

**THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY AND PRESS ACCESS:  
OPENINGS AND BARRIERS  
FOR SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC MESSAGES**

by  
Ian Edward Ross  
Bachelor of Arts, University of Western Ontario, 2000

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**APPROVAL**

**NAME:** Ian Ross

**DEGREE:** MA

**TITLE OF  
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DEMOCRATIC MESSAGES

**EXAMINING COMMITTEE:**

**CHAIR:** Prof. Gary McCarron

Prof. Robert Hackett  
Senior Supervisor, School of Communication, SFU

---

Prof. Catherine Murray  
Supervisor, School of Communication, SFU

---

Prof. Kennedy Stewart  
Examiner,  
Assistant Professor in the Masters of Public Policy  
Program at SFU

**Date:**

Sept 8 2003

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THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY AND PRESS ACCESS: OPENINGS

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### Author:

(Signature)

Ian Ross

(name)

8 Sept 2003

(date)

## ABSTRACT

The New Democratic Party (NDP, provincial, federal and territorial) is arguably the primary bearer of Left leaning values in Canada's political system. A challenger to neo-liberalism extolled by corporations and other political parties, the NDP offers social democracy – an alternative worldview in Canada's ideological marketplace of ideas. However, many critics on the Left complain that the press (the primary vehicle for the dissemination of political information to a mass population) mistreats and misrepresents the NDP and its messages.

The critics' complaints are substantiated in this thesis. Upon investigation of what barriers and openings exist for NDP press access, it quickly became apparent that through cultural commodification and the hegemonic reproduction of dominant ideals within news content, reporters and owners favour the worldviews of dominant social groups (free market political parties, corporations, and wealthy individuals). In turn, the public is not provided a wide spectrum of opinion – threatening a democratic, open Canadian society.

Employing a challenger group paradigm, this analysis finds the NDP faces its most significant barriers to press access from advertiser accommodation and direct ownership interference. Furthermore, the homogenous composition of the newsroom, a lack of financial resources to purchase competitive communication resources, and ideological codes and cultural maps rooted in news values also likely diminish points of access for the NDP's media efforts.

Nevertheless, the NDP is not fully marginalized by the press. Openings to press access were found through strategic news value tactics, effective use of the press gallery news net, and basic appeals to Canadian journalists' personal values and political attitudes.

Overall, it appears that the NDP faces significant ideological barriers to press access while being afforded limited and often inconsistent points of entry. I argue this could be considered a serious ailment to Canadian democracy if the nation's daily print industry

continues to provide its reader with unbalanced debates favouring the free market worldviews of neo-liberalism at the expense of social democratic ideas.

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## INTRODUCTION

*There is definitely validity that the Left has a hard sell on its hands with a media that is dominated by the Right. But you can't just throw up your hands and not use the things that you do have going for you and the tools that are at your disposal.*

– Riva Harrison, Manitoba New Democratic Party  
Director of Communication and  
Premier's Press Secretary

The New Democratic Party<sup>1</sup> (NDP) has proven to be one of the most dominant and consistent social democratic<sup>2</sup> voices in English Canada<sup>3</sup> over the past 60 years.<sup>4</sup> Within the halls of power across the nation, the party has challenged governments and corporations to rethink policies that interpret basic human rights and needs through a market-oriented vision. While many political science scholars have written about NDP messages as policy platforms crafted for electoral appeals (Nevitte, Blais, Gidengil and

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<sup>1</sup> It should be stated up front that the arguments made in this thesis may have less relevance and application in Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Yukon where the party has historically enjoyed significant legislative representation. Some have also argued that the NDP has been more accommodating to neo-liberalism in these provinces (Canadian Dimension, 2003b; Warnock, 1999; Henton, 1995).

In its history, the NDP has been elected to office in four provinces and one territory: Saskatchewan (1944-64, 1971-82, 1991-present), Manitoba (1969-77, 1981-88, 1999-present), British Columbia (1972-75, 1991-2001), Ontario (1990-95) and Yukon Territory (1985-92, 1996-2000) (Whitehorn, 1992; Beatty 2001; Gillis 2002; Girard 2003; Henton 1995; Rae 1996; O'Hanton 1999). However, electoral support for the NDP has been in sharp decline in most provinces over the past 10 years. This will be further discussed later in the introduction and in the first chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Padgett and William E. Paterson (1991) capture the basic elements of social democracy in the following definition. They state, "Social democracy is a hybrid political tradition composed of socialism and liberalism. It is the product of a division in the socialist tradition between those who seek to realise socialist ideals within the institutions of liberal capitalist society (social democrats) and those who remain outside those institutions with the objective of superseding them through revolutionary force (communists). In particular, social democrats are fully committed to participation in the electoral process and in parliamentary democracy. Indeed, social democracy is often referred to as 'parliamentary socialism.' Social democracy is inspired by socialist ideals, but is heavily conditioned by its political environment, and it incorporates liberal values. The social democratic project may be defined as the attempt to reconcile socialism with liberal politics and capitalist society" (p. 1). A more developed discussion of social democracy will be taken up in chapter one.

<sup>3</sup> My discussion of social democracy and the NDP in Canada will focus on English Canada and English language newspapers. I have chosen to not discuss Quebec politics for several reasons: the NDP's failure to establish a long term organizational or electoral base in the province, the social democratic history of the Parti Quebecois, and the complex nature of Quebec politics (including the sovereignty issue).

<sup>4</sup> This time period includes the NDP's predecessor the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF).

Nadeau, 1999; Whitehorn, 1994; Whitehorn, 2001; Penner, 1996), I argue that we need to view the party's messages in a broader communication context – as a set of social democratic options, representing a distinct worldview that can enrich public debate on a daily basis. These are messages that can open up ideological space for different ideas, ignite deliberation on critical issues, and widen the spectrum of political discourse that ensures Canada retains a healthy democracy.

To carry out such a wide reaching campaign, the NDP must be reliant on the daily press as its primary vehicle for the dissemination of information to a mass public. This statement is made based on three considerations. First, newspapers are the medium of record, according to the Royal Commission on Newspapers, “which generally gives more detail than the others, which explores issues in more depth, and which stands as the source to which people refer back” (Canada, 1981, p. 216). Second, the Royal Commission on Newspapers states newspapers are the primary creators and producers of original news content. Press reports often supply content, particularly through wire services, to other news media. Third, the Royal Commission argues newspapers have an agenda-setting influence over public affairs. “... In the complex interplay of decision-making in a democratic society, the way the newspapers handle the news is, as it has been and in the Commission's opinion will continue to be, one of the main determinants of the society's affairs” (Canada, 1981, p. 216).

Nevertheless, future research should be dedicated to the NDP's interactions with other news media, particularly television news programming. In an age of image politics, many scholars have noted that television is a highly influential medium in the design of election campaigns and the shaping of public opinion (Taras, 1996; Blais, Gidengil, Nadeau and Nevitte, 2002; Fletcher and Everett, 1991). Furthermore, television news reporting has become increasingly integrated with newspaper reporting during the recent wave of media convergence (Pitts, 2002). Other communication tools (advertising, grassroots politics, radio, education, and the Internet) also deserve attention; however they also do not offer the same inexpensive, immediate, agenda-setting and trusted access to the Canadian public in comparison to the press.

So how can we understand the relationship between the NDP and the press? Supporters, members, communication directors and leaders of the NDP answer this question with disheartening words. Public feedback compiled for the 2001 federal NDP renewal document What We Heard concluded that, “New Democrats are almost unanimous in viewing conventional media as hostile, at worst, or dismissive, at best, towards the Party, its analysis and even its achievements” (Steering Committee of the National Discussion on the Future of the New Democratic Party of Canada, p. 82).

Michael Valpy (2001), a columnist at the Globe and Mail, and one time federal NDP candidate shared this negative viewpoint. “The evidence of mass media’s complicity in the elites’ revolt is pervasive. The evidence of its support for the commanding ideology of neoliberalism is overwhelming. The evidence of its declarations that no alternative exists... to neoliberalism is not in question” (p. 66).

These complaints were also heard across the nation from interviewed NDP communication directors.<sup>5</sup> Some of them expressed personal frustration that the press mistreats the NDP. Wayne Harding, director of communication for the federal NDP stated:

My general impression is that there is sort of a collective mindset driven by senior writers and commentators that social democracy is a thing of the past. That to be with it you have to either abandon social democracy or think in terms of the so-called Third Way and follow the [German Chancellor Gerhard] Schroeder and [British Prime Minister Tony] Blair model. Many commentators talk highly about this. Younger working reporters also tend to do that... There is a feeling that we are irrelevant; we are a thing of the past.

Other directors chose to express their grievances as a shared viewpoint within the wider NDP membership. Ontario NDP media relations manager Gil Hardy stated, “I think there is a general feeling within the NDP, certainly in Ontario, that we don’t get a fair shake in the corporate media of Ontario.” Similar sentiments also came from Lou Arab, director of communication for the Alberta New Democrat Opposition, who stated:

I’m just saying that Joe Average NDP member or a shop steward in a union would believe quite passionately that the media is not a friend of the Left and that there is over concentration of ownership, which I do agree

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<sup>5</sup> The interview methodology will be discussed later in this introduction.

with, and that the newspapers have a conservative, corporate focus so it makes it harder for the New Democrats to use the media or anyone on the Left to use the media for their own means.

In relative terms, there are few in the NDP's ranks that have a positive comment for the Canadian media system. This is a viewpoint that political science and communication scholarship appears to support.

At the height of the federal NDP's popularity in 1987, James Bayer (1991) concludes that the press was unwilling to provide a great deal of press access<sup>6</sup> for the party on the issue of NATO membership. Bayer's newspaper content analysis on the 1987 NDP's NATO policy paper demonstrates that most publications across the nation were unwilling to provide balanced access. On conclusion of his analysis, he states:

The appearance of the NDP Defence Paper so soon after that of the government's was widely applauded by editorialists and columnists across Canada as providing the raw material for a much needed and long overdue debate on Canadian defence policy. Clearly the press had an important role to play in this debate as a medium to portray both points of view to Canadian readers. Yet, except for the *Montreal Gazette*, the *Ottawa Citizen*, the *Toronto Star* and the *Victoria Times-Colonist* no sampled newspaper printed commentaries supportive of the NDP position, though the Gwyn Dyer syndicated series was presumably available to most (p. 54).

Nine years later, Neil Nevitte, Andre Blais, Elisabeth Gidengil, and Richard Nadeau (1999) found the NDP received the lowest amount of television visibility compared to the other national parliamentary parties in the 1996 federal election. When the NDP was covered, they were presented later in the newscast than any other party. On the other hand, Nevitte et al. did find that NDP stories were the most likely to have a positive tone while Reform party stories were the least likely. The researchers conclude that while the NDP was cast in a more favourable light, the visibility and priority of that coverage was so poor that it likely marginalized any voter or issue impact.

At the provincial level, Donald Gutstein, Robert A. Hackett and NewsWatch Canada (1998) conclude that the British Columbia NDP is given inequitable treatment by

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<sup>6</sup> My use of the term 'press access' is adapted from Richard Ericson, Patricia Baranek, and Janet Chan's (1989) concept of 'media access.' The only difference being that my use of the 'access' concept is specific to newspapers. Ericson et al. explain 'media access' for newsmakers provides the "news space, time and context to reasonably represent the authority of their office. Such access is distinguished from media coverage, which may entail some news space and time but not the context for favourable representation" (p. 5).

the Vancouver Sun. By comparing coverage of the 1986 and 1996 provincial elections, they found incumbency is the most important determinant<sup>7</sup>; however “there is strong evidence that a lesser influence is the Sun’s preference for a right-wing party and its focus on issues of concern to right-wing supporters” (p. 25).

I argue this imbalance in political news coverage is dangerous to democracy. Now more than ever, public space needs to be open to the NDP’s social democratic views and ideas to counter an apparent drift in the status quo to the Right – away from a Keynesian welfare state and towards the free markets of neo-liberalism. Across the country, both provincial and federal neo-liberal governments have been elected and subsequently many have signed free trade agreements, privatized state-owned enterprises, slashed taxes, championed debt repayment, endorsed private health care and/or gutted social programs. Three examples exemplify the shift. In Ontario, welfare recipients must complete tasks for private companies or service clubs to remain eligible under workfare legislation (“Ontario Works Act,” 1997; “Tory Welfare Reform,” 1996). In Alberta, the government has lobbied the federal government to open private health care clinics that will provide faster service for those willing and able to pay out of their pocket (Heyman, 2002). In British Columbia, corporate tax cuts were announced in 2001 that went beyond even the business community’s requests (McCullough, 2001).

I further argue this drastic downsizing of government responsibility in the maintenance of Canadian society has benefited the rich and harmed the poor – creating a growing divide in the wealth and power of Canadians. According to the 2001 census, the 10 percent of families with the highest incomes earned on average \$185,070. This amounts to a 14.6 percent raise in the 1990s – up from \$161,460 in 1990. In contrast, the 10 percent of families with the lowest incomes received a negligible decade increase of \$81 up from \$10,260 to \$10,341 (“Income of Canadian,” 2003).

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<sup>7</sup> The incumbent parties in 1986 and 1996 were the Right-wing Social Credit party and the Left-wing NDP respectively. The incumbent party was afforded a high level of negative framing in both elections; however the 1996 NDP received twice the amount of negative framing than did the 1986 Social Credit party (Gutstein et. al, 1998, p. 24).

These free market policies have also fuelled record profits and salaries at Canada's largest corporations. In 2002, Royal Bank and Bell Canada Enterprises<sup>8</sup> (BCE) were the most profitable corporations in Canada with record profits of \$2,762,000,000 and \$2,475,000,000 respectively ("Ranking by," 2003). Magna International's Frank Stronach was again the highest paid chief executive officer in Canada in 2002 with total direct compensation of \$52,137,280 (Mercer Human Resource Consulting, 2003). Magna and Stronach were also in the news in 2003 for hosting the Ontario Progressive Conservative government's provincial budget announcement at one of their auto-parts plants (Mallan, 2003). It was the first time a government budget had been presented outside a legislature or parliament – illustrating that a power bloc of neo-liberal parties, corporations and wealthy individuals have solidified their position as the dominant social groups in today's Canadian society.

At the same time, the NDP's institutional power has been in a steep decline over the past 10 years. By mid-2003, the party stands at the federal level with the smallest number of seats and the lowest public support for an official party (14 seats and 10 percent of the public support which is only six percent more than the fringe Green party). ("Federal Liberals," 2003). At the provincial level, where the NDP has traditionally had greater electoral success, the party that once represented 52.7 percent of the Canadian population through governments in 1991 now retains official party status only in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Yukon and Nova Scotia (17.9 percent of the national population) (Whitehorn, 1991; Girard, 2003; Tutton, 2003; Gillis, 2002). Manitoba Premier Gary Doer leads the only NDP majority government in the country (Girard, 2003). As such, the NDP's ability to challenge neo-liberal policies within the halls of government through electoral politics appears weakened.<sup>9</sup>

My primary concern is not returning the party to a high level of electoral success<sup>10</sup> (although this would be helpful to rebalancing power in Canadian parliamentary politics);

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<sup>8</sup> BCE is the owner of the CTV television network and the Globe and Mail. It should be further noted BCE is the owner of Report on Business Magazine (distributed as a supplement in the Globe and Mail) that published this ranking of corporations and executives.

<sup>9</sup> While I recognize that the NDP's press access struggles are partly due to their poor showing in recent elections, I will argue in chapter two that a simple mirror model is incomplete and there are greater ideological barriers that impede the NDP-press relationship.

<sup>10</sup> It is far beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss audience research studies.



rather my central focus is retaining the NDP's social democratic messages that challenge neo-liberalism within the spectrum of on-going daily public debate.<sup>11</sup> I consider my work here to be a broad review and rethinking of what opportunities are available and what dead ends are visible as the NDP works within the press environment.<sup>12</sup> More precisely, this thesis will be transfixed on the following central thesis question: how can we best understand the openings and barriers to press access afforded to the NDP?

Of course, such a question cannot be answered easily. First of all, the NDP as a 'party' does not fit the traditional paradigms of political actors. The party has a strong undercurrent of social activists amongst its membership, it is financially dependent on individual and labour contributions and its ideological principles challenge dominant social groups that are largely neo-liberal in orientation. Consequently, my first chapter will explore the history of the NDP and what political paradigm best explains the NDP's position in the Canadian political environment.

On the other side of the coin, the nature of the press also needs to be addressed. What theoretical model can be borrowed that will best explain how the media operate in Canada's current political, cultural, social and economic environment? Furthermore, which of these theories best explains the press's interaction with groups that challenge dominant social groups? To answer these questions, I will investigate the basic principles of three theoretical models (elite, critical and liberal-pluralist).

Working from the arguments made in the first two chapters, I will use the later half of this thesis to explore three influential media filters using a framework adapted from Stephen Reese and Pamela Shoemaker's (1996) text, Mediating the Message. Chapter three will explore how the personal characteristics and attitudes of individual news workers influence press content, and what implications these factors may have on NDP press access. Chapter four will take the same approach examining news routines (specifically routines created to accommodate audiences, sources and press

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<sup>11</sup> This thesis is oriented towards examining press-party relations during periods between elections. Although election media coverage offers short-term heightened exposure to party platforms and candidates, I argue that it is the ongoing public education of social democratic worldviews during the inter-election periods that holds the greatest importance to national and provincial affairs.

<sup>12</sup> To clarify, my efforts here should not be confused with a press relations manifesto that would outline an action plan on how the NDP can extract the highest amount of press access possible. The work here is more exploratory in nature.

organizations), while chapter five will focus its attention on ownership-directed profit maximization (including advertiser accommodation, cuts in the newsroom, market monopolies, ownership intervention) in the daily press industry. The most recent and recognized published works in Canadian media studies (with supplemental American and British works) will be discussed in these three chapters and applied to an analysis of potential openings and barriers that help to explain the NDP's press access.

A significant portion of the research evaluating the NDP's past and current relations with the press will be extracted from a series of interviews I conducted in January-February 2003 with seven NDP communication directors from British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick and Ottawa.<sup>13</sup> Participants were informed in writing and verbally that the interview was voluntary and their anonymity was guaranteed if requested – following the ethical guidelines set out by Simon Fraser University. All of the interviews were conducted over the phone and ran from 50 to 90 minutes in length using a basic questionnaire schedule to guide the semi-structured interviews that covered four major themes: overall impressions of the NDP-media relationship, the effect of different media filters, the use of selected media strategies and the future of the NDP-media relationship. The lack of primary research into the NDP-media relationship prompted these interviews.

Overall, the objective of this research is to spark debate and reflection within Canadian academic, political and media circles on a potential crisis in democratic communication. I want journalists to read this thesis and reconsider how and why they make decisions when selecting and writing political news content. I want the NDP, and specifically their communication directors, to read this thesis as a contribution towards

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<sup>13</sup> The interviewees were: Wayne Harding (Director of Communication (now retired), federal NDP caucus, Ottawa), Carol Ferguson (Legislative Assistant to the Leader of the NDP, New Brunswick), Gil Hardy (Manager, Media Relations for the Ontario NDP Caucus), Riva Harrison (Director of Communication for the Manitoba Government and Premier's Press Secretary), Brian Cousins (Assistant Chief of Staff to the Premier, Saskatchewan government), Lou Arab (Director of Communication, Alberta New Democrat Opposition), 'The British Columbia NDP Media Worker' (anonymity requested; all references to this individual made with the aforementioned job title) (See Appendix B and C for a more detailed breakdown of the interviewees).

Communication departments did not respond to two written emailed requests for participation from Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, Yukon, and Prince Edward Island. A representative from the Quebec chapter did respond with interest in participating; however a language barrier (he only spoke fluent French) would have required a translator and was therefore not pursued.

their current party renewal development.<sup>14</sup> Finally, I want this thesis to spark other academics to step beyond this basic review of the NDP-press relationship to explore empirically when the NDP is most likely to gain press access, and theoretically what other approaches explain the NDP-press relationship. Thus, I want this thesis to be a stepping stone for future research that can develop a more comprehensive understanding of the unstable relationship that currently exists between Canada's most consistent voice on the Left and Canada's profit-oriented press establishment. Only through such debate and discourse can a more democratic communication system be established that could benefit the Canadian public.

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<sup>14</sup> During several interviews, communication directors commented that they rarely have the opportunity to reflect on the NDP-press relationship. They were more often working in a reactive not proactive work environment.

## **CHAPTER ONE: THE NDP AND CHALLENGER GROUPS**

Canadian democracy benefits from the NDP vocalizing social democratic challenges to the ideals of neo-liberalism extolled by Canada's dominant social groups – particularly major corporations and other major political parties. The NDP's ability to express its policies and worldviews through the mainstream press is the central concern of this thesis; however before I launch into a comprehensive review of the NDP-press relationship, I want to undertake a fresh examination of the NDP itself.

This chapter will provide a brief exploration of the past, present and future of the NDP. This exploration can be broken down into three sections: a historical review of the NDP, a brief overview of the party's distinctive characteristics and a critical analysis of the relationship between the NDP and social movements.

For the purposes of simplifying my discussion of the NDP in this chapter, I decided to emphasize the federal branch of the party and underemphasize the provincial branches. I recognize that there are often some organizational and ideological differences between branches; however the complex relations and variations cannot be given sufficient room for debate at this time. Thus, I chose to concentrate on the federal branch because it best represents the collective viewpoints from across the nation. Rand Dyck (2000) explains that the NDP is the most integrated political party in the country. New members must sign up through their provincial branch to become a member of the federal party. And representation on the federal council includes from each province, "the provincial leader, two of the president, secretary and treasurer of each provincial party, along with two additional representatives from each provincial section. These key officials thus formally interact with one another and with their federal counterparts at least twice a year" (p. 171).

By the conclusion, two objectives should be met. First, a basic understanding of the importance of the NDP in Canadian political culture should be recognized. Second, a political paradigm should be adopted to best understand the party's relationship with

Canada's dominant social groups and the daily press establishment. This paradigm will be carried forward into the next chapter when I evaluate how the NDP's relationship with the press can be understood using different theoretical approaches to media studies.

### ***NDP History***

The history of the NDP in Canada is a long and complicated tale – one that cannot be fairly captured in this short chapter. Instead, it is my intention here to provide a chronological outline of the most important organizational and ideological developments within the party.

#### **The Early Years (1932 – mid 1950s)**

The organizational roots of the NDP can be drawn back to the socialist Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) that was founded during the Depression at a Calgary convention in 1932.<sup>15</sup> One year later, the party – consisting of the Ginger Group<sup>16</sup>, labour and socialist delegates from British Columbia and Alberta and farm representatives from Saskatchewan and Manitoba – ratified the Regina Manifesto (a socialist statement of principles drafted by the League for Social Reconstruction) (Whitehorn, 1992). Desmond Morton (1977) explains the CCF's detailed vision of socialism in Canada included:

Economic planning, nationalization of financial institutions, public utilities and natural resources, security of tenure for farmers, a national labour code, socialized health services and greatly increased powers for the central government (p. 12).

The Regina Manifesto's conclusion further solidified the party's socialist position. "No CCF government will rest content until it has eradicated capitalism and put into operation the full programme of socialized planning which will lead to the establishment

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<sup>15</sup> This was not the first effort by the Left to enter institutional political politics. Labour and farmer parties had challenged and won seats in the first decades of the twenty-century. In Ontario, the United Farmers of Ontario won a minority government in 1919, while the United Farmers of Alberta won a majority government two years later. The Progressive party also won strong popularity across the country with 65 elected seats to the Canadian parliament in 1921 (Penner, 1992).

<sup>16</sup> The Ginger group consisted of twelve Progressives and two or three labour members of parliament (Penner, 1992).

in Canada of the Co-operative Commonwealth” (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation [CCF], 1933, p. 8). This political direction earned immediate positive reviews from the Canadian electorate as CCF provincial parties were elected to official opposition status in British Columbia (1933) and Saskatchewan (1934), while the federal wing of the party won seven seats in the national parliament in 1935 (Penner, 1992<sup>17</sup>).

Norman Penner (1992) contends that the CCF was occupied in its early years (many during the Second World War) with finding stable political space in Canadian political culture. While the Communist Party attempted to woo far-Left CCF supporters, Liberal Prime Minister Mackenzie King invited CCF leaders J.S. Woodsworth and A.A. Heaps to join his cabinet and advise him on possible social democratic reforms. Unwilling to compromise the principles of the Regina Manifesto, Woodsworth and his strongest supporters were able to push party members to reject overtures from the Left and the Right to keep the party on course as an independent and vocal voice representing movements from across the country (Young, 1992).

After the war, the CCF received a further boost in support from the electorate – forming the government in Saskatchewan and official opposition in Ontario. According to Penner (1992), the CCF socialist welfare state policies struck a chord with Canadian voters. However, this electoral success did not go unnoticed by the rest of Canada’s powerbrokers. As Morton (1977) explains:

It seemed like the verge of victory for Canadian socialism. Instead, it was the top of the mushroom. Mackenzie King’s Liberals, threatened with defeat and caucus defections to the CCF, hurried family allowances and a generous veterans’ charter into law and promised much more. The Conservatives added ‘Progressive’ to their name and strained, a little unconvincingly, to deserve the title. The business community financed a vitriolic anti-socialist campaign which did not hesitate to link the CCF to Hitler’s Nazis. Even the Communists got into the act. Terrified lest democratic socialists make major gains, the Communists formed an odd, clandestine alliance with the Liberals, working effectively to split the left-wing vote in major industrial centres like Vancouver, Windsor, St. Catherines [sic] and Hamilton. In the 1945 federal election, the CCF

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<sup>17</sup> Penner incorrectly attributed 17 seats to the CCF in the 1935 federal election results. The actual number of seats won was seven. It appears Penner transposed the number of seats for the CCF and the Social Credit party. He attributes seven seats won by Social Credit, but the actual number was 17 (Penner, 1992; Whitehorn, 1992; Tanguay and Gagnon, 1996).

advance was stopped in its tracks. In Ontario, where its popular support slipped back to twenty-two per cent, its legislative representation fell from thirty-four to eight. Never again would the CCF recover the momentum of the war years (p. 14).

### **Transition to Canada's Third Party (mid 1950s - early 1970s)**

For the next twenty years (early 1950s to early 1970s), overshadowed by the postwar economic boom and the Cold War, the party faced slowly decreasing support from the electorate and increasing pressure from within the party to reform its ideological vision. Three prominent party documents illustrate the CCF/NDP's ideological tug-of-war between democratic socialism and social democracy<sup>18</sup> during that time: the Winnipeg Declaration, the New Party Declaration and the Waffle Manifesto.

Faced with a booming Canadian capitalist-driven economy and ideological links to Soviet communism, many leaders in the party felt by the mid-1950s that the anti-capitalist rhetoric in the Regina Manifesto needed to be re-evaluated. In response, the party drafted and passed the Winnipeg Declaration at its 1956 federal convention. The party document was a shift to a more moderate position on the Left of the political spectrum – recognizing the mixed economy and the impractical nature of full public ownership (McDonald, 1987; Morton, 1977).

The language of the Winnipeg Declaration may be the most telling of an ideological shift. Alan Whitehorn (1992) notes that the terms 'class', 'social ownership', 'exploitation' and 'socialization' were removed from the text, while the term 'capitalism' used in a negative context was reduced from 17 to one occasion. Agreeing with Whitehorn, Penner (1996) points out that in contrast to the Regina Manifesto's call for the eradication of capitalism, the Winnipeg Declaration does not have a similar socialist mandate in the conclusion. The Declaration states, "The CCF will not rest content until every person in this and in all other lands is able to enjoy equality and freedom, a sense of human dignity, and an opportunity to live a rich and meaningful life as a citizen of a free and peaceful world" (CCF, 1956). The final objective, Penner (1996) explains, was "a

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<sup>18</sup> A discussion about the ideological difference between democratic socialism and social democracy is explored later in this chapter.

more moderate image [that] might appeal to greater numbers of voters and halt what they perceived as the party's slide into electoral oblivion" (p. 93).

The removal of explicit socialist language from the CCF's platform also made it easier to build formal ties with organized labour. Following the lead of the British Labour Party, David Lewis among other party members built support to create a new party guided by the dual forces of the Canadian Labour Congress and the CCF (Penner, 1992). Together they called for:

A fundamental realignment of political forces in Canada in ... a broadly based people's political movement which embraces the CCF, the labour movement, farmer organizations, professional people and other liberally minded persons interested in basic social reform and reconstruction through our parliamentary system of government (quoted in Williams, 1975, p. 219).

Three years later, the New Democratic Party was born with the adoption of the New Party declaration. According to Morton (1977), the declaration's mandate was "a sharp contrast with the rhetoric of the Regina Manifesto" (p. 24). He further adds that the party's social democratic platform promised among other things:

... Jobs, economic planning and the organized mobilization of social capital which would generate orderly growth. It proposed a Canadian Development Fund and a list of measures to regain control over foreign-owned corporations. National programmes of health insurance, portable pensions and sickness benefits, free education... and a steeply progressive tax system (p. 24).

While Tommy Douglas, the former CCF Saskatchewan premier and first federal NDP leader, struggled to build the NDP as a Left-of-centre third party, a movement within the party began to push it back to its democratic socialist roots in the late 1960s. Called the Waffle movement, the group (including Jim Laxer and Mel Watkins) published a socialist manifesto (reminiscent of the Regina Manifesto) that stated, "Capitalism must be replaced by socialism, by national planning of investment, and by the public ownership of the means of production" (quoted in Dunn, 1995, p. 245). The other main themes were Quebec's right to self-determination, anti-Americanism (targeting both their economic influence on Canada and their foreign policy in Vietnam) and an expanded role for NDP members as activists in extra-parliamentary class struggles (Hackett, 1979).



The Waffle movement became very vocal and influential within the party from 1968-71. While Laxer finished a strong second behind David Lewis in the 1971 federal leadership convention, many Waffle policies were adopted into the NDP platform. However, the movement was unable to maintain forward momentum in the early 1970s for a number of reasons including internal dissension and pressure from more traditional social democrat leaders including Lewis (Hackett, 1979). Most Wafflers eventually left the party, but Penner (1992) explains that “the policies which the Waffle stood for, have remained in no small measure in the NDP: opposition to free trade, advocacy of the national rights of Quebec, and the growing support for Canadianizing unions” (p. 103).

### **The Peak of Electoral Social Democratic Power (early 1970s - early 1990s)**

With the Waffle movement contained, the federal NDP reorganized and refocused to win 31 seats in the 1972 election. This was not only the party’s strongest showing in a federal election; it also positioned them in the balance of power when the Liberal Party failed to win a majority government. According to Whitehorn (1991):

...Trudeau was forced to introduce measures consistent with the NDP’s social-democratic agenda. Among the progressive measures that received attention were increases in pensions, a prices-review board, plans for a government-owned national oil company, a foreign-investment review agency (FIRA), election and party finance reforms, and the government’s intention to nationalize a major sector of the airplane manufacturing industry (p. 92).

Social democratic policies were also enacted in western provinces as voters brought three NDP governments to power in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and British Columbia (Whitehorn, 1992). In Manitoba, the NDP under the leadership of Ed Schreyer won government for the first time in 1969 and again in 1973. In his evaluation of the Manitoba NDP from 1969-1988, Penner (1992) concludes, “NDP rule... produced an impressive legislative record, highlighted by public auto insurance, abolition of Medicare premiums, increased health care benefits, reformed labour codes, a freedom of information act, and the best human rights code in the country” (p. 125).

Two years later, the party won government in Saskatchewan and held power for three terms. Led by Alan Blakeney, the NDP repealed anti-union legislation, enacted the Family Farm Protection Act and cancelled hospital user fees (Morton, 1977).

The NDP also won the 1972 British Columbia election. During its one term in office, the party passed three hundred pieces of “progressive” legislation including a publicly owned timber conglomerate, public auto insurance, Pharmacare, the right to legal aid, public-sector bargaining rights and a Human Rights Board outlawing acts of discrimination (McDonald, 1991).

Building on these provincial successes, the federal NDP became a serious electoral threat in the 1980s as federal NDP leader Ed Broadbent firmly established the party as a moderate Left alternative to the Liberals and Progressive Conservatives. According to William Christian and Colin Campbell (1989):

Broadbent’s target was the welfare liberals who normally support the Liberal Party. His hope was that they would find a centrist NDP more attractive than a business-oriented Liberal party. Consequently, Broadbent soft-pedalled public references to democratic socialism, and sought instead to portray New Democrats as the representatives of decent, caring Canadians (p. 60).

The public responded with increasing support for the federal NDP. From 1974 to 1988, the party’s popular vote increased from 15.4 to 20.4 percent. Those five percent points translated into 27 more parliamentary seats for a total of 43 in 1988 (Whitehorn, 1992). With a second wave of provincial branches elected to office on moderate social democratic platforms in Yukon (1985), Manitoba (1986), Ontario (1990), British Columbia (1991) and Saskatchewan (1991) and the federal party polling as high as 44 percent support in 1987, the NDP appeared to finally be an established authoritative voice in the Canadian political arena (Whitehorn, 1992; Steed, 1988).

### **Party Decline (early 1990s to 2003)**

While the late 1980s and early 1990s were the best of times for the NDP, the past 10 years have been the worst of times. Since 1993, the NDP has experienced a rapid decline in electoral support and internal cohesion. The federal party experienced a

devastating 1993 election when they lost official party status with only 6.9 percent of the vote and nine seats. Whitehorn (1994) explains that, “Instead of the giant leap forward that had been hoped in the heady days of 1990 and 1991 when three provincial governments had been elected, the federal NDP took a major step backwards towards oblivion” (p. 52).

Although the NDP avoided ‘oblivion’ once again in subsequent elections, the party has also been unable to build any significant positive momentum that could return the party to a position of authority in national politics. Stuck more or less in neutral, the NDP won eleven (21 seats) and 8.5 (13 seats) percent of the popular vote in the 1997 and 2000 elections respectively (Whitehorn, 1997; Whitehorn, 2001).<sup>19</sup> As of May 2003, the federal party stands in fifth place in national polls with 10 percent popular support – only six points ahead of the Green Party (“Federal Liberal,” 2003c). This position is a far cry from the height of national social democratic power during the 1970s and 1980s.

Whitehorn (2001) argues that the electoral rejection of the federal NDP can be correlated to the failures of the provincial NDP governments that took office in 1990-1. In Ontario, the public solidly rejected NDP Premier Bob Rae’s government after only one term in office.<sup>20</sup> The British Columbia NDP hobbled through two terms in office using four leaders (two resigned in scandal) before losing all but two seats in the 2001 election (Beatty, 2001). In Saskatchewan, the homeland of Canadian social democracy, the party lost the popular vote in the 1999 election and only managed to retain power by building a coalition government with a small Liberal caucus (Whitehorn, 2001). This sweeping electoral rejection of the NDP right across the country threatens to dismiss the only true opponent to neo-liberalism in institutional politics.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The federal party currently sits with 14 elected members after a by-election win by Brian Masse in 2002.

