to publish. So we must imagine Mesplet beset not only by his own personal difficulties, but also by the cultural indifference of a milieu in which reading was not a habit, and print not an everyday medium. For most people, print must have meant a prayerbook, little more.

Still, when Mesplet risked his stake on a newspaper in 1778, he sold enough copies to pay at least some of the bills. Oddly enough, his *Gazette du Commerce et Littéraire* surrendered not to financial loss but to political paranoia. Having been deserted by one assistant, he was forced to pick another, and the pickings, it seems, were slim. The choice was Valantin Jautard, an imprudent lawyer from France and himself a convinced Voltairian.

Jautard was articulate, voluble, a windbag in fact, and as with many a windbag, he lacked judgment. In editorial upon editorial he openly argued the virtues of Voltaire, going to few pains to mask his bias. Voltaire, of course, anti-cleric and free-thinker, was hardly an appropriate name to invoke in a conservative Roman Catholic province whose authorities had been so recently unnerved by a revolutionary invasion.

Jautard's spunky column soon incurred the wrath of Governor Carleton, and only a month after the newspaper's first issue,

printer and editor both were officially banished from the province. They very nearly had to pack up. Only Carleton's replacement that summer by General Haldimand, combined with a petition signed by a number of the paper's readers, saved them. The popular response must have helped sway the new governor, but he made it clear that his pardon was conditional on continuing good behavior. Quebec still was years away from democracy and the governor's word still was law.

Apparently oblivious, Jautard sharpened his already prickly attacks on authority, political and religious. Mesplet was author of none of this, but we may suppose that he condoned or even encouraged it. The press, after all, was his, and Jautard his employee. Finally, official tolerance was exhausted; both men were nabbed and locked up in the Quebec Citadel. Their news-sheet had survived for 12 months, and was beginning to show proof of its power to stir public consciousness.

Governor Haldimand was taking no chances. The prisoners were held without trial until the end of the American war, three long years later. (Somehow, however, they procured liquor to lighten the pain of con-

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**Let us call for lesser heroes. Give them a shaft of the limelight. Such characters as Fleury Mesplet deserve better than a yellowing pamphlet. And there must be many more like him asleep in the library stacks.**

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finement, and Mesplet was eventually allowed conjugal visits. Not all was barbarism in the New World).

The community's one printer jailed, his press nonetheless issued some publications over these years. Perhaps Madame Mesplet tried her hand at the craft. History records only that the press was under government seizure. In any case, these must have been trying years for Mesplet's wife, with little or no income and no certainty for the future. She applied to the governor several times for her husband's trial or release, to no avail.

How do we picture Mesplet leaving the Citadel after his three years of internment? A haggard wan figure, bent and slightly dazed, pushed through the gates by British redcoats?

Not at all. In 1783, the Americans having won their war, Mesplet escaped. The details of his caper are lost, but historical rumor has it that he may have been encouraged by the authorities who were embarrassed at having flouted his right to a speedy trial. He was never again arrested, nor ever tried under the original charges, and was able to return to public life as if he had never left.

His troubles, however, persisted. The year after his escape he was threatened with bankruptcy. He had been a steady borrower ever since leaving Pennsylvania, and three years in prison had beggared him completely. One creditor, a fellow Frenchman from Philadelphia, magnanimously reduced a large debt, but others were not so kind, and despite last minute promises of repayment, all his household and business effects fell under the bailiff's gavel in 1784.

During this year, frantic letters to and an appearance before Congress, as well as the efforts on his behalf by John Jacob Astor

(a frequent Montreal visitor, and always open for whatever business might come his way), had netted Mesplet a paltry \$400 reimbursement for his war losses. As he put it, it hardly was enough to pay the costs of making the claim. What with his other financial mishaps, such as having converted all his Philadelphia savings and borrowings into Congressional currency (which was rapidly inflated into worthlessness), it is surprising that he didn't go broke sooner. He must have been an affable fellow with a talent for persuasion. A less agile man would not have been able to stay the bailiff for so long.

As it turned out, the sale was only a formality, anyway. The ironies of small town commerce prevailed in Mesplet's favor. A Mr. Gray, who had won his bid for the printing equipment, could do no better than to rent it all back to its former owner, who still was the only qualified printer in town. Mesplet continued in business as before, his debts now cleared and his unlucky partnership with Jautard dissolved.

He launched the *Montreal Gazette* the next year, 1785. It was a success from the start, with an ample list of subscribers, both English and French. (In its early days, the *Gazette* was bilingual).

Madame Mesplet died a few years later. Perhaps her husband's madcap life had been more than she could abide. He, by contrast, seems to have kept his vigor. Half a year of mourning was enough. At the age of 55, he remarried, his new bride a young Montreal girl with a small inheritance. Mixed motives, perhaps. The dowry soon was used as collateral for yet another loan.

Business slackened in the last years. Only the *Gazette* and a small number of books and pamphlets were published. Three years in prison had effectively dampened the printer's zeal. Although the *Gazette* carried excerpts from some of the radical papers in France, Mesplet never again openly challenged the local authorities. He died an ordinary and uncontroversial citizen in 1794, his estate besieged by the debts accumulated since his bankruptcy.

