THE LOUGHEED GOVERNMENT AND THE MEDIA:
NEWS MANAGEMENT IN THE ALBERTA POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

Roger Epp
University of Alberta

This article examines the Alberta government's concern with news management, tracing its corresponding success to the premier's personal skills, limited media scrutiny and a lingering non-partisanship in the political culture.

Cet article examine l'inquiétude du gouvernement de l'Alberta à l'égard du management de l'information en montrant ses succès par rapport aux talents personnels du premier ministre, à l'examen limité des média et au non-engagement persistant dans le domaine politique.

Rather than getting your facts from the media, get them from your MLA.
--Premier Peter Lougheed, to the 1980 provincial Progressive Conservative convention (Edmonton Journal, April 14, 1980, B3).
The notion of an adversarial media - government relationship is widely considered an inherent feature of liberal democratic societies. This relationship typically is described in terms of a game between near equal players: the media, acting as "watch dogs" on the public's behalf, seek to uncover what politicians would conceal. Government in turn attempts to gain favorable news coverage of their actions. Whatever merit this has as a general description of the adversarial situation, it has become almost commonplace in the case of Alberta to attribute the Lougheed government's electoral success as least partially to an atypical, less than adversarial relationship with the provincial media. Opposition politicians and outside commentators (Fetherling, 1981) seem particularly convinced of a "soft" hometown press, nurtured by the superior manipulative skills exercised through the premier's office. It is the intent of this article to examine the relationship between the Alberta media and the Lougheed government in a manner which moves beyond popular, but problem-fraught, generalizations, and accounts for its complex and changing nature. A fundamental question which must be confronted is this: If the Alberta media are "soft," why is the government as preoccupied with secrecy and news management as this paper proposes to demonstrate? Moreover, what factors motivate the government in this regard and enable it to maintain such control over the dissemination of information? This article will briefly place contemporary media - government relations in some historical context, then explore its subject by considering several basic aspects of this relationship: the government's managerial style, tied closely to Lougheed's own personality and attributes; the Alberta media's
structure and varying approaches; and, the persistence of the non-partisan tradition in the provincial political culture.

AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

When Peter Lougheed and his Progressive conservatives swept into office in 1970, they did so with a greater measure of media support than any previous administration in Alberta. The Liberals, who governed from 1905 to 1921, an era when newspapers functioned virtually as party organs and political biases spilled onto news pages unabashedly, were naturally acceptable to some -- the Edmonton Bulletin being the most devout -- and not to others. The Edmonton Journal and Calgary Herald were the most prominent Conservative voices, although, interestingly, a group of Calgary Tories led by Senator James Lougheed, grandfather of the premier, was at one point unhappy enough with the latter paper to consider launching a more faithful party organ (Bruce, 1968, 116 - 123).

The United Farmers of Alberta government which succeeded the Liberals in 1921 never received more than lukewarm support from the metropolitan papers, which were generally uncomfortable with the notion of a rural-based political movement (Bruce, 1968; Betke, 1979). Media-government antagonism then reached its peak during Social Credit's first term, from 1935 to 1940, with both the daily and weekly press almost uniformly opposed to William Aberhart's brand of radicalism (Bruce, 1968; Hill, 1977; Irving 1959, 318 - 326). The Herald, most vociferous among them, periodically likened the
movement's leader to Hitler and Mussolini (April 29, 1935; May 4, 1937). Aberhart in turn used a new medium, radio, both to circumvent and to attack the press as agent of the mythical "Fifty Big Shots" of Central Canada. During the 1935 campaign he initiated a short-lived boycott of the Herald. By 1937, cabinet sensitivity to press criticism and to published leaks from a disgruntled caucus had led to the Accurate News and Information Act, which gave the government sweeping powers to regulate newspaper content and ultimately forbid offenders from publishing. When the legislation was struck down by the Supreme Court of Canada, the Journal was awarded a special Pulitzer Prize for its leadership role in the fight against it. Relations between Social Credit and the media generally improved as the government abandoned its original platform for one of solid, honest administration, and as Manning took over as premier (Bruce, 1968), but never became intimate.