<sup>20</sup> The Ontario NDP dropped from 74 seats and 37.57 percentage of the popular vote in 1990 to third party status with only nine seats and 12.6 percent electoral support by 1999. This was the party’s poorest showing since 1963 (“Composition of,” 2003).

<sup>21</sup> To clarify, I am not claiming that recent election results demonstrate that the public has fully rejected social democracy. There are far too many other variables including the rise of populist/regional/other minor parties (Reform/Alliance, Parti Quebecois, Greens), strategic voting, voter apathy and public displeasure with NDP leadership (Bob Rae in Ontario or Alexa McDonough in federal politics).

## ***Distinctive Characteristics of the NDP***

Through these trials and tribulations, both electoral and ideological, a distinctive party formation has evolved.<sup>22</sup> Unlike Canada's other political parties, the organization of the NDP is distinguishable by four important characteristics: party ideology, a mass membership, union association and activist participation.

### **Party Ideology**

Social democratic ideology is the NDP's most striking and distinguishing characteristic, but it is also very difficult to precisely define. Working from the Left of the ideological spectrum, Hackett (1979) distinguishes social democracy from democratic socialism. He argues democratic socialism places the public interest above profit motivations as the economy's organizing principle. Consequently, the economy should be built through government intervention and significant public ownership. This approach was favoured by the CCF in the earlier years. Hackett further explains that:

This concept of socialism is rooted in an ethical condemnation of the values promoted by capitalism; its supporters tend to support what Walter Young called the 'movement' orientation, viewing electoral politics as only one means of achieving the mass-scale ideological conversion necessary to transform capitalism into socialism (pp. 188-189).

On the other hand, social democracy is entrenched in electoral politics. This ideological stand is, "concerned, in practice at least, with the humanization of capitalism through legislative reforms such as increased welfare benefits and more progressive taxation" (Hackett, 1979, p. 189). It also rejects full nationalization of public services and

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<sup>22</sup> The party's development is ongoing with several important renewal projects recently being completed. The most comprehensive document in the party's renewal process was the federal report What We Heard written by The Report of the Steering Committee of the National Discussion on the Future of the New Democratic Party of Canada (2001). It suggested the party reject trade agreements that "do not meet the tests of democracy, equity and sustainability," (p. 90) make proportional representation a major party issue, commit to "extra-parliamentary action and year-round activism," (p. 92) and incorporate "the principle of sustainability, especially with respect to the environment and ecological issues, in all aspects of Party policy" (p. 90).

In addition, there were several important federal conferences in 2001 including the NDPProgress conference run by grassroots supporters and the Future of Social Democracy conference headed by former federal NDP leader Ed Broadbent and NDP historian Desmond Morton (Morton, 2001: A21; Lawton, 2001a). Provincially, the Saskatchewan NDP released a renewal paper in 2000 (New Democratic Party of Saskatchewan, 2000) while the British Columbia NDP has recently launched a renewal campaign entitled Review, Renew and Rebuild ("Review, Renew," 2001).

acknowledges that taxation and investment controls are sufficient to redistribute wealth. These ideological worldviews have been more or less supported by the CCF and NDP over the past fifty years (Hackett, 1979).

Joy Esbrey and Larry Johnston (1994) dispute this clear demarcation of ideological branches. They argue that the line between democratic socialism and social democracy is increasingly being blurred because:

...over time, socialism has... increasingly made its peace with the private ownership of property. Democratic socialism has long ceased to call for the total collectivization of property in the hands of the state, or otherwise. In the twentieth century, democratic socialism has at most supported the nationalization (appropriation and control by the state) of key industries or sectors of the economy, such as transportation or banking... By and large, socialism no longer seeks to substitute public or collective ownership for private ownership of property. Socialists continue to be wary about the influence and power of corporate property and, by the same token, supportive of genuine collective ventures such as cooperatives or worker-owned business, but they are no longer committed to eliminating private corporations or to restructuring the entire economy on an alternative basis (pp. 102-103).

Instead, Esbrey and Johnston (1994) argue democratic socialism and social democracy may be distinguishable by two finer points. First, a social democratic party does not appeal to one specific class, instead promoting itself within the public as a party dedicated to “social justice and fairness” (p. 103). Second, social democracy relies more heavily on redistribution and regulation, while socialism still remains vaguely more interested in nationalization of key industries.

The uncertainty of exactly where socialism ends and social democracy begins is a longstanding debate among scholars. Christopher Dunn (1995) admits that, “In spite of this important qualification, there is still a great deal of theoretical vagueness to the term [social democracy]” (p. 236). As such, most would argue the NDP retains its social democratic designation under both sets of criteria; however care should be taken when making such contrasts to democratic socialism in consideration of the aforementioned debate.

From the Right of the ideological spectrum, Canadian social democracy can be distinguished from liberalism and conservatism. In the broadest terms, Christian and

Campbell (1985) explain that liberalism champions the individual and their liberty. They state:

The best person is the one who directs and determines his or her own life to the fullest possible extent. The best society is that in which every individual, in full consciousness, can choose for oneself the kind of life to lead, with external social restraints keep to the minimum necessary to preserve society from the aggressive and invasive behaviour of a lawless minority (p. 6).

In Canada, liberalism is divided between two camps: business (or market or neo) liberalism and welfare liberalism. The former discourages government regulation, laws and ownership that restrict the actions of individuals or corporations. The latter theory contends the free market has produced some distortions that restrict other liberties (Christian and Campbell, 1985). The Liberal Party is most often associated with liberalism in Canada; however in the past decade many have argued that the party has shifted its focus to business liberalism at the cost of welfare liberalism ideals. Under Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chretien, the federal Liberal Party has deregulated the application of environmental controls, privatized Canadian National Railways and the St. Lawrence Seaway Authority (among other crown corporations), cut federal spending, cut corporate and personal income tax and signed continental and global trade agreements (Clarkson, 2001). Some provincial branches have shifted even further to the Right, particularly in British Columbia and Quebec, to the point of representing conservatism.

Christain and Campbell (1985) explain that conservatism is traditionally distinguished by two characteristics: business liberalism and toryism. Toryism is explained as a “commitment to the values of collectivism and a belief in the enduring value of hierarchy as an element of social life” (p. 8). Although toryism may have been an active ingredient in the Progressive Conservative Party during the 1950s (in particular during the leadership of John Bracken and John Diefenbaker), Christian and Campbell now explain that toryism is “being threatened by the party’s tough, confident and aggressive business liberals, who at times show considerable impatience with the

demands of ideological compromise” (p. 9). The Progressive Conservatives and Canadian Alliance currently best represent modern conservatism in Canada.<sup>23</sup>

These categorizations are helpful to draw a general map of Canadian political ideology; however there is again some dispute over clear definitions – in this case where the NDP’s version of social democracy ends and liberalism begins. To some extent, the difficulty in settling this demarcation is the result of my thesis design that reviews all branches of the NDP (federal, provincial and territorial) under one umbrella. Although the NDP is considered close to a regionally integrated party (Dyck, 2000), there are significant differences in interpretation of social democracy from branch to branch. These regional differences can be attributed to political climate, party history, electoral success and party systems.

In recent years, some have argued that electorally successful provincial NDP parties in Manitoba and Saskatchewan have become too accommodating of neo-liberalism (market or business liberalism). An editorial in Canadian Dimension magazine contends that the Manitoba NDP government has been unwilling to separate itself from some neo-liberal policies. Specifically, the editorial points out that the Manitoba NDP has refused to raise welfare rates, has the second highest child poverty rate in Canada and has been unwilling to change regressive amendments to the Manitoba Labour Relations Act implemented by the previous Conservative market liberal government (“Manitoba,” 2003).<sup>24</sup> The NDP in Saskatchewan has also been accused of borrowing from the neo-liberal playbook (Warnock, 1999). During their first term in office it received accolades from the Fraser Institute, a neo-liberal think tank, for closing nearly half the province’s hospitals and turning a \$840 million deficit in 1991 to a \$119 surplus in 1995 (Henton,

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<sup>23</sup> One could conclude from these arguments that the Liberal, Progressive Conservative and Canadian Alliance parties promote variations of market liberalism. However, I recognize that this is a simplified conclusion for the purposes of acting as a contrast between social democracy and the different strands of liberalism and conservatism. A more in-depth discussion would have likely broken down these latter ideological stands into five ideological hybrids: reform liberals, market Tories, neo-liberals, liberal conservatives, conservative liberals (Esberey and Johnston, 1994). A close examination of Liberal, Progressive Conservative and Canadian Alliance party policies and leaders would have also been undertaken.

<sup>24</sup> The Canadian Dimension editorial does acknowledge other traditional social democratic policies passed by the NDP Manitoba government including increased funding for daycare, a ‘re-charged’ health care system, reductions in university and college fees and election finance reforms (“Manitoba,” 2003).

1995). This version of social democracy is often labeled ‘Third Way’ social democracy which is popular in Europe, particularly in Britain and Germany.<sup>25</sup>

These market-oriented policy shifts demonstrate a regional wavering from the traditional hallmarks of NDP social democracy; however it would be overdeterministic to conclude that the Manitoba and Saskatchewan examples represent the entire NDP franchise. Both federal NDP leader Jack Layton and Ontario NDP leader Howard Hampton (among other NDP provincial leaders) have stated that they do not support adopting the ‘Third Way’ style of social democracy (“Jack Layton’s NDP,” 2003a; Urquhart, 2000). Lorne Nystrom, a Saskatchewan Member of Parliament (MP) and the biggest advocate of Third Way politics in the 2003 federal NDP leadership campaign, finished with only 9.3 percent of the vote – far behind more traditional social democratic contenders Layton and Bill Blaikie (Harper and Chung, 2003).<sup>26</sup>

Although I acknowledge a possible variance in ideological orientation in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, the notion of NDP social democracy used in this thesis will adopt the traditional orientation defined by Hackett (1979), Esbrey and Johnston (1994), and still upheld by the federal and most provincial NDP chapters.<sup>27</sup> As such, social

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<sup>25</sup> Third Way social democracy became popular in the late 1990s after the publication of Anthony Giddens’ Third Way and the New Labour party’s election victory in Britain (Merkel, 2002). Giddens (1998) argues this ideological approach was a response to five dilemmas faced by developed nations: the entrenchment of globalization into domestic economies, the rise of individualism (in part attributed to increasing diversity in cultures and lifestyles), the participation of social democrats within the capitalist system, the increasing political agency of social movements and a need to re-evaluate ecological issues.

In response, Giddens (2001) contends Third Way politics supports several deviations from traditional social democratic policies that are still based on outdated Keynesian welfare principles. I will outline four points here; however the depth and debate over Third Way politics is much more complex and this should only be understood as a very basic overview of this ideological approach. First, the size of government should be reduced. “An overloaded, bureaucratic state is not only unlikely to provide good public services, it is also dysfunctional for economic prosperity” (p. 6). Second, the state should allow the economy to be driven by the open market, and should only interfere when “markets create insecurities and inequalities” (p. 7). Third, a new social contract should be established that links rights to responsibilities. Giddens’ suggests, “allocating citizens rights of provision, especially welfare rights, without a spelling out of responsibilities, creates major problems of moral hazard in welfare systems. Welfare systems that aren’t integrated with obligations can also produce a culture of deceit – expressed, for example, in high levels of welfare fraud... The theorem that responsibilities go along with rights has now become widely accepted in some spheres – for instance, it is one of the guiding principles of welfare to work schemes” (p. 8). Fourth, social democrats need to recognize that higher taxes may hinder job creation and encourage tax avoidance.

<sup>26</sup> It should be recognized that a deeper discussion on the NDP and Third Way politics would bolster my discussion here; however a lack of academic literature focused on Third Way politics in Canada and scope constraints restrict the development of this section.

<sup>27</sup> As stated in the introduction, this may mean that many of the conclusions reached in this thesis will have less application to the Saskatchewan and Manitoba NDP governments.



democracy remains a unique vision of public governance that distinguishes the NDP from other ideologically oriented parties in Canada.

### **Mass party vs. Cadre party**

The NDP's membership base can be considered one of the party's unique characteristics in the Canadian political system. This distinction can be best drawn out through the adoption of Maurice Deverger's political party model. Deverger (1959) argues that party membership can be understood as fitting into one of two party models: the cadre party and the mass party.

The mass party heavily recruits members to be active learners of the party's ideology and active participants in the party's operation. From this membership pool, an internal process promotes the strongest and brightest members to stand as candidates during elections. "The members are...the very substance of the party, the stuff of its activity. Without members, the party would be like a teacher without pupils" (Deverger, 1959, p. 63). In addition, the mass party heavily depends on its membership for party financing. Deverger explains that:

The mass-party technique in effect replaces the capitalist financing of electioneering by democratic financing. Instead of appealing to a few private donors, industrialists, bankers, or important merchants, for funds to meet campaign expenses – which makes the candidate (and the person elected) dependent of them – the mass party spreads the burden over the largest possible number of members, each of whom contributes a modest sum (p. 63).

In contrast, Deverger (1959) describes the membership of the cadre party as a small group of upper-class power holders (dominant social groups) that are most interested in electoral competition. They are normally most active leading up to an election; consequently during periods of governance their role diminishes to informal correspondence with the candidates. Deverger describes these members as, "Influential persons, in the first place, whose name, prestige, or connections can provide backing for the candidate and secure him votes; experts, in the second place, who know how to handle the electors and how to organize a campaign; last of all financiers, who can bring the sinews of war" (p. 64).

Deverger's (1959) last important division of cadre and mass party characteristics is ideological pursuit. Historically, Left leaning parties have been mass parties. "This effort of organization... made it possible to free the working class from the tutelage of middle-class parties: in order to put up independent working-class candidates at elections it was necessary to become independent of capitalist financing and this was possible only with collective finances" (p. 67). In contrast, the cadre party has historically been Right leaning. "The middle-class Right had no need, financial or political, to seek the organized support of the masses: it already had its elites, its personages, and its financial backers. It considered its own political education to be adequate" (Deverger, 1959, p. 67).<sup>28</sup>

In Canada, NDP membership has been seen as more representative of the mass party model; while the membership of other political parties (including the Liberal Party and Progressive Conservative Party) has fallen more in line with the cadre party model (Carty, 1996; Archer and Whitehorn, 1997; Dyck, 2000).

On the issue of membership stability, R. Kenneth Carty (1996) found that the NDP's membership remained fairly stable from 1988 to 1991 in spite of a national election, a federal leadership campaign and the election of three provincial and one territorial NDP government. This corresponds with the characteristics of the Deverger's (1959) mass party theory that members are consistently active beyond electoral periods. In contrast, "Membership in the [federal] Liberal and Conservative parties is quite different. In both cases, as one would expect of cadre parties that are essentially machines for vacuuming up votes, party membership jumps dramatically in election years" (Carty, 1996, p. 192). To further support this finding, Carty found that membership in a typical riding constituency varied during the 1987-1990 period by an average of 207 percent for the federal Progressive Conservatives and 340 percent for the federal Liberals. The NDP, on the other hand, experienced a much smaller variation of 67 percent.

On the issue of party financing, the NDP also reflect the characteristics of a mass party. Carty (1996) found that the NDP's local riding associations typically have larger

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<sup>28</sup> Deverger (1959) does acknowledge that most parties will not fulfil the exact characteristics of one of his two models. "This distinction, though clear in theory, is not always easy to make in practice" (p. 64). Consequently, comparisons between Deverger's models and Canadian political parties must be understood in relative not absolute terms.

membership incomes because their membership is more stable and their fees are higher.<sup>29</sup> It appears the national membership has also resisted shifting the party's ideological and/or policy positions to better elicit political contributions from corporations. Although membership revenue is not readily available to the public, general public contributions are easily accessible. According to records filed with Elections Canada (2001), the federal NDP for the 2000 election received only \$198,757 (which calculates to 1.2 percent of total election revenue) in corporate election donations. In comparison, the Progressive Conservatives collected \$2,777,286 (44.6 percent of total election revenue), while the Liberals and Canadian Alliance received \$11,862,692 (44.7 percent) and \$6,753,356 (34.4 percent) respectively.<sup>30</sup> These striking financial disparities demonstrate the distinction between the NDP (mass party) and the rest of the Canadian political parties (cadre party).<sup>31</sup>

### **Formal Ties with Labour**

Keith Archer and Alan Whitehorn (1997) point out that the NDP's biggest deviation from Deverger's mass party model is "the group element" (p. 5). Right from the beginning, the CCF was a party inclusive of individuals and class-based farm, labour and academic movements, and provincial, regional and youth caucuses. In particular, organized labour became a principal but not dominant player within the party (another unique feature of a Canadian political party) with formal ties established during the

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<sup>29</sup> The median annual membership for the NDP was \$15. In comparison, Liberal and Progressive Conservative memberships were eight and five dollars respectively (Carty, 1996).

<sup>30</sup> The Liberals biggest corporate donations came from CIBC (\$154,636.77), Merrill Lynch Canada (\$124,853.08) and Bombardier Inc (\$100,502.68). The biggest corporate donors for the Progressive Conservatives came from CIBC (\$95,710.60), Bell Canada Enterprises (\$75,000) and TD Securities (\$63,710.60). For the Canadian Alliance, it was Eiran Development Corp (\$152,000), Fraser Milner Casgrain (\$131,000), Scotiabank (\$127,570) and Dongroup Ltd (\$123,900) that were the biggest sources of corporate financial support (Elections Canada, 2001).

From the Canadian media establishment, Ted Rogers (as a citizen) and Power Corp donated \$90,000 and \$35,000 respectively to the Progressive Conservative Party. For the Liberal Party, CanWest Global contributed \$56,155.80 (Elections Canada, 2001).

<sup>31</sup> The same story can be found in records submitted to Elections British Columbia. In 2002, during a non-election year, the provincial NDP received \$7,250 from companies (both corporations and unincorporated commercial organizations) while the Liberals pulled in \$3,040,159. On the flip side, the provincial NDP accepted \$1,954,611.06 in individual contributions – nearly double the \$1,080,702 that the Liberal Party received from British Columbia citizens ("Annual Financial Report: BC Liberals," 2003; "Annual Financial Report: NDP of British Columbia," 2003).

creation of the NDP in 1961 (Archer, 1992). Archer and Whitehorn (1997) further explain that:

The constitution of the NDP included a collective membership category for members of affiliated trade unions, alongside the original mass base of individual members of constituency associations. In addition to this formal recognition, other formal and informal arrangements ensured labour representation in various positions within the party hierarchy. For example, central labour bodies and affiliated unions may send delegates to party conventions, and labour is guaranteed representation on the party's federal council. In addition, labour has representation on the party executive, and labour representatives can be found on such important bodies as the Strategy and Election Planning Committee (pp. 5-6).

These ties with labour have gone a long way in financing the NDP. During the 2000 federal election, the NDP's national office received \$3,022,480 in union donations<sup>32</sup> with the largest gifts coming from the Canadian Labour Congress (\$683,947.12) and the Canadian Auto Workers National Headquarters (\$452,177.97). These union donations accounted for 18.5 percent of the NDP's revenue during the election – dwarfing the contributions by businesses at 1.2 percent. In comparison, union donations made to the Liberal Party accounted for only 0.3 percent of their revenue, while the Progressive Conservatives and Canadian Alliance did not receive any union contributions (Elections Canada, 2001). In British Columbia, the provincial NDP received \$39,044.99 while the Liberal Party gained \$625 from unions in 2002 (“Annual Financial Report: BC Liberals,” 2003; “Annual Financial Report: NDP of British Columbia,” 2003). This financial backing has allowed the NDP to competitively challenge neo-liberal proponents and parties on a national scale.

However, the NDP-union relationship has been shaky in recent years. Whitehorn (2001) explains Canadian Auto Workers union president Buzz Hargrove has been critical of the NDP in the past 10 years since former Ontario NDP Premier Bob Rae re-opened labour contracts through social contract legislation. In 1998 and 1999, Hargrove encouraged union members in the Ontario provincial election to vote strategically to remove the Conservative government. In other words, if the NDP member in a constituency was seen as unlikely to win the seat, union members were encouraged to

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<sup>32</sup> This amount can be broken down to \$537,142 in affiliation dues and \$2,485,338 in contributions (Elections Canada, 2001).

vote Liberal (Girard, 1998). Hargrove was also a vocal critic of former federal NDP leader Alexa McDonough for her moderate Left views (Fraser, 2001).

On the other hand, Canadian Labour Congress President Ken Georgetti remains committed to the NDP. In the 2000 federal election, he called on all working families to “get out and vote” NDP (Lawton, 2000). At the provincial level, Jim Sinclair (2002), president of the BC Federation of Labour, has also remained a strong advocate for the NDP. Recently he stated:

BC unions have worked closely with NDP MLAs Joy McPhail and Jenny Kwan as they have fought tirelessly in the legislature against the [Liberal Premier Gordon] Campbell government’s assault on basic rights and critical public service. Both New Democrats have been front and centre in the many marches and rallies against the government (p. A21).

Overall, organized labour, although critical at times, has remained formally committed to financing and participating within the NDP party structure.

### **Party Activism**

In addition to class-based social movements (labour), the NDP is also distinct in Canadian electoral politics for its work with new social movements. The New Politics Initiative (NPI) is the most recent movement formation (and strongest since the Waffle movement from 1968-71) within the party attempting to redirect the policy and organizational formation. Formed in 2001, the NPI is a national coalition of, “individuals, some members of the NDP and some not, who believe that Canada needs a new progressive political party” (Stanford and Robinson, 2001, p. 80). It called for direct outreach and consultation with non-electoral social movements (including environmentalists, seniors and anti-globalization protesters), other Left political organizations and citizens’ organizations (Stanford and Robinson, 2001). Led by social activist Judy Rebick and MP Svend Robinson, the NPI desired a party that:

... reintegrated the energy and commitment of the social movements with electoral campaigning, and one which put top priority on a new struggle for expanded democracy – would hold great potential for both strengthening the social movements and rebuilding a progressive electoral presence (Robinson and Stanford, 2001, p. 82).

The proposal was taken to the 2001 NDP convention where it failed to receive majority consent with only 40 percent support. Although the proposal was rejected, it demonstrated serious activist participation within the party (Lawton, 2001b).

The influence of new social movements was felt again in the 2003 federal NDP leadership convention. The winner Jack Layton, a Toronto city councilor, was a strong advocate of steering the party in a direction that would better accommodate social activists (Harper and Chung, 2003). Unwilling to pursue “elite accommodation” (gaining the support of the party’s organizational leaders), Layton garnered most of his support from social activists, social movement organizations (including Oxfam and Greenpeace) and MPs Svend Robinson and Libby Davies (both founders of the NPI movement and the only two MPs to support Layton) (Goar, 2002; Zolf, 2003).<sup>33</sup> Layton’s respect for new social movements was an important element of a winning campaign, according to Whitehorn. He further argues that a recent upsurge in movement mobilization could help rebuild the NDP if proper ties are made (quoted in Chung, 2003a). Although the party has yet to resolve the exact role of new social movements within the NDP’s organization, their informal participation is another unique feature not felt by Canada’s other political parties.

Overall, the NDP can be cast as a social democratic mass party with a strong membership base of new and old social movements together rallying against the current shift towards a neo-liberal status quo.

### ***A Challenger Group Paradigm***

These characteristics demonstrate that the NDP is not a corporate-sponsored, cadre political party. With a mass party membership base with strong roots in traditional and new social movements supporting social democratic reforms, the NDP can be seen as a unique political entity in Canada and an apparent challenger to Canada’s dominant social groups. But if the NDP does not meet the traditional expectations for a cadre political

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<sup>33</sup> It should be recognized that one of the Layton’s biggest endorsements came from former NDP leader Ed Broadbent who is considered by many to be among the party’s elite.

party, what other paradigm is better suited to the NDP's ideology, mass party orientation, membership and political action characteristics?

The notion of the 'challenger group' posed by Charlotte Ryan (1991) may provide a more applicable paradigm to carry out an analysis of the NDP and its relations with the Canadian press in the forthcoming chapters. In her book Prime Time Activism, Ryan explains that 'challenger groups' are groups "challenging the status quo" (p. 8) from the Left of the political spectrum. She further notes that challenger groups include, though not exhaustively, "traditional movements like labor and civil rights, as well as new social movements like environmentalism or gay rights" (p. 260).

Although the NDP is clearly by definition not a social movement, the party can be understood to challenge the status quo from an ideological Left orientation when the aforementioned distinctive party characteristics are considered. So can we understand the NDP using a broad interpretation of a 'challenger group'? By drawing ties between Ryan's social movement organization (SMO) case studies<sup>34</sup> and the NDP, the last part of this chapter will attempt to make the case that a 'challenger group' paradigm best conceptualizes the NDP's place in modern politics. To make the case, five key characteristics will be drawn out: policies, goals, membership, tactics and role.

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<sup>34</sup> Additionally, it should be noted that I am working from a general resource mobilization tradition during my brief ventures into social movement theory. Resource mobilization theory is focused on *how* movements develop and participate in collective action. Mobilization is understood as "the process by which a group acquires collective control over the resources needed for action. Those resources may be labor power, goods, votes, and any number of other things, just so long as they are usable in acting on shared interests" (Tilly, 1978, p. 7). Furthermore, collective action is understood as "people's acting together in pursuit of common interests" (Tilly, 1978, p. 7).

Bill K. Carroll (1997) explains the resource mobilization approach was seen as more applicable than new social movement theory that "focuses primarily on *why* specific forms of collective identity and action have appeared in late twentieth-century Euro-North American societies" (p. 8).

Carroll (1997) further explains that resource mobilization theory analyses "tend to be specific situational context that facilitates or hinders a process of movement mobilization, while [New Social Movement theory] formulations are typically more sensitized to the broad, macrosociological transformations of the late twentieth century, which provide new cultural, political, and economic contexts for collective-identity formation" (p. 8).

This provides the general context of my work within the social movement theory tradition; however it is not my intention and it certainly beyond the scope of this chapter to fully explore the theoretical debates that surround social movement research.

## **Policies**

The NDP's social democratic ideology has inspired party policies that directly challenge neo-liberalism upheld by Canada's dominant social groups. These NDP policies have argued for social democratic solutions to issues as far ranging as democracy and human rights, infrastructure, culture, health care, employment, communities, education, the economy, the environment, foreign policy, first nations, children and natural resources. Since there is not room in this chapter to discuss each and every one of these policies, I will briefly illustrate the NDP's policy challenges to neo-liberalism with four striking examples: global trade agreements, public ownership, foreign policy and gender equity. Many of these examples will also demonstrate the NDP's close association with SMOs on these issues.

The issue of public ownership has been at the heart of several provincial NDP policy campaigns in recent years. In Ontario, the provincial NDP successfully fought against the governing Progressive Conservative Party's privatization and deregulation of the province's hydroelectricity program in 2002 (Brennen, 2002a; Brennen, 2002b). Although the NDP took the lead on the campaign, the party also worked heavily with the Ontario Electricity Coalition which includes, according to their website, dozens of SMOs including the Ontario Coalition for Social Justice, the Toronto Environmental Alliance, the Canadian Auto Workers, and the Canadian Association of Retired Persons ("About the OEC," 2003).

In other parts of the country, similar campaigns are currently underway to achieve two goals: bring public ownership to targeted private industries and fight against the privatization of long standing public services. The NDP of Nova Scotia is calling for a driver-owned non-profit auto insurance plan after profit-maximizing auto insurance companies hiked rates by 65 percent in 2002 ("Ensure the lowest," 2003). In British Columbia, the party successfully fought against the governing Liberal Party's privatization of the Coquihalla highway – one of the few roads that connect the province's lower mainland to the interior regions. Joy MacPhail (2003), leader of the British Columbia NDP, argued during the battle that:



The Coquihalla is public property; it has been paid for through taxes and tolls. Selling the revenue streams to the highest bidder is a betrayal of the Interior communities who paid to build the road... Interior communities are being told that they will continue to pay tolls for the next 55 years – but now the money will go to lining the pockets of private companies instead of paying for public roads.

These examples demonstrate that the NDP is a clear challenger to the open market ideals of neo-liberal governments that have little interest in ensuring that essential services and programs can benefit and be affordable to all Canadians.

Fighting against free trade and globalization is another social democratic policy that has been a central issue in the NDP's recent campaigns. The federal party through its 'fair trade not free trade' campaign has challenged Canada's Liberal government to stop signing away the democratic rights of Canadians in trade agreements and to global trade organizations that are based on free market principles. To counter, NDP MP Bill Blaikie explains the NDP's trade policy adopted in 2000 demanded:

... new and existing international trade agreements and institutions must incorporate enforceable provisions to protect core labour and social, environmental and human rights standards. Simply paying lip service to such standards in cynical and toothless sidebar agreements, as in the case of the NAFTA, is unacceptable. Canada's experience shows that social protections are meaningless if they are not backed with tough sanctions. The absence of binding social rights is particularly outrageous when contrasted with the enforceable investor protections enshrined in the investor-state dispute mechanism that was included in the NAFTA and proposed in the MAI. New Democrats have therefore renewed their call for the removal of the investor-state mechanism from the NAFTA, and have committed to fight the inclusion of similar provisions in the WTO, the FTAA, or any other global trading regime.

In order to address the elitist and uncritical commercial orientation of our international institutions, the new NDP trade policy also calls for measures to enhance the democratic accountability of the global trading system. In addition to the trade bureaucrats and business interests that are responsible for today's fundamentally imbalanced and anti-social web of trade agreements, democratically elected leaders, trade unions and NGOs from the broader civil society must also be involved in regional parliaments and other innovative forums to ensure that a broader, more balanced set of perspectives is brought to bear on future trade negotiations.

This policy against market globalization has taken the party to the streets to protest with other like-minded SMOs. On the NDP's website dedicated to the 'Free Trade not

Free Trade' campaign they offer direct links to dozens of SMOs including the Ottawa Coalition to Stop the FTAA, the Canadian Labour Congress, the Council of Canadians and the Sierra Student Coalition. Again, this demonstrates that the NDP and SMOs are working together to fight against market liberalism in Canada.

On the issue of women's rights, the NDP has been out front in fighting to correct a market bias that discriminates against women in the workforce. The NDP of Canada argues:

... There are better ways to put women on an equal footing with men. We need strategies to support women in balancing work and family - a national child care plan, decent wages and greater workplace flexibility.

Alexa McDonough and Canada's NDP are working for women and fighting for jobs that provide decent pay and benefits, reasonable job security, flexibility, access to training, opportunities for advancement and predictable working hours. We are working to strengthen employment equity and pay equity, amend EI legislation to improve benefits for part-time workers, and initiate a voluntary, accessible, affordable and quality child care program ("An Agenda for," 2003).

On the foreign policy front, the federal NDP has long fought for an independent and peaceful role for Canada on the world stage. They believe that global development can best be achieved by working with non-commercial global institutions (for example, the United Nations and the Red Cross) to provide social and economic solutions. Former federal NDP leader Alexa McDonough (2003) states, "Canada's foreign policy should be guided by the principles of peace and social justice. We need policies that address the roots of conflict - poverty, environmental degradation and the power of global corporations and the governments that support them."

Most recently those policies have been reflected in the NDP's opposition to the United States' National Missile Defence (Star Wars) plan and their military intervention in Iraq (Operation Iraqi Freedom). Again, NDP leaders have aligned themselves with SMOs and protested on the streets against the Canadian government's association with these military solutions. Also, the NDP of Canada's 'No Star Wars for Canada!' campaign website has links to the Canadian Peace Alliance, Bombs Away, the Federation of American Scientists and Greenpeace ("No Star Wars," 2003).

These examples illustrate that the NDP consistently challenge free market governments and corporations with policies that offer distinctly social democratic alternatives. The NDP's cooperation with SMOs in these campaigns further demonstrates the party's activist approaches to changing the landscape of Canadian society.

## Goals

Doug McAdam (2000) contends that SMOs can be divided into two separate classifications: revolutionary/radical and reform-oriented. Revolutionary/radical groups "require a major redistribution of wealth and/or power" (p. 121) while reform-oriented groups take smaller, more moderate steps towards their intended goals.<sup>35</sup> Carl Boggs (1986) also notes this clear division in SMO's goals. He explains that:

The explicitly radical component of new movements – for example, the social ecologists, the left wing of the peace movements, the radical feminists, and some anarchist-styled neighbourhood groups – constitutes only a small minority [of all social movements]. A preponderant number of activists and supporters belong to issue-oriented reform movements or protest organizations that have no explicit antisystem political agenda (p. 12).

Ryan's (1991) SMOs would appear to fall into the reform-oriented group classification. Her two main case studies exemplify this point. Local 26 of the Hotel, Restaurant, Institutional Employees, and Bartenders Union (affiliated with the AFL-CIO), led by Domenic Bozzotto's "reform" campaign and a strong contract committee, entered into a labour dispute with Boston hotels in 1982. Ryan describes the union's moderate message during this campaign as equating wage and benefit issues with "hotel workers' pride in their work and the basic unfairness of hotel management's treatment of labor" (p. 253). The other example was the New Bedford Delegation to Nicaragua. Following a visit to that country in 1987, the 15 delegates (an ad hoc group) lobbied against American foreign policy that sponsored contra warfare in Central America (Ryan, 1991).<sup>36</sup> Both

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<sup>35</sup> For discussion on Canadian revolutionary (or counter-hegemonic) social movements, see Carroll (1992), Carroll (1997).

<sup>36</sup> Ryan (1991) also addresses reform efforts in her analysis of Gramsci's concept of hegemony (this concept will be discussed in the next chapter). She mentions that movements do not have to be revolutionary or counterhegemonic; rather they can "erode a hegemonic world view." Furthermore, Ryan

groups called for a re-evaluation of status quo worldviews (anti-labour, pro-militarism); however they did not call for a revolutionary transformation of the state's structure and administration.

This reform orientation is also followed by the NDP. As previously discussed, the party replaced the radical socialist language of the Regina Manifesto that called for the eradication of capitalism for a more moderate, reform position outlined in the Winnipeg Declaration (CCF, 1933; CCF, 1956). It would appear that both groups (the NDP and Ryan's social movements) share the goal orientation of reform politics.

## **Membership**

There is also an apparent shared membership between Ryan's SMOs and the NDP. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the NDP's membership includes individuals active in new social movements, and formal membership ties with organized labour. Local unions and peace movement organizations, the orientation of Ryan's two main case studies (Local 26 and the New Bedford Delegation), are two very active groups within the NDP's membership (Archer and Whitehorn, 1997).

This is not uncommon for Left-wing parties and social movements, according to Diarmuid Maguire (1995). He notes that, "some [activists] enter party life after a period of activity in protest movements... while others pursue a life of 'double militancy'.... [This has] been characteristic of the history of the left since the late nineteenth century" (p. 201). Furthermore, he argues that this shared membership creates a natural undercurrent with both groups to work towards similar goals. For movements, "[t]hese encounters usually have the cumulative effect of shifting movements from what [Alberto] Melucci calls a 'nonpolitical terrain' to one that is political. That is, movements will seek to realize their goals by influencing political institutions such as parties" (p. 200). On the other hand, the activist membership in a political party creates a strong resistance against conforming to brokerage politics and "the requirements of state management" (Maguire,

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speaks of "small openings where we can take an opportunity for reform and enlarge it – what veteran activist Richard Healey calls reforms that explode outward" (p. 22).