It's obvious that Fleury Mesplet was a bad accountant and a spend-thrift. But from me, at least, he gets posthumous credit for surviving in the midst of uncertain politics and with an unstable means of livelihood. True, he died a bankrupt, but he also left us one of our major newspapers. What we know of his tells of a restless man with a roving eye, a quality craftsman who had no patience for commercial details, a man who liked a rich wardrobe and a fine cellar.

He was no scoundrel, only a free spirit with an aversion to compromise, a pioneer in the truest sense. To have translated his somewhat offbeat energies and tastes into a socially-useful life, and in so doing to have retained the mark of personal freedom, this was a kind of heroism, low key and, yes, Canadian. . . .

So let us call for lesser heroes. Give them a shaft of the limelight. Such characters as Fleury Mesplet deserve better than a yellowing Royal Society pamphlet, 60 years old. And there must be many more like his asleep in the library stacks.

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*George Galt lives in London, Ont.*

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# BRITISH PAPERS HAVE SORE TUMMIES

by Paul Mixson

Just about every newspaper publisher suffers from high costs: Energy, newsprint and people. In London's Fleet Street, however, they add a few more ingredients to brew a special brand of publisher's poison.

The first major newspapers have closed under cost pressure and there are rumours about a few others. The Newspaper Publishers' Association is getting weaker, while unions are getting stronger and the government is investigating "freedom of the press," i.e. newspaper ownership and economics.

Last year's newsprint crisis went a long way in bringing about the problems facing Britain's not very cost conscious and besieged newspaper management. Newsprint prices increased nearly 50 per cent last year, increasing from \$180 a metric ton to \$265. Analysts expect more hikes, so that by the end of the year newsprint will be \$360 a long ton.

The newsprint problem was complicated in Britain by the tradition of not signing long-term contracts with newsprint suppliers. Instead, publishers bought on-the-spot market as prices fluctuated. This, of course, caused a major shortage when the supply of newsprint fell last year.

British demand is estimated at 1.7 million tons this year and it represents 28 per cent of costs of a popular Sunday paper. With Scandinavia not expected to add much capacity this year, there still are no plans for increasing Britain's newsprint capacity.

While Scandinavia had no trouble raising prices, British suppliers are tied down by Phase Three price controls and there is little incentive for them to expand. Their costs have increased enormously from the three-fold oil price hike and increases in British coal and electricity prices.

Thus, Britain's newsprint suppliers must think very hard before investing \$25 million for a 110,000 metric ton newsprint plant. It can certainly sell the output, but at an unknown price, hampered by government restraints and rising wages, to newspapers who still do not sign long-term contracts. Even under the best of conditions, newsprint has a low profit margin compared to other types of paper products and Britain doesn't have anything approaching the best of conditions.

Newsprint suppliers believe that publishers have been short-sighted and should place more reliance on cover prices, rather than advertising. For Britain, this could mean a price of 13 cents for a popular daily and much more for a quality daily.

Whether the industry will go this far is unknown, but a jump in cover prices is certainly around the corner and publishers will be waiting to see the impact this has on circulation and the important casual sale.

To emphasize that costs are not just a publisher's gripe, but a serious matter, Beaverbrook stopped publication in Glasgow of its highly reputed *Scottish Daily Express* and *Sunday Express* and the Glasgow *Evening Citizen*, with a combined circulation of 1.2 million.

The job loss of 1,800 included 150 journalists. It is transferring the two Express papers to its Manchester plant and has sold the name and goodwill of the *Evening Citizen* to a rival publishing group in Glasgow for \$6.6 million.

Beaverbrook management blamed the closures on high costs, a lack of cash, an inability to raise the required amount from banks, and lack of union co-operation in Scotland. Managing director Jocelyn Stevens said the unions showed "very, very little understanding" of the group's financial problems and that the Scottish Daily Newspaper Association refused to treat them as a special case in wage negotiations.

The unions, however, see it in a different light. They say the closures were an asset-stripping operation, closing a company because its assets are worth more in liquidation terms than its operational profits.

The *Times of London* did a financial study of Beaverbrook and concluded that with huge real estate holdings not valued at market price, Beaverbrook shares are worth \$8.45 in assets, while the share price moves around the \$1 level. It could see no reason why Beaverbrook couldn't raise the cash it needed and the *Financial Times* concurred.

For these reasons, the Beaverbrook unions are quite concerned. One union spokesman said: "It is not only the jobs of Beaverbrook employees in Glasgow that are at stake. It could be the jobs of the whole Beaverbrook empire."

Meanwhile, the Scottish unions are not sitting still. They are planning a union co-operative to get the Glasgow paper back in publication. Glasgow was the only city outside London sustaining more than one major daily and the unions want to see this as well as jobs come back.

They've raised nearly \$400,000 from dismissed employees to seed the plan and the British Labor government has indicated interest in supplying 50 per cent of the estimated \$6 million it will cost to get the venture implemented.

The crowning paradox is that the new newspaper would have one third of the employees of the old Beaverbrook papers and based on the concept of tight manning and no conflict between staff and management.

Staff conflict with management is a fact of life in British newspapers. Printers strike at the drop of a hat at touchy political ads and the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) has called for participation in newspaper management, a government subsidy for newsprint, and a rise in cover prices.

The NUJ feel that Beaverbrook's London and Manchester operations will collapse without journalistic participation, calling Beaverbrook a "gargantuan, slipshod, ramshackle empire."