When Peter Lougheed became Conservative leader in 1965, he was able to present himself to reporters and media executives as the modern, urban and professional "kindred spirit" they could not find within the government. By the 1971 campaign, this concerted effort at cultivating key journalists had translated into what is generally regarded as sympathetic treatment both from reporters and most newspaper editorialists. Social Credit officials have cited the reporting of the Journal's John Lindblad -- a childhood friend of Lougheed's brother, and post-election appointee as director of Alberta's Ottawa office -- as the most blatant example of a widespread tendency to exaggerate the success of PC rallies while focusing coverage of their party's campaign on a small number of poorly -
attended events (Barr, 1974; Hustak, 1978). Editorialy, the Journal and Herald were singled out by then - premier Strom as particularly anti-Social Credit. The Journal responded with this front - page proclamation:

Harry Strom has been predicting the Journal would oppose the re-election of the Social Credit government. WE DO. (Aug. 27, 1971)

The 1971 campaign also revealed Lougheed's preference for, and use of, television. Not long after becoming party leader, after an unimpressive performance on a televised panel inter-view program, he requested and received permission to use the facilities of CFCN - TV Calgary late at night to improve his delivery and otherwise gain familiarity with the medium. In 1971 he felt comfortable enough for the Conservatives -- acting on the recommendation of a media sub-committee struck several years earlier by Lougheed -- to spend more than 85% of their campaign advertising budget on television (Barr, 1974; Hustak, 1978). Social Credit strategists, less impressed with the medium and saddled with a leader who could not bring his personal warmth to the screen, directed less than one - quarter of their budget to television.

ELEMENTS OF NEWS MANAGEMENT

Since 1971, what generally can be characterized as an attempt by the Lougheed government to assert more control over the dissemination of information has manifested itself in several ways, involving departmental staffs, caucus and
cabinet, and particularly the premier's office. First, the government set about almost immediately to overhaul and expand the Public Affairs Bureau into what a recent report for the NDP administration of Manitoba admiringly termed "one of the strongest communications organizations in North America" (Winnipeg Free Press, Feb. 8, 1983, 1, 4). With a 1982-83 operating budget of $8.4 million--excluding advertising costs--the bureau has about 230 employees, of whom 70 are actually public relations specialists. Bureau staff are assigned in varying numbers to government departments to coordinate information releases and media relations. The bureau also conducts seminars for senior civil servants, and occasionally for cabinet ministers, in dealing with reporters. As well, it operates the Alberta Communications Network, which distributes government releases and voice clips from ministers to newsrooms across the province. As the report of a private consultant commissioned by the government has pointed out (Socio-Systems, 1973), these handouts tend to be used indiscriminantly as news, with minimal or no editing, particularly by small media outlets having no representation in Edmonton, simply because of their convenience. In this way, the network can be seen as an expensive means of getting the government's message through to the electorate while bypassing some of the gatekeepers, namely legislative reporters whose job is to interpret independently the message and assess its significance. The bureau as a whole represents part of a highly centralized approach to news management, which borrows heavily from the advanced public relations techniques developed in the corporate world from which Lougheed and many of his ministers have come.
Second, the government and the premier himself have continued to favor television over other media. Perhaps as revealing a clue as any is the fact that both Lougheed's press secretaries have been hired from television, the first a former news director at CFCN Calgary, and his successor a legislative reporter for a private Edmonton station. This preference, in part, reflects both the medium's dominance in contemporary culture and Lougheed's relative comfort with it, but also should be seen as involving some degree of the above-mentioned desire to circumvent the gatekeepers. When the government pushed successfully in 1972 for the introduction of television cameras in the legislature -- a Canadian first -- one of its major arguments concerned the right of Albertans to see their elected representatives in action, "a right to be realized more fully than by simply newspaper reporting" (Alberta Hansard, 1972, I, 6-61). Ironically, perhaps, the news cameras have remained virtually consigned to one corner of the chamber, which permits a frontal view of government benches but only a rear view of the small opposition contingent.

