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Who owns what in Canada's press—an opportunity missed — ELIZABETH MAY

Following on from my discussion, last edition, of the Murdoch media empire scandal, Murdoch's influence in Canada, and Kai Nagata's exposé of media integrity in his blog 'Why I quit my job,' let's look at Canada's media.

As far back as the Davey Commission in the 1960s, Canadians have been warned about Canada's concentration and vertical integration of corporate media ownership. By the 1980s, the Kent Commission report described the fact that so much of the Canadian news media ownership was in so few hands as 'monstrous.'

When giant CanWest's empire broke apart in 2009, the Green Party suggested CanWest's bankruptcy was the perfect time to expand the number of owners of Canadian media and sell the newspapers (or at least offer the papers for sale) to the highest bidder. No media covered our press release.

Although CanWest's television and newspaper holdings were sold separately that's as far as it went. The 46 CanWest daily papers, including flagship and famously unprofitable *National Post*, should have been open to any bidder to break-up the unhealthy degree of corporate control. But the trustees in bankruptcy only accepted bidding for all 46 papers (including all BC's dailies). Paul Godfrey, ideologically aligned with the *National Post*'s historical editorial stance, bought all 46 for over \$1 billion.

Another giant in Canada, Quebecor, controls Sun Media as a wholly owned subsidiary. That conglomerate is the largest newspaper publisher in Canada, including 43 paid and free dailies (including the once great *London Free Press*, *Kingston Whig-Standard* and *Peterborough Examiner*), as well as 200 community papers (they bought-up Osprey), as well as the new channel SUN-TV, and TVA, the largest commercial TV station in Quebec.

Quebecor also runs Canoe providing English and

French internet properties, online servers, and a host of other companies, now known as media properties.

BellGlobe Media is another huge player, owning 28 TV stations, including CTV, 15% of the *Globe and Mail*, 29 specialty channels, 33 radio stations, including big players in Toronto and Ottawa CFRA and CFRB, as well as dozens of online products and internet networks (such as Sympatico).

If this were a board game, it would be called Monopoly. We do have CBC and Radio-Canada, but, as former CTV bureau chief Kai Nagata (who worked at CBC before CTV) points out, CBC brass have made all reporters terrified of expressing what could be construed as a 'left-wing' opinion.

Looking for an independent newspaper in Canada? We have two large dailies that fall outside the Bell, Shaw and Quebecor conglomerates—the *Chronicle Herald* in Halifax (owned by the Dennis family) and the *Toronto Star*, owned by a trust, Torstar. On the coast we have the small, but mighty, *Island Tides* and brave independent online journalism in *The Tyee*.

Calling For A Media Policy Debate

We need a serious policy debate in this country. With eyes opened by the Murdoch empire scandal, maybe we are ready to look at our own news media and see if new tools are needed.

Current competition laws only operate to hold in check the price of papers. CRTC only looks at Canadian content.

Bottom line: we need anti-trust laws to break up the excessive media concentration, in only five or six hands, Canada-wide.

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