According to Ted Heath, last prime minister and now leader of the Conservative opposition, newspaper publishing is overmanned by 25 per cent, although some argue it could be as much as 40 per cent. He cited the use of high-speed letter presses which

take seven men to operate, but in Manchester papers use 12 men and in London 17 and 21. Machines are designed to produce 50,000 copies an hour, but are allowed to produce only 20,000.

Heath said overmanning costs publishers \$100 million a year and that unions should get with management to reduce this figure over the next two years. He added that talk of government subsidies and redirecting advertising revenue to papers that couldn't attract it was out of the question for his party and that unions should reduce their efforts at influencing the content of ads and editorials appearing in the papers.

Once again, as is typical with much of British industry, newspapers are saddled with muddle-through management, some hopelessly buried in class consciousness amid almost anarchistic union interruptions.

The results are easy enough to see. The latest figures show that all major Fleet Street newspapers will be in trouble this year. Only the unique *Financial Times* is expected to make a profit, while the Mirror papers and the *Guardian* will have losses of more than

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\$2 million. The *Observer* and *Daily Mail* will have undisclosed, but larger losses than last year and *The Times* and *Telegraph* just might break even.

The seriousness of newspaper economics has given the Labor government an excuse to step in and appoint a royal commission to investigate freedom of the press. Their guideline is: "... to inquire into the factors affecting the maintenance of the independence, diversity and editorial standards of newspapers and periodicals and the public's freedom of choice of newspapers and periodicals..."

It seems nearly unanimous that a royal commission is too slow and powerless to bring about a major change without a great deal of united effort from publishers and unions.

But, the *Financial Times* asks, "Who is to set (editorial) standards?" Independence, they argue, is based on commercial viability, free from government grants, while freedom from so-called commercial censorship of the market, when referring to editorial standards, is a meaningless phrase.

They point out that the Labor government has historically tried to reform communications media, which it regards as biased. Some Labor Party leaders believe that the economic problems can be solved by a simple government subsidy, rather than more efficient operations.

The *Guardian* took the stand that newspapers should welcome the investigation because the press is less thorough at inquiring into its own problems.

One of their columnists claimed that the quality papers can tell you all about buying a second home on the continent, but that the views from the shop floor on the touchy subject of the Industrial Relations Act were "as from another world." This certainly seems to be a valid criticism of British journalism.

This brings up the added question, is it time to stop under-rating the intelligence of the working-class reader?

No one knows what will result from the commission's investigation, but it certainly will get a great deal of publicity.

On top of these problems, News International, publishers of the *Sun* and *News of the World*, and Associated Newspapers, of the *Daily Mail* and *Evening News*, announced that they will move their offices away from high overhead Fleet Street.

Thus, they join the *Financial Times* and the *Guardian* in having more reasonable rents, but increasing the decentralization of the London newspaper community.

During all of these changes, threats and investigations, the industry should be holding together in its collective bargaining unit and trade association, the Newspaper Publisher's Association, (NPA), but they are not.

The NPA does not believe in local contracts, so when International Publishing refused a local union contract and their union went on strike, it cost them seven million copies in lost circulation. International Publishing then withdrew from the NPA, so it could minimize union disruption.

The NPA hit the panic button and said if another publisher went against them, they would cease to exist as a force in British publishing. And, to deliver the coup de grace, Beaverbrook promptly stepped in and announced that unless it was treated as a special case and allowed to make local deals, it, too, would withdraw from the NPA.

With NPA declining in influence, there is no central point for publishers to rally round and Fleet Street is becoming increasingly fragmented. The fact that outside influences are affecting management decisions and editorial policies may mean that they need changing and all management can do is focus on profitable operation, and that not very well.

All of these pressures still have at root the desire for a free and bias-less newspaper, but in this complicated era simple solutions such as subsidies and profitable commercial operation just are not enough.

From all indications if the British press is

to retain its tradition of independence and high quality journalism in the 1970's and '80's, it must institute changes. And, to institute change in order to remain the same is not exactly the easiest line to walk.

Whether British management and unions can join together to work out solutions to the very real problems facing newspapers and yet still remain as unbiased as possible remains to be seen. Yet, to accomplish anything separately is living in the past.

*Paul Mixson is a freelance writer based in London, England.*

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# SO YOU WANT TO SELL A STORY?

by JOHN PAUL KOWAL

The successful query is the watershed that separates published writers from the great mass of unpublished unknowns. No manuscript, regardless of its apparent brilliance, is worth anything at home in your desk. How then do you get it from your desk to an editor?

Some have tried the unsolicited manuscript technique. That means that they just send the completed manuscript and illustrations to an editor, cold, with no previous contact.

Many publications, especially the high-paying, large-circulation markets, either don't review unsolicited manuscripts or don't have the staff for such a review. Sending the unsolicited manuscript is also a sign that the writer does not really understand the "business" of freelancing. It further has the disadvantage of typing up a manuscript at one publisher with no reasonable expectation of acceptance. In all, you stand a good chance of wasting your time and the editor's.

There is an established accepted procedure for selling your manuscript. First, you should have studied the markets. Here you will want to consult such sources as *Writer's Market*, *Gebbie House Magazine Directory* and for monthly updates *The Writer* and *Writer's Digest*.

Then, you should check a current copy of the publication. Since extensive freelancing should lead you to the library, while you are there study several of the most recent issues of your targeted publication. Nothing offends an editor more than to have a query from someone who is not aware that for the last three months the magazine's format and style have changed a great deal. You can top that insult by writing to an editor listed in *Writer's Market* only to find out that a new editor has recently replaced him.