More recently, this television preference has been manifested in Lougheed's apparent willingness to take to the air and "speak directly to Albertans" during periods of federal-provincial conflict over energy and the constitution. In 1981, for example, he made two province-wide broadcasts at public expense, which were produced, not surprisingly, at CFCN Calgary. While some media commentators have described his performance as wooden, others maintain that the premier's seeming amateurism is deliberate and that he succeeds on television precisely because he comes across to the viewer
not as slick but as controlled and low-key (Halinda, 1983). This explanation is complemented by reporters' observations that Lougheed demonstrates in news conferences an acute awareness of the medium's particular demands. If, for example, he is asked a difficult question in front of the cameras, he may respond either by rambling on in a series of incomplete sentences -- negating any possibility of a neat, 30 second "clip" suitable for the evening newscast -- or by simultaneously diminishing the audio quality by such methods as tapping a pencil on the table (Lougheed and The Media, 1983). In this way, he does not evade the question. He also ensures that whatever discomfort he may display in answering it does not appear on television. His control in front of the cameras is such that the producer of a recent documentary was unable to find any film footage in which Lougheed visibly had lost his temper (Spandier, 1983).

Third, and perhaps most fundamental, Lougheed has been surrounded by a shield which insulates him from the media to a greater extent, for example, than the other western premiers. The first clue to reporters that the accessibility they enjoyed with Lougheed as opposition leader was coming to an end may have been the post-election construction of a door outside the premier's office, preventing them from camping between it and the cabinet chamber to catch him entering or leaving a meeting (Lougheed and the Media, 1983). This shielding tendency has been revealed in several other ways since 1971. Unlike most provincial premiers and, until recently, the prime minister, Lougheed has steadfastly refused to consider the idea of a regular news conference. Reporters must either confront him outside his office or
the legislative assembly--his press secretary running interference--or wait until he decides to hold a formal news conference. By contrast, when Allan Blakeney was premier of Saskatchewan, he was said to stop by reporters' legislature offices routinely to ask whether they had any questions for him; a similar openness has been noted both in Manitoba and British Columbia (Zwarun, 1981; Lethbridge Herald, April 26, 1980, B1). George Oake, now the Journal's legislature bureau chief after working in a wide variety of political jurisdictions, compares government secrecy in Alberta to that in Argentina under military rule (Oake, 1983). While the comparison would seem somewhat exaggerated, the fact remains that legislative reporters generally complain of a lack of access to the premier and some cabinet ministers. It is not uncommon for Lougheed's itinerary to be withheld from them. On one occasion he had been meeting with financial and political officials in New York and Washington when the local media tracked him down -- with the help of American contacts (Calgary Herald, Oct. 30, 1981, A3).

Not surprisingly, much of the reporters' animosity is directed at Ron Liepert, who serves as press secretary for both the premier and cabinet (Oake, 1983; Fotheringham, 1980). Liepert in turn rejects charges of undue secrecy or lack of cooperation:

Because the government is fairly large in majority, a number of media people--especially people who are new to Alberta, or new to the legislative beat -- might feel some responsibility that they have to be sympathetic towards the small opposition, or have
to form their own opposition, and for that reason would be perceived by a cabinet minister as negative towards the government. I think, though, that what is incumbent upon a reporter who is covering the legislature is to establish a rapport with a minister or his executive assistant, and with our office. I guess we have to know a little about that person -- whether we can trust him when we talk to him. (Lougheed and the Media, 1983)

Legislative reporters, like reporters generally, must earn and maintain a degree of respect from those with whom they deal. What is perhaps more significant in Liepert's statement is the notion -- seemingly pervasive within the government -- that reporters naturally will side with the opposition. New MLAs quickly receive the same message. Tom Sindlinger, who was elected in 1979 and expelled from the government caucus in mid-term, has said members were warned that:

we would be facing a very hostile media and that it would develop as the term went on. We were given very explicit instructions cautioning us about our relations with the media. We had to be very conservative in what we said. (Edmonton Journal, Feb. 9, 1981, B1)

Sindlinger's expulsion has been interpreted widely as the result not of his disagreement with government energy and constitutional policy, but rather of his decision to do so publicly. According to Oake (1983), the lesson was clear for other relatively talkative MLAs: "Everybody shut up after that."
A former Lougheed cabinet minister, Jim Foster, recalls that while there were no explicit rules for ministers on their style of media relations, the premier commonly would brief newcomers on the subject. Furthermore, "if there was a member of the press gallery who was consistently, in someone's view, distorting things or being unfair, we [the cabinet] would know about it and respond accordingly toward the reporter" (Foster, 1983). In his view, the media may well focus too much on the opposition because of the numerical imbalance, but at the same time some ministers are more secretive than necessary. Many simply are uncomfortable with reporters. The premier, however, "is quite an organized fellow. He's pretty careful about how he manages information. That's the people around him, too."