1995, p. 200). Again, we can see that although social movements and Left-wing political parties like the NDP do not hold identical membership records, there are a high number of shared members working towards similar ends in both groups. This provides further evidence that Ryan's SMOs and the NDP share organizational characteristics.

## **Tactics**

McAdam (2000) attempts to further divide reform-oriented movements as either working through institutionalized or non-institutionalized forms of action. In other words, a group can be defined as working through "proper channels" (p. 121) or not working through them to achieve reform goals.

A major theme in this thesis is the acquisition of press access by outsider groups to disseminate alternative worldviews to the general public. This can be seen as a non-institutional action since it brings pressure to bear on the dominant social groups through indirect channels of communication. Being the focus of Ryan's (1991) book, media tactics by SMOs were heavily discussed. For example, media access allowed Local 26 to mobilize 5,000 supporters and create indirect pressure on some of Boston's most prestigious hotels in 1982. The union also took other non-institutional actions including public rallies in 1982 and a strike by Harvard foodworkers in 1983.

Another SMO example briefly discussed by Ryan (1991) is the citizen action group Fair Share that brought pressure on the state of Massachusetts to clean up an abandoned hazardous waste disposal site. According to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) (1995), Fair Share used non-institutional tactics such as newsletters, door-to-door canvassing, picketing, television appearances and newspaper quotes to pressure local and state officials to act on the environmental and health dangers created by the site.

The NDP has also participated or lead a number of non-institutional or extra-parliamentary actions over recent years to protest a range of neo-liberal and foreign policy issues championed by the dominant social groups. One of the party's main tools has been

the press to bring pressure on governments.<sup>37</sup> In addition, the leaders and membership have rallied on the street with thousands of protesters against war and globalization (Keung and Hutsel, 2003; Keung, 2003; Lawton, 2001c) and in many provinces walked the picket line against unfair contract negotiations (Brown, 2000; Gregoire, 1999). The party has also been occasionally disruptive at government press conferences (Briggs, 2002) and broken parliamentary traditions (Chung, 2003b) to get their message out to the government and the public.

However, to classify these groups as non-institutional actors misses half the story. All groups previously discussed also participate in institutional actions. Designated members of Local 26 worked within formal labour negotiation process to finally settle their contracts, while Fair Share also lobbied state officials and submitted a qualitative health study that was incorporated into the public health assessment report prepared by the MDPH (Ryan, 1991; MDPH, 1995).

The NDP, as a political party, more traditionally participates in institutional forms of action. They voice their worldviews in regular legislative and parliamentary debates on government proposed legislation, pursue the government during Question Period and sit on review committees, among other institutional roles. They also contest elections for the opportunity to hold power.

What this short discussion appears to indicate is that Ryan's SMO case studies and the NDP can be understood as non-conformists to McAdam's tactics model since they use both non-institutional and institutional tactics. Once again, this demonstrates that these groups have a close relationship in the creative and flexible manner they participate in the political arena.

## **Role**

While many of these characteristics demonstrate that SMOs and the NDP have close relations, the definitions of party and movement strikes a clear demarcation. A

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<sup>37</sup> This will be a major theme in the discussion of NDP-press relations in chapters three, four and five of this thesis.

party, by definition, is an organization that is “concerned with providing government leaders, with public policies, and with mobilizing the electorate” (Engelmann and Schwartz, 1975, p. 1). In contrast, reform-oriented SMOs are groups that do not seek power through formal parliamentary governance. Paul Burstein, Rachel L. Einwohner and Jocelyn A. Hollander (1995) further define these movements as, “organized, collective efforts to achieve social change that use noninstitutionalized tactics at least part of the time” (p. 278). Susan Phillips (1996) adds that parties are also coalitions of interests and therefore often take a more moderate position on issues to accommodate the differing interests of members and offer a reasonable alternative to which the voting public will be receptive in an election. Movement organizations, particularly ones focused on a single issue, can be more radical in their ideological pursuits and tactics. Subsequently, the movements are seen to articulate the views of the public, but political parties are seen to aggregate those interests on behalf of the entire population.

### **Social Movements as Parties**

As such, the roles of social movements and parties by definition in countless political science textbooks are clearly separate; however Phillips (1996) disagrees that this separation is absolute. She argues that the movement-party dichotomy needs to be reassessed.<sup>38</sup> One of her contentions is that movements can move into parliamentary politics without losing their movement role. To make her point, Phillips (1996) notes the success of the German Green party provides a reasonable illustration of a conflict between the definitions of party and movement. The Greens, similar to the NDP, can be considered a mass party with strong movement membership and Left-of-centre ideological goals.<sup>39</sup> Born out of a collection of new social movements, the party was founded in 1980 with a platform emphasizing participatory democracy, civil rights, environmental and cultural renewal, pacifism and anti-Americanism. Three years later

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<sup>38</sup> Phillips (1996) also notes that there is “sparse literature” (p. 440) in this area of study in Canada.

<sup>39</sup> It is recognized that there are some differences between the German Bundestag and the Canadian House of Commons making a comparison between the two political systems imperfect. In addition, the political and ideological history of the Greens and the NDP is not identical. Nevertheless, there are strong ideological, organizational and electoral similarities that make this a reasonable example to illustrate my point.

after numerous regional and municipal successes, the party won representation (27 deputies) in the national parliament with 5.6 percent of the popular vote in the national election (Boggs, 1986).<sup>40</sup>

In his attempt to explain the unique transition of a movement into institutional politics, Carl Boggs (1986) explains the Greens have positioned themselves in:

... a position from which they would... be able to pursue a dual strategy linked to the simultaneous development of party and movement, electoral politics and grassroots struggles, legislative reforms and direct-action protest... With the Bundestag itself, Green delegates were in a position to offer programmatic alternatives to the stale ideas set forth by the CDU (the Christian Democratic Union of Germany) and SPD (German Social Democratic Party), guided by the hope that ensuing debates would at least provide an ideological forum in which fresh ideas and new information could be put forward (pp. 177-178).

The party's ideological vision challenged the state while representing marginalized citizens, retaining strong movement involvement and challenging corporate sponsored parties (Boggs, 1986). This success in electoral politics has also not dissipated over time. Working from this movement party role, the Greens have remained a vocal oppositional force within institutional German politics for the past two decades. In the 2002 national election, the party won 8.6 percent of the popular vote and currently buoys the Social Democratic Party in a coalition government (Erlanger, 2002).

Consequently, Boggs (1986) contends that the Greens demonstrate a unique role in parliamentary politics stating that:

Whereas the new movements often seem content with a replay of 1960s-style militancy, especially in their spontaneous rejection of large-scale organisational and electoral politics, the Greens wished to translate radical goals into a strategically coherent language and action. This meant building a national organization prepared to move onto the institutional terrain without sacrificing the vitality of popular initiatives. Viewed in this way, *the Greens embody neither a flight from politics nor a simple return to traditional pluralism, but a convergence of party and movements that suggest a broad redefinition of politics* [Italics added](pp. 178-179).

These characteristics, as stated by Boggs, appear to add further support that the division between party and movement is not absolute.

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<sup>40</sup> The German parliaments work within a proportional representation system that requires five percent of the popular vote before a party can be assigned any seats (Boggs, 1986).



## **Returning to the Challenger Group Paradigm**

In my pursuit of a paradigm that best explains the NDP's role within the Canadian political arena, there is clearly no perfect choice. While the NDP would traditionally be classified within an institutional political party paradigm, this does not go far enough to explain the party's ideological or organizational characteristics if I am going to evaluate its relationship with the profit-oriented press owned by dominant social groups. Instead, I turn to the notion of the challenger group raised by Ryan (1991). Her definition includes groups "challenging the status quo" – which could by the nature of the NDP's ideological and organizational characteristics include them. On the other hand, Ryan's exclusive illustration (although not exclusive in definition) of challenger groups as SMOs does present a conceptual problem – the NDP by definition is not an SMO. There is also a logical argument that publicly elected parties have more social legitimacy than unrepresentative SMOs that needs to be considered. Nevertheless, if one is to evaluate the shared characteristics of Ryan's reform-oriented movements and the NDP there is a relative relationship that appears to become visible. If one adds to the analysis the arguments by Phillips (1996) and Boggs (1986) that the clear division of movement and party is not absolute, then the paradigm link between Ryan's SMOs and the NDP appears very possible.

In the end, if I am to adopt a paradigm to examine the relationship between the NDP and the press, a broad interpretation of the challenger group paradigm appears to present a much stronger explanation of the core ideological and organizational traits of the NDP in comparison to the traditional institutional political party paradigm. To solidify the application of this paradigm, I will revise the challenger group definition to be "any group or organization that challenges the power of dominant social groups through reform-oriented politics."

## ***Conclusion***

The preceding reflections of the NDP within the larger Canadian political environment demonstrate that the party cannot be painted with the same brush as English Canada's other parliamentary political options (Liberals, Saskatchewan Party, Progressive Conservatives, and Canadian Alliance).<sup>41</sup> The NDP's social democratic ideology puts them in direct conflict with the neo-liberal promises promoted by the other parties and major Canadian corporations. The NDP's membership also provides more consistent mass party support in contrast to the electoral concentrated cadre party style reflected in other Canadian political parties. And last but not least, participation in the NDP has a historically strong undercurrent of social activism from both old and new social movements. The NDP would appear to be a party unlike any other in North America.

What this would appear to demonstrate is the traditional political party model is insufficient to adopt when examining the NDP's relationship with the mainstream, profit-oriented press. This conflict between movement and party traits makes it an exciting case study deserving much more academic and popular attention. More models, theories and paradigms need to be debated to explain the party's role in Canadian politics. While a borrowed and revised challenger group paradigm is unquestionably imperfect, it does provide a fresh and applicable model to capture the party's unique features. As such, I contend that the ideological and organizational elements of the NDP are best reflected in my revised definition of the challenger group paradigm. It is this political model that I will carry forward into the next chapter to explore potential theoretical media studies' models.

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<sup>41</sup> I have excluded the Quebec provincial Parti Quebecois and Action Democratique du Quebec parties and federal Bloc Quebecois party because of my earlier stated concentration on English Canada.

## **CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO MEDIA STUDIES**

The Canadian press system is held together by a complex web of political, economic, social and cultural functions. Untangling this web is no easy task, but for the purposes of this thesis it is an exercise that must be undertaken to fully grasp the nature of Canada's press environment and its relations with the NDP (as understood in the broader challenger group paradigm).<sup>42</sup>

To achieve maximum breadth and depth, the general design of this thesis will approach the examination of media access for the NDP (and more broadly challenger groups in this chapter) from a top-down design. Three theoretical models in media studies will be examined in this chapter to provide a macro-level framework to build context for later discussions on empirical studies of press influence (chapter three, four and five).

Paul Nesbitt-Larking (2001), in his review of theoretical approaches to the Canadian media system, classifies media studies' theories into three models: liberal-pluralist, critical and elite. At its most basic level, liberal-pluralism argues that a full spectrum of opinion derived from different social groups is provided to the public based on conventions of objectivity, fairness and social consensus. Critical theory<sup>43</sup> critiques the social order in which the media and cultural phenomena exist (Golding and Murdock, 1996). Elite theorists contend a small group of individuals manufacture or influence news to reflect their ideological persuasions (Nesbitt-Larking, 2001). Each model offers a unique and rich explanation of how media systems work.

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<sup>42</sup> The relative lack of academic literature of NDP-media relations impedes my ability to review theoretical media studies debates and relate them directly to the NDP; therefore I have expanded out the discussion to consider how different theoretical approaches can best explain the interactions between the media and all challenger groups (as defined in the last chapter).

Furthermore, my discussion of the press will often be discussed under the broader topic of media, because media theorists do not consistently distinguish between television, radio and newspapers.

<sup>43</sup> Nesbitt-Larking concentrates his discussion of critical theory on critical structuralism (Roland Barthes, Murray Edelman). I remain committed to his compartmentalization of media studies theories; however I have elected to shift the focus of my critical theory discussion to critical political economy and cultural studies models. This shift is needed to better suit the discussion on the struggle for media access between media and source. The work of Curran, Gurevitch and Woollacott (1982) and Golding and Murdock (1996) also take this direction when discussing critical theory.

Nesbitt-Larking's (2001) division of theoretical models into these three camps was selected over other frameworks for four significant reasons. First, each of these theories starts from a general agreement that there is some media access inequality that favours powerful individuals, institutions and collective bodies (Curran, Gurevitch and Woollacott, 1982). These theories allow me to move forward to examine the struggle over power and access in the media system.<sup>44</sup>

Second, Nesbitt-Larking's theoretical models are reasonably compatible with several other notable frameworks in media studies proposed by James Curran et al. (1982), Peter Golding and Graham Murdock (1996), Ryan (1991) and Hackett (1991). This increases the depth and quality of my discussion and diminishes most potential conflicts over the interpretation of basic concepts and models.

Third, the models are situated along a continuum of media access – on the one end liberal-pluralist being the most open and on the other end elite theory being the most closed. This provides a simplistic yet helpful method of mapping explanations and contrasts between the three theories.

Fourth, the division of theories into three camps provides a manageable number of examinations that cover most major work in this area of study. David Taras (1990) provides a similar spectrum of media studies' theories but his breakdown offers seven models.<sup>45</sup> This would be an unmanageable number of inquiries in this short chapter. For these reasons, I believe that Nesbitt-Larking's (2001) framework provides the best approach for this chapter exploration.

Using this framework, each theory's underlying principles will be briefly defined and applied to media studies. Working from these principles, more specific questions regarding Canadian media access and challenger groups will be asked – each theory's Canadian context will be explored, its power relations examined, its barriers to access considered and access openings for challenger groups proposed. These inquiries will provide a healthy review of macro-level frameworks to help explain the complex web of

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<sup>44</sup> This is a key premise of this thesis that was discussed in the introduction.

<sup>45</sup> Taras' (1990) models can be loosely compartmentalised into liberal-pluralism (mirror model, distorted mirror model, political model, audience model, organizational model), elite theory (ownership model) and critical theory (ownership model, cultural model).

political, economic, social and cultural functions of the Canadian media system that influence the degree of access afforded to challenger groups (including the NDP).

After the evaluation of theoretical models, I will conclude this chapter by proposing a narrowed theoretical lens from which the remainder of this thesis will be examined. The objective of this lens will be to establish theoretical scope throughout the paper; while at the same time not narrowing the focus to the point of stifling important debates. Establishing a theoretical lens is consistent with other evaluations by social movement media scholars, such as Todd Gitlin (1980), Ryan (1991) and Hackett (1991), when exploring media access. This chapter will reflect similar approaches taken by these scholars in an attempt to theoretically explain how media content is shaped.

### ***Liberal-Pluralism***

Liberal-pluralist theory sees the media as reflective of “achieved cultural consensus” (Nesbitt-Larking, 2001, p. 90). Nesbitt-Larking explains that this theoretical model is drawn from two traditional worldviews. Liberalism is an ideology that promotes freedom of the individual and the right to private property.<sup>46</sup> Pluralism contends that power is widely dispersed among different groups in society. Each group can communicate their views in competition with others in an open forum of discussion. Together, “liberal pluralists regard the state basically as a set of responsive institutions that receive demands from the plurality of groups in society and convert them through a process of deliberation into public policy outputs” (Nesbitt-Larking, 2001, p. 90).

### **Media Studies and Liberal-Pluralism**

When applied to media studies, traditional liberal-pluralists argue that the media are apolitical institutions that are largely autonomous from corporate, labour or government influences. Curran and Michael Gurevitch (1977) state that, “control of the media is said to be in the hands of an autonomous managerial elite who allow a considerable degree of flexibility to media professionals” (p. 4). Those media workers, Hackett (1991) explains,

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<sup>46</sup> See chapter one for a deeper discussion of liberalism

are seen by liberal-pluralists to work as independent watchdogs over society's dominant groups to ensure they are acting in the public's best interests. Hackett adds:

Though autonomous, the media are held nevertheless to be in some sense accountable and responsible to their audience and to the social system as a whole, though the mechanisms of the marketplace, the legal framework established by the State, and journalists' own sense of professional responsibility. Likewise, journalism is held to be open to the expression of diverse viewpoints and interests (p. 53).

Nesbitt-Larking (2001) explains that liberal-pluralists acknowledge media access inequity exists; however "they do not believe that the media have any (systematic) role to play in the reproduction of the dominant ideology or in the shaping of culture" (p. 91). They often argue that imbalances in reporting are the result of occupational mistakes, unanticipated personal bias or misinformation. As such, most bias in news reporting is temporary and quickly self-corrected through journalistic conventions of objectivity, fairness, balance and accuracy (Nesbitt-Larking, 2001). These conventions are anchored in journalism practices by specialized education and on-the-job training. In addition, each reporter attempts to maintain an ethical responsibility to societal service throughout his or her career (Taras, 1990). Thus, journalism is seen as a self-reflexive profession that maintains the highest standards of skill and control over content.

This journalistic accountability, according to liberal-pluralists, is incorporated into Canadian society through a free press system that is supported by mass audiences – often called the 'consumer sovereignty argument.' This argument contends that journalistic conventions are shaped and reinforced by competition. Public disagreement or dissatisfaction with the range of articles and columns in a media product can quickly result in lost market share (Curran and Gurevitch, 1977; Hackett, 1991). The argument follows that circulation numbers can often indicate how fair and accurate journalists have been in their efforts to describe the general public's worldviews. This means it would be both ethically and fiscally irresponsible for a news media institution to publish perspectives considered biased or false by their audience.

Nevertheless, liberal-pluralists acknowledge that there are still occasions of consistent reporting bias against oppositional issues or groups. This bias cannot be explained by the failures of journalistic conventions or occupational mistakes. Liberal-

pluralists argue this bias is not typically the result of interference of political or media elites in the role of ideological gatekeepers; rather it is a demonstration of real social consensus (Hackett, 1991). Media workers, it is argued, often use social consensus as a measurement to evaluate the accuracy and objectivity of their media reports. “To be outside the consensus was to be, not in an alternative value-system, but simply outside of norms as such: normless – therefore, anomic” (Hall, 1982, p. 62). Issues or events that are labeled deviant fall outside any reasonable value-system; therefore they do not deserve fair consideration in the production of media content.

### **Challenger Groups and Liberal-Pluralism**

Challenger groups, by definition in the previous chapter, promote reforms (based in alternative worldviews) to the current social consensus value system supported by dominant social groups. Thus, challenger groups are not deviant (revolutionary, radical or counter-hegemonic) groups and therefore cannot be discounted by liberal-pluralists as normless and excluded from reasonable public debates. Faced with this definition of challenger groups, liberal-pluralists would likely argue that challenger groups should have an opportunity to vocalize their views within the media’s public democratic forums of discussion.

However, that opportunity is largely based on the challenger group’s relative proximity to the social consensus. For institutional politics, this argument implies that the closer a party’s policies match the current social consensus value system, the more media access will be available to the party. For reporters and editors, election results can be considered an easy and immediate measurement to gauge the Canadian social consensus; therefore an argument follows that a party’s media access is partly dependent on electoral achievement. As such, a party’s encounters with barriers to media access could be attributed to its inability to garner support from a public that has strong agency.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, my use of the term ‘agency’ should be understood in relative not absolute terms to contrast structure when explaining the actions of individuals or groups. The concept of agency contends “that structures cannot be seen as determining and the emphasis should be placed on the way that individuals [or groups] create the world around them” (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner, 2000, p. 9). On the other hand, structural arguments contend that individual actions are determined by social structure. “Many

Liberal-pluralism also gives agency to challenger groups, according to Ryan (1991). She explains that liberal-pluralists would argue that challenger groups making consistent and direct contact with reporters will be rewarded with increased media access. And if the press is acting out its watchdog role over dominant social groups, then challenger groups also have the opportunity to gain access by criticizing dominant social groups that drift from the social consensus.

These conclusions have faced increasing criticism by media theorists in recent decades as a complete explanation of the creation of media content (Curran et al., 1982; Hall, 1982). In particular, liberal-pluralism fails to explain the high barriers to media access faced by challenger groups during periods of support by the public majority (Hackett, 1991; Ryan, 1991). Critics also argue that liberal-pluralism gives too much agency to media workers to determine whom they are going to source and what issues or events they are going to give priority. Furthermore, liberal-pluralism is criticized for failing to consider other powerful cultural, political and economic influences that can possibly marginalize, demobilize or ignore challenger messages and platforms (Hackett, 1991; Ryan, 1991).

Liberal-pluralism's ultimate failing may be its inability to seriously contend with the issue of power (Hall, 1982; Ryan, 1991). The social consensus debate is a prime example of liberal-pluralism's failing to incorporate power relations. While liberal-pluralists use social consensus as a benchmark for accurate reporting, Hackett (1991) argues that it is "a problem to be explained, rather than something to be taken for granted and celebrated" (p. 55). Hall (1982) further explains that liberal-pluralism's categorization of deviant and consensus formations is not a natural process but a clear illustration of social definition. "Matters of cultural and social power – the power to define the rules of the game to which everyone was required to ascribe – were involved in the transactions between those who were consensus subscribers and those who were labelled deviant" (pp. 62-63). In other words, the media can be seen as active agents negotiating their interpretation of reality from those with social and cultural power rather than just passively reflecting a pre-existing true reality (Hackett, 1991; Hall 1982).

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Marxists... argue that social relations, not individuals, are the proper objects of analysis. Individuals are only the 'bearers' of social relations" (Abercrombie et al., 2000, p. 9).



Although challenger groups work within the consensus domain, this critique of liberal-pluralism demonstrates that the media environment is a realm of struggle. There are clear cultural and societal power relations that they must work with and against to acquire media access. The further away their views drift from full social consensus, the greater the barriers they will face in their relations with the media.

Furthermore, there are other power relations for which liberal-pluralism cannot provide answers to challenger groups. First, the impact of media monopolies on the media industry has depreciated the value of the consumer sovereignty argument. If there is no competition, the consumer has no other options and no power to influence the direction of news coverage (Golding and Murdock, 1991). As such, audience demand for challenger perspectives will likely fail to reach the decision-makers within media institutions.<sup>48</sup>

Second, the reduction of staff and resources in newsrooms has impeded the quality of media content and the ability of reporters to cover a wide range of perspectives (Trim, Pizante and Yaraskavitch, 1983; The Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, 1997). This likely benefits dominant social groups that have the financial resources and dominant perspectives to become a consistent newsmaker (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996).<sup>49</sup>

Third, reporters work within a small job market and hold little organizational power; therefore they cannot challenge the direct power of the owner when there are differences in ideological news perspective.

In the end, it would appear that there are too many cultural, political and economic question marks surrounding the issue of power for which liberal-pluralism fails to provide substantial answers.

### **Liberal-Pluralism: Conclusion**

One could conclude from the preceding evidence that liberal-pluralism does not appear to be a complete explanation of how the media operate. Nevertheless, some of the

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<sup>48</sup> This argument is discussed in more detail in chapter five.

<sup>49</sup> A more in-depth debate on this issue will be provided in chapter four.

principles of liberal-pluralism and the empirical work published from this perspective should not be completely rejected. There is some limited value and lessons here for challenger groups. For example, most journalists remain committed to a code of ethics that rejects or diminishes the strength of power relations.<sup>50</sup> Their code of objectivity also pushes them to gather contrasting viewpoints from challenger groups if social democratic issues (for example, health care or the environment) are raised by dominant social groups that guide consensus formation. Ryan (1991) agrees that some benefits can be found in liberal-pluralism. She states:

Their detailed portraits of how the media work suggest where institutional structures might yield to pressure from challengers. We may think that the opportunity for change is more limited than these studies imply, but we still want to take advantage of whatever openings exist (p. 13).

Taking all these points into consideration, tentative lessons taken from a liberal-pluralist perspective could be incorporated into a broader understanding of the media's relationship with the NDP (as understood as a challenger group).

### ***Elite Theory***

Elite theory (often discussed as 'instrumental political economy') makes nearly the complete opposite claim to liberal-pluralism. It criticises social and political systems that allow a very select and unaccountable group of individuals (predominantly white, male and upper-class) to determine society's culture and ideology.<sup>51</sup> Their prestigious positions in society permit them to directly and intentionally promote their dominant interests at the expense of the majority of the population. These ideals often include capitalist

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<sup>50</sup> Commitment to this code of ethics in some situations can cost some reporters and editors their own job. See discussions later in this chapter on James Travers and Lawrence Martin.

<sup>51</sup> My use of the term 'ideology' in this paper differs in scope depending on the context used. When used to address media or social power, ideology has a wider scope that can be best understood as symbolic content that works to reinforce the interests and demands of dominant social groups. John Thompson (1990) explains that ideology "can be used to refer to the ways in which meaning serves... to establish and sustain relations of power which are systematically asymmetrical – what I shall call 'relations of domination.' Ideology, broadly speaking, is meaning in the service of power" (p. 7).

When used to distinguish political parties and movements, a narrower interpretation and definition is needed to identify the different strands of capitalism (for example, neo-liberalism or social democracy). Raymond Williams (1997) explains that in this context ideology can be understood as a "relatively formal and articulated system of meanings, values and beliefs, of a kind that can be abstracted as a 'world-view' or a 'class outlook'" (p. 109).

acquisitiveness and male domination (Nesbitt-Larking, 2001, p. 92). However, their power does not go as far as conspiracy or corruption, according to Wallace Clement (1975). Elite theory, he claims, critiques a social structure where elite members play within the “rules of the game” that they consider fair and legitimate. “Legitimate, of course, because the elite generally make the rules” (p. 41).

Clement (1975) further explains that an elite comprises the uppermost executive positions in economic, political and social realms. Its cohesion as a social group “requires that its structure be specified, that members of the group interact and are related to one another sufficiently to say they exhibit solidarity, cohesiveness, coordination and consciousness of kind” (p. 5). That network is most often maintained through socializing at common clubs, membership on each other’s board of directors and through intermarriage (Nesbitt-Larking, 2001). Elites are seen to have much greater class cohesion than middle or lower class citizens; therefore the elite can focus their agenda-setting power more effectively to direct society’s culture and ideology (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996).

### **Media Studies and Elite Theory**

Nesbitt Larking (2001) explains that this elite group, that includes major media owners, is seen to employ the media as a vehicle of propaganda to impose dominant ideals on the masses. The symbolic world is crafted through these dominant elite messages. The audience is seen to have little agency to critically evaluate or potentially reject these messages. Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman (1988) propose ‘the propaganda model’ to criticize the power of the elite. The model is based on the contention that the elite are able to “fix the premises of discourse, to decide what the general populace is allowed to see, hear and think about, and to ‘manage’ public opinion by regular propaganda campaigns” (p. xi). Simply, elite theorists criticize a social structure that allows power to reside fully and completely in the hands of the uppermost executive positions in economic, political and social realms.

Although Nesbitt-Larking (2001) draws out the class conflict that is the core of elite theory, he fails to draw applicable strands of classical Marxist thought into the debate that would provide a full context to this discussion.<sup>52</sup> Marxist ideology is a common component in elite theory used by Clement (1975), Chomsky and Herman (1988), and Ralph Miliband (1969). Their work is inspired by the concepts developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1970) – particularly the base-superstructure metaphor. In very simplistic terms, this concept explains that the economy is considered the base of society on which ideology (the superstructure) is built. Working from this overarching societal explanation, they further argue that class ownership of the means of production brings with it the means of mental production (media messages). The other classes (subordinates) that do not have power over material production are subject to those messages and accept them through false consciousness (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996).

Elite theory further argues that the media have little independent power – they are “organically inseparable from elites.” (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996, p. 232). Economic and political elites all work towards the same ideological goals. Miliband (1969) argues that:

there is nothing particularly surprising about the character and role of the mass media in advanced capitalist society. Given the economic and political context in which they function, they cannot fail to be, predominantly, agencies for the dissemination of ideas and values which affirm rather than challenge existing patterns of power and privilege, and thus to be weapons in the arsenal of class domination (p. 236).

Working from this expanded understanding of elite theory, we can see how brash media owners in a concentrated Canadian media industry have given recent popular support to the elite theory approach. Israel (Izzy) Asper, one of the country’s largest media owners, owns 14 television outlets (11 on the Global network and three CH local channels) and 13 newspapers (11 metropolitan and two small market dailies) through his CanWest Global Communication Corporation (“Overview: Publishing,” n.d.). He is also the former leader of Manitoba’s Liberal Party and a close friend of Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien. With a net worth of \$614 million, Asper can be considered a

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<sup>52</sup> Nesbitt-Larking discusses Marxist theory in his third theoretical category – critical thought. He appears to be trying to separate elite theory and Marxist critical theory. His reason for this separation is unclear. This may simply be an attempt at simplification and compartmentalization.

member of the media elite within the corporate elite (“100 Wealthiest,” 2003).<sup>53</sup> Through his media corporation, elite theorists would argue that Asper has the power and responsibility to broadcast and publish media content that best meets the objectives of the elite class.

This power and control, according to Lawrence Martin (2001), resulted in him being fired from his position as national columnist for Southam News by the Asper family in 2001. Previous to his firing, Martin was investigating and writing about Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chretien’s ethical conduct surrounding his sale of shares in the Grand Mere golf club and a subsequent loan request with a Crown corporation to assist the same golf course. Martin claims that the cooperation of elites, being Asper and Chretien, resulted in his dismissal. Martin recalled that:

one of my bosses told me that every time I wrote something strongly negative about Mr. Chretien, the Prime Minister’s Office was on the phone to David Asper. Thinking this was all quite exaggerated, I was about to place it in my burgeoning b.s. file when another superior told me the same thing... Most people assumed then that the primary reason was my reporting on Shawinigate (p. A17).

Elite theory scholars would criticize Martin’s firing as an example of members of the media and political elite supporting each other to limit diversity of viewpoints and shape the symbolic world to their own advantage.

Further evidence of elite cohesion can be seen with an examination of CanWest’s board of directors, which demonstrates complex corporate elite relations. The Honourable Frank McKenna, the former Liberal premier of New Brunswick, also sits on the board of directors for the Bank of Montreal, General Motors Canada, Noranda, Marsh Canada, Zenon and Shoppers Drug Mart (“Board of Directors,” n.d.). Jalynn H. Bennett, president of Jalynn H. Bennett and Associates, also sits on the board of directors for Sears Canada, Bombardier, CIBC and the Ontario Power Generation Company (Church, 2002). Lord Conrad Black of Crossharbour also sits on the board of directors for Brascan Limited and CIBC in addition to a directorship with Sotheby’s Holdings and ownership of Hollinger

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<sup>53</sup> This ranks him as the seventh wealthiest communications/media titan in Canada and the 44<sup>th</sup> wealthiest individual or family in the nation (“Rankings by,” 2003).

International Inc. (Hollinger, 2003).<sup>54</sup> These close business relationships at the highest levels of the capitalist structure will most often reinforce shared objectives to promote corporate liberal philosophies, according to elite theorists (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996).

The Asper example illustrates the intimate relations between political, economic and media powerbrokers that form Canada's elite. This, however, is not an isolated set of relationships. Similar webs of corporate cooperation and participation can be drawn with Canada's other media elite: Ted Rogers (President and CEO of Rogers Communication), Michael Sifton Jr. (President and CEO of Osprey Media Group), the Irving family (The Irving Group in New Brunswick) and Paul Desmarais (Chairman of the Executive Committee of Power Corporation of Canada).<sup>55</sup> Clement (1975) would assert that there are high expectations that each of these members will exhibit "elite solidarity, cohesiveness, coordination and consciousness of kind" (p. 5) when directing the production of media products. As such, these media titans are common examples used in elite theory arguments to criticize the concentrated elite ownership and control of Canada's media institutions.

Some Canadian media industry spokespeople argue the Canadian media elite no longer hold significant power because the Canadian newspaper industry is now more diversified than at any other point in recent Canadian history (Elliott, 2002; Davis, 2002). Only three years ago, Conrad Black owned 60 of 107 newspapers in Canada. Today, Osprey Media Group is the largest newspaper owner with 22 publications, followed by SunMedia (15), CanWest (13), Hollinger and GTC Transcontinental (10 each) and Power (7) ("Ownership of," 2003) The spokespeople assert that this ownership diversification

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<sup>54</sup> Black owned over half of Canada's daily newspapers in 1998. At that point, many media workers and scholars saw him as the poster child of the media elite. For further study on Black, see Siklos (1995); Barlow and Winter (1997); Miller (1998); Wells (1996); Winter (1997); Desbarats (1999).

<sup>55</sup> Desmarais is another media titan example used by elite theory scholars. His Power Corporation is a Fortune 500 company (432<sup>nd</sup> in 2001) with a publishing wing (Gesca Limitee) which controls 50.4 percent of French language newspapers in Canada (Campaign for Press and Broadcast Freedom, 2003). Desmarais is renowned for cut cutting and profit maximizing while still using his papers as a federalist mouthpiece in Quebec's continuing sovereignty debate. He was a mentor and former employer of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney. Desmarais' son is married to Prime Minister Jean Chretien's daughter. It is said Pierre Trudeau's Liberal leadership campaign was hatched in Power Corporation's boardroom (Winter, 1997). Peter C. Newman (1993) states, "no businessman in Canadian history has ever had more influence and more extended influence with Canadian Prime Ministers than Desmarais" (p. 14). He is also seen as an establishment man. Winter (1997) comments that, "Desmarais is fondly known by senior management as 'Le Patron' and is the patriarch of the French-Canadian business community" (p. 49).

will provide more media access for a diverse range of voices in the news (Elliott, 2002; Davis, 2002).

This argument misses the most important point of elite theory. The cost of media ownership restricts control to an elite few individuals. Whether it is two or 10 owners, those that can afford the means of production remain committed to supporting each other (Clement, 1975).

### **Challenger Groups and Elite Theory**

Elite theory assumes the existence of ‘structural domination’ that makes actions by opposition groups appear largely futile. Challenger groups are seen as part of the subordinate masses that lack agency to react with force or determination against the dominant social groups. Nesbitt-Larking (2001) further explains that:

unlike liberal-pluralist theory, elite theory does not subscribe to the notion of a broad, unified, and equal culture or to an open state. The culture is divided into a huge agglomeration of largely impotent masses who are manipulated, by a tiny coterie of determined and ruthless men, who occasionally rotate in their possession of near absolute power, but who always dominate” (p. 91).

Accordingly, Ryan (1991) argues that elite theory does not consider long-term media access for challenger groups a realistic possibility. If a challenger group achieves prominent media access, it is likely to be very conditional, marginal and not longstanding. Similar conclusions are made by Herman and Chomsky (1988). They explain that the media, “permit – indeed, encourage – spirited debate, criticism, and dissent, as long as these remain faithfully within the system of presuppositions and principles that constitute an elite consensus” (p. 302). In other words, challenger groups can find points of media access only during moments of elite disagreement. These moments are most often infrequent and short lived.