With your market research complete, you now are ready to write your query. At this point, writers fall into two schools of thought. The first would query with an idea and wait for a positive response from an editor before preparing a manuscript. The second school of thought would query an editor only when the manuscript was completed. This second technique guarantees that the editor will get what is promised with no unforeseen delays.

What is a query? It is a simple inquiry to an editor describing what you have and asking for his response; whether he would be interested in reviewing it for possible publication. This mechanism saves you and your potential editor time, energy and aggravation.

You should remember that the query sent through the mail is almost always the only information that an editor has about you. If it is misspelled, mistyped, mangled and has a coffee stain on it, you've made your first impression.

Your query should be neat, professional, as brief as possible, and should be responsive to the publication's needs. The definition of a publication's needs will be, in part, spelled out in your market research but must be complemented by your perception as

## TIPS FOR THE FREELANCER:

- *Study your market.*
- *Check a current copy of the publication you're going after.*
- *Query the editor with a concise description of your story, whether it's completed or still in draft stage.*
- *Tell the editor something about yourself: Do you have the credentials to be offering a particular article to a particular publication?*
- *Be patient. Editors actually are busy people and they can't get to your letter or manuscript tomorrow morning.*
- *It's wise not to submit your material to several editors simultaneously. Someone's bound to be embarrassed.*
- *Get to know the many publications, sometimes with differing audiences, which could consider your story. Often you can, with a bit of rewriting, sell essentially the same idea to different markets.*

you review current copies of the publication. When querying an editor, restrict yourself to one article; shopping lists conceal your better ideas.

What is the spirit of a query? It should be a cross between standard business correspondence and a good sales pitch. To a certain extent the query is a writer's strip-tease. You want the editor to yell back, "show me more."

Right now, someone out there is saying, "Well, I know one publication that wants a complete outline," or, "One magazine that I deal with wants the lead with some sample from the body of the article."

You should give your editor whatever he or she wants. The format that I have successfully used for a decade is a simple, one page, four paragraph letter.

The first paragraph is a series of intriguing, rhetorical questions. These questions are natural grabbers and would lead on any

reader to find their answers. If the questions are right, you have the editor hooked. You have sold him an idea. An idea that is central to your article. You can also use these questions directly or indirectly in your piece. Now hit him with the second paragraph.

The second paragraph is a simple two-or three-sentence explanation that describes the size, scope and nature of the article and any illustration. Here you should tell the editor the title, length, scope or perspective, time availability if not available immediately, and detailed description of the illustrations supporting the article. In this paragraph you want to show that you know, understand and have the ability to meet his demanding needs. Remember, when you help him you are helping yourself.

At this point you have interested him in an idea in the first paragraph, detailed your specifications in the second, and now in the third paragraph you will tell your editor who you are, establishing in his mind why he should review your article.

In the third paragraph you should tell the editor anything that makes you qualified as the author of your proposed piece. Here he may be interested in your training or formal education, previous publications, the fact that you are an authority in the field, or that you were the eye witness or key character in your proposed article. Tell him anything that will endorse your authorship.

Finally in the fourth paragraph, simply ask him if he would be interested in reviewing your proposed article for possible publication.

At this point students usually hit me with two questions.

"Why can't I ask him for a commitment in the letter?" Normally, the best you can get out of any editor, even ones whom you have been working with for some time, is a commitment on his part to seriously review your offering to see how it fits into his needs. More than that is unrealistic. Demanding more than that which is reasonable could eliminate you from consideration by the editor.

The other common question is, "Does it help to have your own fancy stationary?" My personal response is that anything that helps separate you from the rest of the batch of mail is useful, both to you and your editor. Attractive stationary singles you out and also says that you have made a serious commitment to your freelance activities, and gives a business-like impression on the receiving end.

By following this method of freelance marketing, or an adaptation to meet your specific situation, you will find that you can better please editors and yourself and save time, energy and frustration using a simple, yet effective query. It should mean money in the bank.

*John Paul Kowal is a freelance writer-photographer based in Boston. He formerly lectured in communications at Fairfield University.*

# PR: CLEAR AWAY SMOKESCREENS

by COLIN MUNCIE

FOR MANY years, public relations struggled to drag its image out of the gutter. But since Watergate the term has seeped back to where some say it belongs -- the sewer.

The gang of galoots which surrounded the U.S. presidency and defamed honest public relations -- yes, there is such a thing -- will rank right down there with Goebbels, Lord Haw Haw and Tokyo Rose if anyone ever dares to write the history of pr.

Journalists, whether they admit it or not, are part of the pr process. Yet they see themselves and pr as mortal enemies.

No journalist, and certainly not in the company of another journalist, would ever dream of admitting that he or she had ever been helped by a pr man, many of whom they see as "fallen journalists".

But on many occasions a journalist out-chasing a story would come back empty-handed were it not for the "handout" news he had been fed by a pr man. Such is the self-image of the mass-media journalist (defender of the truth, protector of the little people) that it is rare for him to admit he needs even legitimate pr help.

But even before Watergate the gut relationship between journalist and pr man was less than chummy, despite the assurances some pr men give to their clients that they have "good contacts" in the right places in the media.

Journalists, who secretly envy the expense accounts and high salaries they think all pr people earn, are often openly contemptuous of pr practitioners -- "they're good at pouring drinks and opening doors at press receptions and that sort of thing."