Lougheed's apparent personal dislike for situations he cannot control seems one major reason for the shield around him. A long list of illustrations could be cited in support of this assertion. In 1981, for example, Lougheed appeared only once on a radio talk show, and then on the condition that listeners' questions were submitted in advance, in writing, and put to him in a taped interview (Edmonton Journal, June 23, 1984, B3). He once stormed out of an interview with two Canadian Press reporters when asked about alleged improprieties involving several of his ministers. He claimed to have been misled about the topic of the interview (Edmonton Journal, Nov. 17, 1979, A1). On another occasion Lougheed denied a request for an interview for a national women's magazine series on the ten provincial premiers. His press secretary explained that he did not want to deal with "Eastern editors" and suspected he was
being used to lure other western premiers into the project (Zwarun, 1981). Finally, and perhaps most illustrative of the philosophy which this article attributes to the premier and his government, Lougheed accepted an invitation in 1979 to address a meeting of the western American governors in the expectation that his contribution would be informal and private. When he discovered that the host state of Idaho has an "open meeting law," which forbids the discussion of public business behind closed doors, he protested but to no avail. The handful of Alberta reporters accompanying him was allowed into the meeting (Edmonton Journal, June 12, 1979, A14). Following a more recent, unannounced trip by Lougheed to the Eastern United States, one observer suggested that "the premier has always regarded the media as an instrument to be used to convey a message, as much as possible, on his own terms" (Calgary Herald, Oct. 30, 1981, A3). Unlike most politicians, he refuses to recognize an "informative role that goes beyond the mere passing along of rehearsed, pre-packaged information."

THE PROVINCIAL MEDIA

The Alberta legislative press gallery generally fits the characteristics of provincial galleries offered by a research study for the 1981 Royal Commission on Newspapers: dominated by one or two print bureaus, subject to high turnover of personnel, particularly in the broadcast sector, and, with exceptions, more interested in the skirmish of daily question period than in investigative reporting:

The high rate of turnover tends to mean
that the collective memory of the gallery is short or reposes in one or two veterans, often long-time correspondents for smaller dailies. ...Between sessions, most provincial galleries lose more than half their members to other duties, precluding the investigative work that might go on in the absence of the pressures of covering the legislature. (Fletcher, 1981, 57 - 58, 60)

In Alberta, the longest-serving gallery members in the print and broadcast sectors respectively date back to the mid-1970's and to the late 1950's, the latter representing a marked exception. While cabinet ministers have at times lamented that this transience prevents reporters from becoming as well-versed as they should be (Foster, 1983), it is equally the case that government gains an advantage in dealing with a gallery which collectively is less familiar with the history of an issue than its spokespersons.

The Edmonton Journal is the dominant organization in the gallery. Because of the resources the paper has chosen to allocate to its bureau, its coverage is more comprehensive and more likely to determine the news agenda both for other gallery members and for opposition MLAs, who at times brandish newspapers as they ask questions in the chamber. As well, much of the Journal's reportage is transmitted across the Canadian Press news service and used by other Alberta media outlets, which may or may not be represented in Edmonton. The Journal maintains a legislative bureau of six, along with a full-time columnist, an expansion which
occurred after the one-sided 1979 election provoked then-publisher, J. P. O'Callaghan, to declare the paper to be the "unofficial opposition." In recent years, the *Journal* has been the primary source of revelations embarrassing to the government, although it should be noted that some of these -- particularly in the area of social services -- have originated with reporters outside the legislative bureau.