Individual media workers that endorse challenger groups that conflict with the elite consensus are most often reprimanded or outright fired and replaced with more ideologically cooperative employees. David Radler, former president of Conrad Black’s Hollinger company, once stated, “I am ultimately the publisher of all of these papers, and

if editors disagree with us, they should disagree with us when they're no longer in our employ” (Newman, 1992, p. 68).

James Travers, former editor of the Ottawa Citizen, argues he was fired as punishment for encouraging progressive or Left-centre perspectives in 1996. “There was some room for differences of opinion that would make it difficult to continue in a job like this... on social policy issues, I think we are quite far to the left of Mr. [Conrad] Black’s point of view” (quoted in Mahood, 1996, p. A6). Black shifted the Citizen’s moderate Right-wing position to a “strident champion of neoconservatism” under newly installed editor Neil Reynolds (Barlow and Winter, 1996, p. 11-2). The argument follows that those who remain in the newsroom that are personally sympathetic to challenger groups will most likely adopt a personal policy of self-censorship to maintain employment and potential career advancement. In the end, elite theorists believe the media can be a very closed environment to challenger groups.

Elite theory is a popular and convenient explanation for challenger groups that face continuing struggles for media access. It provides a face and a reason for media censorship. It also provides a villain to direct frustration, advertiser boycotts and community protests. However, elite theory does not provide a full explanation to the points of access that challenger groups can or have managed to capture. Nesbitt-Larking (2001) contends that elite theory has “a superficial attractiveness” (p. 93). It is a simplistic and easy-to-grasp reason to explain the barriers faced by challenger groups; however the true nature of the media environment and barriers to access are much more complex. Ryan (1991) concurs and describes elite theory as an “overdeterministic” model (p. 15). The theory removes too much agency from the public, reporters, and challenger groups. It also overestimates the ability of owners to fully control every aspect of their multinational corporations.

There are four arguments that further outline the weakness in elite theory. First, most owners want to maximize profits. Meeting the needs of their revenue sources, audience and advertisers, may not always mesh with the voice of the elite (Nesbitt-Larking, 2001) Hackett (1991) explains, “newspapers perceived to be ‘objective’ are more likely to attract mass readership than those seen as expressions of owners’ biases”



(pp. 63-64). In addition, expenses in the news operation need to be kept to a minimum. Hackett (1991) contends media workers will likely work more efficiently with relative autonomy in their daily reporting routines than if ownership is consistently supervising, reviewing and filtering each piece of news product. Direct elite control of the news product to ensure challenger groups are not given media access can lead to fiscally irresponsible actions. Accordingly, profit maximization requires owners to work from a mostly hands-off approach, which circumvents the mechanics of elite control.

Second, ownership cannot completely control the production of media products. Although a level of self-censorship likely exists, there is still a strong resolve with media workers to maintain journalistic integrity and conventions in most newsrooms. There remains “a widespread expectation that standards of objectivity, balance, fairness and impartiality will be followed” (Nesbitt-Larking, 2001, p. 93). Challenger groups may be able to find points of access with some reporters by appealing to these conventions.

Another rebuttal to the claims of elite theory scholars is the observation that media owners do not even seem willing to stifle all critical media industry debate within their own publications. The major Canadian newspapers have even employed media industry reporters – Keith Damsell at The Globe and Mail, Antonia Zerbisias at the Toronto Star and Matthew Fraser<sup>56</sup> at the National Post – who are often critical of ownership interference. Furthermore, when serious episodes of ownership interference have occurred in the past, media workers (sometimes promoting media reform issues) have been given media space to voice their opposition (although most often with competing publications) (McCarthy and Sallott, 2002; Martin, 2002; Mills, 2002). This example contradicts claims by elite theorists that the media content is controlled and fully determined by those who own the means of production.

Finally and most disruptive to elite theory principles, direct elite control of media production is simply not necessary to disseminate dominant ideologies and marginalize challenger groups. Cultural forces and practices that are intrinsic to the media process will often disseminate cultural frames that benefit elites without their direct involvement (Hall, 1982; Nesbitt-Larking, 2001; Magder, 1989). This is the contention of the third

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<sup>56</sup> Interestingly, Fraser was promoted to the post of Editor-in-Chief of the National Post in May 2003. There is no evidence that a new media columnist has been assigned to the beat.

model of media studies, critical theory, which includes work from a Marxist background but is able to accommodate cultural forces.

### **Elite Theory: Conclusion**

Elite theory seems incomplete. While the media can be seen as a tool to disseminate neo-liberal views to the general public, elite theory seems far too over-deterministic in claiming that the elite will be able to shut out nearly all challenger perspectives. There is a clear site of struggle within corporate-owned media for which the elite theory cannot account.

### ***Critical Theory***

These considerations for power, culture<sup>57</sup> and ideology are found in Nesbitt-Larking's third media theory – the critical model. Golding and Murdock (1996) explain that the critical approach, in the broadest possible terms, “draws for its analysis on a critique, a theoretically informed understanding, of the social order in which communication and cultural phenomena are being studied” (p. 12). Golding and Murdock further state that it is most often identified as a Marxist or neo-Marxist approach that investigates the dynamic and problematic features of late capitalism. Critical theory's central concern is the power relations (ideology) within the action and structure of communication. This is meant to discern the real constraints that shape the lives of each individual citizen.

Critical theory can be further understood in a simple comparison to elite and liberal-pluralist theories. In contrast to the liberal-pluralist model, critical theory is unwilling to ignore the ideological workings of modern western capitalism (Golding and Murdock, 1996; Curran, 1990). “North American society is stratified... the ruling group has interests in common that separate them from, and put them in potential opposition to, the majority of the population” (Hackett, 1991).

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<sup>57</sup> ‘Culture’ is a commonly contested term. For the purposes of this thesis, I will borrow from Hall (1980) to define culture as “the sum of the available descriptions through which societies make sense of and reflect their common experiences” (p. 59).

In contrast to elite theory, critical theory is unwilling to accept the argument that elite members of society must overtly shape the content of their media product to reinforce neo-liberal ideologies (Hall, 1982; Nesbitt-Larking, 2001; Magder, 1989). On a theoretical continuum of media access, critical theory can be seen to fit between elite theory and liberal-pluralism.

### **Ideology and Critical Theory**

Ideology is a central concern in critical theory and deserves immediate attention to develop a basic understanding of a root principle of this theoretical approach.<sup>58</sup> In the discussion of elite theory, Thompson's (1990) definition of ideology was stated (in the footnote) as "ways in which meaning serves... to establish and sustain relations of power which are systematically asymmetrical – what I shall call 'relations of domination.' Ideology, broadly speaking, is meaning in the service of power" (p. 7). A second definition from Samuel Becker (1984) provides further context to Thompson's definition. Becker states that ideology, "governs the way we perceive our world and ourselves; it control what we see as 'natural' and 'obvious'" (p. 69).

Accordingly, dominant social groups that are able to promote self-serving common cultural themes, which are easily accepted as common sense by the general population, earn power. Their dominant cultural themes are used to guide society in the direction that best fits their vision for the entire social structure. I agree with Shoemaker and Reese (1996) when they suggest, "ideas have links to interests and power and that the power to create symbols is not a neutral force. Not only is news about the powerful, but it structures stories so that events are interpreted from the perspective of powerful interests" (p. 224). According to Marxian theory, it is the dominant classes that own the means of production that have the best means available to promote their vision to the masses.

The Glasgow University Media Group (1976) provides an excellent example of how ideology is presented in daily news content. They demonstrated that labour unions receive the heaviest burden of responsibility for contract disputes. While corporate

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<sup>58</sup> Ideology is also a vital function of elite theory; however its contribution to my discussion on critical theory makes it a more valuable point of discussion at this point in the chapter.

management is scripted in the news to present 'offers', labour proposals are termed 'demands.' This is a simple demonstration of uneven power assignment that is accepted by journalists and their audience without mass complaints to this unbalanced terminology.<sup>59</sup> The media have the ideological power to define the day-to-day observations and perceptions of the world to a mass readership or viewership.

One of the most common ways that the media determine what is and what is not going to match the cultural symbols of the dominant ideology is their treatment of sources. Sources are often treated as heroes or villains to the status-quo. Dan Hallin (1989), in his review of media coverage of the Vietnam War, divided a reporter's understanding of issues and sources into three ideologically established regions: sphere of consensus, sphere of legitimate controversy and sphere of deviance. The sphere of consensus encompasses ideologically accepted themes that are not regarded as controversial. Reporters and their audience do not see any need for debate by opposing positions on basic social standards.

The sphere of legitimate controversy is the realm where issues recognized by dominant social groups are debated. In the United States, Hallin (1989) explains "the limits of this sphere are defined between and within the Democratic and Republican parties – as well as by the decision-making process in the bureaucracies of the executive branch" (p. 116). Reform-oriented challenger groups would also likely work within this sphere; however this does not mean that a challenger group and a Republican senator would garner the same media access. Hallin (1989) does note that each sphere has "internal gradations and the boundaries between them are often fuzzy" (p. 117). The messages from challenger groups would likely be subservient to the dominant social groups because the former lack ties to dominant social groups.

The sphere of deviance is the realm where reporters and dominant political or social classes reject political actors with perspectives that are outside and opposed to the dominant ideology. This is likely the terrain that revolutionary or counter-hegemonic groups would tread. Their media access is denied because they are seen "as unworthy of

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<sup>59</sup> This example was borrowed from Shoemaker and Reese (1996).

being heard” (Hallin, 1989, p. 117). Accordingly, the power within ideology has great value to determine the voices that are heard with favourable representation.

An understanding of the value and power of ideology leads to three very important questions. Who has control over the selection of cultural symbols? How are those symbols generated and distributed? And what does this mean for media access for challenger groups? Divergent intellectual histories have been taken within the critical model to answer these questions. I will study two theoretical camps here – cultural studies and critical political economy.<sup>60</sup>

### **Critical Theory: Critical Political Economy**

The general tenets of critical political economy are built upon similar Marxian strands drawn out in my previous elite theory discussion. Critical political economy remains focused on processes of modern capitalist economies derived from the base-superstructure metaphor and the class relations perspective. Golding and Murdock (1996) explain that this critical version of political economy is the study of “general economic dynamics and the wider structures they sustain” (p. 14) used to explain the interdependence of power relations, ideology and situations. In contrast to elite theory, modern critical political economy is much less associated with the direct, intentional production of false consciousness and more interested in the reproduction of accepted norms within a larger cultural sphere.

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<sup>60</sup> I have purposely avoided a discussion on critical structuralism, which is often identified as the third branch of critical theory. Golding and Murdock (1996) advise avoiding this line of study when investigating “how particular micro-contexts are shaped by general economic dynamics and the wider structures they sustain” and “the ways that communicative activity is structured by the unequal distribution of material and symbolic resources.” (p. 14). They suggest structuralism does not consider changing environments or relationships. Instead, this branch of critical theory sees all relationships as “building-like edifices, solid, permanent and immovable” (p. 15). Its textual focus also precludes social context and changes in the social environment.

## Critical Theory: Media Studies and Critical Political Economy

Political economists working from a critical perspective have expanded their vision of communication in recent decades to roam outside the restrictive traditional dimensions of labour and class relations.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, they remain wedded to traditional political economy that is “preoccupied with the multifaceted ways in which culture is produced and structured as a result of dynamic imperatives to commodification” (Mosco, 1996, p. 252).

Curran (2002) explains one of the reasons for this recent deviation from elite (instrumental political economy) theory was the inability of scholars to support the notion that ideologically formulated work produced by reporters was directly and intentionally controlled to a significant degree through “pre-selection, socialization and managerial supervision” (p. 113). Instead, most have concluded that media workers have relative autonomy in most media organizations. Curran suggests political economists have redirected their focus to external rather than internal forms of control. They have started to direct more attention to wider cultural and ideological influences. Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reese (1996) further explain that:

the political economy approach need not mean that the media simply reproduce the prevailing ideas of their owners. More recently, many within this perspective have rejected the orthodox Marxist view of the media as mere channels of dominant ideology, arguing that the media are sites of struggle between rival ideologies<sup>62</sup> (pp. 230-231).

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<sup>61</sup> The degree of change and historical chronology of this shift is debated – particularly among Britain’s most recognised political economy scholars. See Mosco (1996) for a general review of the debate between Curran and his proposed ‘new revisionism’ and Golding and Murdock’s rejection of his conclusions within the field of political economy of communication.

<sup>62</sup> This comment of competing ideologies likely reflects the cultural studies notion of hegemony that will be discussed later in this chapter. I suspect that Shoemaker and Reese’s comment refers not to the competition of all ideologies; but most often the competition of ideologies held by competing factions of the dominant class that exercise social and cultural leadership. This comment also reflects the difficulty to clearly separate cultural studies and critical political economy, particularly within the space constraints of this short chapter. I will attempt to clearly separate the two approaches, but Mosco (1996) offers a much more in-depth discussion of the broader lines that exist between them.

## **Critical Theory: Challenger Groups and Critical Political Economy**

Critical political economists see the door to media access nearly closed to challenger groups. Increasing shareholder expectations, potential takeover bids and the uncertainty of technological innovations has recently accelerated economic pressures to cut staff, encourage infotainment and limit investigative reporting resources. This has been described as 'cultural commodification' or 'commercial culture.' News product is produced not for a higher cultural propose; rather it is created in exchange for advertiser and audience revenue.<sup>63</sup> The argument follows that neo-liberal ideological news stories and newsmakers are not manufactured; rather they become integrated into the current neo-liberal political environment driven by capitalism as status-quo, non-controversial and non-mobilizing perspectives. Consequently, they are given media access to avoid displeasing these revenue sources (advertisers and audience) (Golding and Murdock, 1996; Bogart, 1995).

Alternative challenger-funded media institutions are also rejected by critical political economists as infeasible. Herman and Robert McChesney (1997) argue the future potential of challenger group supported Internet sites making the jump into the mainstream seems unlikely. They point to aggressive investments made by established media companies that can dominate new cultural industries through their economies-of-scale advantage. Traditional forms of media, including radio, television and newspapers, sponsored by challenger groups are also seen as nearly impossible to develop on a mass distribution scale.

Such arguments may be over-deterministic in an age of alternative distribution routes and affordable publishing formats. Some challenger groups have already succeeded in producing community zines, free bi-weekly publications and Internet news magazines. Popular Internet sites, [rabble.ca](http://rabble.ca), [Straightgoods.com](http://Straightgoods.com) and [Indymedia.org](http://Indymedia.org),<sup>64</sup> have become sites of publication resistance to economic media barriers determined very difficult to pass by critical political economists. In particular, [Rabble.ca](http://Rabble.ca) has become one

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<sup>63</sup> There is an important side argument in this field touted by Dallas Symthe. He argued that it was the audience that was being commodified for sale to advertisers. A media product was seen as part of the manufacturing process – a free lunch (Hackett, 1991).

<sup>64</sup> For further study on the [indymedia.org](http://indymedia.org) success, see Uzelman (2002).

of Canada's most successful Internet ventures. Championed by Canadian social activist Judy Rebick, *rabble.ca* reports that it averages six million hits and more than 70,000 visitors per month ("About us," n.d.).

Newspapers also present an opportunity for challenger groups. While it is true that Canada currently lacks a Left-of-centre supported newspaper; it is over-deterministic to assume that this achievement can never be accomplished. In the United Kingdom, The Guardian has prospered with clear leanings to the Left. In Sweden, the government has tax exemptions that encourage newspaper competition from a wide spectrum of ideological perspectives in print. In Canada, challenger groups have been brainstorming methods to enter the media marketplace. One proposed by Don LePan, president of Calgary's Broadview Press, is particularly promising and creative. He suggests creating a new, national weekly newspaper that would be an eight to twelve page insert in free, community weeklies across the country. Revenue would be collected from advertising and its staff would be broadly Left-of-centre with centrist and the occasional Right-of-centre voice. LePan calculates the start-up cost would be well under one million dollars. (quoted in Valpy, 2001). This proposal and many others have not yet been realized, but it is overly deterministic to assume that a successful attempt is impossible.

Critical political economy also fails to fully consider that economic pressures to publish non-controversial and non-mobilizing content are not absolute within the currently established mainstream press. Canada's highest circulating newspapers still have reporters and columnists that hold social democratic political perspectives and are publicly supportive of challenger groups. This list includes Michael Valpy (Globe and Mail), Rick Salutin (Globe and Mail), Naomi Klein (Globe and Mail), Thomas Walkom (Toronto Star), Michele Landsberg (Toronto Star) and Linda McQuaig (Toronto Star). Valpy ran in the 2000 federal election (Toronto's Trinity-Spadina) for the NDP and returned to his old job as a columnist after finishing second to Liberal Tony Ianno. Valpy (2001) notes, "I like to think that means my journalism meets the standards of *The Globe and Mail*. It also means *The Globe and Mail* has allowed me – in periodic large chunks – a voice to create a narrative of events" (p. 65). Economic constraints may limit editorial diversity, but they have not shut the door completely to opposing perspectives.



In summary, critical political economy argues that capitalist-driven economic objectives push the news media to reinforce the status-quo that is currently very accepting of neo-liberalism. Nevertheless, some of the aforementioned evidence does allow for some contested terrain and challenger group media access either within the publications currently being distributed or through a new, challenger-sponsored publication.

### **Critical Theory: Cultural Studies**

The other major strand of critical theoretical exploration is cultural studies. This discipline began to develop in the late 1950s and early 1960s in the United Kingdom. Three scholars are credited with the founding works: E.P. Thompson, Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart. Peter Dahlgren (1997), in his historical review of cultural studies, explains that “all, in very different ways, contributed to the conceptualizing of culture as a feature of the lived practices of everyday life, which needed to be understood in political terms” (p. 50). The University of Birmingham is credited with nurturing the new theory (led by Hoggart then Hall) and today cultural studies is employed by scholars across the world to explore diverse subject matters (Dahlgren, 1997). All of these scholars see culture as the vehicle of influence, not the individual actions of society’s elite (instrumental political economy) or the economic bottom line (critical political economy).

Curran et al. (1982), in the broadest possible terms, explain that this theory seeks to explain how social forces define issues and significance within an arena of ideological struggle. It also seeks to explain how ideology is transmitted through culture, rather than simply economic mechanisms, to guide the belief system of the general public.

Moving from a general definition of cultural studies to a more refined understanding, Hall (1980) offers a helpful overview statement:

Cultural studies conceptualizes culture as inter-woven with all social practices; and those practices, in turn, as a common form of human activity; sensuous human praxis, the activity through which men and women make history. It is opposed to the base-superstructure way of formulating the relationship between ideal and material forces, especially, where the base is defined by the determination by the economic in any simple sense. It prefers the wider formulation – the dialectic between social being and social consciousness ... It defines ‘culture’ as both the

means and values which arise amongst distinctive social groups and classes, on the basis of their given historical conditions and relationships, through which they handle and respond to the conditions of existence: and as the lived traditions and practises through which those understandings are expressed and in which they are embodied (p. 63).

Cultural studies theorists argue that it is the dominant classes that remain best able to define the 'means and values' of culture. Most often it is their capitalist, neo-liberal values that are moulded into the common sense and common culture. Unlike the economic determinism of critical political economy or the instrumental manipulation of elite theory, the power of the dominant classes does not seem as apparent in cultural studies. But how can the minority of the population (elites) have control over the development of culture and the active participation by the majority that do not benefit from it?

Cultural studies theorists turn to Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony to explain. John Hartley (1994) summarizes that hegemony:

...refers principally to the ability in certain historical periods of the dominant classes to exercise social and cultural leadership, and by these means – rather than by direct coercion of subordinate classes – to maintain their power over the economic, political and cultural direction of the nation. The crucial aspect of the notion of hegemony is not that it operates by forcing people against their conscious will or better judgement to concede power to the already powerful, but that it describes a situation whereby our consent is actively sought for those ways of making sense of the world which 'happen' to fit in with the interests of the hegemonic alliance of classes, or power bloc (p. 133).

The consent that is sought by the dominant classes is rarely, if ever, challenged. Hackett (1991) outlines four functions that hegemonic ideology uses to win consent for the existing social order. First, it seeks to reduce class tension by explaining it as merely "differences of cultural or individual intelligence" (p. 57). Second, dominant relations are naturalized and transformed into common sense worldviews. Third, important social relations are ignored or marginalized. And finally, "hegemonic ideology generalizes the particular into the universal, or the partial into the whole. In other words, particular interests of the dominant class are translated as the universal interests of the whole society and partial 'truths' are taken as complete descriptions of the whole" (p. 57). Together,

these functions simplify for the general public a very complex world into concepts and ideas that benefit the dominant groups of society.

Gitlin (1980) is quick to point out that hegemony is not a static explanation of societal power. He explains that while all individuals in society use hegemony to make sense of the world, they also “stretch, dispute and sometimes struggle to transform the hegemonic ideology” (p. 10). For hegemony to exist, it must be willing to adapt. The theory holds that different dominant social groups with different ideological strategies and desires consistently contest power. The top institutions often find their influence strengthened through coalitions and by modifying their visions with popular trends. The ebb and flow to hegemony allows it to remain relevant and demobilizes alternative concepts of power, according to Gitlin (1980).

### **Critical Theory: Media Studies and Cultural Studies**

The media (producers and distributors of mass culture) are a vital member of any hegemonic coalition. The media’s institutions, ownership, structure and personnel have been developed and work within a culture supportive of market liberal principles. “No one has to tell anyone in the media to reproduce the dominant ideas and ideals; the idea of acting counter to the prevailing belief systems simply does not occur to most agents in the media” (Nesbitt-Larking, 2001, p. 95). This is the key to success for the dominant ideology. It must fit the prevailing culture to remain unchallenged.

### **Critical Theory: Challenger Groups and Cultural Studies**

Hegemony not only reinforces dominant ideologies, it also corrupts messages that are offered by challenger groups. Hackett (1991) explains that, “it makes them appear dangerous, unrealistic, or unreasonable, or even renders them unthinkable from within the established maps of reality” (p. 57).

Gitlin (1980) produced a landmark critical media study on the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and their struggle with hegemonic barriers to gain consistent

media access. He concludes that hegemony leaves little room for oppositional voices. He states:

An opposition movement is caught in a fundamental, and inescapable dilemma. If it stands outside the dominant realm of discourse, it is liable to be consigned to marginality and political irrelevance; its issues are domesticated, its deeper challenge to the social order sealed off, trivialized, and contained. If, on the other hand, it plays by conventional political rules in order to acquire an image of credibility if, that is, its leaders are well-mannered, its actions are well-ordered, and its slogans specific and 'reasonable,' it is liable to be assimilated into the hegemonic political world view; it comes to be identified with narrow (if important) reform issues, and its oppositional edge is blunted.

This is the condition of movements in all the institutions of liberal capitalism; one major site of the difficulty lies within the mass media. By framing movements in all the ways I have tried to demonstrate, by excluding and by taming, the media reinforce one of the central rhythms of American political history. Opposition movements emerge but their radical identities weaken (p. 291).

Following Gitlin's (1980) reasoning, challenger groups that work within this conceptualized hegemonic structure (normally on the periphery) lack the power to control its direction. They are left in a position to offer "narrow reform issues" without any "oppositional edge" (p. 291). The media fail to give them serious and consistent media access because challenger groups lack the same power as dominant social groups to contest the ideological space within capitalist hegemony. Consequently, challenger groups have a much more difficult time shifting the media debate into their domain (Ryan, 1991).

However, cultural studies theory, as represented by Gitlin, is not without contradictions and question marks. Ryan (1991) argues that Gitlin's proclamation that challenger groups will always be marginalized or ignored by the media may be the weakest link in his cultural studies argument. Ryan (1991) asks: if it is true that challenger groups cannot achieve media access, how can we understand successful challenger group media campaigns? The work of Greenpeace and other environmental groups pushed for the Rio Summit and other 'green' economic and political policy changes.<sup>65</sup> The AIDS movement brought the disease and its stereotypes to the public's

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<sup>65</sup> For further study of Greenpeace's interactions with the media, see Dale (1996).

attention. Peace protests, particularly around the Vietnam and Iraq wars, have pressured governments to shift direction in foreign policy planning. The dominant groups that have power within the hegemonic structure did not champion these campaigns; yet these issues did land on the public agenda with agenda-setting power.

There is also a concern that cultural studies theorists have failed to fully consider the agency of challenger groups. This is another point of contention by Ryan (1991) in her critique of cultural studies.<sup>66</sup> She sees cultural studies as over-deterministic because the Gramscian concept fails to consider that challenger groups are active respondents that talk back to the media. Ryan states:

Gitlin's work does not generally deny the importance of agency, the potential of social actors to alter their conditions. Here, however, agency is underplayed. Overdetermination takes the form of highlighting how hegemony coopts social movements, but downplaying how social movements might erode a hegemonic world view (p. 21).

Furthermore, Ryan (1991) questions Gitlin's counter-hegemony conclusions that the only way challenger groups will be granted media access and social acceptance are through a revolutionary or radical change in ideology and power. Instead, Ryan stresses, "social movements – even weak, defensive ones – erode the system, contribute to a crisis, and generally weaken the status quo" (p. 21). Dominant social groups may have the upper hand, in Ryan's opinion, but they are not the only social and cultural leaders that maintain power, "over the economic, political and cultural direction of the nation" (Hartley, 1994, p. 133). If enough challenger groups can erode or shift the direction of the status quo, the media may be more willing to include their opinions and perspectives in published public debates.

Hackett (1991) offers similar optimism in the Canadian context. In his examination of the peace movement in Canada during the 1980s, he found hegemonic processes of the mainstream media did not always trivialize or ignore peace messages. He further asserts that:

the Canadian press does not simply denigrate political dissent and inhibit social change. Through contradictions within dominant ideology and

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<sup>66</sup> Ryan's discussion floats into critical political economy at times to reflect an overarching critique of critical studies.

official discourse, the structural needs of news organizations, and an independent streak in journalistic culture, the political and media systems themselves generate openings for dissent and change (p. 277).

### **Critical Studies: Conclusion**

Critical theory (cultural studies and critical political economy) provides another well-developed theoretical map to achieve greater understanding of the constraints imposed on challenger groups in their efforts to gain media access. I argue this map is able to balance political, economic, ideological and cultural factors better than elite theory and liberal-pluralism. Nevertheless, I believe that critical theory fails to map all aspects of the Canadian media environment. Critical theorists (critical political economy) often fail to fully clarify what happens when long-term dominant class perspectives and short-term economic goals conflict. Most support their arguments using an economic deterministic approach cannot be universally applied. Critical theory (cultural studies) also downplays agency and potential for challenger groups to chip away at the status-quo and potentially shape it more in accordance with their vision. It may be a handicapped battle, but I do not see it as a foregone conclusion. In summary, I agree with Ryan that critical theory does help us to understand the media, but it does so in an ‘over-deterministic’ manner.

### ***Conclusion***

This review of three media studies theories concludes that no theory can fully explain the complex nature of the Canadian media landscape. Critical and elite theories appear over-deterministic when suggesting that challenger groups will be nearly always denied access, while liberal-pluralism theory appears under-deterministic. Facing similar theoretical challenges, Ryan (1991) and Hackett (1991) chose to avoid narrowing their discussion into one incomplete theoretical lens. Instead, they move into their social movement investigations maintaining the right tension between constraints and possibilities. William Gamson (1991) applauded Ryan’s effort to balance “between structure and agency – between an overemphasis on constraints that leaves no room for people to make history and an overemphasis on agency that ignores the differences

between challengers and members of the polity” (p. xiii). Hackett (1991) also voices his reservations to a single theoretical approach in his examination of media access and the peace movement in the 1990s:

The pluralist model of an open and diversified media system does not correspond to the real world of power relations. On the other hand, I seek to avoid the determinism and pessimism implicit in much critical research. The media’s playing field is not a level one but sometimes it is possible to win playing uphill (p. 2).

Following their lead, I will move forward attempting to maintain a similar tension between ‘constraints and possibilities.’ However, due to time and space limitations, I will discard further discussion on elite (instrumental political economy) theory. This theory appears to be the weaker of the two Marxist class theories discussed and fails to consider too many characteristics (culture, audience expectations of objectivity, journalistic conventions and integrity) of the modern media system. Therefore, I will move forward balancing my discussions on studies of press influence in the following three chapters between liberal-pluralist and critical theory explanations. My approach can best be described as examining media filters through a qualified critical theory lens.

### **CHAPTER THREE: THE INDIVIDUAL MEDIA WORKER PRESS FILTER AND THE NDP**

The NDP is faced with an uphill battle to maintain social democratic worldviews in Canada's current political discourse. No question, a comprehensive press plan would be a key component in a party renewal strategy to respond to this challenge; however it is beyond the scope of this thesis to synthesize all possible constraints and possibilities into a press relations manifesto. Instead, my remaining chapters will build a 'foundation of understanding' based on where press barriers reside that may contribute to discriminatory press treatment of the NDP and where press openings exist from which a successful future NDP communication plan may be built.

To review, the first chapter explored what the NDP represents and why the NDP can be considered a 'challenger group'. The second chapter evaluated different theoretical approaches to media studies and adopted a qualified critical lens to help explain the relationship between challenger groups (including the NDP) and the Canadian media in today's current social, political, cultural and economic environment.

With the political and theoretical foundation set, I will now move forward using empirical and primary research to directly address my core research question: what barriers and openings to press access are afforded to the NDP? To answer this question, this chapter and following two chapters will identify different media filters, evaluate them through a qualified critical theory lens, and draw conclusions on their influence in the context of press access for the NDP.

The basic framework for this evaluation will be borrowed from Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reese's (1996) text Mediating the Message. They argue that while the majority of news analysis examines how media content (independent variable) influences the public (dependent variable), more attention is need on factors from inside and outside the newsroom (independent variable) that influence the production of news content (dependent variable). Building on the works of Gitlin (1979) and Herbert Gans (1980),



Shoemaker and Reese employ a five layer hierarchical model to examine news content determinants. The model situates the individual media worker level at the core, then expands outward with media routines, organization, extra-media and ideological levels. They explain that:

the level of analysis in communication research can be thought of as forming a continuum ranging from micro to macro – from the smallest units of a system to the largest.... These levels function hierarchically: what happens at a lower level is affected by, even to a large extent determined by, what happens at higher levels (pp. 11-12).

This chapter will discuss how the characteristics of individual press workers<sup>67</sup> can shape press content and what implications those influences have on the NDP's press access. The next two chapters will take similar approaches with increasingly higher levels of influence: journalists' work routines (chapter four), and organizational structure and extra-media factors (chapter five).

The fifth and most overarching media filter discussed by Shoemaker and Reese (1996) is ideology. Instead of following Shoemaker and Reese's framework and separating discussions of ideology from the other four levels of media influence, I elected to discuss ideological influences early in my thesis (chapter two<sup>68</sup>) and use those discussions as tools to analyze the impact of individual media workers, news routines, organizational structure and extra-media influences.

My framework will also differ from Shoemaker and Reese's (1996) model in two other significant ways. First, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to fully review all academic contributions at each level of their model. Instead, this chapter and the following chapters should be considered a streamlined or condensed version of their framework using only the most applicable and acclaimed works. Second, the framework

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<sup>67</sup> The terms 'press worker', 'media worker', 'journalist' and 'reporter' are common occupational labels used to describe employees of press institutions. For some media studies scholars, these terms have shared meaning; while for others there are clear differences in occupational responsibilities. For the purposes of clarity, I will borrow from David Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit (1991) to define 'journalists', 'media workers' and 'press workers' as newspaper employees, "who have editorial responsibility for the preparation or transmission of news stories or other information – all full-time reporters, writers, correspondents, columnists, newsmen and editors" (p. 168). The other term 'reporter' will be defined as a specific type of journalist. 'Reporters' can be defined as journalists who only structure their news stories around sourced information and do not intentionally express any personal bias.

<sup>68</sup> The chapter defined ideology, considered how it could be transmitted through culture to the general public and offered a model to explain the ways in which the news media maintain ideological boundaries.

will concentrate on the Canadian press system in contrast to Shoemaker and Reese's American focused efforts. Canadian authors, mainly working from political communication, cultural studies or political economy backgrounds, will be used when available to contribute to the debates. In addition, semi-structured interviews with NDP communication directors will be used to add further depth to discussions on NDP-press relations. With these alterations, my framework will work with the qualified critical theoretical lens (discussed in chapter two) to solidify an understanding of barriers and openings to NDP press access.

### ***Individual Media Worker Level***

The backbone of the Canadian press system is the journalist. They are the only employees that have the direct task of collecting information and producing news content. But who are these individuals that the press environment depends on? And how much influence do they have in the press production process? Furthermore, what implications do their actions have for the NDP? To answer these questions, I will break down an examination of journalists' characteristics into two different discussions pulled from the work of Shoemaker and Reese (1996): personal background and characteristics; and personal attitudes, values and beliefs.

### ***Background and Characteristics***

The Canadian newsroom has a very homogeneous composition. Comprehensive demographic surveys of Canadian journalists show that the average Canadian media worker is an upper-middle class, white male with approximately 15 years of experience and a university degree (Pritchard and Sauvageau, 1998; Bergen, 1987). For the NDP, a party that sponsors policies that represent the underrepresented, this raises the possibility of conflicting worldviews with journalists – making it difficult to identify and cooperate with each other. For this reason, I will explore three striking areas of inequality within the newsroom (gender, race and income status) and draw conclusions of the potential impact on press access for the NDP.

John Miller (1994) found in 1993 that racial diversity in Canadian newsrooms was nearly nonexistent. Working with the Canadian Newspaper Association (CNA)'s Diversity Committee, Miller concluded that only 2.6 percent (or 67 of 2,620) of professional press jobs were held by non-whites.<sup>69</sup> Miller complained that this was a clear underrepresentation of Canadian minorities and contrasted his results with the 1991 Canadian federal census that reported visible minorities accounted for 13.2 percent of the population. These simple numbers demonstrated a resounding discrepancy in representation – only one-fifth of minorities were being properly represented in Canadian journalism.

Miller (1994) further noted that there did not seem to be any efforts by the press industry to rebalance racial representation in the newsroom. He noted that in 1993, forty-seven reporting jobs were filled in Canada but only three hires were non-white individuals. Diversity also ranked nineteenth out of twenty-one issues facing the newspaper industry in a 1993 CNA publisher's poll. Four years later, Miller (1998) still failed to see any progress in hiring policies. He comments:

If newspapers want to hire minorities, they're going to have to take down the 'Do not apply here' signs. Unfortunately, that's not going to happen soon in Canada. Even though minorities are so poorly represented in newsrooms that they can scarcely be counted, editors say there's nothing they can do about it (p. 134).