Perhaps the following exchange between a radio reporter and a pr man accurately characterizes the relationship between journalist and pr man, I don't know.

The pr man walked up to the bar and struck up a conversation with a journalist. As it progressed the pr man remarked: "You know, we're both really in the same line of business -- communications."

The journalist, one of the more pompous types, snorted into his Scotch-and-water: "We most definitely are not. You, sir, are in the business of touting your client's propaganda."

"I, sir, am in the business of gathering, editing, analyzing and disseminating legitimate news and information."

Then turning to a second journalist at the bar, he added: "I suppose there are a few pr men who are all right, y'know -- as long as they are kept in their place."

I cannot recall if the journalist relished this put-down before or after the pr man paid for his drink, but I rather suspect it was after. It is a matter of perverse pride among journalists that they are prepared to swallow a pr man's booze but not his line.

But let's get serious.

Part of the blame for the "bad press" received by important segments of business and industry can probably be placed on poor advice from either in-house pr departments, or from outside hired help. And, of course,

there is always incompetent reporting.

But the essential reason, I suspect, is that management -- untrained in pr and not understanding its value when it is honest, properly-planned and well-executed -- does not recognize good pr advice when it gets it.

And it's too easy for management to blame lousy pr when the hounds of the press come

baying after a story that threatens to place a company or corporation in a bad light.

Even the best pr man should not be called in to try to clean up a mess that very likely need never have happened had he been listened to in the first place.

Far too often management has used pr  
*(continued on page 11)*

## We Need a Writer

We're Northern Electric: Canada's largest manufacturer of telecommunications equipment and third largest in North America. And our horizons have expanded to the point where we are now an international leader in our field.

At present, we have an important story to tell -- to the general public, to the telecommunications industry, and to our employees. We're in the market for an experienced writer, a versatile pro who can turn out crisp, accurate, and informative copy on a broad range of subjects that directly involve Northern Electric.

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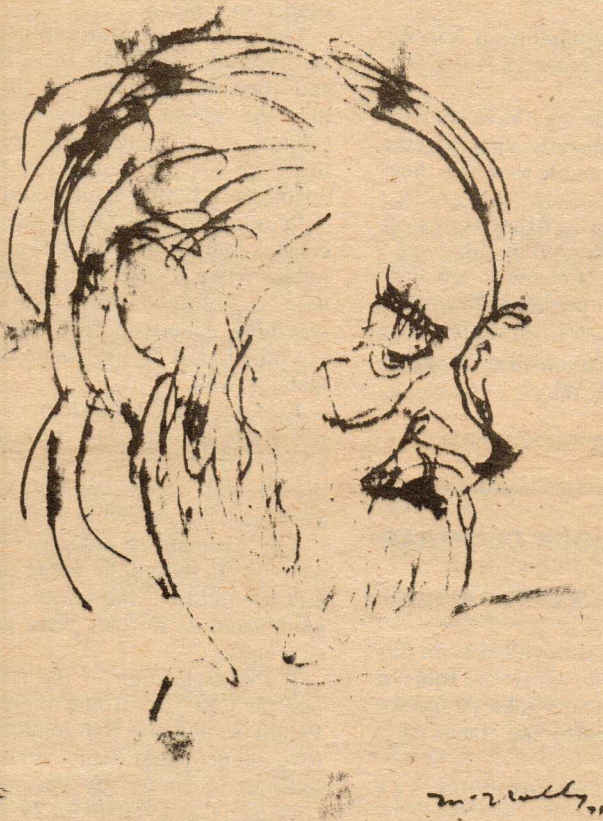
What they're saying about . . .

# Mugwump Canadian

## The Merrill Denison Story

by Dick MacDonald

and the Merrill Denison Renaissance



Return from obscurity. A last hurrah for Merrill Denison.  
—*Maclean's*

Perhaps someday someone will discover Denison as a great Canadian, telling us that we just don't make enough of heroes like him.

—*Montreal Gazette*

A pleasing tribute to a survivor who saw no harm in spreading himself thinly from medium to medium and enriching each before moving on.

—*Toronto Star*

At a time when many Canadians are showing intense interest in the output of Canadian writers and acknowledging with pride a literary quality that, unfortunately, is not always present, the Merrill Denison story provides a justifiable boost to the national ego.

—*Winnipeg Free Press*

Above all, MacDonald presents us with the man himself who at 80 remains an angry very young man indeed, obstinate and cussedly opiniated, and, what is most irritating, nearly always in the right.

—*Montreal Star*

The reader follows not only the life and loves of the subject but also learns about—or renews acquaintances with—the ideas, characters, events and institutions illuminated by Denison in an almost incredibly prolific career.

—*The Canadian Press*

Here is a man of boundless creative energy taking in whatever opportunities come his way and enjoying them to the full when he has them in his grasp.

—*Hamilton Spectator*.

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playwright-broadcaster-historian

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# LETTERS

## PURSUING ETHICS

*Editor:*

While I heartily endorse Pierre Berton's *cri de coeur* in the June, 1974, issue of *Content*, I would enter a small caveat.

Mr. Berton apparently is unaware that there is a professional organization of journalists with a code of ethics, dedicated to raising professional standards and prepared to undertake disciplinary action where unethical conduct is proved.