Editorially, the *Journal* considers itself "almost a spokesman in the newspaper business in the West," attempting to articulate the region's interests (Thorsell, 1983). Its editorial position, therefore, is basically supportive of the government on fundamental federal-provincial issues such as energy and the constitution, differing when it does largely in terms of the most appropriate tactics. The *Journal* criticized the 1980 decision to reduce the eastward flow of oil, for example, as indefensible provocation (October 30, 1979, A4); yet it was perhaps more "hawkish" than the government during the constitutional debate. Where its editorial page has represented more of an unofficial opposition is on domestic issues such as social services or the environment. William Thorsell, associate editor, attributes little power of public persuasion to the *Journal*'s editorials (1983), but suggests they can embolden a minority within the government caucus which may be making the same point on an issue. In any case, Lougheed does take them seriously enough to respond when he disagrees strongly, either through a letter to the editor -- sometimes under the name of a local MLA but, Thorsell is convinced, drafted in the premier's office -- or during his annual meeting with the paper's editorial board.5
Of the remaining Alberta-based print media representatives in the gallery -- a steadily diminishing number -- the Calgary Herald maintains the largest bureau: two reporters and a columnist. Like the Journal, it has increased its representation in recent years, bucking a trend that has seen the closure of one-person bureaus by the Lethbridge Herald, Medicine Hat News and Calgary Sun (formerly the Albertan). The Edmonton Sun is limited in its coverage of the legislature by a lack of resources and by a tabloid preference for short, entertaining stories which negates in-depth explanation of issues. That leaves the newsmagazine, Alberta Report, which pridefully distances itself from the local "branch office managers" of the "Toronto-owned press" (August 16, 1982, 44), as the only legitimate voice of Alberta's interests. It might be reiterated here that the province's daily newspapers, to varying degrees, have all supported the Lougheed government editorially on what are considered fundamental issues. None -- even the Lethbridge Herald, under a staunch Liberal publisher through the 1970's -- has recommended the electoral defeat of the Lougheed government. Nonetheless, because Alberta Report's political biases tend to spill more freely onto its news pages, one is less likely to find stories critical of the government than one would in the newspapers. The exceptions are stories which involve an arbitrary action by a social worker -- the subject of an ongoing crusade -- or a perceived lapse in the defense of provincial interests.

In the broadcast sector, the sister stations CFCN Calgary and CFRN Edmonton might be considered most significant for two reasons: their long-standing news rating supremacy and
their close historical association with Lougheed. The premier's loyalty to CFCN can be traced to his late-night television practices sessions as an obscure new politician. Moreover, he is said to have personal friendships with influential individuals at both stations (Hustak, 1978, 190). These factors typically have been cited in support of charges that the two stations are "soft" on the government. Also cited is the periodic "Conversation with the Premier" program, produced alternately at the two stations. Lougheed's biographer describes it as "nothing more than a thinly-disguised commercial for the Conservative party" (Hustak, 1978, 190). At one time the half-hour interview program involved an open invitation for Lougheed to appear when and as often as he wished, a policy which has since changed. Both stations defend the program as anything but soft. A recent program, it is pointed out (Halinda, 1983), included on its panel a prominent labour leader and a small business representative who grilled Lougheed on his optimistic projections for the Alberta economy.

Another charge raised against CFRN in the mid-1970's by two former reporters concerned an alleged station policy, allocating coverage to respective parties in proportion to number of seats, and stressing that the NDP not appear on its highly-watched six p.m. newscast (Hustak, 1978, 191-192). The allegations were denied at the time. The controversy, however, does point to a serious limitation in television news: the fact that perhaps only a dozen stories can be squeezed into a major newscast and that, as a result, the process of selection is more crucial than in the roomier print media.

Steve Halinda, CFRN's assistant manager of news
and public affairs, describes the station's fundamental criterion as being the importance of a story to a broad spectrum of viewers (1983). The underlying philosophy is to give them enough information from different sides of an issue to make up their own minds. In that the station assumes an independent stance in its coverage, it considers itself to be in an adversarial relationship with the government, which Halinda regards as unnecessarily secretive: "It strikes me that the media and government don't have a better relationship because of the secrecy factor." However, with a few exceptions in the past decade -- perhaps the most memorable being the disclosure of grant giveaways in the department of culture -- neither television nor radio coverage of provincial politics and government could be considered investigative or analytical in orientation.