Miller (1998) concludes that the lack of racial diversity is overwhelming in Canadian newsrooms<sup>70</sup>; yet editors, managers and owners refuse to take serious issue with this apparent racial segregation.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, 16 of the 41 newspapers surveyed did not even employ a single minority journalist. In terms of power and authority in the newsroom, only 10 of the 41 newspapers sampled had non-white supervisors (Miller, 1994).

<sup>70</sup> This disparity is not isolated in Canada. In the United States, the American Society of Newspaper Editors reported that 12.07 percent of American journalists had minority backgrounds in 2002 ("Newsroom Employment," 2002). This is only a slight improvement from 10 percent in 1993 (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996) and the 2002 representation count still represents less than half of the American minority population that stands at 24.9 percent ("USA Quick," 2002).

<sup>71</sup> Federico Barahona (2000) offers further support to Miller's findings. In 2000, Barahona conducted an independent qualitative follow-up study to Miller's CNA research. He found that few newspapers and no national organizations have made any effort to correct the racial imbalance in the newsroom since Miller's 1994 recommendations were submitted to the CNA.

Personal income is another indicator of a disconnect between journalists and the general public. David Pritchard and Florian Sauvageau (1998) found in 1995 that the average newspaper journalist made an annual income of \$58,185. That number corresponds with numbers gathered by Gertrude Robinson and Armande Saint-Jean (1998) in 1994. In a deeper breakdown of salaries, they found the lowest paid journalist position was the general beat reporter at a small circulation newspaper<sup>72</sup> who earned \$29,224. The same position at medium and large circulation<sup>73</sup> newspapers paid on average \$45,500 and \$46,020 respectively. Further up the journalism ladder, a star reporter at a large circulation newspaper makes on average \$60,216 a year while an assistant managing editor earns \$78,676.

If salaries have remained constant for the past decade, the average journalist's family (using Pritchard and Sauvageau's [1998] calculation) lives above the national family income average of \$55,016 ("Income of Canadian," 2003). Furthermore, this comparative calculation is made without any additional income from other family members. If there is a second wage earner in the family, an average journalist's family income would likely rise above three-fourths of the Canadian population.<sup>74</sup> Consequently, it is difficult to conclude that the majority of journalists live in the same economic and social conditions as the lower wage earners in the country.

Robinson and Saint-Jean also take issue with another gross imbalance in Canadian newsrooms – gender. Robinson (1981) authored a pioneer study on gender and the newsroom in 1974 that found women composed only 21 percent of the newsroom. A follow-up study by Robinson and Saint-Jean (1998) twenty years later found only limited progress had been made towards equal gender employment. Women accounted for only 28 percent of the newsroom in a study conducted in 1994 and 1995 (a 33 percent relative increase over 20 years). This is a far cry from the gains made in the United States where women increased their proportionate representation by 77 percent over the same time

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<sup>72</sup> Small circulation newspapers have a distribution of less than 50,000 copies daily. For example, the New Brunswick Telegraph Journal and Thunder Bay Chronicle-Herald.

<sup>73</sup> Medium circulation newspapers have a daily distribution of between 50,000 and 100,000 copies, while large circulation newspaper have over 100,000 copies distributed daily. For example, the Victoria Times Colonist and St. Catharines Standard are medium circulation papers, while large circulation newspaper would include the Vancouver Sun and Toronto Star.

<sup>74</sup> The top twenty percent of families make above \$91,972 ("Demographic Statistics," 2003).

period (from 22 to 39 percent). Canadian women also failed to earn any significant representation at the editor-in-chief position (from 10 percent in 1974 to 11 percent in 1994). Robinson and Saint-Jean (1998) are cautiously optimistic that the gender gap is slowly closing<sup>75</sup>, but admit, “women have still got a long way to go before they reach numerical and salary equality” (p. 370).

In the end, these focused studies on gender, income and race, along with broader Canadian surveys by David Pritchard and Florian Sauvageau (1998) and Bob Bergen (1987), provide strong evidence that the composition of the newsroom does not represent the demographics of the Canadian general population.

### **Implications for the press: Background and Characteristics**

The influence that gender, race and income inequity in the newsroom has on Canadian press content is uncertain. Scholars, it appears, have struggled to draw a consistent and direct empirical correlation. For example, Miller (1998) provides evidence of racial bias in Canadian newspapers to complement his racial workforce study, but he fails to demonstrate if or how the race of the journalist influences their reporting patterns. In fact, evidence of an empirical correlation seems to be a common omission in most work on race and media in Canada.<sup>76</sup>

There is however a critical argument that the dominant white, male, middle-upper class demographics of the newsroom will perpetuate a certain dominant worldview over all journalists. Karen Ross (2002) argues that women will often be more judgemental on feminist or minority issues to prove themselves in a male dominated environment. She states:

Women journalists often resort to even more macho reporting styles than their male colleagues as if to prove their professional mettle and, of course, in order to get their material past the sub-editor... Women journalists are often much more hostile in their reporting of women politicians than their

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<sup>75</sup> Robinson and St. Jean (1998) found some positive indicators of future gender equalization in their analysis. They pointed to mid-level newsroom positions that showed the proportion of women with the title of assistant managing editor improved from 11 to 22 percent while the day/night editor position jumped from eight to 28 percent.

<sup>76</sup> Such studies would likely require comparing newsrooms that have different compositions.

male counterparts, and many women represented in this study believe that women journalists are used deliberately by new producers to either disarm interviewees and thus encourage them to disclose more than they want, or else to write bitchy women-on-women pieces which are given a spurious authenticity because the journalists and politician share the same sex (p. 108).

Shoemaker and Reese (1996) and Stuart Allan (1999) come to the same conclusions from a slightly different perspective. They state that editors will often allow visible minorities to cover stories that have racial elements; however a high journalistic expectation is attached to the assignment that the canon of objectivity<sup>77</sup> is followed.

Objectivity, in this case, most often means the story should conform to hegemonic ideals and authoritative sources used by the newsroom's dominant class – white, male, upper-middle class reporters and editors. Allan (1999) further concludes that, “to achieve the aim of a truly integrated newsroom will require a far more profound change than that associate with affirmative action initiatives alone” (p. 182).

Shoemaker and Reese (1996) state another method that ensures that dominant social groups retain their worldviews in news content is the choice by editors not to assign minority issue stories to journalists with similar minority backgrounds. Some editors avoid such story assignments under the belief that minority reporters will act as advocates to their cause – an issue of conflict of interest. Shoemaker and Reese further explain:

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<sup>77</sup> Objectivity is often considered an influential professional value intended to help media workers meet organizational requirements and avoid offending their readers. According to Hackett and Yuezhi Zhao (1998), journalists see the definition of objectivity from a liberal-pluralist perspective as one or a combination of four possible meanings: the negation of journalist's subjectivity, the fair representation of each side in a controversy, balanced scepticism towards all sides in a dispute, and the search for hard facts that can contextualize a dispute.

Its influence on media content can be understood at two levels. First, it is a central journalistic code that strongly encourages reporters to consult multiple sources for accuracy of fact and some diversity of perspective at least on issues that are considered legitimately controversial. In the Canadian daily mass media market, most advertisers would likely not be interested in a publication with only a limited partisan circulation base (Hackett and Zhao, 1998).

Second, digging deeper into the code of objectivity from a critical perspective, “conservatizing tendencies” can be found. Hackett and Zhao (1998) argue that objective journalism constructs stories using accounts of reality provided by authoritative sources and common sense principles. “It just so happens that the sources who are most ‘appropriate’ – available, articulate, convenient, and apparently authoritative – are usually spokespersons or decision-makers in powerful institutions” (p. 142). Weighing both sides of the issue, it would appear that objectivity does help promote equitable media access as a journalistic goal; however journalists attempting to work towards this goal often ignore or marginalize newsmakers that they do not perceive as authoritative or promoting common sense ideals.

The implication...is that women might not be as objective as men... Yet does anyone ask whether men should be allowed to cover sports or war?... Does anyone ask if heterosexuals can cover heterosexual issues objectively? Does anyone ask if white reporters can cover stories about whites objectively? (p. 79).

One can conclude from these debates that dominant social group worldviews will most often be reinforced within newsrooms until a significant power bloc of minority reporters and editors can challenge the long established news frames used in the publication. However, it is also difficult to conclude the strength and frequency of this dominant social group bias without more conclusive empirical research.

### **Implications for the NDP: Background and Characteristics**

This social inclusion bias favouring dominant social groups may present a barrier to press access for the NDP because it has traditionally been very active in working for the under-represented. Three indicators, in particular, demonstrate their close association with women, low-income earners and minorities: policies, voting support and candidates/elected members.

The NDP's policies demonstrate its links to Canada's underrepresented. Federal party policies include campaigns for gender equity (as discussed in the previous chapter), equal rights to gay and lesbian families, first class health care for Canada's aboriginal community, improving benefits for the unemployed, eliminating child poverty, assistance to the east coast fishing industry, and equality for individuals with disabilities ("NDP on the Issues," n.d.). As a provincial example, the British Columbia NDP party while in power in the 1990s implemented policies that built social housing, raised the minimum income tax bracket, created pay equity and implemented heritage language programs at 150 grade schools ("The NDP decade," 2003). These examples demonstrate the NDP's social democratic policies benefit individuals that are regularly underrepresented in Canadian society.

Voter appeal also demonstrates in many cases that the NDP resonates stronger with subordinate groups. Andre Blais et al. (2002) in their review of voter preferences in the 2000 federal election found that the NDP in English Canada received 15 percent of the

female vote compared to men from which they received only nine percent voter support. This corresponds with the realignment thesis that argues that women have recently switched their vote from the Right to the Left of the political spectrum comparative to men. Lynda Erickson and Brenda O'Neill (2002) note this is a worldwide trend and clear evidence of the shift first appeared in the 1997 general election. They further explain that:

This new alignment, or the modern gender gap, is thought to be a consequence of the changes in gender roles characteristic of post-industrial societies. Changes such as the extraordinary growth in women's labour force participation and the increase in women's levels of education could contribute to more leftwing voting preferences among women when combined with factors such as the occupational segregation, lower pay rates and higher levels of public sector employment that women experience compared to men and which are still features of post-industrial societies. But gender role changes and the structural/situational factors that accompany them are also said to both cause and interact with changes in cultural values and dispositions (p. 375).

Polling by Ipsos-Reid in the past year also demonstrates that women more than men favour the NDP. In Ontario, if a provincial election were called 16 percent of women said they would vote NDP, while only 12 percent of men made the same claim ("Ontario Politics," 2003). In British Columbia, 32 percent of women would vote for the provincial NDP compared to 24 percent of men ("BC Liberals," 2003). And nationally, 27 percent of men felt the NDP, if elected to power, would do the worst overall job of any party, while only 17 percent of women held the same opinion ("Four in Ten," 2002). These polling results again demonstrate a clear gender divide in support for the NDP.

The same polling data also demonstrated stronger support for the NDP from lower income earners. In a poll that asked which federal party would do the worst overall job if elected, the NDP was the top choice for 27 percent of respondents making \$60,000 or more (high income earners), while only 16 percent of respondents with an income of less than \$30,000 (low income earners) selected the NDP ("Four in Ten," 2002). In both the British Columbia and Ontario election polls, low income earners selected their provincial NDP at 31 and 19 percent respectively, compared to 26 and 12 percent voter preference from high income earners ("Ontario Politics," 2003; "BC Liberals," 2003b). During the 1997 election, the bottom 20 percent of household income earners were more likely to vote for the NDP than the top 20 percent, according to Nevitte et al. (1997). Altogether,



these results again indicate that Canada's underrepresented are more supportive of the NDP.

It appears to be a different story for the ethnic minority vote. Although the NDP has policies that would appeal to ethnic minorities, voting and polling patterns do not demonstrate any significant responsive support. In the 2000 federal election, Blais et al. (2002) found voters with a non-European origin voted overwhelmingly for the Liberal Party (72 percent) while only nine percent voted for the NDP. According to Kenneth Carty, William Cross and Lisa Young (2002), this is a historical trend due in part to immigration and multiculturalism policies most often associated with the Liberal Party.

A third indicator of the NDP's support for the underrepresented is the selection of electoral candidates and leaders. Since 1963, the federal NDP has nominated the largest contingent of female candidates by a major political party in each general election ("Women of Canada," 2000).<sup>78</sup> Between 1965 and 1979, the party at least doubled the number of female candidates selected by the other major political parties. In 1993, the NDP nominated for election a record 113 women compared to 67 and 64 for the Progressive Conservatives and Liberal parties respectively. In the most recent election, the NDP had 107 female candidates compared to the Liberal government's 84 women ("Women of Canada," 2000).

Regarding leadership, the federal NDP has elected two women to the party's leadership post – Audrey McLaughlin (1989-1995, the first federal female leader in Canada) and Alexa McDonough (1995-2003). The NDP has also had a number of provincial leaders. Elizabeth Weir and Joy McPhail are currently female NDP leaders in New Brunswick and British Columbia respectively. Pam Barrett and Helen MacDonald have also recently been NDP leaders in Alberta and Nova Scotia respectively.

In regards to candidate selection based on income status and ethnic minority status, no published evidence could be found that the party represents these social classifications more than other parties. Nevertheless, a substantial amount of policy, voter support and

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<sup>78</sup> The Marxist-Leninist party had more female candidates in 1979 (48 to 47) and 1980 (62 to 33); however I have excluded them on the basis that the party has never won a seat in the federal parliament.

candidate selection evidence does help argue the claim that the NDP represents under-represented citizens more often than other political parties.

Consequently, some evidence suggests the NDP has suffered negative press relations because of the party's differing composition and policies compared to the background of journalists. Robinson and St-Jean (1991) argue that press gallery reporters and editors often subtly marginalize female politicians. The scholars contend reporters ignore political and social accomplishments, use the word 'feminist' in a negative context, see female politicians as responsible for actions taken by all women in society, and finally direct attention to female fashion and grooming far more than male politicians. McLaughlin would concur with these conclusions. She recalls in her biography that the male dominated Canadian press gallery often acted in a chauvinistic manner. Her favourite example is the occasion:

... when two Tory women cabinet ministers showed up at the same function wearing the same outfit. This event caused a minor sensation in the media. Whatever for? The papers could as easily have run the following headline: 'Two Hundred and Fifty Male MPs Appear in Commons Wearing Same Dark Blue Suit!'"(p. 92).<sup>79</sup>

Interestingly, NDP communication directors during my interviews never alluded to any negative press bias from the lack of newsroom diversity.<sup>80</sup> There could be several reasons for this lack of discussion. First of all, no direct questions were presented on this exact topic (this was an unforeseen omission in the interview schedule); however several questions did probe in areas that could have initiated such a discussion (in particular their thoughts on the opinions of individual journalists and the importance of leadership focused politics). Secondly, the high majority of interview participants were themselves male, white and former reporters – characteristics that could possibly diminish their perception of gender and race inequality in the newsroom. Finally, the choice of all but one participant to speak on the record, even when anonymity was offered at the beginning

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<sup>79</sup> This is not just a complaint levied by the women of the NDP. Former Conservative Prime Minister Kim Campbell has also complained about the media bias against female newsmakers (Powell, 2003).

<sup>80</sup> One subtle indication that the communication directors recognize the homogeneous composition of the newsroom is the fact that all references to individual journalists were male and white (with the exception of one journalist whom was only referred to as 'he' and therefore a racial indicator was not present). However, only five journalists during the seven interviews were specifically discussed making it difficult to draw any conclusions with such a small population and still maintain a strong level of validity.

of the interviews, may have hindered their willingness to discuss an issue that could be very damaging to their future relations with current press workers.

Even though no evidence was offered by current NDP communication directors, it appears possible to conclude with evidence from published literature that dominant class (white, male, middle-upper class) backgrounds held by a high majority of Canadian journalists could have the limited potential to impose barriers to NDP press access. However, there is no measurement of how and when this influence would be most harmful to the NDP.

### ***Personal Attitudes, Values and Beliefs***

Although the homogenous nature of the newsroom leads to possible conclusions that journalists are more likely to support dominant worldviews, the average journalist's personal attitudes, values and beliefs show indications that the opposite conclusion may be true – he or she may be more open to the NDP's social democratic arguments than the general public. Evidence derived from sociological work and personal evaluations by individual reporters indicates the majority of journalists have progressive personal values and/or Left-of-centre political attitudes. This potential harmony of worldviews between the NDP and individual press workers could have positive implications on the party's relations with the press and therefore deserves serious discussion.

Regarding personal values, Gans (1979) concluded that most American journalists<sup>81</sup> try hard to be objective but “reality judgements are never altogether divorced from values<sup>82</sup>” (p. 39). To qualify what types of values are most often associated with a journalist's reality judgements, Gans points out six consistent values: ethnocentrism, altruistic democracy, responsible capitalism, smalltown pastoralism, individualism and moderatism. Ethnocentrism refers to reporters granting more authority to national or domestic perspectives over foreign perspectives. Altruistic democratic values evaluate issues and events for their adherence to democratic ideals. This is most often evident in

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<sup>81</sup> There has not been a similar study on Canadian journalists; however Gans' study is commonly cited in Canadian media literature including Hackett, Gruneau, Gutstein, Gibson and NewsWatch Canada (2000).

<sup>82</sup> Gans (1979) defines values as “preference statements about nation and society, and major national or societal issues (p. 41).

stories about corruption and protest. Journalists also support the perspective that society will prosper within a market of free trade (responsible capitalism). This perspective has limits – unreasonable profits or gross exploitation of consumers or the labour force are not supported.

Small-town pastoralism is another commonly held value, according to Gans (1979). Journalists see urban populations in a negative light for their crime, racial tension and cultural excess. They also highly value individual liberty (individualism). “The good society of the news is populated by individuals who participate in it, but on their own terms, acting not in the public interest, but as they define it” (p. 50). Finally, journalists value moderatism. They discourage extreme actions and treat individuals acting beyond legal or cultural expectations with contempt. These progressive values seem to conflict in some ways with the Canadian status quo that is accepting of market liberalism and its tenets including profit maximization and globalization.

These progressive values also likely overlap in some way with the Left-of-centre political attitudes held by the average Canadian press worker. Pritchard and Sauvageau (1998) in 1996 found journalists rated themselves ‘progressive’ and the editorial policy of their news organization as centre-conservative.<sup>83</sup> These results are consistent with two other surveys conducted in the 1980s. Bob Bergen (1986) surveyed 383 Canadian journalists in 1986 and found they overwhelmingly described themselves as ‘moderate Left’ in their personal political ideology. Canadian journalists were also more likely to have leanings for the NDP at both the federal (32.7 percent) and provincial (31 percent) levels than any other party.<sup>84</sup>

Peter Snow made similar conclusions after surveying the Ottawa press gallery in 1982. In federal politics, 37 percent of respondents stated they felt closest to the NDP while 18 and 11 percent felt closest to the Progressive Conservatives and Liberal Party,

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<sup>83</sup> Journalists were asked to rate their political attitudes and the editorial attitudes of their news organization out of 100 (0 being very progressive and 100 being very conservative). Newspaper reporters rated themselves 31 while giving a 61 rating to their news employer. The difference of 30 rating points is significant when contrasted with radio reporters (47 for their organization and 41 for themselves for an eight point difference) and television reporters (47 for their organization and 35 for themselves for a 12 point difference) (Pritchard and Sauvageau, 1998).

<sup>84</sup> The Liberal Party received 22.5 percent support provincially and 25.3 percent federally. The Progressive Conservative Party received 9.3 percent support provincially and 12.8 percent federally (Bergen, 1987).

respectively (quoted in Taras, 1990). Altogether, these Canadian personal political attitude studies appear to demonstrate a consistent personal sympathy to Left-of-centre politics by journalists. In combination with journalistic values outlined by Gans, it would be fair to say that the average Canadian press worker holds progressive and/or Left-of-centre personal political perspectives as an individual.

### **Implications for the press: Personal Attitudes, Values and Beliefs**

The degree of influence of these progressive values and Left-leaning political attitudes on news content is difficult to measure. Taras (1990) may be the most prominent Canadian media scholar to argue that political attitudes make it into print. He concludes in his book The Newsmakers: “Political convictions are an inevitable ingredient in news reporting” (p. 49). That conclusion is based on two pieces of Canadian evidence. First, he cites Bergen’s (1987) survey that found 12.4 percent of Canadian journalists admit to reflecting their own personal political leanings in stories or editing. However, the academic value of this small minority is questionable since Bergen’s definition (and my definition) of journalists includes columnists. It could be argued that these press workers are much more likely to express their political convictions considering the more subjective nature of their professional roles.

Taras’ (1990) other evidence comes from Barry Cooper’s study of Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) journalists. Cooper’s (1994) content analysis concludes that reporters for the nation’s public broadcaster were framing their reports with a severe Left-wing ideological bias. However, Taras’ evidence using Cooper also appears weak under examination. Desbarats (1995) in his review of Cooper’s book found the author’s ideologically neo-liberal persuasions throw into doubt the fairness and accuracy of his work.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, Desbarats adds:

Sins of Omission includes features unusual in an academic work, starting with the dedication ‘to the taxpayers of Canada, who, for several years,

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<sup>85</sup> Cooper is also currently the Director of the Alberta Policy Research Centre for the corporate sponsored and ideologically neo-liberal Fraser Institute. Several Canadian media scholars have found a neo-liberal bias in the media analysis reports released by this think tank (Gutstein, 1998; Cross, 1997; Taras, 2001; Thompson, 1997).

have involuntarily paid for public broadcasting in this country and who know, very clearly, the value they have received.’ Taken literally, at least the way Cooper meant it, this would make the book redundant. Notwithstanding this, having stated his own bias as clearly as possible, Cooper spends a great deal of time and effort exposing an aspect of CBC television news apparently hidden from his readers: a persistent effort to portray left-wing values, leaders, and political movements in a favourable light while omitting relevant information from the other end of the political spectrum (p. 175).

For Taras (1990), this critique does not appear to come as a surprise. He even acknowledges, “certainly not everyone will agree with how Cooper interpreted the stories and reports that he analyzed” (p. 49). On the same note, with the evidence provided by Taras (1990), it is certainly easy to see how many scholars would find his empirical evidence insufficient to conclude a journalist’s political perspectives are an inevitable influence on the content of their work.<sup>86</sup>

The influence of personal values is also somewhat questionable. Gans, himself, downplayed the influence of personal values eight years after publishing Deciding What’s News. In 1987, he wrote that organizational constraints and professional norms effectively remove the effects of most journalists’ attitudes and values. “For rank-and-file journalists, whether they are reporters or writers or even news executives, personal attitudes do not affect their work except in unusual circumstances” (p. 31).

Upon evaluation, it appears that political values and attitudes held by Canadian press workers can be considered progressive or Left-of-centre; however the influence that these views have on their work is uncertain and likely limited. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) concur with this assessment. They explain “because of these mixed research findings, we are unable to make any sweeping statements about the influence of communicators’ personal attitudes, values and beliefs on media content” (p. 91).

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<sup>86</sup> Herbert Gans comes to a similar conclusion with the American media system in his critique of newsroom studies by Stanley Rothman, Linda Lichter and S. Robert Lichter. They concluded journalists had Left political leanings that influence reporting patterns. However, Gans points out that they never provided any evidence of a correlation between political attitudes and political stories. Furthermore, Gans (1985) cites a number of studies (Epstein, 1973; Sigal, 1973; Tuchman, 1978) that conclude political leanings rarely influence political reporting.

## **Implications for the NDP: Personal Attitudes, Values and Beliefs**

Although the influence is likely very limited, the occasional opening or barrier to press access through personal values and personal political attitudes still has important implications for the NDP. First of all, the work of Bergen (1987) and Pritchard and Sauvageau (1998) demonstrate that press workers are aware and open to the arguments of the NDP. This provides implicit evidence that journalists still believe social democratic arguments are important in Canadian public debate. In turn, they are likely to continue issuing at least minimal press access to the NDP (since they are arguably the most authoritative voice of social democracy in Canada).

When explaining the potential influence of Canadian journalists' personal values and political attitudes, the majority of NDP communication directors made a clear division between reporters and columnists. While a minority of communication directors acknowledged that reporters hold progressive or Left-of-centre worldviews,<sup>87</sup> there was a full consensus with the earlier conclusion that personal ideology rarely prejudices the work of individual reporters. Ontario NDP media relations manager Gil Hardy captured this consensus with the comment that:

... many reporters have individual opinions and political leanings but I'd say 90 percent of the time it does not get into their writing. For columnists, you're entitled. That's your job. If you are a columnist, you are entitled to express your political opinion. But straight beat reporters that are covering Queen's Park (the Ontario legislature) I'd say for the vast majority of them their personal opinion does not affect their coverage.

Instead, the majority of communication directors pointed out reporters make serious efforts to remain 'fair' and 'accurate' as part of their professional role. A quote from Riva Harrison, director of communication for the governing Manitoba NDP, captured this mood for NDP communication directors:

While the commentary or the editorial bent of an outlet may be more right of centre than what you might like, you know, on a daily basis you are dealing with individual reporters and the individual reporters for the most

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<sup>87</sup> A direct question to communication directors to assess the political attitudes of reporters was not asked; rather a more general question on if and how political attitudes and personal values influenced media content was solicited. Without a direct probe, a minority of directors commented that some reporters have Left-of-centre political attitudes. This is an important point considering that no directors argued or gave examples of reporters holding Right-of-centre political attitudes.

part don't have agendas, they want to write a good story. They are open to what you tell them and most of them care about what they write, like I did when I was a reporter.

Again, this may mean that although reporters are unwilling to sympathize with social democratic perspectives when writing stories, their recognition of these perspectives and their efforts to remain fair and balanced will likely lead to some openings for NDP press access.

However, the majority of communication directors qualified this opening for NDP press access with the acknowledgement that stronger influences can redirect a reporter's best intentions. Ontario's Hardy warned that there are serious limitations to press access openings at the individual press worker level because of recent staff and resource cuts and news routine time constraints. Carol Ferguson, legislative assistant to the leader of the New Brunswick NDP, concurred with Hardy and further added that upper-level editors and owners can also influence what makes it to print and what is cut.<sup>88</sup> These qualifications provide further evidence that reporters have some influence over press content but are largely subservient to more influential macro-level media filters that tend to reinforce dominant worldviews.

On the other hand, Right-wing political attitudes dominate the work of Canada's regular columnists, according to the majority of NDP communication directors. Manitoba's Harrison expressed that majority opinion with the statement, "Look at the preponderance of Right-wing columnists and your only Left voice are guest columnists that are published on occasion."

Although the majority of NDP communication directors concluded that Right-wing columnists act as an intimidating barrier to NDP press access, nearly half insisted that there are still occasions of access openings. Alberta's director of communication for the New Democrat opposition Lou Arab commented that:

I do try to get their take on the world and fit our stories into that take as best as possible. For example, the columnist who has a very negative view of us does hold, although he's got a pretty conservative viewpoint, the view the government is kind of drifting and listless. And every now and

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<sup>88</sup> These issues and how they specifically affect the NDP will be discussed in more detail in chapter five.



then we can sort of frame our message into his view of the world and get that message out.

Agreeing with Arab, Manitoba's Harrison used an example of NDP press access through former conservative National Post columnist Paul Wells. During the 2003 federal NDP leadership convention in Toronto, she set up a meeting with Manitoba's NDP Premier Gary Doer and Wells to:

... talk to him about health care and where we need to go and [Doer] ended up getting some good coverage in Paul's column. So is it an insurmountable challenge? No. You can't just be turned off by it and just throw up your hands and say 'I give. All there is is Right wing columnists and we are not going to talk with them.'

What does this mean for NDP press access through the political attitudes and personal values of individual press workers? It appears that NDP communication directors and published scholarship support the argument that there are very limited openings to press access for the NDP through personal values and political attitudes. Right-wing columnists will most often create a barrier to press commentary on NDP policies; however that barrier appears not to be absolute. Meanwhile, reporters offer some openings through professional responsibility to fair and accurate reporting, but do not very often translate their personal Left-of-centre or progressive attitudes into the text of their presswork.

## ***Conclusion***

Evidence evaluated in this chapter demonstrates that individual press workers have only limited influence in determining the barriers and openings for the NDP's press access. There appears to be a lack of empirical and primary research that demonstrates that the actions of journalists based on their background, personal values or political attitudes will have a significant influence in their daily reporting work. For the most part, this can be attributed to larger macro-level influences, particularly organizational hiring policies and news routines, which will more often dictate how press content is shaped.<sup>89</sup>

There are cultural, social, economic and political elements that promote dominant values through the writing of individual press workers. The average press worker is white, male and upper-middle class – characteristics that some critical theorists conclude

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<sup>89</sup> These influences will be discussed in the forthcoming chapters.

favour dominant worldviews based on a social inclusion bias. There is also the preponderance of Right-wing columnists in the Canadian daily press that espouse market liberal viewpoints. These characteristics at the individual press worker level largely overshadow social democratic ideals promoted by the NDP. As such, journalists do not appear to have full agency over their daily work and are most often guided towards ideological perspectives that support conservative ideals.

Although the evidence seems to point in that direction, there are some small points of press access at the individual media worker level that demonstrate that journalists do not always marginalize the NDP. Professional roles that promote fairness and accuracy in combination with polling that finds journalists have personal Left-of-centre or progressive worldviews may suggest the NDP will not be fully ignored in future public debates. These journalistic characteristics appear to provide somewhat of a press access safety net.

To conclude, the individual media worker level seems to subtly favour dominant social group perspectives. However the NDP and their social democratic message retain some small openings to press access here that could be helpful in the design of a full communication strategy.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: MEDIA ROUTINE PRESS FILTER AND THE NDP**

The fact that the influence of reporters' attitudes and backgrounds is questionable and difficult to pinpoint is most likely due to their inconsistent nature. There are far too many other meta-factors that impede the journalist's ability to act independently from the objectives of the press institution. Media routines, on the other hand, are consistent actions established within the press structure to ensure the daily delivery of news items is achieved. Standardization is the rule of thumb at this level of influence ensuring that supply (sources), production (press organization) and consumption (audience) considerations are satisfied. These routines likely have a higher determining influence on news content. In turn, these routines will also have strong implications for the NDP in the determination of the openings and barriers available to the party in its effort to attain press access.

### ***Audience***

Reporters depend on routines to help them resolve what their audience thinks is news. When negotiating how much press access NDP messages will be granted over other possible storylines, it is the journalist's standardized perceptions of their readers' demands that can go a long way in assisting in the decision making process.

Newspaper management may conduct reader surveys to understand their audience's reaction to the content provided; however, Shoemaker and Reese (1996) explain journalists rarely source this information in the day-to-day mechanics of story selection and creation. Instead, they rely on news judgement – the evaluation of news stories based on predetermined or common sense news values. These values become the “yardsticks of newsworthiness” (p. 111) and reporters rely on them to determine if a story is worthy of access and what angle can be taken into the story to make it the most appealing for their audience. These news values have been defined by a number of scholars over the years;

however to continue the Canadian focus of this analysis, I will borrow from Hackett et al. (2000). They list the most prominent news values as:

...timeliness, relevance to an ongoing topic or theme; political significance; consistency with journalists' expectations, or conversely, novelty, shock or scandal; drama; clarity and unambiguity, conflict; negativity (harm, threat, death, destruction); scope or scale of impact; human interest; and the involvement of individuals, especially celebrities and powerholders (p. 35).

This is by no means a complete list<sup>90</sup>, but it provides the basic value principles from which most journalists work to satisfy their audience.

### **Implications for the press: Audience**

Reporters most often select and write their stories according to immediate events of scandal, celebrity, conflict and death. Long-term social or cultural issues rarely see the printed page when evaluated by this measurement (Hackett et al., 2000). The Montreal Gazette's national editor Evangeline Sadler (2002) illustrates this point in her review of the top Canadian news stories of 2002. She selected the Robert Pickton pig farm murders in Port Coquitlam, British Columbia as her number one story of the year, followed by the 'moron' comment by Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien's communication director, the rise of the Mario Dumont's Action Democratique du Quebec, the federal government's gun registry scandal, the friendly fire incident in Afghanistan and the Jamie Sale and David Pelletier figure skating gold medal scandal at the Salt Lake City Olympic Winter Games.<sup>91</sup> In total, these top six events comprised two human tragedies, three scandals and one profile of a political celebrity/hero.

This standardization of press content allows journalists to quickly evaluate a story idea, conduct interviews and write an article that will be accepted and understood by editors and readers. While this is a valuable explanation of news selection, critical

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<sup>90</sup> Also see Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1989); Karlberg (1995).

<sup>91</sup> Rounding out Sadler's (2002) top 10 was Prime Minister Jean Chretien's retirement announcement (celebrity, conflict with Paul Martin), Quebecer Michel Jalbert's arrest after crossing the Canadian-American border to buy gas (international conflict, human interest), ratification of the Kyoto Protocol and the Romanow Report on health care reform. Although the last two news stories are based on long-term social issues, it could be argued that Sadler chose to point out events (a vote and a report) as the reason for the story's importance.

theorists suggest news value has an even deeper significance. They ask: why are these values deemed the most important to the journalist and the general public?

Stuart Hall, Chas Chitcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke and Brian Roberts (1978) explain that journalists must use cultural maps of the social world in order to explain “unusual, unexpected and unpredicted” (p. 54) events to their audience. Without these shared maps, a journalist’s audience would be unable to understand why a story is newsworthy. John Hartley (1982) distinguishes four general maps as the most often used by journalists and the general public. These maps see society as “fragmented into distinct spheres”, “composed of individual persons who are in control of their destiny”, “hierarchical by nature”, and “consensual by nature” (pp. 81-82). Hackett (1991) further explains that:

... as criteria for scanning and making sense of the world, [news values] have inscribed within them social relations of power and inequality; they constitute a link between social stratification and signification. In that sense, news values are an ideological code, one which constitutes a news discourse that typically emphasizes celebration of, and threats to, dominant values and institutions, as well as the routine doings and particularly the statements of those who hold socially sanctioned power and knowledge – political leaders, acknowledged experts, spokespeople of established institutions. Routinely excluded or marginalized from news discourse are ways of making sense of the world that point to fundamental contradictions within the existing social order, and/or which suggest that that order may itself constitute a threat to the well-being of the very people it claims to serve (p. 78).

In summary, journalists see themselves as professionals who use routines to explain complex stories to their audience in an anticipated and easy-to-understand format. However, this level of agency and neutrality simply does not hold up under critical scrutiny. Although journalists retain some control over their work, time and resource limitations discourages them from thinking ‘outside the box.’ Therefore, the standardizing influence of news values can be seen to favour common sense principles that most often reinforce dominant ideological codes.

## **Implications for the NDP: Audience**

For the NDP, journalists' perceived audience expectations may provide a key opening for press access. Because news values are more or less standardized, the NDP can anticipate the expectations of reporters and craft the style and substance of its social democratic messages accordingly. A near consensus of NDP communication directors confirmed this hypothesis.