I refer to the Canadian Science Writers' Association whose membership includes more than 100 men and women writing about science in the mass media, disseminating science and technology information or teaching journalism.

The association is the custodian of three \$1,000 annual prizes for outstanding science writing. It has a growing program to improve communication between scientists and technologists, the public and the media.

Ken Kelly, Director  
Information Services  
Ministry of State  
Science and Technology  
Ottawa

## SILENT MEDIA

*Editor:*

Not so many months ago, one of the top items in the news was the imminent expulsion of the East Asians in Uganda. General Amin had decided that the commercial licences of the Asians resident in Uganda would not be renewed. Because the vast majority of these Asians were in business for themselves, this was tantamount to kicking them out, albeit a little less directly.

Editorialists bitterly attacked Amin. When the Asians finally had to leave, the editorialists called on the Canadian government to admit the Asians as New Canadians. And many of them did come to Canada.

In comparison to the media's excellent work on the Uganda episode, it is disturbing to note that another African country is preparing to do virtually the same thing, with virtually the same eventual consequences -- yet the media have not said anything. In fact, they have not mentioned the item at all.

The only reason I know about the situation is that I found a copy of African Development lying around the newsroom. The January issue of this London-based monthly magazine -- which discusses Africa from an economic viewpoint -- has, on page 15, an article headed "Aliens must sell up soon" under the logo "Analysis - Nigeria".

Allow me to quote from the story:

"The Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree, aimed at indigenising the economy, is due to come into full effect on March 1, 1974 and the drive towards Nigerianisation of the economy is warming up.

"Under the Decree 22 categories of business . . . will be completely Nigerianised and no alien will be allowed to be owner

or part-owner of these selected enterprises. Formation of these enterprises by aliens was banned from February, 1972 and from March 1, 1974 all aliens who have been involved in this sector will have to sell out completely.

"This sector includes many small-scale and service enterprises such as betting businesses, agencies, bread-making enterprises, electrical equipment, assembly plants, leisure industries and retailing, as well as strategic sectors such as transport, broadcasting and publishing.

"It is the Lebanese population in Nigeria who will come under the hammer under this section of the Decree.

"For the majority, once they have sold off their businesses, it will mean leaving Nigeria for good as they will be unable to renew their residence permits."

Although other aliens in other types of businesses will also be affected by other sections of the decree, the Lebanese, owning mainly small enterprises, presumably will be the hardest-hit.

In other words, it's Uganda all over again, yet the media say nothing. Why?

Dave Pinto  
Montreal

## JOCK CLAPTRAP

*Editor:*

Re: Paul Hoch's *The Jock Culture Revisited* (*Content*, No. 39).

Mr. Hoch's supportive evidence on his charges that we who write sports are tools of management and fear for our jobs should we adopt anything but the party line comes from four sources:

— A 1920s report on promoter Tex Rickard.

— A 1932 quote from Gene Tunney.

— An incident at the 1964 Flint Open golf tournament.

— Leonard Shecter's book, *The Jocks*, which itself related as evidence incidents from years past.

It is, indeed, fortunate that Mr. Hoch is securely employed in the humanities department of one of our institutes of higher learning where tenure is as important as ability. If 10-year-old evidence was the best he could produce, he couldn't hold a job on any sports page in the country.

I grow weary of the pseudo-intellectual claptrap thrown around by self-styled critics who decide in their assumed superiority that sports pages are beneath their notice. As for ". . . the real possibility that the newspaper needs the team more than the team needs the newspaper", the day pro or amateur sport falls in a hole I will be out of work as long as it takes me to walk across the room and switch to another line of reporting.

You see, Mr. Hoch, I learned my trade. I respectfully suggest that you concentrate on learning yours.

Jim Taylor,  
Vancouver *Sun*

## DAMN EDITORIALISTS

*Editor:*

In an interesting series of editorials, the three Toronto daily newspapers have come up with a solution to the present crises involving the CBC and the CRTC -- let Parliament handle it.

The decision is interesting in light of the fact that the press is criticizing the CRTC for doing exactly the job it was set up to do -- make specific recommendations concerning the immense problems facing public broadcasting in Canada.

The *Globe and Mail* refers to this process as "tyranny" and calls the CRTC a "bully" and then in the same breath recommends that the government increase the cost to private operators for using the air waves to make up for the money the CBC will lose during the advertising phase out.

In addition, the *Globe* seems to have a crystal ball to second guess the Canadian public when it says that if the CRTC mandate is enforced most Canadians will be watching American television -- an affront, not only to CRTC judgment, but to Canadian taste, as well.

Further, the *Globe* estimates that if all the proposals advocated by the CRTC are adopted the total cost to Canadians would be double the approximately \$250 million a year the CBC gets from Parliament.

The estimate is dubious enough. But by asking: "Is the public going to approve such an expenditure," the *Globe* makes the reference seem as if costs were going to double overnight.

If the suggestion of the CRTC is carried out, the CBC, according to president Laurent Picard would lose \$16 million in advertising revenue next year, which undoubtedly would have to be footed by Parliament. It would cost each Canadian about 79 cents.

The *Toronto Star* is no less bold. It dismisses Pierre Juneau's 92-page effort to make the CBC the leader in a new trend in broadcasting, not only in Canada but of all North America, as an "interesting theory."

It disagrees with the mandate, not because of its scope, but because it does not conform to the 1968 Broadcasting Act. It prefers to cite as a guideline the 1957 Fowler Royal Commission on Broadcasting recommending that the CBC finance its costs by competing more aggressively for commercial revenue.