The CBC is the single exception to what generally are not antagonistic relations between the government and the broadcast sector. As a matter of principle, the premier and some ministers are said to refuse to go out of their way to help the network's television and radio reporters (Foster, 1983). Some of this hostility is attributable to the 1977 screening of the television docu-drama "Tar Sands" -- based very loosely on a book by Larry Pratt -- which portrayed Lougheed as a foul-mouthed dupe of the oil companies during the Syncrude negotiations. Lougheed pursued libel action against the CBC for several years before reaching an out-of-court settlement, including $82,500 in damages, a primetime apology, and a promise to never air the program again (Calgary Herald, May 11, 1982, A3). Ironically, however, when the suit was before the courts, Lougheed tended to shun the
CBC's local reporters -- despite the fact that "Tar Sands" was a network production -- while remaining somewhat more flexible with the Edmonton-based national television reporter who represented an important vehicle for communicating with the rest of Canada (Spandier, 1983). It would be wrong, though, to suggest that government hostility toward the CBC began with the docu-drama. Already in 1975, then-deputy Hugh Horner was lashing out at the "CBC - NDP" alliance, amid revelations of a scandal in his department. It is also conceivable, as Spandier (1983) and others suggest, that the network has received a cold shoulder from the Lougheed government simply because it is a federal institution in a province intermittently in conflict with Ottawa.

THE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

Describing the contemporary political culture of Alberta, Roger Gibbins has written:

While the ideological opposition to partisanship that provided an important element in both the UFA and Social Credit movements has disappeared, the non-partisan temper of Alberta provincial politics has not been substantially altered (1980, 143).

Theories of non-partisanship are not without problems, despite their status as almost conventional wisdom regarding the Alberta experience. Perhaps foremost among these is that, whatever the composition of the traditionally lopsided legislature, a substantial minority of votes has
been ineffectively split among opposition parties (McCormick, 1980). Nonetheless, it would seem that for this article at least two elements of the non-partisan theme have some applications: the appeal for unity within the province whenever a federal threat is perceived, and the Conservative government's claim to have room within the party and caucus for a wide range of viewpoints, sufficient for all but the most radical of Albertans. This claim was echoed in a radio spot on behalf of the party's candidates in the 1982 election:

They cover the widest possible spectrum of political philosophy, from truly progressive to truly conservative. And within Progressive Conservative caucus there are as many discussions ... as there are throughout the province. Let those who will, scream, 'more opposition.' We should be quietly pursuing good government, government that comes from open, democratic process. (Calgary Herald, Oct. 28, 1982, A10)

However much the Sindlinger experience stands as a refutation of this claim, the election results speak for themselves.

If the majority of Albertans are ambivalent about the need for a stronger legislative opposition -- perhaps supporting the principle, but in someone else's riding -- it seems plausible that they would feel the same way toward more aggressive news reporting. Journalists interviewed for this article were unanimous on this point: when the media complain about secrecy or argue for freedom of information legislation, they are perceived by the public as "whi-
ning" and self-interested. One columnist, repeatedly critical of the government, has been subjected to obscene and threatening telephone calls at his home (Oake, 1983). Not surprisingly, also, the Alberta Report perspective that the province's newspapers are controlled from Toronto commands a seemingly large following. Lougheed himself has resorted to such attacks at times when his government is facing domestic criticism while simultaneously engaged in conflict with Ottawa. He told the delegates to the party's 1980 convention that:

> certain of our opponents are trying to give the impression that we're insensitive and yeah, it hurts. Our opponents -- and they're not just political parties -- try to ignore the extent of our social programs in the hope people won't notice. We can't let them get away with that. (Edmonton Journal, April 14, 1980, B3)

At a subsequent conference, he alluded to "forces in central Canada that are not allowing our message to get across in Alberta." Thorsell (1983) suggests that Lougheed believes little of this, that he makes such remarks occasionally for tactical reasons only. Intimidating reporters is part of the adversarial game and, besides, bolsters the party faithful. Nonetheless, the fact that the message strikes a responsive chord illustrates this fundamental aspect of Alberta's political culture.