One recent example of a highly successful press strategy that appealed to standardized news values was the Ontario NDP's Hydrozilla tour in 2002. Ontario NDP media relations manager Gil Hardy explained that the party used a rubber-suited monster to follow the governing Ontario Progressive Conservative Party around the province to criticize their hydro-electricity deregulation policies. The monster effectively derailed several Tory energy policy media events by dominating press attention and getting the NDP's anti-deregulation policies onto the public agenda. The resulting headlines demonstrated the NDP's success strategy to grab the attention of journalists. A Cambridge Reporter headline read, "NDP's Hydrozilla steals the show" (Briggs and Payne, 2002, p. A5) while a St. Catharines Standard article was titled, "'Hydrozilla' taunts minister" (2002, p. B8). It was a stunt that included elements of timeliness, relevance, political significance, novelty and conflict – a strong news value formula that the Ontario press could not ignore. In fact, the campaign was considered so successful that National Post columnists' Robert Benzie and Graham Richardson (2002) rated it the most successful media stunt on the year.

Such successful news value crafted campaigns are not a new discovery for the NDP. NDP MP Svend Robinson and Ontario NDP Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) Peter Kormos have made careers in politics by grabbing the attention of the press. Robinson has raised native rights and environmental issues on several occasions by facing arrest for blocking logging roads with native groups and standing trial in traditional native clothing (Canadian Press, 1985; Southam News, 1994). On another occasion, the Burnaby, British Columbia politician sparked media attention on American foreign policy (specifically Nicaragua and the Strategic Defense Initiative [Star Wars]) by interrupting

Ronald Reagan's 1985 address to the House of Commons (Goar, 1987; Southam News, 1994).

Kormos has also employed news value tactics (particularly conflict, drama and humour) to draw media awareness to important social issues. In an effort to prove to the media and public that the Conservative government was lying about the Family Support Plan offices being operational, Kormos broke into the Attorney General's office and videotaped new computers that had not yet been plugged in and boxes of cheques and files that had not been opened (Wright and Girard, 1996; Gombu, 1996). The Welland, Ontario MPP also caught the media's attention in 2003 by bringing a dog and a pony to Queen's Park to protest corporate tax cuts and the government decision to skirt democratic tradition by holding the annual budget announcement at an auto-parts factory instead of in the legislature (Boyle, 2003).

Former federal NDP leader Ed Broadbent and his media team were also highly successful in mixing ideological messages and press valued backdrops to garner positive attention with reporters in the late 1970s and 1980s. During the 1979 federal election, the NDP received glowing reviews from national and regional newspapers including an editorial endorsement by the Toronto Star ("The choice," 1979; "Broadbent's home plan," 1979; "Broadbent's tax plan," 1979). Broadbent biographer Judy Steed (1988) attributes part of this success to well-designed media events. She explains:

He was getting his message across via ingenious press 'events' that were designed for media appeal. 'You've got to hand it to Ed Broadbent,' wrote the [Toronto] Star's David Blaikie from Saskatoon on April 18. 'He's an innovator when it comes to staging election news conferences. The campaign isn't half over yet and about the only place he hasn't held one is the dark side of the moon.' The cameras followed Ed on a tour of Vancouver harbour, down into the bowels of Sydney Steel Mills, through the high-tech control room of a Saskatchewan potash mine. As the Star's Mary Janigan put it, 'these days Ed Broadbent doesn't talk about the issues – he visits them.' All in the name of making real and tangible his 'Gospel of Industrial Strategy' (p. 227).

Not only was Broadbent an excellent media event creator, he also recognized that leadership style resonated with high news value attributes of human interest and celebrity politics. In the late 1970s, he worked hard to be a media player by adapting his personal appearance and presentation style to benefit the media's perception of himself and the

party. Steed credits his efforts to meet the needs of the press as a large reason why he polled the highest approval ratings of any federal politician from 1980 to 1988 (Steed, 1989).

This celebrity leadership news value strategy continues to be a core component of NDP's media relations planning, according to NDP communication directors. All but one felt that leadership was one of the most important tools at their disposal to harness openings into press access. Brian Cousins, assistant chief of staff for the Premier in Saskatchewan, commented that in their situation as the governing party:

a leader who makes himself accessible and wins the confidence of the media by being and appearing to be sincere and forthcoming has been for us incredibly important. I believe the NDP is going to get another majority whenever this election occurs and it is going to because the leader instils confidence in the public and that gets conveyed because the media never failed to be impressed by [NDP Saskatchewan Premier Lorne Calvert].

Carol Ferguson, legislative assistant to the leader of the New Brunswick NDP, echoed a similar tune to the importance of leadership for openings in press access. She stated that:

I think my boss here, Elizabeth, is known for her media savvy and she is very media popular in the sense that she gives the right soundbite and she knows to be slightly outrageous. She has very good political judgement so I think in comparison to other members of other political parties in the province she gets a disproportionate amount of attention because of her ability to work the way the media want politicians to work.

Although leadership and media events that have strong elements of news value present a highly appealing avenue to garner press access, a minority of NDP communication directors recognized that there were serious pitfalls in becoming dependent on news value press formulas. The most common complaint was that it often distorted or ignored the most pressing issues that the NDP wanted to table into public debate. The 'British Columbia NDP Media Worker' stated that:

Things that tend to make the headlines are spectacular and scandal driven. And as a result there is less interest in something that could be quite substantive and significant. I mean we have tons of information that we think is critical to the public interest. And when we try to sell it to a reporter they just kind of shrug their shoulders and go 'so what?', meaning essentially 'ya that's important but its not a story' and what they mean by story is that it isn't going to jump off the page. 'It's not going to get my



editor excited. It's not going to get us selling papers.' And again I don't think that individual reporters have entirely sold themselves out to any great degree but I think that that is the nature of their business and they have to feed the appetites of the industry.

The same NDP media worker also illustrated the danger of focusing a media plan too heavily on one political leader with the following comment:

Within a year really [British Columbia Premier] Glen Clark showed you a good example of the positive and negative effects of leadership oriented politics. In the fall of 1995, the NDP was in poor shape. No one expected us to come anywhere close to winning the election and Clark came out of nowhere and bang ran a great campaign and kicked ass and won the election. Within a year, he was actually pulling the party down because his personal popularity was plummeting. Then of course, all the deck stuff started to happen and we suffered horribly for that.

Although most political parties in Canada can levy such complaints, a few NDP communication directors took their critique further – claiming news values were particularly biased against the NDP's social democratic messages. New Brunswick's Ferguson felt the press was much more willing to accept appeals to news values from political parties that incorporated neo-liberal arguments into their media message because there was a perception with journalists that audiences desired these dominant ideological codes. Manitoba's Harrison concurred with Ferguson, adding that her government had very poor interest from the media for a news conference to announce the thousandth home built in Winnipeg's inner-city over the previous two years. She stated:

I guess it's just what is expected of us. It's good news and it's not terribly exciting to story editors who make the selection ultimately of what they decide to cover. See what is interesting, where I think the Right-of-centre philosophy has the greatest impact is not in what you read and not in how stories are written but which ones get covered.

This argument is further reinforced later in the interview when she stated that:

you know the president of a chamber [of commerce] saying something has always been more newsworthy than the president of a school or a parent school council saying the same thing. You know, it's almost an inherent attitude in society. We assign a lot of credibility and a lot of weight to business leaders, economists as a society. Their views and their actions, and the things that they comment on are seen as newsworthy, more newsworthy than most things coming out of typical Left causes – poverty, daycare providers, housing activists.

These critiques reflect earlier conclusions from Hall (1982), Hartley (1982) and Hackett (1991) who assert ideological codes could favour the messages proposed by dominant social groups. From these arguments, a number of probable conclusions can be drawn. First, social democratic messages are more likely to tackle social structure issues (such as health determinants, poverty determinants and class relations) that point out how the social order threatens the well-being of the public. Hackett (1991) would likely argue that such arguments espoused by the NDP would be “excluded or marginalized” (p. 78). Therefore, the NDP could be limited when choosing what media campaigns it wants to pursue.

Second, cultural maps that seek out “individual persons who are in control of their destiny” (Hartley, 1982, p. 54) and ideological codes that seek out political leaders that have “socially sanctioned power and knowledge” (Hackett, 1991, p. 78) forces the NDP, a traditionally collective (mass) party, to professionalize its media campaigns through leadership news value. While there was a near consensus with NDP communication directors that leadership news value has been an asset for the NDP, it also pushes the party away from its mass party roots and hands over responsibility for the party’s success to one individual.<sup>92</sup>

A third conclusion that can be drawn from this news value discussion is that NDP media campaigns crafted around pre-determined news values can still effectively launch social democratic issues onto the provincial or federal agenda. Successful campaigns by Broadbent, Hampton, Robinson and Kormos demonstrate that news value tactics remain an important opening to media access that can circumvent higher ideological influences at the organization and extra-media levels (to be discussed in the following chapter). Although an issue may need to be framed as an event, or an event may require an element of conflict or humour to be added, the end result is that the NDP can use news value tactics to increase its opportunity of communicating social democratic messages to the mass public.

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<sup>92</sup> The downfall of NDP governments in Ontario (1995) and British Columbia (2001) can be partly attributed to the rejection of the party’s leadership (Bob Rae and Glen Clark respectively).

## ***Media Organization***

Press workers must also adopt news routines to satisfy organizational requirements. In the era of 24 hour television news channels (for example, CTV NewsNet, CBC Newsworld, CNN) and consistently updated Internet sites (for example, www.salon.com, www.drudgereport.com, www.bourque.org), information must be gathered and distributed in the fastest possible time with limited resources. Standardized routines are often used by press workers to increase efficiency to help their organization remain competitive (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). To explore what influence this has on press content and what implications it might have for the NDP, I will direct my focus on two of the most common organizational news routines: news nets and pack journalism.

The news net, a term coined by Gaye Tuchman (1978), represents the collection of information for media distribution. Tuchman claims:

Its haul is dependent upon the amount invested in intersecting fiber and the tensile strength of that fiber. The narrower the intersections between the mesh – the more blanket like the net – the more can be captured. Of course, designing a more expensive narrow net presupposes a desire to catch small fish, not a wish to throw them back into the flow of amorphous everyday occurrences. Today's news net is intended for big fish (p. 21).

In other words, beat reporters often work from locations where stories thought to be appealing, or at least acceptable, to the audience are consistently available. They are also locations where the most suitable sources are found.

Herbert Gans (1979) lists six source considerations used by journalists to identify the most suitable sources: past suitability of information provided by a source, the amount of information a source can provide, the reliability of that information, the trustworthiness of a source, a source's authority, and the ability of a source to articulate information. These sources can be found most consistently at parliament, legislatures, courts, city halls and police departments (Tuchman, 1978). In addition, there are issue-based beat reporters (for example, health or science) and foreign correspondent beats (for example, Washington, DC or London, England).

Pack journalism also has a standardizing effect on press content. Press workers from different press organizations working on the same news beat will often consult with

each other to confirm the best story is being covered. This is also called 'groupthink' or a pack mentality.

Because most newsreaders rarely read more than one daily publication many press organizations will discourage journalists from pursuing investigative stories or scoops because there is little evidence that the extra expense and time will improve a readership base (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). Ottawa Citizen editorial page editor Peter Calamai believes there are several other reasons for organizations to encourage reporters to fall into line with their peers: it helps to ensure that they will not miss important stories and it requires less resources (which likely reduces costs). For the reporter, it is also easily induced by peer pressure and it is often self-confirming (quoted in Russell, 1994). Nick Russell (1994) adds one more reason to Calamai's list – it ensures that if the reporter is wrong, the finger of blame will not be solely directed at them alone. "The desire to be unique is far outweighed by the risk of being different" (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996, p. 125).

### **Implications for the press: Media Organization**

The influence of these organizational news routines can be significant. Newspapers have limited staff and resources to cover the issues and events of the day. This means that story selection has to be pre-determined as best as possible for the press system to function smoothly. Priority has to be standardized. This means that the news net locations are covered first – crime news from the police department, political news from the legislature, municipal news from city hall and legal news from local courts. Placing reporters at pre-selected locations then reaffirms and reinforces the public legitimacy of institutional sources (the majority of which are dominant social groups) that work at those locations (Hackett et al., 2000). Gans (1979) argues that working consistently in a social setting allows the journalist to develop close relations with their sources; however this also creates a conflict of interest that benefits powerholders. He further explains that:

being on the inside enables beat reporters to gather information that lends itself to dramatic inside stories; but at the same time, they must concentrate on stories that please their sources, since angering them many endanger

their closeness or rapport, thus ending the reporter's usefulness on the beat. As a result, beat reporters are drawn into a symbiotic relationship of mutual obligations with their sources, with both facilitates and complicated their work. This symbiotic relationship develops in almost all beats, but it becomes particularly problematic for agency beat reporters whose stories have political implications. They can make news out of inside information that aids an agency in its competition with other agencies or helps it get its message into the White House, but they cannot so easily propose stories which can hurt the agency. Consequently, beat reporters must often practice self-censorship, keeping their most sensational stories to themselves in order to protect their beat (p. 133).

This becomes a self-reinforcing process that keeps institutionalized sources in the news and makes it difficult for outside challenger groups to break into the news net process (Hackett et al., 2000).

While news nets give priority to many institutionalized sources, pack journalism reduces the opportunity for those individuals or groups to gain press access. A news reader who wants different perspectives on an issue or event is likely to pick up three publications on any given day and find very similar perspectives and even the same quotes. The Royal Commission on Newspapers (Kent Commission) in 1981 had particularly strong words for the impact of this news routine. They described it as "the unimaginative pursuit and filing of essentially the same stories" (Canada, p. 64).<sup>93</sup>

What is even more threatening to news diversity is the tendency (particularly in government press galleries) to allow a veteran or celebrity journalist to guide the entire pack. Richard Ericson et al. (1989) note that one reporter in the Ontario provincial press gallery was extremely influential with her peers:

She tried to pressure other reporters into taking her view, which was essentially pro-government and against the two opposition parties. She was said to have the advantage of good government sources for leaks, giving her the power to establish frames and elicit deference and conformity from other reporters (p. 181).

Calamai also witnessed this 'leader-of-the-pack' journalism routine in federal politics during Progressive Conservative leader Joe Clark's days in opposition during the late 1970s. He recalls that:

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<sup>93</sup> Clive Cocking's (1980) examination of the media-politician relationship in the 1979 federal election provides a more detailed and insightful recount of the Canadian media engaging in pack journalism.

when it originally started out, only one person was writing that Joe Clark was a klutz, who couldn't rub his stomach and pat his head at the same time, and that was Allan Fotheringham, on Clark's round-the-world tour as Opposition leader. And when the tour ended three weeks later everybody on the tour was writing that story. Part of it was peer pressure. Part of it was status, with Fotheringham writing it. Part of it was their editors saying, 'Well, Allan Fotheringham says Joe Clark is a klutz, how can you keep saying he's alright? He looks like a klutz to us.' All those aspects came into it... It became a mental pack...everyone agreeing, 'Yes this guy is a klutz and shouldn't be Prime Minister. We'll just finish him off here, and put him out of his misery'" (quoted in Russell, 1994, p. 66).

This 'leader-of-the-pack' syndrome appears to further threaten diversity of perspectives in political reporting.

In summary, the organizational routines of news nets and pack journalism appear to establish an uneven level of access in favour of institutionalized sources and their messages. It appears that news nets ensure that there is a consistent centralization of information collection from locations where dominant social, political, economic and cultural groups are more often found. Pack journalism further reduces the diversity of institutionalized sources — even further narrowing perspectives communicated to the public. For the NDP, this could create a barrier to press access if it is filtered out of this primary group of institutionalized sources.

### **Implications for the NDP: Media Organization**

Standardized media routines steer journalists towards the most available and dependable sources. One of the most prized news nets for newsmakers is the soapbox in the provincial legislatures or the federal parliament. The election of just one party member to a house of governance puts an entire political party at a distinct advantage to attaining press access. This bodes well for the NDP. Although the electoral authority of the NDP is currently weak across the country with only two governing parties (Saskatchewan and Manitoba) and one official opposition (Nova Scotia), the NDP still has members in parliament and in nearly every provincial and territorial party-based legislature, with the exception of Quebec and Prince Edward Island.<sup>94</sup> Working from

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<sup>94</sup> It should be noted that the Northwest Territories and Nunavut do not have party-based political systems.

within the halls of governance in close proximity to a press gallery offers strong press access opportunities if the NDP takes the initiative to court relationships, suggest story ideas and promote policy platforms with political reporters.

Les Leyne, a Victoria Times-Colonist columnist recalls that former NDP British Columbia MLAs Moe Sihota and Glen Clark (later to be Premier) while in opposition took full advantage of their proximity to reporters in the legislature. They would consistently hang around with gallery members, swapping story ideas and feed them information (in particular with print reporters). “They worked like they were another arm of the Gallery... I remember breaking a story and Glen Clark came upstairs [into the Gallery office] and said, ‘Ah shit! You got that story. I was working on that’” (quoted in Littlemore, 2001, p. 124).

The majority of NDP communication directors agreed that working within the legislature or parliament brings them better prospects with the press than any other Left-wing group. Lou Arab, Alberta’s director of communication for the New Democrat Opposition, appears to capture the mood of NDP communication directors in the following statement:

I think we actually do much better than most social movements and that is just privilege for being the legislature. It’s easier – we are right here in the centre of the storm and I do not think the press make a great deal of effort to go out of their way to cover social movements here.

Another strong comment supporting this viewpoint came from New Brunswick’s Ferguson. “I think the news media are focused on just covering the parliamentary assembly. They just don’t have the resources to go out into the community and do other things. So in some ways I think legislatively the coverage is easier to get just because of the limitations and we are there.”

The need to be innovative and assertive with the press gallery was also recognized by Arab. He stated that his media relations team has been particularly successful in their creative efforts to maximize opportunities for press access in the Alberta legislature despite their third party standing and the government’s best efforts to manage the media. In the past, the NDP had been forced to respond to government comments after its formal

press conference<sup>95</sup> that is held every day at three o'clock in the afternoon while the legislature is in session. This strategic scheduling ensured that the government retained the best press access while opposition parties were left scrambling to draft and communicate responses before reporters' evening deadlines. To subvert this process that handicaps the NDP in acquiring any significant press access, Arab's media team:

... decided to essentially forego question period and when the house is sitting try to do a news conference in the morning with our media hit of the day and try to set the agenda. And we had a lot more success at that in the fall. We got a lot of coverage on issues that we wanted to talk about instead of just reacting to the government news all the time. Because as the third party, reacting to news takes up a huge amount of resources for very little coverage. We might get one line out of that in a fifteenth paragraph story in the Edmonton Journal which is just not satisfactory for the amount of time and energy that we put into it. Its much better if we sort of decide on what we want to attack the government on and put it out on our own time line and on our own schedule because then we knock the Liberals out of the picture altogether. And then forcing the government to react to us instead of the other way around.

Although having the attention of the press gallery presents a significant advantage for press access, a minority of communication directors noted that the attention also raises possible barriers that are not initially apparent. Ontario's Hardy suggests that becoming comfortable with the press in the federal or provincial capital will often result in ignoring small community publications that play a major role in electing NDP politicians to government in the first place. This short-sightedness has the potential to create long-term press access barriers in ridings outside of the major metropolitan centres, he argued. In response, Hardy said the Ontario NDP is increasing its efforts to communicate with a wider range of press outlets across the province:

[Ontario NDP leader Howard Hampton] is out of Toronto [right now], we are going to ridings that we think we have a good chance of winning in the next election. So he is in places like Peterborough, and he's gong to be in Scarborough and Oshawa. Getting local media is important, because that is where the voters are. So that is the way of leaping over the heads. It pays to go over the heads of the press gallery here and we encourage our members – the more media, the better.

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<sup>95</sup> Unlike the federal parliament and most legislatures across the country, the Alberta government does not participate in hallway scrums where reporters have more control over who is questioned and when questions are asked.



Pack journalism is another potential press barrier that can prevent the NDP from communicating a clear message when working within the legislature. Wayne Harding, director of communication for the federal NDP, complains that this style of journalism is a double-edged sword for the NDP.<sup>96</sup> When pack journalism is concentrating its attack on another party in the legislature, the policy messages that the NDP wants to communicate are largely ignored. Harding illustrates his point with two recent examples of pack journalism: the downfall of former Canadian Alliance leader Stockwell Day and the continuing conflict between Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chretien and his likely successor and former finance minister Paul Martin.

On the other hand, Harding admits that when the NDP is the focus on the pack's attention, it can be equally damaging for the party because it becomes very difficult to direct the media's attention to the exact issues and topics that the party wants to discuss. To illustrate his point, he described an episode of pack journalism at the 2003 NDP national leadership convention. During the election, there was a 45-minute delay in vote counting due to concern over a security measure in the on-line voting system. Harding further explained that he:

... had to explain this to reporters and they were clearly delighted that they had some prey in their spotlight, in the scrum. But it was sort of just yelling, they yell 'is the integrity of the election, is it being compromised? Are you the victim of hackers?' and they were yelling out these questions. Everyone got quite caught up in it and these are people that I know. They are not a lynch mob normally.

Overall, this analysis provides evidence that news routines built to accommodate the time and space constraints of journalists likely opens some doors to press access for the NDP. The election of at least one party member to a house of government provides immediate access to and authority with a large number of seasoned journalists working in the press gallery. However, the energy and resources needed to manage pack journalism and a wide range of press outlets that demand attention can be unforgiving for small

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<sup>96</sup> New Brunswick's Ferguson also raised serious concerns about pack journalism in her province. "I mean in terms of the legislature – what happens is everybody talks with everyone else and they decide amongst themselves what they are going to cover and everybody talks to everyone else and that is how the news kind of gets decided on."

communication departments.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, unlike the other major parties in the nation, long term NDP membership within government houses is currently fragile in nearly half the legislatures it has members sitting. The party has only one seat in the New Brunswick legislature and two seats in the Newfoundland and Labrador, British Columbia and Alberta houses of government. This uneasy dependence on seven provincial ridings across the country demonstrates that while the NDP should take full advantage of government news nets to disseminate their social democratic messages to a mass public, it should also recognize the immediate barriers to press access that it would face if the electorate rejected the party in a series of poor election showings.

### *Sources*

The press environment is partially characterized by the power struggle that takes place between press workers and sources for influence over what and how information is published. Although other forms of communication are available to reporters (including government documents, polling, firsthand observation and local library records), they rarely have the time or resources available to conduct such investigative-style reporting. Instead, they turn to individuals, think tanks and other organizations that are familiar, easily available and knowledgeable (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). For the NDP-press relationship, this indicates that press access will be moderately determined by the party's ability to accommodate journalistic media routines – particularly time and space constraints.

The escalating demand for public relations companies in recent decades demonstrates the increasing awareness by individual sources (representing themselves or a group, movement or political party) that it is in their best interest to spend financial resources to craft the best possible message (Watson, 2002). Russell (1994) reasons the information officer:

... can choose the time and place for the event: she can select the source to face the media and thoroughly brief that source in advance; she can select whose questions will be answered, and she can shut down the whole event if things get tough. For a working journalist, all these factors are

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<sup>97</sup> The size and budget of NDP communication departments will be discussed later in this chapter.

manipulative, and the situation is exacerbated by the complete lack of spontaneity or exclusivity (p. 79).

While reporters can occasionally reject information provided at news events for its lack of news values, the overwhelming institutional demand for reporters to file stories and the general acceptance of media events as part of the news collection process often results in stories being published against a reporter's better instincts (Hackett et al., 2000).

Individual sources (including political parties, companies and interest groups) that are restricted by time and resource constraints often lack the immediate research needed to support their point of view. To compensate, groups with shared worldviews have funded think tanks and research institutions to fill the information gap in part to meet journalistic routines for immediate, accurate information. These research institutions provide empirically researched policy reports that have the appearance of non-partisan authority. For the most part, reporters have accepted these institutions into their information gathering news routines (Taras, 2001).

Taras (2001) notes that in the 1980s and 1990s, the corporate community took notice of the demand for think tanks and funnelled considerable resources into establishing Canadian institutions. The Vancouver-based Fraser Institute, the CD Howe Institute in Toronto and the Canada West Foundation in Calgary are now among the most influential policy-oriented research institutes in Canada. They often make headlines with timely and conservative reports on public policy issues (Taras 2001; Gutstein, 1998; Cross, 1997; Thompson, 1997).

### **Implications for the press: Sources**

A strong effort by sources to control the style and substance of their image has likely made a large impact on press content. Reporters appear more than willing to passively collect information rather than actively seek out new sources, events or issues. Leon Sigal (1973) found that New York Times and Washington Post reporters most often (58.2 percent) used routine channels (official proceedings, press releases, nongovernmental proceedings and information from other news organizations) to gather their information. Only one-quarter (25.8 percent) of stories were identified as being

gathered through enterprising routines (interviews conducted at reporters' initiative, spontaneous events witnessed firsthand, independent research and reporters' own conclusions and analysis). This demonstrates that reporters in their negotiation of story selection favour passive information gathering routines.

This passive collection of information favours those individual or groups (including political parties, companies and interest groups) that can afford to spend the capital resources needed to design and implement effective press campaigns that hold the attention of working journalists. The adage – you get what you pay for – often rings true here. Thomas Watson (2002) explains that despite declining revenues, corporations and political candidates are spending heavy to grab the media spotlight. He cites a International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) report that concludes communication spending in Canada has increased by 37 percent from 2000 to 2001. Furthermore, Fortune 500 companies spent on average \$2.7 million for public relations in 2001, according to a Thomas L. Harris/Impulse Research survey (Watson, 2002).<sup>98</sup> This creates a potentially serious imbalance in press access. Dominant social groups with the available capital resources to dedicate to high quality public relations and media relations plans remain well-positioned to most effectively disseminate their messages to receptive journalists.

Corporate voices have also achieved strong press influence using well-financed think tanks as information vehicles. A content analysis study of seven Canadian daily newspapers conducted by Gutstein (2000) in 1998 concluded Right-wing think tanks received four times more mention than Left-wing think tanks. The Toronto Sun was the most imbalanced with 29 Right leaning sources to one Left leaning source, while the Toronto Star offered the most balance (43 Right to 34 Left). Another study by Gutstein (1998) focused on the Vancouver Sun during the same year. He found that politically Right-wing think tanks were often labelled with more favourable language. Contrasting an article that sourced the Fraser Institute (Right-wing) to another that sourced the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA; Left-wing), Gutstein (1998) noted:

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<sup>98</sup> General Motors and Levi Strauss have even gone as far as spending \$150,000 to \$200,000 in 2002 and 2003 for media relations campaigns – just dedicated to the media promotion of their 2003 Super Bowl commercial (Vranica and O'Connell, 2002, p. B1).

The Fraser Institute was called, simply, ‘a Vancouver-based free-market think tank’ in the second paragraph. The CCPA was called a ‘left-wing coalition’ in the story headline, a ‘bloc’ in the sub-headline (‘The bloc also urges Martin ...’ -- Soviet bloc? Bloc Quebecois?), ‘socialists’ in the lead paragraph, and a ‘coalition of left-wing groups’ in the second paragraph.

Taras (2001) explains that the failed efforts by social democratic or Left-wing think tanks to acquire press access can be attributed in part to a lack of financial muscle. He concludes that think tanks, like the CCPA, simply do not have the capital resources available to fairly wrestle corporate sponsored institutes for the attention of journalists. Hackett et al. (2000) comes to similar conclusions as Taras. The former explain that:

it may well be linked to the greater resources and output of market liberal institutes, compared to their political rivals. More broadly, the imbalance of access both reflects and reinforces the apparent dominance of market-liberal perspectives on economic problems and solutions (p. 205).

In the end, the resulting impact on press content appears to be that market liberal sources and think tanks have been more successful in disseminating their class worldviews by appealing to news routines using their economic dominance. The NDP and other challenger groups that lack similar economic means likely face significant barriers in comparison.

### **Implications for the NDP: Sources**

Although news routines built on audience and organizational expectations appear to offer potential openings for NDP press access, source bias appears to be a potentially serious barrier for the NDP. The main issue here is money. Although the party is well supported by unions, other labour organizations and individuals across the country, the NDP can likely not compete on a regular basis against the corporate donations that flow into the Liberal Party, Canadian Alliance and Progressive Conservative Party coffers. The cost of planning and implementing a solid communication department, which accommodates media routine needs and has a higher likelihood of leaving a party in control of their image, is often too expensive for the NDP.

Follow-up email correspondence with NDP communication directors confirmed they work with a small staff and on a tight budget. In Alberta, Lou Arab is the only staff

member directly responsible for communication affairs with an annual budget of \$120,000 (personal communication, April 19, 2003). British Columbia has a staff of two with a yearly budget of around \$250,000 ('British Columbia NDP Media Worker', personal communication, May 5, 2003) while Ontario spends \$320,000 annually with a staff of six (Hardy, personal communication, April 29, 2003). Surprisingly, the governing NDP in Manitoba (seven staff in cabinet communication department; \$355,000 budget) (Harrison, personal communication, April 27, 2003) and Saskatchewan (five staff in media services department; \$350,000 budget) (Cousins, personal communication, May 5, 2003) have only slightly larger budgets and similar staffing numbers to Ontario.<sup>99</sup> These numbers seem to assert that the NDP is financial restricted on the press events and campaigns it wants to launch. Unfortunately, comparative data with other political parties is not readily available – making it difficult to draw contrasts to further solidify my point that the NDP faces an economic disadvantage.

However, a reasonable argument could be made that the NDP experiences the same funding inequity in its the Liberal spent \$12,525,174 in the 2000 election while the Canadian Alliance had a budget of \$9,669,648. In contrast, the NDP ran third in spending with just half the Liberal budget (\$6,334,585) (Elections Canada, 2001).<sup>100</sup> This appears to be a consistent trend across the country. In the 1999 Ontario election, the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party spent \$4.5 million on its campaign (not including money spent on polling, ads and the leader's campaign) while the Ontario NDP spent \$2.4 million on its entire campaign (Campbell, 2003). What these numbers demonstrate is that a financial resource disparity exists between the NDP and Canada's neo-liberal parties. As a result, this spending gap is likely to erect barriers to press access for the NDP.

Interestingly, while the majority of NDP communication directors were willing to disclose departmental expense information and complained that their departments were short staffed, the majority did not link this handicap back to the financial resources of the party. In part, this could be attributed to the interview schedule that did not ask them to specifically address this issue; however the fact that they were willing to raise the concern

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<sup>99</sup> Carol Ferguson or Wayne Harding did not return email correspondences on this subject matter.

<sup>100</sup> The Progressive Conservatives spent \$3,983,301 while the Bloc Quebecois spent only \$1,968,693 (Elections Canada, 2001).

of staff shortages without expanding on its causation may indicate a hesitation to explore such a subject matter. The only significant observation made on the subject came from Harding of the federal party.<sup>101</sup> His comments demonstrated both the sensitive nature of the financial issue and the critical need for more resources for communication departments with the following comment:

Well, lack of money is a serious problem for the NDP. They don't like to admit it but it is a serious problem. Our office is a mess. It's too small. We don't have the resources to buy the ads that we should be buying. We don't have resources to have the research that we should be buying. Money is a problem and it affects communications in general and it affects media relations.

Other communication directors were more interested and willing to discuss measures taken by the party to compensate for the lack of party finances. Ontario's Hardy pointed out that the NDP can still have a solid press campaign if the party can establish itself as an expert source on topics that it anticipates will become 'hot button' issues in the near future. Hardy illustrated his point with the recent hydro privatization issue that received heavy press coverage in Ontario during 2002. He stated that:

[NDP leader Howard Hampton] was way out in front of it giving press conferences to two reporters when it wasn't an issue. When it became an issue, we were there. We were seen as the people, and it was often quoted in new stories, 'Hampton who has been leading the fight on hydro for the past eighteen months said.' So again, it is credibility because we have been out there on it for a long time.

A few communication directors also mentioned think tanks as another media tool to compensate for the lack of resources in their party's communication departments. The 'British Columbia NDP Media Worker' stated that Left-wing think tanks often open the initial "social space" and public interest in social democratic policy areas from which the NDP can later launch a media campaign.

Again, the lack of financial resources available to Left-wing voices, in this case Left-of-centre think tanks, was not discussed to any significant degree. Nevertheless, the fact that communication directors complain they lack staff and research resources to

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<sup>101</sup> Incidentally, Harding may have been more willing to speak on this subject considering his impending retirement in February 2003.

effectively influence journalists and the lack of capital evident in election spending infers that NDP communication departments are under-funded. In turn, that puts the NDP on an unequal footing with well-financed neo-liberal voices in the struggle to gain the most influential access to journalists. The result in many cases is that the NDP faces a serious barrier to press access when dominant social groups have the resources to consistently and convincingly shape their market liberal worldviews to receptive journalists.

### ***Conclusion***

Overall, news routines have a much more consistent and explicit influence on the style and substance of news reporting in comparison to the characteristics of individual press workers. News routines viewed from a liberal-pluralist perspective can be seen as essential conventions to gather, process and distribute news to the general public while meeting the needs of the newspaper corporation. These efforts made by journalists to be fair, accurate and objective following the elements of journalistic conventions provide some openings for the NDP – particularly working within news nets and presenting social democratic messages interwoven with pre-established news values.

However, a critical assessment of this media filter demonstrates that dominant social groups are more frequently given favourable treatment over challenger groups in terms of press access. Ideological codes are embedded in news values causing journalists to favour messages touted by dominant social groups. Organizational routines of news nets and pack journalism also appear to limit debate and favour institutional sources that are most often dominant social groups. Although the NDP at this time has reasonable access to parliamentary and legislative news nets, the party is only hanging onto its institutional source status privilege by a very slight margin in many provinces across the nation.<sup>102</sup> Finally, market liberal sources and think tanks have a clear economic advantage to plan expensive and effective media campaigns that journalists are willing to accept in their negotiation of source restraints within the news routine filter.

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<sup>102</sup> As previously mentioned, the NDP has only one or two seats in four legislatures making its presence very uncertain from election to election.



All viewpoints considered, it appears that the NDP has some openings to press access available to it if it is willing to adapt its message to accommodate restraints imposed on journalists. While these news routines do favour dominant social group perspectives, the NDP is clearly not marginalized to the point that critical scholars like Todd Gitlin (1980)<sup>103</sup> would contend. By thinking ‘outside the box’ the NDP has managed to subvert agenda-setting government press conferences in Alberta and hydro deregulation policies in Ontario using well-crafted communication plans that took full advantage of media news routines. In summary, while the media routine filter will often discriminate against the social democratic messages of the NDP, it would appear that there remain more access points here when compared to the organizational level of press influence to be discussed in the next chapter.

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<sup>103</sup> As discussed in chapter two, Gitlin (1980) claimed that parties working within the hegemonic order against dominant social groups would come “to be identified with narrow reform issues, and its oppositional edge is blunted” (p. 291).