The *Sun* is in the dark over the entire issue and says that it appears that neither the CBC nor the CRTC "seems to know what it is doing." It mainly finds fault with CBC programming and pleads that Monty Python be broadcast at a "civilized" hour rather than at midnight.

Ronald Kish  
Toronto

## PR: CLEAR AWAY SMOKESCREENS

(continued from page 8)

as a convenient, and preferably impenetrable, shield between the boardroom and the press (and therefore the public), while management gets on with the serious business of turning a profit.

But sooner or later this myopic attitude is going to have a direct influence on profits. In an ear that begs for better dialogue between business and consumer, keeping your mouth shut is a helluva dumb way to communicate.

On the other hand, pr cannot expect to receive management support and encouragement if, as it sometimes seems, it cannot convince management of its worth.

Even management in some major advertising agencies, which pride themselves on their communications skill, have difficulty assessing the value of pr -- it is all too often given away as a bonus in a bid to win an advertising account.

However, ad agencies seem to be coming around to recognizing the value of good pr, although every so often I get cause to doubt this.

Like the time a girl who, I must presume, had only just joined an agency pr department, phoned up to ask: "How much does it cost to get a news article in Marketing?"

Some hope that management is trying to understand the value of good pr, which is simply honest communication, is seen in the establishment by J. Walter Thompson in the U.S. of courses for management in meeting the press.

J. Walter Thompson, incidentally, is the second-largest advertising agency in the world. It is also the agency that H.R. (Bob) Haldeman -- who made up Nixon's infamous "Prussian Guard" with John Erlichman -- once worked for.

But don't hold that against the Thompson agency -- it is just as ashamed of Haldeman as any right-thinking person.

The news report form which I learned of this, described the school as being set up to teach management how to "deal with the press." I hope that is not the intent, because if the attitude from the start is "dealing" with the press, then it's got off on the wrong foot.

"The purpose of the course," says JWT in New York, "is not to teach them how to manipulate an audience, but how better to understand the media and government."

Most of the executives who have taken the courses have come from food, drug and oil industries -- industries which have been under attack.

It includes teaching the executives how to handle themselves in interviews with tough, anti-business broadcast and print journalists.

If courses such as this -- and similar courses are now being set up in Canada by other firms -- can help business communicate its story, warts and all, so that the public can judge all the facts, then let's have more of them.

If business has a story to tell, as it surely must, and if it feels that its side of the story has not been fairly explained through the media to the public, it must learn to understand the media.

If these courses give management the new skills necessary to do this, then they should be encouraged.

But if they teach management how to go

about a cover-up job, they will backfire. If Watergate taught us nothing about pr it taught us that much.

The purpose of good, effective pr is NOT to create a smokescreen. It is to clear it away.

---

*Colin Muncie is the editor  
of Marketing magazine.*

### INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS MANAGEMENT

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**Duration: 30 lectures beginning  
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The course will examine the expanding role and scope of the internal communicator in industry, business, government and institutions. It will provide a wide range of practical skills and guidance in professional internal communications management. Techniques and topics explored will include basic journalism, graphics and design, various media production process, and communications theory, policy and administration. Lectures will identify specific problems and developments related to publications, audio-visual programs and support communications systems.

Further information regarding the course and pre-registration interviews is available from the Centre for Continuing Education 772 Sherbrooke Street West (telephone 392-4904) or from Corporate Communicators Quebec P.O. Box 1476 Station A, Montreal H3C 2Z9.

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**EXPERIENCED NEWSPAPER PERSON:** Wanted to handle layout for national mining publication and to do general mining news reporting. Please write or phone: Editor, The Northern Miner, 77 River Street, Toronto M5A 3P2. (416) 368-3481.

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**SITUATION WANTED:** Young man, 22, bilingual, college-educated, seeking position as junior reporter with daily or weekly, anywhere in Canada. Availability: Immediate. Contact: Serge Tittle, 896 Lafèche Rd., Hawkesbury, Ont. (613) 632-8417.

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**REPORTER-COPY EDITOR**, 5½ years' experience on medium-sized daily; features, bright heads, specialties; wants new position, any medium, Metro Toronto Area. S.E. Tomer, 6 Grant St., Utica, N.Y. 13501, U.S.A.

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**BORN AGAIN** Christian religious writer with B.A. in honors philosophy and 12 years' newspaper experience including two years as religion writer for mid-western Ontario daily seeks position with Catholic, charismatic, inter-denominational or non-denominational publication or as religion writer for secular publication. Reply to Box D, Content, Suite 404, 1411 Crescent, Montreal 107, P.Q.

A day care center will go into operation by the end of the summer for children of employees at the Vancouver *Sun* and *Province*. Designed to accommodate 20 initially, the center is being set up by the Vancouver-New Westminster Newspaper Guild, -- the first guild local to sponsor such a project. It is an outgrowth of a joint Guild-management study done under the current *Sun* and *Province* contract but management will pay no cost and will have nothing to do with the operation, allaying any concern that the center's cost will be deducted from future contract gains. The center will be established with the help of the British Columbia Day Care Agency which will provide a portable unit four blocks from the newspaper plant and will be operated by a non-profit corporation set up by the guild. Monthly cost is \$125 per child, to cover salaries of three supervisors and other operating costs, but employees who cannot afford that much will be able to have part of the cost paid by a public welfare grant.