Another element of the non-partisan theme is alluded to in Fletcher's research for the Royal Commission on Newspapers:
Maintaining good relations with key sources is vital to reporters especially in small legislatures. In Alberta, reporters felt pressure to be loyal to their province in dealing with federal-provincial conflicts. (1981, 61)

According to Oake (1983), there is a "mentality in the government that if you're too critical poorer access to the premier and senior ministers than those reporters perceived to be on-side. Other journalists, it should be noted, disagree with this view, suggesting that access is limited regardless. In any case, it seems reasonable to assume that if some journalists feel pressured by the public and the government to be counted as Albertans against Ottawa when the need arises, others -- especially those born and raised in the province -- will naturally agree with Lougheed's view of Canada. Hustak, in his biography of the premier, tells of his own experience with the local television cameraman assigned with him to cover a Conservative campaign rally, who refused to film Lougheed tripping on the podium and then explained: "You really didn't expect me to film anything like that that could embarrass our premier, would you?" (1978, 192). A more common indication of the same underlying attachment is the use of "we-they" terminology in stories and interviews regarding a federal-provincial issue. The tendency is by no means pervasive in the press gallery, but it certainly exists.
CONCLUSIONS

One of the most significant developments in the past decade has been Alberta's increasing newsworthiness nationally, the result of its increased economic and political influence. This, in turn, has helped attract to the province a number of experienced and highly-regarded journalists in both print and broadcast sectors. As well, out-of-province newspapers such as the Globe and Mail and Toronto Star are now represented in the press gallery, although their reporters are responsible for covering a large region, not simply provincial politics. Thus it might be argued with some justification that the Lougheed government today faces a less insular, more critical media corps than it did even five years ago. Yet whatever the extent of this development, it should not be considered the root cause of the government's concern with secrecy and news management, which was already hinted at in 1971 amid greater sympathy from reporters and editorialists. What seems more plausible is that increased media scrutiny has served only to heighten the government's so-called siege mentality, and will continue to do so pending the rise of public disenchantment and thus a stronger political threat. Even then, one view (Oake, 1983) contends that the government is simply incapable of change, that "secrecy is ingrained in them." Certainly it must be seen as more than a reaction to the probings of a supposedly hostile press gallery.

It would be equally incorrect, on the basis of the preceding analysis, to project a fundamental challenge within the foreseeable future
to the government's ability to maintain its present approach to news management. Several reasons might be advanced in this regard. First, recent media trends toward cost-cutting and what is labelled "market-survey journalism" -- which values household hints ahead of lengthy political analysis in its catering to mass tastes (Kent, 1981, 172 - 173) -- can only have a detrimental effect on the legislative press gallery. The closing of several bureaus in recent years has already been noted. It would seem that if legislative reporters feel constant pressure to justify their positions, they will be less disposed to plunge into time-consuming and quantitatively unproductive investigative research. Neither will their employers encourage them to do so.

Second, the media generally are conservative in political philosophy and therefore unlikely to endorse editorially a radical departure from the status quo, whether it be to the left or right. Newspapers and broadcast stations -- save for the CBC and provincially-funded CKUA - Radio -- are basically profit-oriented and their owners and administrators, with exceptions, are businessmen before they are newsmen (Midgley, 1980). The province's newspapers may have quibbled editorially about the appropriate size of a legislative opposition, but consistently have supported the Conservatives at election time, a fact that seems unlikely to change in the short term. As this article has attempted to demonstrate, there exists among media executives and at least some of their reporters an open affinity with the positions articulated by the Lougheed government.
Third, the medium of television will continue to leave the government with a means of communicating its message if it perceives that this is impossible through traditional channels. A provincial premier surely must retain the right to address the electorate directly by television on a matter of urgency. It should be recognized, however, that television by nature provides the communicator with certain advantages. The viewer's attention is divided between the verbal and visual messages: one cannot absorb the information at one's own pace -- as one can a newspaper article -- to critically assess it. In short, television is more effective in communicating a position or image than in initiating discussion of an issue. It is a powerful tool in the hands of a government aware of its requirements and its possibilities.

Fourth, the foundations for information management put in place during the Lougheed era will continue to function for his eventual successor. The Public Affairs Bureau stands out in this regard. It is possible to foresee that as media outlets reduce their direct commitment to legislative coverage, they will become more dependent not only on wire services but also on the bureau for provincial political information. One should not deny these outlets some on-going sense of news judgment in the use of this material. Nevertheless, the existence of such a highly-organized government communications network constitutes a form of power which is not available to the opposition (Socio-Systems, 1973, 21).