## **CHAPTER FIVE: ORGANIZATIONAL AND EXTRA-MEDIA PRESS FILTERS AND THE NDP**

There is a clear power hierarchy within press institutions. The potential influence held by a newspaper owner and their appointed executives to shape the style and substance of their media product is exponentially greater than the individual journalist working within their news routines. Not shy to use that power, owners have recently intensified efforts to restructure the newsroom and the news industry in the pursuit of maximum profit returns (Vipond 2000; Siegel 1996; Nesbitt-Larking 2001; Shoemaker and Reese 1996; Underwood 1993). As former Quebecor (newspaper chain) owner Pierre Peladeau quipped to the Kent Commission in 1980, “Profit is the name of the game” (Canada, 1981, p. 42).

This trend towards a profit orientation in most cases has cut financial resources for editorial content (newsroom organization), reduced industry competition across the country and worked to accommodate advertisers. In addition, some owners have demonstrated a willingness to directly intervene in the editorial content of their publications to better match their own worldviews. At first glance, these trends appear to create more barriers than openings for the NDP’s press access if one is to consider the party’s conflicts with free market thinking. As such, it would appear that Shoemaker and Reese’s (1996) third and fourth media filters, organizational and extra-media influences on content, deserve a serious investigation.

### ***Newspaper Industry***

The pursuit of profit has been the main motivation behind historical changes to the Canadian press industry. In recent decades, bottom line financial strategies have shrunk the newspaper marketplace with fewer owners and fewer publications (Vipond, 2000; Siegel, 1996; Nesbitt-Larking, 2001). To evaluate this declining diversity, I will

concentrate my discussion on two key factors in the newspaper industry: market monopolization and ownership concentration.

Ownership of the Canadian newspaper industry has become one of the most concentrated in the advanced capitalist world over the past century. Previous to the First World War, 135 publishers owned 138 daily newspapers in Canada. That level of diversity started to disappear in the 1920s when the Southam and Sifton families initiated an expansion of ownership across the country. Roy Thomson would later join the chain ownership fray in the 1950s (Siegel, 1996). Arthur Siegel (1983) contends this trend to chain ownership was a logical capitalist strategy to redistribute profits where maximum returns on investment were forecast. Owners who had reaped the rewards of high profits from their individual newspapers saw further potential profits in redeploying their money back into the newspaper marketplace. With no large capital investments needed and further benefits of economies-of-scale, owners increasingly pursued acquisitions within the industry.<sup>104</sup>

As the market currently stands, ownership concentration has decreased from a high-water mark in 1998 when Conrad Black owned 58 of the country's 105 daily newspapers with a total circulation of 2.4 million copies per day (Miller, 1998).<sup>105</sup> Ken Goldstein (2002), executive vice-president and chief strategy officer for CanWest Global, goes as far as arguing that press concentration no longer exists in Canada. He points out that his company is the country's highest circulating chain, but its circulation only accounts for 12.9 percent of households in Canada. This small number demonstrates the lack of dominance by any one company in the newspaper marketplace, he maintains.

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<sup>104</sup> The numbers speak volumes to the level of profit and concentration by 1982. The Southam chain owned 14 dailies with 27.4 percent of total Canadian circulation while the Thomson chain held 21.6 percent of national circulation with 40 daily newspapers. In total, these two companies distributed six of every 10 newspapers in the country (Siegel, 1983). This media concentration strategy with economies-of-scale benefits was a profit winner for Thomson, Southam and other smaller press owners. The Kent Commission estimated from 1973 and 1980, the average return on net assets for all daily publications was 30 percent with the highest year of return in 1974-5 with 37 percent (Siegel, 1983).

<sup>105</sup> His empire included all the daily newspapers in Saskatchewan, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador, in addition to 80 percent of all Ontario dailies (Miller, 1998). He also launched the National Post in 1998 to compete with the Globe and Mail in the national newspaper market.

Goldstein's (2002) argument does have some merit.<sup>106</sup> When addressing newspaper monopolies, CanWest can be credited for continuing to float the debt-ridden National Post – the only significant addition to the Canadian newspaper market in the past 10 years (Ferguson, 2002).<sup>107</sup> However, the rest of Goldstein's argument hinges on a very selective mathematical equation: the number of newspapers sold compared to the total number of households in the country. Upon closer investigation, three more meaningful calculations demonstrate Goldstein's statistical evidence and conclusion are very questionable.

First, how many companies own the majority of Canadian newspapers? The Canadian Newspaper Association answers that fifteen companies own 97 of 102 Canadian newspapers – a 95 percent level of ownership by chains.<sup>108</sup> Breaking the numbers down further, the five largest companies<sup>109</sup> own 70 Canadian dailies (69 percent). The Osprey Media Group has the largest holding with 22 mid to small circulation publications in Ontario, while CanWest Global owns 13 publications (“Ownership of,” 2003).<sup>110</sup> These numbers draw a basic map of the limited ownership distribution in the Canadian newspaper environment. This is a map that Goldstein seems hesitant to provide.

Second, do some owners have high regional concentration of local daily newspapers? According to the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, the answer is ‘yes’. In British Columbia and Saskatchewan, CanWest accounts for 86 and 84 percent of daily circulation respectively. GTC Transcontinental owns all of the daily newspapers

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<sup>106</sup> When addressing the entire Canadian media marketplace, Goldstein is right to point out that the diversity of media products has grown exponentially over the past half-century. Furthermore, CanWest has launched a national news program with anchor Kevin Newman that adds diversity to the evening newscast selection previously dominated by CBC and CTV (Goldstein, 2002). On the other hand, there are issues regarding cross-media ownership and convergence that appear, on the surface, damaging to the diversity argument. While a full cross-media analysis would be beneficial to a comprehensive debate on media access, it is beyond the scope of this thesis. The focus of this thesis will remain on newspapers because of their agenda-setting nature and opportunity for in-depth coverage (as discussed in the introduction).

<sup>107</sup> Rob Ferguson (2002) estimates the Post has lost \$200 million since debuting in 1998.

<sup>108</sup> The last five independent Canadian newspapers are: Le Devoir (Montreal), Caraquet L'Acadie Nouvelle, Amherst Daily News, Flin Flon Reminder and The Whitehorse Star (“Ownership of,” 2003).

<sup>109</sup> The five largest Canadian newspaper chains are: Osprey Media Group, Hollinger Canadian Newspapers LP, GTC Transcontinental, CanWest Publications and SunMedia (“Ownership of,” 2003).

<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, multi-millionaires own nearly all of these media companies. And it is likely to stay that way. While Conrad Black purchased the Sherbrooke Record for only \$20,000 in 1969, the Osprey Media Group paid \$35 million for the Sarnia Observer and Chatham Daily in 2001 (Siklos, 1995; Canadian Press, 2001b). The financial capital now needed to purchase a newspaper has simply grown beyond the reach of most citizens or small companies.

in Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador, while the Irving family owns all of the English language dailies (and 89 percent overall) of the New Brunswick newspaper market (“Daily Newspaper Tables,” 2003).<sup>111</sup> For consumers that disapprove of the style or substance provided by a Canadian newspaper owner, they rarely have another viable regional option to read.

Finally, Goldstein fails to consider basic readership data. Using circulation numbers does not take into consideration the fact that more than one individual most often reads a single newspaper and that casual readers diminish the daily circulation calculation. The Newspaper Audience Database company<sup>112</sup> reported that 83 percent of Canadian adults read a newspaper last week and 57 percent read a newspaper yesterday (“Readership Highlights,” 2002). Among the highest read newspapers in the country, The Vancouver Province and Vancouver Sun have an average weekly audience (individuals that read the paper at least once during the week) of nearly a million readers each (901,200 and 846,500 readers respectively). Replacing circulation numbers with readership numbers in Goldstein’s calculation would mean that in British Columbia 54.8 percent of households read the Province and 51.5 percent read the Sun at least once a week.<sup>113</sup> Considering both sides of the argument, it would appear that readership and circulation data do not support Goldstein’s contention. Although the industry is not concentrated to the 1998 high-water mark (with Conrad Black), it remains at a level where a few companies can dominate a readership base and potentially restrict consumer choice and content diversity.

While ownership concentration reduces publication diversity across the country, market monopolization centralizes fiscal and editorial control to one newspaper owner in most markets. Siegel explains that profit maximization pressures have been the most recent historical trend eliminating competing city newspapers.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> In addition, two companies (Power Corporation and SunMedia) have a virtual duopoly in Canadian French daily newspapers with 95.5 percent of the circulation totals (“Daily Newspaper Tables,” 2003).

<sup>112</sup> NADbank is owned by a collection of daily newspaper companies, advertising agencies and advertiser members. Its Vice-Chair is Ron Clark, Senior Vice-President to CanWest Global Media Sales, Newspaper Division (NADbank, 2002).

<sup>113</sup> This calculation is based on the number of British Columbia households according to the 2001 Canadian census (“Population and Dwelling,” 2002).

<sup>114</sup> Two historical trends soon after Canadian confederation help explain the early beginnings of city newspaper monopolies. At that time, partisan newspapers were tied directly to political factions. When the faction faltered in public support or merged with other factions to form a political party, the newspaper

Hackett et al. (2000) assert one of the primary methods for newspaper organizations to eliminate city competition is through the short-term circulation wars. Often referred to as the 'jackal' or 'bandwagon' effect, most companies are only willing to advertise with one publication and a large majority will quickly gravitate to the newspaper that has even a slightly larger circulation base. This quickly leaves newspapers with smaller circulation numbers with very little advertising revenue – most often forcing them to fold or merge with the most dominant local paper because of heavy financial losses. Siegel (1996) concludes that newspaper owners have found these short-term measures to eliminate the competition most often leads to long-term higher profits for the surviving newspaper because they inherit full control over advertising and subscriber rates.

Another more direct method for press organizations to eliminate competition and pursue higher profits was demonstrated by the Thomson and Southam chains in 1980. On August 27 (later dubbed Black Tuesday), Miller (1998) notes that Southam closed its Winnipeg Tribune and Thomson closed its Ottawa Journal in a “business arrangement” (p. 64) to enhance overall profits for both companies. The elimination of the Tribune gave Thomson’s Winnipeg Free Press a monopoly in the Manitoba capital, while Southam’s Ottawa Citizen found itself reporting alone in the nation’s capital (Siegel 1996: 124). The Royal Commission on Newspapers (The Kent Commission), created after government backlash to the deal, concluded in its report that the level of media concentration held by a limited few Canadian companies was extremely disappointing for a democratic nation (Canada, 1981).

The end result of this pursuit of higher returns on investment by Canadian newspaper companies has been the near elimination of city competition across the country. In 2003, only nine multiple daily newspaper cities remain. Halifax is the only city in Canada served by three broadsheet publications (the Chronicle-Herald, the Daily News and Mail-Star) while Montreal boasts two French broadsheets (Le Devoir, La Presse), one French tabloid (Le Journal de Montreal) and one English broadsheet (The

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followed a similar fate. Secondly, the introduction of new technology cut costs of production and increased potential distribution areas that encouraged expansion into the mass market. Slowly, newspaper publishers left the control of political parties and re-established themselves as penny press publications. Their mass audience appeal left them subservient to high editorial expenses and uncertain customer loyalty. Again, this forced many publications to merge or fold (Siegel, 1996).

Gazette). The rest of the multi-publication cities are served by one broadsheet and one tabloid publication that are directed at different audience demographics.<sup>115</sup> The days of price wars and inter-city journalistic competition are nearly dead. Or as Hackett et al. (2000) quip, “the days when a city of 200,000 might have had five or six competing papers soon went the way of the Model-T Ford” (p. 53).

In the simplest of terms, the Canadian newspaper market is not highly competitive. Within cities, most newspapers have a monopoly that provide them with more control over how much revenue they want to reinvest in editorial content and how much they want to charge advertisers and subscribers. Across the country, a handful of media owners help shape the style and substance of Canadian press content. When contrasted with the newspaper marketplace forty years ago, the current press industry offers Canadians fewer owners and fewer publications from which to choose.

### **Implications for the press: Newspaper Industry**

Market monopolies and ownership concentration can influence the quality of news reporting; however there is some debate if the influence will be positive or negative. Nesbitt-Larking (2001) explains that although many liberal-pluralists have “certain misgivings” (p. 120) over ownership concentration, they believe that reduced owner and market diversity can increase the quality of news coverage. Many contend that less competition in media markets can help to eliminate some of the infotainment style reporting that they attribute to competing media institutions appealing to the “lowest common denominator” (p. 120). According to some Ottawa reporters after the closure of the Journal, monopolies also diminish the need to file multiple meaningless stories each day. One reporter commented in Walter Stewart’s (1981) report to the Kent Commission that:

before you were always worrying about the other guy. You would be at a meeting where not a lot happened, and you would see the ‘Trib’ guy dash for a phone at the end. You’d say to yourself, ‘What the hell is he so

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<sup>115</sup> Although Toronto is the headquarters for four newspapers, I have only counted the Toronto Star (broadsheet) and the Toronto Sun (tabloid) as Toronto newspapers. The other two publications, the National Post and Globe and Mail, promote themselves as national publications.

excited about?’ so you’d wind up filing a story just to cover your ass, not because it was really worth putting in the paper. Now you do the stories that matter, and you have a little more time to think about what should be covered and what can be left out (p. 12).

Furthermore, many liberal-pluralists, according to Nesbitt-Larking (2001), argue that large newspaper chains have the financial and labour resources to produce “richer and deeper editorial content” (p. 121). The transformation of the Ottawa Citizen after Conrad Black’s purchase exemplifies this point. Black spent more than one million dollars to rebuild the Ottawa broadsheet. One year later in 1998, the newspaper was rewarded with nine National Newspaper Award nominations and accolades from journalists, editors and academics. Christopher Dornan commented, “I find myself turning to the Citizen with increasing excitement, and I look at it now ahead of the Globe and Mail” (quoted in Wilson-Smith, 1998, p. 14). These examples and arguments illustrate that a lack of competition may enhance editorial quality.

Most critical theorists and a few liberal-pluralists would disagree with this assessment. They see market monopolies and ownership concentration more often making a negative impact to news diversity. Specifically, the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom (1997) disagreed that the financial resources dedicated to the Citizen greatly improved diversity and quality in the Canadian newspaper industry. A sponsored content analysis found only limited improvements in the Citizen, while resources and staff at smaller Hollinger dailies were drastically cut back to pay for the changes at the Citizen.

Further supporting evidence of this argument can be found in the conclusions of a content analysis by Katharine Trim et al. (1983). They measured the impact of monopoly conditions on municipal political coverage in the Free Press and the Citizen, and found that the amount and quality of coverage had decreased significantly.<sup>116</sup> At the Winnipeg Free Press, the coverage of city hall decreased by two-thirds (from 141 to 47 stories), while the Ottawa Citizen dropped twenty percent (from 99 to 79 stories). The loss of competition also correlated with shorter stories and a reduction in source diversity. In

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<sup>116</sup> Trim et al.’s (1983) study sampled stories from the Ottawa Citizen and Winnipeg Free Press during two six-month time periods – one period before (July-December 1979) and one period after (July-December 1981) the elimination of their competitor.



1981, higher profile news sources were given more emphasis while “lower-tier decision making institutions” (p. 53) which had received media access in 1979 were largely ignored in 1981. Trim et al. conclude, “...in both cases the news became less comprehensive and dropped significantly in frequency after the closures of the *Tribune* and the *Journal*” (p. 54).

Taking all perspectives into consideration, there appears to be mixed findings on what impact market monopolies have on content. However, if one were to value empirical research over personal reflection, it would appear that the critical evaluation is more substantiated. In other words, profit motivations will more likely drive newspaper owners to shape the industry and its publications to meet profit expectations and not quality expectations. This could mean that reporters will become more reliant on news routines to satisfy demands for more content production. In turn, this would reinforce common sense story lines and ideological codes, as discussed in the previous chapter. Of course, these conclusions are based on incomplete evidence, and further investigation is needed on the Canadian newspaper industry to solidify my line of reasoning.

### **Implication for the NDP: Newspaper Industry**

Already positioned in an underdog role when dealing with the media establishment, the NDP may face increasing barriers to media access as news diversity continues to decrease. Together, market monopolies and concentrated ownership will likely leave the NDP battling with more widely accepted market liberal worldviews for a shrinking amount of editorial coverage. Concerned about these general limitations created by media concentration, former federal NDP leader Alexa McDonough (2002) warned, “A healthy diversity of media voices is a fundamental pillar of democracy.”

The majority of NDP communication directors were particularly concerned about the decreasing number of press gallery reporters. Many noted that concentration of ownership had centralized government reporting to a few selected journalists who are responsible for the entire chain. Windsor Star reporter Gail Robertson supports this observation. In the late 1990s she was alarmed by the Southam chain’s cut back to only

four newspapers with bureaus at the Ontario legislature. “Eventually, there will be one Queen’s Park reporter for Southam” (quoted in Winter, 1997, p. 97). This leaves the NDP heavily dependent on the story selection and framing by only a handful of journalists. Gil Hardy, the Ontario NDP’s media relations manager, expressed the majority concern in the following comment:

I’m always shocked how press galleries in legislatures and even federally seem to be shrinking continuously as convergence goes ahead and different organizations are merged together and when I was here there were far more independent journalists and reporters who were just working for a single newspaper. Now that just doesn’t exist almost. And that is really too bad cause it means the same kind of message is going to too many more people...

Although this reduction in news diversity does not directly discriminate against the NDP any more than other parties, it likely harms the NDP disproportionately because it reduces points of access that the party is already at a disadvantage to obtain.

The ‘British Columbia NDP Media Worker’ also pointed out that ownership concentration could be harmful to the party’s press access because such control can intensify a newspaper chain’s interest in promoting a good business climate that will financial benefit the newspaper’s bottom-line. He stated that:

with fewer media outlets you simultaneously have less ability for alternative points of view to be expressed and simultaneously the larger corporate agenda. I mean having CanWest Global own all the daily papers in the lower [Vancouver] Mainland and on the lower [Vancouver] Island means the point of view expressed in those things will be similar. But also that they have proportionally more at stake in having the province’s business climate the way they like it to be. If, on the other hand, it was three small corporations, they would still be interested in low tax, free money for rich people kind of regime probably, but they would have less power to affect that idea. When they get together, it is just a larger, hungrier behemoth.

Such power held by one newspaper chain to determine the press content over a large region is a serious concern for the NDP. This could mean that chains could shape the content of their daily publication to be supportive of like-minded neo-liberal parties and erect barriers to the NDP that does not ideologically share similar interests. The ‘British Columbia NDP Media Worker’ adds further evidence of this potential press manipulation with the circumstances surrounding the Believe BC advertising campaign

currently running in the Vancouver Sun and Vancouver Province. The ‘British Columbia NDP Media Worker’ states:

CanWest Global and their media partners decided that the BC economy would benefit from a feel good campaign promoting all of the wonderful things about BC. And that is fair enough, actually the BC economy would benefit from that, but its interesting coming from an organization that when we were in power ran nothing but bad news stories about the economy which in our view scared off a lot of potential investors by basically saying ‘anyone with an interest don’t come here, this is a third world country.’ And then when the economy really started to tank [in 2002] with [BC Liberal Premier Gordon] Campbell left holding the bag, all of a sudden the major newspapers are team players who want to do everything they can to make people better about the economy.

What the ‘British Columbia NDP Media Worker’ seems to be implying is that newspaper organizations are not only interested in promoting a stronger economy that will benefit the newspaper’s bottom line, but also implementing such campaigns when they have more cooperative parties in government that share a market liberal philosophy. Logically, for the NDP this could mean its social democratic messages would face tall barriers when in conflict with regional ownership concentration and the promotion of local economic prosperity. In contrast, neo-liberal parties could enjoy much greater access. Overall, the loss of news diversity and the possibility of economic neo-liberal boosterism could create serious barriers to press access for the NDP.<sup>117</sup>

### ***Newsroom Organization***

The pursuit of profit in the Canadian newspaper industry has also encouraged owners to slash newsroom staff and cut back contracts in order to obtain bottom line benefits at individual newspaper outlets. Although this has been a long-standing concern in the Canadian newspaper industry, Miller argues the past 10 years have been particularly volatile for journalistic employment. Shareholders disappointed with lower than expected returns in combination with revenue slumps, corporate takeovers and increased expenses have pushed newspaper organization to reduce editorial staffing costs at most Canadian newspapers.

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<sup>117</sup> This issue will be further discussion in a later section of this chapter on direct ownership intervention.

Two examples exemplify my point about newsroom downsizing. First, Black purchased two Saskatchewan dailies (the Saskatoon StarPhoenix and the Regina Leader-Post) in 1996 and proceeded to fire 25 percent of the staff two days later. Former managing editor of the StarPhoenix Wilfred Popoff commented, “I was fired not because of anything I did or didn’t do, but because of the need to cut costs in the quest for fantastic profits.” (quoted in Winter, 1997, p. 33). The CanWest Global Asper family made similar cuts to the National Post in 2001. Seventy editorial staff workers were laid-off – an estimated 20 percent of the newsroom (Damsell, 2001).

Newsrooms that have already been downsized also face wage rollbacks, undervalued contract offers and lack of seniority rights. Unhappy with these management attitudes, editorial staff have participated in several strikes in recent years. Reporters were off the job at the Calgary Herald for eight months in 2000 before Conrad Black finally broke the union over the issue of employment protection while a three week strike in 1998 at the St. Catharines Standard did not prevent wage cuts to new hires (Canadian Press-Reuters, 2000; Gillespie, 1998).

Although it would be easy to attribute these labour disputes to Conrad Black’s abrasive and public contempt for organized labour, other media companies faced similar backlashes from their editorial staff in 2002. Staff at FP Canadian Newspapers LP’s Winnipeg Free Press and CanWest’s Victoria Times-Colonist were off the job for one and nine weeks respectively (“Winnipeg Free Press workers,” 2002; “Victoria: Newspaper,” 2002). The Osprey Media Group’s Sudbury Star, Port Hope Evening Guide and Cobourg Daily Star were also on strike in 2002 (each for four months) fighting unfair wages (Lewis, 2002; Miller, 2002; “Cobourg, Port Hope,” 2003). In comparison, between 1990 and 1995 there were only seven strikes at Canadian daily newspapers (Siegel, 1996).

Business manager Nigel Sones for Local 3024A of the Communication Workers of America that represented Port Hope and Cobourg reporters commented that although he has negotiated contacts with the Thomson and Hollinger newspaper chains in the past, Osprey is the press organization most committed to the bottom line that he had ever seen. “They’re not buying these papers to put out better newspapers; they’re buying them to make as much money as possible” (quoted in Miller, 2003). Sones further described the

news stories and pictures they publish as “only the wrapping for the advertising” (quoted in Miller, 2003).

Media scholars concur that the editorial staff cuts and wage reductions have stepped beyond acceptable levels of corporate reorganization. Mary Vipond (2000) argues that owners have cut staff “to the bone,” (p. 68) hired freelancers and inexperienced reporters, and reduced local coverage. Siegel (1996) adds, “the newspaper industry of the mid-1990s [was] not burning fat; it [was] destroying muscle” (p. 119).

These arguments are further reinforced by comments made by owners and managers of Canada’s media companies. Most recently, CanWest Global President and CEO Leonard Asper (2002) in a speech to the Canadian Club made a statement that reinforces the claims made in this chapter about fiscal focused ownership intentions. In response to complaints from media competitors, disgruntled employees and “anti-business academics” (p. 3) about media commercialization and editorial control, he replied, “They just can’t come to terms with the notion that the media is a business and that owners of those businesses must treat them as such in order to attract capital” (p. 3).

Asper’s comment reflects similar past statements made in moments of honesty by other newspaper executives. In 1997, after the acquisition of the Southam chain by Hollinger, its chief financial officer Jack Boulton forecast that the company would generate 35 percent annual returns on investment from many of its metropolitan newspaper holdings after 750 jobs were eliminated and other financial restructuring has taken place (quoted in Mahood, 1997).

In 1992, Hollinger president David Radler provided even more candid evidence of plans to extract excessive profits from newspaper holdings while reducing the editorial workforce. He reportedly said:

I visit the office of each prospective property at night and count the desks. That tells me how many people work there. If the place has, say, 42 desks, I know I can put that paper out with 30 people and that means a dozen people will be leaving the payroll even though I haven’t seen their faces yet (quoted in Newman, 1992, p. 68).

These examples and statements demonstrate that staff and resource cutbacks to meet news organizations' economic goals have circumvented journalistic goals of editorial quality and diversity.

### **Implications for the press: Newsroom Organization**

Editorial room cutbacks have strongly influenced the production of news content – particularly limiting the number of stories that can be produced. In turn, fewer sources have the opportunity to translate their worldviews and perspective to journalists in hopes of gaining favourable coverage and the attention of a mass public.

A 1996 study by Jim McKenzie illustrates the impact on editorial diversity and quality that newsroom cutbacks can cause. A content analysis study was conducted on the Regina Leader-Post for three weeks prior and three week after the Hollinger mass firings. The study demonstrated a significant deterioration in news content. Local stories written by staff reporters dropped by nearly 10 percent (65.9 to 56.3 percent) and were replaced with cheaper national and international news wire. There was also a reduction in stories covering agriculture, general news, police and fire, education, the environment and labour while entertainment feature writing increased. McKenzie concluded that, “When the takeover was announced, the paper’s executives said that Hollinger’s vast resources would enable the Leader-Post to improve. That didn’t happen. Under Hollinger, the paper deteriorated...”<sup>118</sup>

Peter Desbarats (1990) argues that not only are fewer local or social issue stories covered in the downsized newsroom, but also journalists have become or are becoming too complacent to pursue any innovation in their work efforts. He further contends that:

when journalists come to understand that the bottom line is more important than editorial excellence, that media owners regard editorial costs as, at best, a necessary evil... they perform accordingly. Editors begin to give preference to journalists, who are good at the ‘quick and dirty,’ who can produce a flow of usable if not notable material. Journalists either adapt to this or leave for jobs in other fields... Eventually a tradition of quick,

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<sup>118</sup> These results would not have surprised Popoff. “You can’t take 24 bodies out of a newsroom of 63 and not affect quality.” (quoted in Winter, 1997, p. 33).

shoddy journalism develops, with value placed on negative stories that can shock and attract attention. This process is now well advanced in some Canadian newsrooms. (p. 115)

To conclude, it would appear that recent internal organization and downsizing in the pursuit of profit have decreased news diversity and discouraged assertive journalism.

### **Implications for the NDP: Newsroom Organization**

The impact of this fiscal-shaped newsroom on the NDP can be understood at two levels. A basic reading of the newsroom situation raised concerns by all communication directors that the quality of journalism is being hindered. The lack of innovative or investigative journalism was a common frustration expressed by the majority of NDP communication directors regarding cutbacks of resources and staff in Canadian newsrooms. Brian Cousins, assistant chief of staff to the NDP premier of Saskatchewan, expressed the majority frustration with the following comments:

I think [profit maximization] definitely affects the quality of journalism in the province. The level of research and analysis that is done here is quite pathetic. And that's not so much a criticism of the journalists; it is a criticism that they are not given the resources, the time or the expectations by their management to do better...

Cousins later added:

There are fewer journalists functioning in the province even though our population is about the same. And so they are all doing more with less and there are relatively few that have the opportunity to do any kind of analysis and I don't think they function very well. They still pretty much try to figure out what is going on superficially and rarely ever look at the bigger forces that are at work out here.

In addition, a minority of NDP communication directors raised concerns that journalists no longer take pride in their work, echoing similar comments made by Desbarats (1990). Riva Harrison, director of communication for the Manitoba NDP, quipped, "I think it's fast food. Daily journalism is a fast food market. It's turning out your stories every day."

A minority of NDP communication directors took this common complaint to a deeper, more critical analysis. They expressed concern that the simplification of media

content would benefit newsmakers that promote common sense storylines. The communication directors reasoned that such information would be easier for the journalist to digest, reproduce and distribute. At the same time, social democratic NDP messages that challenge the status quo would be distorted or ignored because they required more time and resources for the party to fully explain to the journalist, and for the journalist to explain to their audience. Wayne Harding, director of communication for the federal NDP, illustrates this point with the recent failures of his party to direct media attention onto the public safety threats created by government policies around water privatization. He stated that although the party has provided background information to journalists and hammered on the issue during Question Period in the legislature, the short-staffed media appear unwilling to reallocate staff and resources away from the easy-to-write celebrity spectacle of the Jean Chretien “death watch.”

New Brunswick’s Carol Ferguson, legislative assistant to the leader of the NDP, shared Harding’s frustration that staff and resource cuts were reinforcing the trend for status quo reporting. She further complained that the lack of critical reporting reinforces the views of dominant social groups and hinders the ability of any challenger voice to gain serious press access. She states:

Just in terms of the workload issue I have seen their work load increase significantly over the past 10, 11 years that I have been here. So they do not have a real opportunity to really do much in terms of research and reflection. And what happens in my view is they just have to take what is given to them and especially in the government kind of situation when you have a whole pile of communication officers spinning.... I find that increasingly it is very difficult for journalists to offer anything else than what they are given by the person who wants to make the news. That includes us too, right? If we are lucky, they will just take what we have and put it in the paper. So they have much less resources to independently raise issues and increasingly they have to work with what is in front of them. And I think that has really been a detriment to a broader, critical base for news coverage and I think that when that happens it is harder to raise dissenting voices. Because the best place that they get information from and the easiest place that they get information from is government and it is harder for all of us with less resources to critically question that.

Overall, it would appear that an assembly line newsroom climate raises press barriers to social democratic NDP messages because over-worked journalists are less



willing to consider ideas or sources that complicate common sense, easy-to-write storylines.

### ***Direct Ownership Intervention***

Another concern in the organizational structure of newspapers is the impact of direct ownership intervention. Often stringent supporters of neo-liberalism, owners have on occasion published their own viewpoints or changed staff to make the ideological tone of the paper more supportive of the open market (Winter, 1997; Miller, 1998; Barlow and Winter, 1997; Hackett et al., 2000).

Many liberal-pluralists would argue that these occasions of ownership intervention are not a serious source of concern in the overall production of news content. Nesbitt-Larking (2001) explains that many liberal-pluralists argue that:

in the early days of capitalism, firms were small and owners had direct and personal daily control. In today's world, the media are large-scale companies with shareholders and managers. There has been a divorce of ownership and control. Shareholders, even major ones, have little say in the editorial content of the paper... Professionals in the media, such as editors and journalists, make such choices. These professionals are characteristically people of little personal property. Unlike rich capitalists, with a vested interest in promoting the capitalist system, the media managers are said to be disinterested professionals, committed to balance, fairness and impartiality (p. 119).

However, critical scholars and other liberal-pluralists cite actions taken by Conrad Black and the Asper family that strongly negate such an argument. According to Miller (1998), James Winter (1997) and Maude Barlow and Winter (1997), Black did not hesitate to shift the editorial content of his newspapers to meet his neo-liberal worldviews when he moved into the press industry. For example, Miller states that at the Ottawa Citizen in 1996, editor Jim Travers, editorial page editor Peter Calamai and other editorial writers were replaced by:

... writers, some of them non-journalists, whose resumes spoke of work for the Fraser Institute and the [Ontario Progressive Conservative Premier Mike] Harris government. Calamai was replaced by William Watson, a conservative McGill University economist whose last column for the Financial Post expressed the hope that history would judge [former Progressive Conservative Prime Minister Brian] Mulroney to be one of the great prime ministers (p. 76).

The Asper family, the purchasers of most of Black's publications in 2001, have also made alterations to the newspapers to further entrench a uniform neo-liberal viewpoint.<sup>119</sup> Most prominently, the Aspers implemented a national editorial policy in late 2001 that required all of its newspapers to publish the same editorial written from the CanWest Global home office in Winnipeg. The editorials are written by or with the assistance of Murdoch Davis, editor-in-chief of Southam News and reflect the worldviews of the Asper family. Local publishers or editors are not allowed to contradict the owner's position (Southam News 2003a).

Stephen Kimber<sup>120</sup>, a former columnist with the Halifax Daily News, argues that the Aspers are only interested in the newspaper industry for three reasons: profit, a "promotional vehicle for their television network [and] also as private, personal pulpits from which to express their views" (quoted in Brown, 2002, p. A25). Kimber states these views include tax breaks for the rich, privatizing health care, pro-Israel foreign policy and support for the federal Liberal Party.

A review of the national editorials in the first three months of 2002 appears to corroborate Kimber's claim. One editorial piece titled "Tax-happy governments still go after just one taxpayer," argues that, "[n]one of [the provincial or federal] governments sufficiently recognize that lower taxes are a necessary lubricant to foster the hard work, risk-taking and innovation critical to productivity growth, job creation and a higher standard of living" (Southam News, 2002b, p. A18). Other editorials called for: national securities regulation standards to protect financial investors (Southam News, 2002c), exporting fresh water (Southam News, 2002d), United Nation budget reforms to make it a better "return on investment" (including axing "the bloated cultural organization" UNESCO) (Southam News, 2002e, p. A14), more cooperation with United States' foreign policy, increased spending to the military (Southam News, 2002f), and social spending cuts to 'native Indians' (Southam News, 2002g). Together, these editorials offer further evidence that ownership intervention can likely cause a standardized neo-liberal position to be solidified in many of Canada's largest regional newspapers.

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<sup>119</sup> Asper has also championed more personal issues such as support for Israel and the leadership of Jean Chretien.

<sup>120</sup> Kimber is also director of the school of journalism at the University of King's College.

Davis defends this policy on the basis that it was meant to explore issues from a “Canada-wide perspective rather than only regionally” (Southam News, 2003a). He further states that:

...it is wrong to characterize this as an intrusion into freedom of expression. That term defines the freedom of media and individuals from government intrusion. It does not mean freedom to have one’s words published even if they don’t meet standards. Nor does it mean proprietors are not free to manage newspapers as they feel is best. Those who call on government to act against this initiative are inviting limits to freedoms, not defending them. Editorials are judged in the marketplace of ideas. We believe this initiative will succeed there (p. A12).

However, Davis’ argument is countered by comments from Desbarats (2002):

Newspaper publishers traditionally have interpreted freedom of the press as something that they purchased along with their ownership of newspapers. In fact, this right is a cornerstone of freedom of the press under our democratic system; it’s supported by journalists as well as publishers. However, publishers tend to express it as an absolute right. Journalists see it as co-existing with other rights, particularly their own.

Journalistic rights are less clearly defined than property rights but they relate to basic principles of freedom of speech and of the press. Where news media are owned by a few giant corporations or by the state, these so-called rights of journalists are the only bulwark against an owner’s undoubted legal right to control the content of its news media. Defined more by precedent than legislation, these rights have been regarded by journalists as worth defending, literally to the death (p. A13).

Desbarats’ (2002) argument that journalists should be allowed to write articles and columns on any topic without fear of ownership intervention is supported by both Kimber (quoted in Brown, 2002) and Miller (1998); however they believe that many CanWest writers have become so demoralized by another case of ownership intervention that they are now self-censoring their work or writing confrontational columns with the expectation that they will be fired. Specifically, Kimber acknowledges that he had avoided several sensitive topics during his time working for the Asper’s Halifax Daily News.