Billed as a space-age newspaper, the New York *Press* will be launched in New York early in 1975 with \$8 million of the industry's most advanced automation and electronic technology controlling and operating its production machinery. Oil-man John M. Shaheen, who is backing the newspaper, sees his venture as a combination of the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*. The 96-page New York *Press* will carry 50 per cent general news and 50 per cent business and financial news. Reporters will "write" copy on a video typewriter. The story is displayed on the screen in front as the reporter writes it, copy is hyphenated and justified automatically, correcting is done by striking over a word. Editors retrieve the story on their video screens for final editing, updating additions and headline writing. The punch of one key sets the copy any width desired. There is only a 20-minute lag between final copy deadline and start up of the presses and average delivery time -- established by three years of test runs in all kinds of weather and traffic conditions -- is 13 minutes to Grand Central Station, 11 minutes to Penn Station. The paper's 28-foot high four-color presses will allow management to run color on page one daily and color film can be shot, delivered, processed, printed and the completed paper delivered to news stands -- all in 120 minutes. Projections call for four daily editions, five days a week, with a circulation of 300,000.

Ex-Canadian newsman Chris Braithwaite (*Globe and Mail*, 1969-70) is editing a new weekly paper, the *Chronicle* based in Barton, Vermont. He has teamed up with Ed Cowan, now at the *New York Times'* Washington bureau, who is publisher.

## miscellany

One reason the Canadian film industry has such a small audience -- at present the films are seen by only 10 per cent of their potential audience -- is that film distribution networks are almost exclusively controlled by U.S. companies. And because of this, U.S. majors have a virtual strangle-hold over the Canadian film market, according to Cinematheque Quebecoise's annual report. So no matter how many Canadian films are made or how good they might be, they would be assured of box office failure in their own country. The report recommends government agencies such as the CBC and NFB and the private sector, and the establishment of a national film distribution system which could compete with U.S. majors. The report also suggests a Canadian content quota system . . . The same report shows the Canadian Film Development Corp. spent \$4 million on 44 films in '72-'73, a sum considerably larger than that of previous years. . . . At the same time during 1973, investment in Canadian Film-making took a sharp turn for the worse. Even with the government paying half the bill through the CFDC, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find private investors to make up the other half.

FM rock listeners have increased by 100 per cent in the last five years, according to a survey of stereo-rock audiences in 31 major U.S. markets. The increase was recorded for all age groups up to age 49, although teenage listeners still account for the majority . . . Watergate coverage has increased newscasters' credibility with the public, says a U.S. opinion poll. Walter Cronkite of the *CBS Evening News* was rated the most trustworthy newscaster by some 70 per cent of those polled. The highest-rated reporter was CBS's Dan Rather. . . *Rolling Stone* says there's going to be a revival of big rock concerts in the U.S. Producers and promoters are securing the largest man-made festival sights such as football and baseball stadiums. Although profit margins are seen as smaller on a percentage basis, net profits should be larger because of sheer size.

Children's cartoons logged the highest violence ratings in a recent survey of the incidence of violence on U.S. TV. The study says that the frequency of violent episodes has decreased only minimally since 1967 and the average number of violent occurrences is 7.3 per hour. . . . Covering the possible impeachment of President Richard Nixon may be a problem, warns Fred Friendly, former chief of CBS News. He

recommends that U.S. networks develop a co-operative rather than competitive attitude towards the coverage, that no editorial comment be made during the proceedings, and that commercials should be taboo. . . . *Sesame Street* is catching on in South America: A Mexican company is producing 268 episodes in Spanish which will have a potential audience of 106 million children in 13 Spanish-speaking countries.

The BBC may have its budget for world service cut by the U.K. Treasury, which would curtail most of the foreign language broadcasts but keep up English-language programming. At present, the BBC world service reaches about 60 million people in 40 languages and, because of its independence from government control, the service has a world-wide reputation for telling the truth. According to the *The Economist*, this should give it priority over government information services.

A Norwegian government survey shows there is overwhelming public support for a forthcoming ban on all tobacco advertising. More than 80 per cent favored the law. For non-smokers, the figure was 85 per cent and for smokers, a surprisingly high 78 per cent . . . The U.S.S.R. is sending one of its advertising specialists to Canada to study ad techniques here. The Soviets told a recent delegation of Canadian admen that they are eager to learn North American advertising techniques in order to apply them in Western markets.

Worth reading: *Liberating the Media - The New Journalism*, published by Acropolis Books, c/o Colortone Building, 2400 17th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009. Compiled by Charles Flippen, a former reporter and now assistant professor in the College of Journalism at the University of Maryland, the book contains articles by 15 noted American journalists, among them Ben Bagdikian, Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese, Robert Semple, and Jack Newfield. There also are examples of what the editor considers The New Journalism, which, he says, is partly characterized by a "freshness, a vigor, an exuberance, a freedom, a concern for the individual which was not possible before in the mass media." The book offers a variety of definitions for the styles and techniques being employed in contemporary journalism, it's a good compendium of thinking today. Two quotations in the book help under-score the debate about the so-called New Journalism. One's from author James Baldwin: "I want to be an honest man and a good writer." The other, from Mark Twain: "Always do right. This will gratify some people and astonish the rest." The book retails for \$8.95 (cloth) and \$4.50 (paper).

## content

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