Finally, and most importantly, the apparent public disinterest in more aggressive reporting -- indeed, the willingness to accept the "Toron-
to head office conspiracy" theory -- can only serve to uphold the government's approach to media relations. This public attitude is not peculiar to the Lougheed era. It was seemingly more pronounced in the early Social Credit years. In a province with a history of electing governments with substantial majorities -- in part, at least, a mark of non-partisanship -- it is not surprising that to advocate or practice a more aggressive journalism is to pose a threat to everything Albertan. It would seem overly optimistic to project that this attitude will necessarily change on that far-off but inevitable day when the Conservative appeal begins to wear thin. A more balanced political alignment need not be the outcome, if the past is any guide. Thus it would seem that the paradox presented at the outset of this paper is not about to disappear. On the one hand, the media, with exceptions, will continue to function as somewhat less than full-fledged adversaries of the government, for both structural and philosophical reasons. On the other hand, the media will continue to be perceived by the government and its supporters as a collectively hostile force, thus serving as a convenient, but largely undeserving, rhetorical target within the Alberta political milieu.
The act required newspapers to reveal to the government, upon request, sources of information for stories printed within the preceding sixty days, and to publish any statement given it by the Social Credit Board in rebuttal to any story, with the same prominence as the original. The act also empowered cabinet to forbid the publishing of information provided by specified individuals, and ultimately to prevent a paper from publishing.

At one time, a legislative reporter for a radio news service actually conducted such seminars for a fee. He has since been appointed to a senior communications position in the department of social services.

There are striking similarities, for example, between the functions of the bureau and the work of the public relations department of Dow Chemical Ltd., as outlined in a recent speech by the corporation's communications director concerning the reasons for a turnaround in public image (Globe and Mail, March 23, 1983, B5). The mastermind behind the reorganization of the bureau was David Wood, a former co-worker of Lougheed's at Mannix Corporation, where he was head of public relations.

The print reporter is Bill Sass, who recently moved from the Medicine Hat News to the Edmonton Journal when the former closed its legislature bureau. The broadcast reporter is Frank Dolphin, CBC-TV Edmonton, who has covered the legislature in a variety of print and broadcast capacities.
Lougheed does spend less time than he once did meeting with provincial media executives. Much of his more recent efforts at cultivation has been directed at influential out-of-province journalists and editorial boards. The Globe and Mail typically is cited as a paper which Lougheed has "turned around" editorially.

REFERENCES


Fletcher, Frederick. The Newspaper and Public Affairs, Research Study for the Royal Commission on Newspapers. Ottawa: Department of Supply and Services, 1981.

Foster, Jim. Personal interview, March 1983. (Mr. Foster is a former provincial cabinet minister who is now a lawyer and chairman of the Alberta Press Council.)
Fotheringham, Allan. Alice in Looneyland and a Mixmaster out of Control, *Maclean's*, May 5, 1980, 64.


Halinda, Steve. Personal interview, March 1983. (Mr. Halinda is assistant manager of news and public affairs, CFRN Edmonton.)


"Lougheed and the Media" a television documentary produced by Don Spandier, CBC Edmonton, aired January 24, 1983.


Oake, George. Personal interview, March, 1983. (Mr. Oake is legislative bureau chief for the Edmonton Journal.)


Spandier, Don. Personal interview, February 1983. (Mr. Spandier is a producer with CBC-TV Edmonton.)

Thorsell, William. Personal interview, March 1983. (Mr. Thorsell is associate editor of the Edmonton Journal.)

Zwarun, Suzanne. Peter Lougheed, Chatelaine, October 1981, 72, 234 - 236.

(In the course of researching this paper, a number of other journalists and government officials -- in the Public Affairs Bureau, for example -- were interviewed, sometimes less formally, but not quoted directly. Their comments either confirmed factual information or reiterated observations made by others.)

Roger Epp (B. A. University of Alberta, 1984) is a student and former daily newspaper journalist attending the University of Alberta. His research interests are in public policy and religion and politics.