

# Tomorrow's News:

## How to Fix Canada's Media

BY MARSHALL SOULES

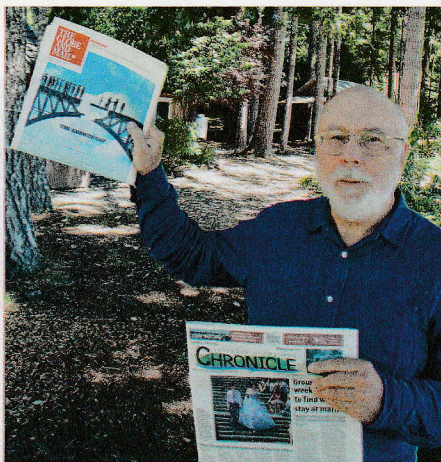
Journalist, teacher, writer of many books on news reporting and world traveller living in Ladysmith, Marc Edge has published a new book with a message we need to pay attention to. Print newspapers are on the ropes, struggling to compete in a marketplace increasingly dominated by digital news and changing consumer habits. Local news sources have been particularly vulnerable, and *Tomorrow's News: How to Fix Canada's Media* provides background and recommendations for fixing a broken news system.

Competition for news reporting has forced the former print newspapers to cut costs, fire reporters and photographers, and centralize editorial decisions. Local news coverage has been especially hard hit with closures and cost-cutting — something we have experienced here on Vancouver Island.

With his engaging writing style, extensive research and knowledge of business practices, Edge describes how these changes have been rolled out since the worldwide web made its public debut in the mid-1990s. Especially concerning is his finding that over 90 per cent of Canada's print news business is owned by US hedge funds, which are taking enterprises that could be making good profits but are drowning in debt in a scheme that benefits hedge-fund investors.

Foreign ownership limits on Canadian news enterprises are not being enforced, and the consolidation of news production into fewer hands means that local news does not get the attention and coverage we deserve and need. Edge artfully provides the background readers need for understanding the changing news environment in Canada.

Edge follows through on the title's promise on "how to fix Canada's media," particularly news media. His suggestions for reform are worth the price of admission. While his previous books provide ample background on how we arrived at this sorry destination, his suggestions in this most recent effort bring sparks of illumination to the growing darkness and should be required reading for every politician, especially with so many elections in the wings. If we don't like politics as usual, then we need news that helps us make informed decisions, not that taunts us with uncertainty and divisive political antics.



Author Marc Edge wants to fix Canada's Media. Photo: Marshall Soules.

Solutions proposed by Edge for media reform include not bailing out news organizations who falsely claim they can't make a profit; encouraging non-profit news organizations to flourish with the help of tax-deductible donations; and creating co-ops and employee-owned newspapers. He wants to rewrite the playbook of current corporate news practices.

Another option encourages foundations to play a role in funding news production, but their tendency to advocate for their own interests can introduce bias in reporting. The result is often blatantly misleading "pink slime" funded by "dark money." As a profession, public relations influencers increased dramatically, while the number of working journalists has plunged equally dramatically. Edge proposes, instead, the formation of an LDRS (Local Democracy Reporting Service) that promotes informed democracy instead of PR flack, political division and lack of accountability. As others have noted, news is the oxygen of democracy, and we need fresh winds to fan the flames.

Edge suggests that instead of bailing out corporations, civic-function journalism — helping communities know themselves for civic purposes — could be funded to share their news stories. Collaborative journalism and news sharing reverse the old idea of "scooping the competition" and instead share news to obtain more in-depth reporting.

Even though it has been controversial, Edge entertains the idea that taxing enterprises like Google and Facebook, which are making windfall digital profits, could spread the wealth and increase news availability. Governments would not directly subsidize the news; they would simply redirect the riches of the

Internet to improve online content and reinvigorate local news.

Edge suggests that Canadians should allow most for-profit local newspapers to expire along with their broken business model, build a national network of flexible online newsrooms and thus rescue what most needs to be saved — journalists.

Another plan for fixing the media is inspired by European initiatives to implement voucher programs where citizens redeem an annual allotment to support their preferred news sources. Vouchers shift decisions about what news to support from public authorities to individual users.

Above all, Edge advocates for accountability journalism — we should fund the watchdogs of democracy. Let other enterprises make money publishing celebrity news, sports reporting or opinions — at their own expense. While accountability journalism is the most powerful and necessary reporting we need, it is also the most vulnerable form of news: risky, costly and technically difficult. This is the journalism Marc Edge says we need to worry about. "Access reporting tells you what the powerful said, while accountability reporting tells you what they did."