It would seem reasonable to conclude from this discussion that direct ownership intervention when flexed at Canada’s newspapers can reinforce a neo-liberal editorial position. Furthermore, the owner’s ideological viewpoint may trickle down into general news reporting as journalists attempt to avoid confrontations with editors and head office.

## **Implications for the NDP: Direct Ownership Intervention**

The NDP is faced with an apparent disadvantage to press access as neo-liberal content is infused into publications by ownership demands and journalists' self-censorship. The worldviews of the NDP and press owners rarely if ever align, leaving the chance that owner demands or editorials would benefit the party at slim to none.<sup>121</sup>

Regarding direct ownership intervention that directly raises barriers to NDP press access, the public connections no longer appear to be as strong since Black sold his press properties. During Black's rein in the press industry it was much easier to make this argument since he was a vocal press opponent of the NDP's policies and leaders. In 1992, he wrote that the governing Ontario NDP was a "howling mob of single issue fanatics; lesbians, abortionists, ecogeeks, labor agitators, standing and shouting on each other's shoulders" (p. 42). On federal NDP leader Audrey McLaughlin, Black (1991) described her as, "Bob Rae in drag, mouthing crypto-Marxist platitudes that have about as much contemporary relevance as the utterances of the Flat-Earth Society" (p. 11).

However, such public denouncements of the NDP are not often expressed by Canada's current press barons. Neither Asper or any other major owner (including Osprey's Michael Sifton Jr., BCE's Jean Monty and Quebecor's Pierre Karl Péladeau) have demonstrated any serious public hostilities directly against the NDP. This conclusion is corroborated by the fact that the majority of NDP communication directors interviewed could not offer any overwhelming evidence that owners were directly

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<sup>121</sup> The one exception to this statement may be the trustee ownership of the Toronto Star, Canada's highest circulation daily. In theory, the trustees are expected to uphold six principles set out by former Star publisher Joseph Atkinson (1899-1948). Atkinson expected his paper to publish editorial content that promoted a strong, united and independent Canada, social justice, individual and civil liberties, community and civil engagement, the rights of working people and the necessary role of government. "These six Principles collectively constitute the intellectual framework on which Star editorial policy has been based. Standing alone, they dictate few specific answers to particular issues of policy and debate. They must continually be interpreted to apply to new and diverse situations. They have, however, provided a firm and principled foundation on which analysis and reasoning can take place. They also provide a spectrum against which news coverage can be organized to highlight issues worthy of debate" ("The Atkinson Principles," 2001).

In practice, some would argue the Toronto Star has been more attentive to NDP policies in the past; however the paper has only editorially supported the party in one federal election (1979) and rarely at the provincial level (The Choice, 1979c).

altering press access afforded to their party. No mention was made of the Asper family, Peladeau, Monty or Sifton during all of the interviews. Ontario's Gil Hardy stated, "I'm not sitting in the boardroom so I have no idea. I really could not fairly answer that. Maybe there are publishers that are saying 'no we do not want the NDP in this story' but I have no way of knowing that. I think most reporters would resist that."

In fact, it was only the smaller press owners that drew the ire of a few communication directors. In New Brunswick, Ferguson was the most forthright in her contempt for ownership interference – pointing to many rumours of actions taken by the Irving family. She commented that many reporters that have covered New Brunswick provincial politics over the years have been fired for digging into issues that have displeased the Irving family. On two occasions, Ferguson believes the Irvings made decisions that directly restricted NDP press access. During the 1995 election, the St. John Telegraph Journal ran a false story that Elizabeth Weir, the NDP leader, would be unable to take her seat in the legislature if elected because of a petition she signed that was a clear breach of the legislative assembly act. According to Ferguson, the article stated a vote for Weir was a wasted ballot.<sup>122</sup> On other occasion, a regular NDP column written by Ferguson for the Moncton Times-Transcript was pulled after the party successfully fought for the city to reject a bylaw that would have privatized the city's public water supply. Although Ferguson believes the Irving's interfered in both of these cases, she was unable to provide any overwhelming evidence during the interview that the NDP's press treatment was the direct result of ownership demands.

The 'British Columbia NDP Media Worker' also expressed concerns that editorial interference from CanWest management had taken place on a few occasions (although not directly affecting the NDP); yet he could also not isolate how the intervention had taken place or who exactly had made the final decisions. In the end, none of the communication directors offered any substantial evidence of ownership interference beyond rumours and questionable content published in the news.

In part, the lack of critical discussion in the interviews on this area of media influence may be attributed to the fact that the owners rarely have contact with

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<sup>122</sup> Weir was still elected in her St John Harbour riding.

communication directors. In addition, none of the interviewees mentioned any moments when reporters expressed to them solid evidence of partisan intervention by senior editors or owners. As such, communication directors lose their most direct channels of information on whether private instructions, regarding NDP news coverage, have been given or are currently being given behind closed doors.

Scholars also appear silent on recent cases of ownership intervention, with the exception of Asper, making it difficult to generalize this style of media influence to the majority of Canadian newspapers. It would appear further research and investigation is needed to make any strong conclusions about direct ownership intervention, specifically instructions bearing a direct impact on NDP media access. What is clear is some owners have given directions that will mould their publication with neo-liberal worldviews. In these cases, the NDP or policies supported by the NDP have faced barriers to press access.

### ***Advertiser Accommodation***

In their pursuit of profits, newspaper owners must also take into consideration the demands of advertisers. Since corporations selling products and services purchase most advertising, many scholars have argued that there is a need to accommodate their wishes, requests and demands when shaping the news content in the daily press. This has clear implications for the NDP since it is a party that advocates for policies and ideals that often do not match the worldviews of profit-oriented corporations.

The financial muscle of advertisers is significant in Canada's press system. Statistics Canada reports daily newspapers generated \$2.496 billion from advertisers in 2001 – a 34 percent increase from 1993 (\$1.863 billion). In contrast, circulation revenue has decline during the same period from \$740 million in 1993 to \$709 million in 2001 (Peter Kalhok, Unit Head, Publishing, Advertising and Design Industries Service Industries, Division Statistics Canada, personal communication, August 25, 2003; Siegel, 1996) In total, Canadian newspapers (daily and community) in 2001 earned 71 percent of their revenue from advertisers (\$3.25 billion) while 16 percent came from circulation sales (\$750 million) (“2001 Survey,” n.d.)

So which advertisers have the most muscle? According to A.C. Nielsen Company of Canada (2002), automotive manufacturing companies and automotive dealers appear to currently be the most dominant advertisers in Canadian daily newspapers. Six out of the top 10 (and 10 of the top 20) ad spenders in 2001 came from the auto industry with General Motors Consolidated Local Car Dealers taking the biggest spender title (\$77,336,800).<sup>123</sup> Other industries that made the top 20 list include media companies<sup>124</sup>, department stores<sup>125</sup> and the Government of Canada. In total, the top 200 daily newspaper ad purchasers in 2001 accounted for \$1.903 billion in spending.

Siegel (1996) argues, “In strictly economic terms, the media exist as message-bearers for those who want to sell something to newspaper readers...” (p. 113). This basic financial breakdown signals a potentially serious power imbalance over who has financial muscle in the daily print industry – which may impact what and how news content is produced.

### **Implications for the press: Advertiser Accommodation**

There is an old adage that ‘those that pay the piper, play the tune.’ In the context of the newspaper industry, C. Edwin Baker (1994) argues that the dependence of advertising dollars pressures newspaper executives to accommodate merchant’s needs. To illustrate his point, Baker outlines four newspaper policies that blur the line between editorial and advertising departments. First of all, journalists should write about advertisers’ products and services, and their broader commercial interests, with care and consideration. Secondly, newspapers should “create a buying mood that will induce readers... to have more favourable reactions to advertisements” (p. 44). Thirdly, newspapers should work hard to avert offending advertisers’ potential customers with partisan and controversial

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<sup>123</sup> The other top 10 auto industry advertisers are: Chrysler Dodge Jeep dealers association (2), Chrysler Consolidated Local Car dealerships (3), Pontiac Buick Cadillac Dealers Association (4), Chevrolet Oldsmobile Dealers Association (6), and Ford Consolidated Local Car dealerships (8) (A.C Nielsen Company of Canada, 2002).

<sup>124</sup> Media industry advertisers include Bell Canada Enterprises (7), CanWest Capital Group (9), Viacom Enterprises (17), and Alliance Atlantis (18) (A.C Nielsen Company of Canada, 2002).

<sup>125</sup> Department store advertisers include Hudson Bay Company (5) and Sears (10) (A.C Nielsen Company of Canada, 2002).

news content and finally, newspapers should be marketed to “middle-to-higher-income audiences whose greater purchasing power advertisers value most (p. 44).

Ben Bagdikian (2000) offers further development for this last point. He argues that American advertisers are much more willing to spend their ad dollars in publications that are attractive to consumers with higher disposable income. Consequently, the easiest way for a newspaper to improve its bottom line is changing content to attract an elite demographic that advertiser’s desire.

Hackett et al. (2000) confirm this is also an issue in the Canadian press system. Expanding on the points raised by Baker (1994) and Bagdikian (2000), Hackett et al. state that:

the logic of the market is one dollar, one vote – not one person, one vote. Media that promote the perspectives and interests of recent immigrants, or of the poor, or that consistently challenge consumerism and the business system, have had more difficulty surviving in an advertiser-driven business environment (p. 67).

But what mechanisms have been put in place to ensure advertiser demands are given priority? Doug Underwood (1993) argues that changes in many newspaper management structures have played a significant role in bringing together advertising and editorial departments. In a process he calls ‘total newspapering’, traditional editors that have worked their way up the journalistic ladder are being increasingly replaced by business educated managers/editors (many with Masters of Business Administration degrees) with little or no editorial background. These new editors/managers then shape the news format based on demographic surveys and direct coordination with advertising departments.

While Underwood (1993) recounts a number of examples in the United States including the Kansas City Star and Arizona Republic, there does not appear to be significant evidence that this trend has made its way north of the border. He does discuss the transition of the London Free Press to a survey-based tabloid (similar to USA Today); however that newspaper has since reverted back to the more traditional editor-directed, broadsheet format. In addition, the editor-in-chief positions at both Canadian national newspapers have remained in the hands of well-seasoned journalists that have worked



their way to the top. At the National Post, the position is currently held by Matthew Fraser, formerly the paper's media columnist, while Edward Greenspon holds the same rank at the Globe and Mail with a background as a political columnist. Neither have any formal business education, thus depreciating Underwood's argument in the Canadian context (CanWest Global Communication, 2003; "Edward Greenspon," 2003).

Nevertheless, Hackett et. al (2000) contend that most Canadian newspaper editors have learned to accept the fact that advertisers must be accommodated by favouring consumerism over social values to create a favourable "editorial environment" (p. 66). A shift to infotainment (the fusing of news and entertainment) is one avenue to avoid offending readers, while another route is treating the reader as a consumer. Regarding labour disputes, Hackett et al. (2002) contend coverage:

usually emphasizes inconvenience and disruption to consumers. The excluded alternative is news that addresses us as workers, as citizens, or as members of a fragile ecosystem, rather than primarily as consumers of products or as passive spectators of political scandals (p. 66).

There are also been some cases of advertisers successfully demanding structural or staffing changes at newspapers when their financial interests have been damaged by unflattering press coverage. In 1994, Managing editor Larry Marshall and reporter Don Anderson of the Sunshine Coast News were fired after advertisers complained about an editorial written by Anderson that criticized the business district of Gibsons, British Columbia. In the editorial, he stated that:

the proliferation of junk shops and tacky gift boutiques is indicative of the thoughtlessness and laziness of business owners who choose to avoid diversification and competitive prices. There appears to be no effort from retailers to attract customers, particularly residents of the coast (quoted in Lazarus, 1994, p. B4).<sup>126</sup>

Hackett et al. (2000) note there have been other instances of direct advertiser intervention in Windsor, Ontario and possibly Vancouver; however these disputes appear rare or at least rarely publicly disclosed. Likely, newspaper managers take a more proactive approach to advertiser accommodation in an effort to avoid being backed into a reactive position by advertiser complaints and demands.

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<sup>126</sup> This example is borrowed from Hackett et al. (2000).

Everyone does not share this argument that advertisers have strong influence over press content. Liberal-pluralists are more likely to assert the consumer sovereignty argument.<sup>127</sup> James Curran (1996) explains that in this view, through the principles of the free market, readers will ultimately determine how media content is selected and shaped. “Media-owners in a market-based system must give people what they want if they are to stay in business, and this ensures that the media as a whole reflect the views and values of the buying public and act as a public mouthpiece” (p. 91).

Although newspapers could certainly not exist without an audience, Curran (1996) notes there are a number of fatal flaws in the rationale of the consumer sovereignty argument. First, as discussed earlier in this chapter, market monopolies have eliminated sufficient competition in most cities to the point that there is no other alternative publication from which readers can compare or select if they are unsatisfied with their local newspaper. Secondly, rising barriers-to-entry in the newspaper marketplace make it very difficult to start a new publication, although as noted in chapter two, it would be over-deterministic to state there is no chance at all. Thirdly, the contention that “media controllers subordinate their ideological commitments to the imperatives of the market is only partly true” (p. 95). What becomes apparent through these and other critiques by Curran is that the audience does have a small voice in the content of the paper; however there are much larger and more powerful sources of influence that make a larger impact on news content.

One could conclude from this discussion that newspapers have incorporated accommodation for advertisers into the day-to-day news process, while agency with the readership to shape the style and substance of publications seems minimal.

### **Implications for the NDP: Advertiser Accommodation**

The influence of advertisers should be a serious concern for the NDP. It would appear that newspaper organizations fuelled by profit motivations are willing and able to accommodate the wishes of advertisers with a consumer friendly, elite marketed product.

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<sup>127</sup> This argument was also briefly discussed in chapter two.

One can reason from this conclusion that the NDP will likely face some barriers to press access because they promote policies that do not create a buying mood (for example, homelessness, welfare and aboriginal rights) and do not likely reflect the worldviews of an upper class audience (for example, day care, fair trade and urban transit). In other words, it would appear newspaper organizations are more interested in advertiser-driven profits than promoting political discourse that strengthens a democratic community. The 1980 Royal Commission on Newspapers acknowledged this trend, stating “It was left-wing viewpoints that tended to be under-represented as commercialism increased its hold” (Canada, 1981, p. 15).

On the issue of audience influence, NDP communication directors had mixed opinions. Some supported the consumer sovereignty argument. The ‘British Columbia NDP Media Worker’ stated, “Since a newspaper is a money making business, you want to increase advertising; therefore you make a paper that everyone wants to read.” However, a thin majority of communication directors did not see any impact made by the media audience. Harding, from the federal party, supported his conclusion that the audience was a non-factor in news content with two examples. He noted that a noticeable racial bias in the Toronto Sun does not discourage African Canadians or Black Jamaicans from reading the publication, and a clear anti-NDP bias on Vancouver radio and television stations also does not mobilize the public to protest or switch news choices.

Regarding advertisers, the majority of communication directors did not have any knowledge of direct advertiser intervention that affected the NDP or the issues that the party promotes. The ‘British Columbia NDP Media Worker’ summed up the response from the majority of respondents with following statement. “I don’t think in any case that a major advertiser has phoned up the publisher of the paper and said ‘you have to publish a negative story on the NDP because they bug us’...” Furthermore, none of the directors made reference to newspapers creating a ‘consumer friendly’ environment or appealing to upper class audiences that could raise barriers to NDP press access.

In the end, the majority of NDP communication directors do not share strong views that confirm or deny advertiser accommodation will impact NDP press access. In part, this may be the result of NDP communication directors having no professional experience

in newspaper management; therefore being unable to speak to the final decisions that shape the style and substance of daily publications. On review of their responses, it may also be possible that the majority of respondents interpreted the questions on this topic as asking for their thoughts on direct audience or advertiser influence, rather than the intended general query on any influence, whether indirect or direct.

Nevertheless, one could conclude from critical published scholarship that advertiser accommodation can create a consumer friendly environment at the expense of important social issues and market regulation issues that the NDP has traditionally supported. Further investigation is needed to draw direct lines between NDP press campaigns on these issues and its treatment by reporters and editors.

### ***Conclusion***

From this in-depth discussion of the newspaper industry's organizational structure and extra-media elements, there is clear evidence of a strong undercurrent of neo-liberalism that implicitly, and on rare occasion explicitly, shapes press content. There are two central concerns for NDP press access raised here as the press industry further shapes itself for profit maximizing purposes: a reduction in editorial diversity and an accommodation of free market thinking.

The most imposing barriers to press access appear to be created by media organizations choosing to favour free market ideals to accommodate advertisers, owners and upper class readerships. Profit margins are strengthened by publishing 'buying mood' news content that advertisers' desire; however, such actions also potentially reduce discussion on social democratic issues advocated by the NDP such as welfare and child poverty. There are also demands by owners (directly) and readers with large disposable incomes (indirectly) to give strong attention to market deregulation, tax cuts, expensive holidays, stock prices and BMWs. In turn, this can restrict the coverage afforded to NDP's social democratic campaigns on corporate citizenship, fair trade and social policies.

Indirectly, the NDP is also harmed by fewer reporters and columnists available to listen to its side of the story. While the reduction of editorial diversity is arguably not

directly biased more against the NDP than other Canadian sources, what market monopolies and ownership concentration does cause is the intense competition for the limited number of points of access still available. With the NDP already working from an underdog position to gain media access, fewer points of access further restricts possible opportunities for the party to bypass barriers erected by other press filters including source-based news routines, advertiser accommodation and ownership demands.

While NDP communication directors extensively discussed the potential impact of individual journalists and their news routines, many of them struggled to answer queries on many of the media filters discussed in this chapter. Likely this is a result of an apparent disconnection between their relations with journalists and the unknown actions taken in press boardrooms. Therefore many of these conclusions made in this chapter have been built (more than the other chapters) from more general arguments made from critical and liberal-pluralist perspectives on press influence through the media organizational and extra-media filters. Nevertheless, there is a strong case to be made here that this enveloping filter, within which reporters and their news routines exist, demonstrates noteworthy arguments that the NDP faces larger barriers to press access compared to other newsmakers because of an ideological divide.

## CONCLUSION

Many NDP leaders, members and supporters have long complained that the Canadian press mistreat their party and its social democratic messages. They point to the Right-wing tirades of Conrad Black or the expensive media relations campaigns launched by other parties, but never has an academic work been produced that tries to make sense of it all. That was my goal while crafting the pages of this thesis.

Upon investigation of what barriers and openings exist for NDP press access, it quickly became apparent that the party must do battle within a social structure that supports a clear inequitable distribution of power. Dominant social groups (including Right-wing political groups, corporations and upper-class citizens) have a clear advantage using economic capital and cultural codes to shape the nation's hegemonic order to best fit their needs. I argue that recent shifts within the status-quo away from social democratic worldviews and towards free market, small government thinking further demonstrates the muscle of Canada's elite.

The press would appear to reinforce this ideological power structure. Through cultural commodification and the hegemonic reproduction of dominant ideals within news content, reporters and owners favour the worldviews of dominant social groups. This positions groups that challenge the authority of dominant social groups at a distinct disadvantage when attempting to use the press as a vehicle to disseminate their Left-wing messages to a vast public. While I reject Gitlin's (1980) conclusions that all challenger groups will face marginalization or have their "oppositional edge blunted" (p. 291), I do recognize that the opportunities for them to gain consistent press access and work towards setting a public agenda are limited in a commercialized press environment.

This challenger group paradigm is an important starting point to understanding NDP-press relations. It recognizes that while the NDP is an institutional parliamentary party, its unique characteristics (including labour financing, activist undercurrents, reform goals and social democratic policies) leave it positioned most often as an outsider in

Canadian political arenas. In turn, the party faces an uphill battle for media access against market liberal parties and corporations.

Working from this paradigm, the barriers to NDP press access appear to be quite formidable. At the most micro-level of news production, there is a clear contrast between the homogeneous (male, white, middle-upper class) background of Canadian journalists, and the class, gender and racial diversity of the NDP (found in its policies, candidate selection and electoral support base). While there is little evidence that reporters will intentionally distort the news to accommodate individuals from their own background, there are critical arguments that reporters could struggle to identify with class, feminist and race arguments that are devalued by hegemonic codes rooted within the regime of objectivity.

The disproportionate access to capital resources favouring dominant social groups also threatens NDP press access. As a source (or newsmaker) attempting to embed itself within reporters' passive information gathering routines, the NDP cannot financially keep pace with market liberal parties and corporations when acquiring the services of high quality public relations and media relations workers to effectively disseminate messages into the newsroom.

Advertiser accommodation by newspapers is another potential barrier to NDP press access. In efforts to satisfy the newspaper industry's primary source of revenue (advertisers), newspaper executives appear to have taken actions to craft the style and substance of news content to create a 'buying mood', avoid offending 'consumers' and appeal to a middle-upper class audience. This raises a serious barrier to the NDP's social democratic policies on poverty, welfare, aboriginal rights, fair trade and day care, that would arguably not be embraced by advertisers and their targeted audiences.

Direct intervention by press owners marks a fourth barrier to NDP press access. Owned by men that have built their fortunes on profit maximization and support free market logic, the press is an influential tool at their disposal to ensure the hegemonic order is reinforced for their benefit. In their view, the NDP on most occasions pose a direct threat to profits and neo-liberal ideology – often resulting in the past with harsh words from press baron Conrad Black or his personally selected editors and columnists.

Although current press owners are less publicly antagonistic against the NDP, there are still clear indications (including the CanWest national editorials) that owners are willing to intervene in the editorial production of newspapers to ensure their worldviews are published in the best possible light.

Nevertheless, explicit instructions by owners are most often unnecessary to ensure dominant ideological worldviews are used to frame the daily news. Instead ideological codes and cultural maps, freely accepted by reporters and the majority of the public as basic news values, appear to sometimes subvert challenger worldviews that may offer a fresh, alternative perspective on social, economic, political and cultural issues. For the NDP, this could prevent the party from launching media campaigns that tackle social structure issues (such as health determinants, poverty determinants and class relations) that point out how the social order threatens the well-being of portions of the public.

While the ideological codes and cultural maps rooted in news values may put some conditions on the NDP's media campaigns, there remain significant openings to the party's social democratic messages if the campaign works with and around the codes and maps. Successful campaigns by Broadbent, Hampton, Robinson and Kormos using humour, conflict and leadership news value tactics demonstrate that this is a valuable opening to distributing the party's messages to a vast public.

Another important media access opening enjoyed by the NDP over other Left-wing organizations is the legislative or parliamentary news net. It would appear that working from within the halls of governance in close proximity to the press gallery offers strong press access opportunities if the NDP can take the initiative to court relationships, suggest story ideas and promote policy platforms in a creative manner.

There also appears to be a social democratic 'safety net' supported by the personal values and political leanings of individual journalists. Although they proclaim to have Left-of-centre political views and progressive values, it does not appear that they infuse these personal views into their professional writing. Instead, they make every effort to work with 'fair' and 'accurate' approaches to their news work. One could conclude from such observations that if journalists make every effort to be 'fair' and they personally appreciate and understand the worldviews of the NDP, there is a strong likelihood that the



party has a 'safety net' that ensures their social democratic messages will not disappear completely from the press spotlight.

In summary, there are serious indications that structural and ideological influences impair the NDP from gaining the same amount and quality of press access afforded to Canada's dominant social groups. Although points of access can be identified and should be pursued with vigour and determination by NDP communication workers, there is also concern that these openings will shrink in the current press environment. This forecast is primarily founded on recent actions taken by media owners, particularly the Asper family of CanWest Global and Sifton of the Osprey Group, to escalate cost-reduction strategies (including staff and resource cuts), intensify media routine practices and better accommodate advertisers to make the recent wave of media convergence a profitable venture.

For the NDP, I argue this means that the party must not only rework its communication plans to avoid barriers and take advantage of openings identified in this thesis, but the party must also dedicate energy and resources towards reforming media regulation policies. Arguably, this could be considered a two-pronged approach to media access – this thesis addressed the short-term issues while recent work on media reform and media democratization by scholars including Curran (1996), David Hesmondhalgh (2000) and Hackett (2000) discuss how the media structure can be challenged for long-term benefits.<sup>128</sup> Although it was beyond the scope of my thesis to address long-term media reform issues, I suggest here that the NDP also needs to take an active interest in this area of policy and activism. Although the party will occasionally speak out in reaction to an editor being fired or a newspaper changing hands, media reform does not appear to be a serious concern for the party at this time. This is troubling since the party's short-term communication strategies are threatened by trends indicating there will be future press access reductions for voices outside the status-quo. Thus, in my opinion the party needs to take an active interest in at least three basic areas of media reform. First, the NDP needs to become an active participant in the current Canadian Senate review of media policy. Second, the party needs to listen to its activist membership and build closer

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<sup>128</sup> Also see Lee (1995), Hazen and Winokur (1997).

ties with the media democracy movement. Third, the party must make every effort to integrate alternative communication methods (particularly the Internet) into its communication plans.

In the short term, the NDP needs to conduct an intensive and inclusive (provincial and federal) review of its communication strategies to better develop effective media plans for the future. The NDP in the past has seemed unwilling or uninterested in such a venture. Three points struck me as disappointing and disheartening in my interviews with NDP communication directors. Most communication directors acknowledged that they rarely considered media campaigns (including other branches of the NDP) outside of their own province when developing their own media strategies. Second, many communication directors admitted their communication plans were not much different from other neo-liberal parties. Third, many communication directors agreed that they take a reactive not proactive approach to dealing with the press. I argue this strategy does not seem adequate if the NDP seeks to circumvent the apparent ideological and structural barriers that have been outlined in the chapters of this thesis.

So I argue a more innovative NDP media plan is needed working from the general map of the press environment provided in this thesis. Clearly, the party needs to think 'outside the box' and take better advantage of where the press access openings are available while keeping an eye out for access barriers. From the conclusions made in this thesis, I recommend three strategies that the NDP should pursue.

First, the NDP should dedicate resources and energy to better understand news value tactics since they appear to offer the best openings to press access. However, rather than using news value tactics blindly, the party must work to assess their ideological codes, when they are the most valuable to the party, and when they will circumvent the party's message. In particular, a deeper understanding of leadership news value is vital for the party to have a better chance of avoiding the unfavourable circumstances that resulted from the press and public rejection of NDP Premiers Glen Clark in British Columbia and Bob Rae in Ontario.

Second, the party must be proactive in acquiring press access. By being aggressive on the hydro-electricity issue, the Ontario NDP established itself as a primary source on

the subject within media circles. By circumventing traditional press gallery traditions that the government and official opposition speak to the press first, the federal and Alberta NDP branches have been able on several occasions to set the day's agenda. By being persistent with Right-wing columnists, the NDP in Manitoba and Alberta have been able to gain access. Consequently, I argue the NDP has much better opportunities to gain press access if it works with an aggressive, proactive approach.

Third, I suggest that the NDP needs to be innovative and forward thinking in its use of new communication technologies. With significant barriers to press access demonstrated in this thesis, potential opportunities through non-mediated, digital and/or wireless communication may prove to be tools that the NDP can make major breakthroughs in political communication.

On a positive note, recent actions on the federal level indicate that the party is ready to take a new approach to getting its message through the press and out to the general public. I argue the membership election of media-savvy Jack Layton in 2003 to the party's leadership is a step forward to gaining the press access rewards of leadership news value. In addition, the hiring of Jamey Heath, a former communication coordinator for Greenpeace, to the post of director of communication and research for the NDP caucus may be another sign the party is willing to look to other campaigns and other media methods.

From an academic standpoint, there is a great amount of work that needs to be done to further develop an understanding of the NDP-press relationship. One study not undertaken in this thesis due to space and scope constraints, but potentially very valuable to the NDP-press access discussion, is a comprehensive quantitative content analysis of newspaper reportage on political parties. At the outset of this thesis, I worked to establish from an empirical quantitative position using three small content analysis studies that the press has treated the NDP unfairly. While helpful as a starting point, deeper and more developed content analyses are needed to explain what frames, topics, sources and language are used in news content that discusses the NDP. This would complement the theoretical and qualitative work presented here.

The issue of media convergence also deserves academic discussion. As television, newspapers and Internet properties merge with the help of the CanWest Global and Bell Canada Enterprises, the discussion of 'press' access may be becoming more obsolete because it is more difficult to separate the content of each medium. Thus, I argue future scholarly discussions should deliberate on the implications of convergence on the NDP-press relationship, and whether a broader NDP-media discussion, that includes all major media formats, is best.

The challenger group-press relationship also deserves further study. In this thesis, I assert that groups or organizations challenging the power of dominant social groups through reform-oriented politics would theoretically have diminished agency to counter imposing economic and cultural constraints. Furthermore, there are some conclusions, in my viewpoint, that can be extrapolated from this NDP press access case study to apply more broadly to most other Canadian challenger groups. Arguably, these groups lack financial resources to launch competitive campaigns that appeal to passive reporters, support issues that disgruntle media owners and advertisers, and likely face marginalization on issues that drift too far from ideological codes and cultural maps embedded in news values. However, challenger groups may also have press access opportunities through reform-oriented appeals to news values, and journalists' personal values and political attitudes. Greenpeace has certainly been successful in gaining press access with outlandish media stunts, while Canadian unions have also found openings with outspoken leaders, such as Buzz Hargrove, Bob White and Ken Georgetti.

While such conclusions seem logical, further study is needed to determine whether these general conclusions on barriers and openings based on my NDP case study have validity and reliability in the challenger group-press relationship. To carry out such an investigation, I suggest further case studies need to be undertaken using the Shoemaker and Reese hierarchical media filter model. Possible Canadian case studies include: the Green Party (both provincial and federal), social democratic municipal parties (such as Vancouver's Coalition of Progressive Electors or the Burnaby Citizens Association), the Canadian Auto Workers union, the gay rights movement, and the environmental movement (including Greenpeace).

Finally, the audience needs to be factored into the NDP-press research equation. Clearly, there is little value for the NDP to dedicate significant resources and effort to press access, if the audience is unreceptive to press content. Thus, important questions need to be asked. What NDP press messages are received clearest by the public and why? What social, political, economic and cultural conditions impact the readers' evaluation of NDP press messages? Has the public become disillusioned with political reporting to the point they do not take it seriously? The answers to such question not only have serious implications for the NDP's communication strategies, but more broadly they will help to explain the impact of the press in creating a wider spectrum of public discourse on political issues.

These academic and political suggestions for future study and action just further demonstrate the complex nature of the NDP-press relations. Accordingly, I strongly advocate that this political communication debate should not end on this page. For the NDP, the benefit of debating this issue is a better connection to the Canadian public. For Canadian academics, it provides a new and important field of research straddling political science and communication studies. For Canadian politics, it could help to better entrench a challenger voice to battle neo-liberal proponents. For Canadian democracy, it can only broaden the spectrum of ideological worldviews being debated within the general population.

To conclude, the words of Taras (2000) seem the most fitting to capture the significance of taking innovative and progressive action on the issue of NDP press access. He states:

The essential lifeblood of a healthy democratic society is the degree to which it is open to new ideas, different points of view, and controversial issues. A public space is by its very nature combative and chaotic and filled with popular myths and obsessions. It is a place where passions can be vented and demons fought and slain. But is it also the place where the essential work of a society takes place – the place where ideas are formulated and debated. If the public space is closed off to people with unpopular views or ideas or to important information, then a society risks becoming rigid and atrophied, losing its turbulent and vital energy (p. 5).

**APPENDIX A:  
OFFICE OF RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL**

**SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY**

OFFICE OF RESEARCH ETHICS



BURNABY, BRITISH COLUMBIA  
CANADA V5A 1S6  
Telephone: 604-291-3447  
FAX: 604-268-6785

September 11, 2003

Mr. Ian Ross  
Graduate Student  
School of Communication  
Simon Fraser University

Dear Mr. Ross:

**Re: The New Democratic Party and Media Access**

The above-titled ethics application has been granted approval by the Simon Fraser Research Ethics Board, in accordance with Policy R 20.01, "Ethics Review of Research Involving Human Subjects".

Sincerely,

Dr. Hal Weinberg, Director  
Office of Research Ethics

**APPENDIX B:  
INTERVIEWS**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Party branch</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Interview Date</b>	<b>Anonymity</b>	<b>Transcript release</b>
'British Columbia NDP Media Worker'	British Columbia	NA	10 January 2003	Yes	18 August 2003
Lou Arab	Alberta	Director of Communication, Alberta New Democrat Opposition	10 January 2003	No	23 July 2003
Brian Cousins	Saskatchewan	Assistant Chief of Staff to the Premier	19 January 2003	No	28 July 2003
Riva Harrison	Manitoba	Director of Communication and the Premier's Press Secretary	23 January 2003	No	30 July 2003
Gil Hardy	Ontario	Manager, Media Relations, Ontario NDP Caucus	15 January 2003	No	6 August 2003
Carol Ferguson	New Brunswick	Legislative Assistant to the Leader of the NDP	30 January 2003	No	7 August 2003
Wayne Harding	Canada	Director of Communication	4 February 2003	No	28 July 2003

**APPENDIX C:  
DETAILS OF INTERVIEW SUBJECTS**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Status of party at time of interview</b>	<b>Press experience</b>	<b>Number of years working for the NDP</b>
'British Columbia NDP Media Worker'	Second party, no official party status.	NA	NA
Lou Arab	Third party, no official party status	None	15 years – Most of work as volunteer; Constituent Assistant, low level communication position (British Columbia NDP government), Director of Communication (Alberta New Democrat Opposition).
Brian Cousins	Minority government	20 years – A number of positions with the CBC including: Radio Reporter, Radio Manager (Thunder Bay, Ontario; Iqaluit, Northwest Territories (now Nunavut)), Regional Director (CBC Northern Service; Saskatchewan).	10 years – Most years spent specializing in northern communications. Current position (Assistant Chief of Staff to the Premier, Saskatchewan Government) focuses on reorganizing the government's communication structure.
Riva Harrison	Majority government	11 years – Reporter and Copy Editor (Winnipeg Sun).	4 years – Director of Communication, Premier's Press Secretary.



Gil Hardy	Third party, no official party status	15 years(+) – Provincial affairs columnist, Federal Politics Reporter (Thomson newspaper chain),	4 years as Media Relations Manager.  He was also Press secretary for former Toronto Mayor Barbara Hall.
Carol Ferguson	Third party, no official party status	None	12 years – Past seven years as Legislative Assistant to the Leader of the NDP
Wayne Harding	Fifth party, official party status	10 years (approx.) Reporter (New Westminster Columbian, Canadian Press, Victoria Times), Assistant City Editor (Victoria Times).	31 years – Press Secretary (Minister of Highways, British Columbia NDP; Lead of the Opposition, British Columbia; Federal NDP caucus), communication manager (NDP leader Ed Broadbent’s office), Director of Communications (Ontario NDP caucus, Federal NDP).

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