The Ontario Press Council is half way through its second year and its first annual report is just around the corner. Whoever is putting that report together must be asking himself, "Is the press council a watchdog or a paper tiger?" It's a hard question to answer: it depends on what you perceive the press council to be.

Fraser MacDougall, executive secretary of the council, has said the council has been described as dog with two heads, one barking inward and the other outward. Fair enough; but what's it barking at? Inwardly, the beast is barking at its eight member papers in an attempt "to maintain high ethical standards and good performance." Those papers are: the Ottawa Citizen, Toronto Star, Hamilton Spectator, Windsor Star, London Free Press, Windsor Sun, London Expositor, Kitchener-Waterloo Record. The eight represent 55 per cent of daily circulation in Ontario.

Outwardly, the council is barking at the public - governments, organizations, individuals - with the avowed aim of defending the public interest in the freedom of the press.

The press council came into being in September 1972 as a direct result of the Report of the Special Senate Committee on the Mass Media (the Davey Report) published late in 1970. That report had said extremely unkind things to say about the ways in which Canadian newspaper publishers discharged their responsibilities to their readers in particular and the public in general. It wouldn't be unfair to say that the Ontario Press Council was the reaction of publishers to meet well-founded criticism without actually going so far as to send their ways and attempt, as the Davey report urged, to prepare their readers for social change.

But to be fair, Beland Honderich of the Toronto Star, was advocating a press council two years before the Davey report appeared. Early in 1968 Chief Justice McRuer in his royal commission inquiry into civil rights in Ontario had recommended the establishment of a press council "to control and discipline the press and other news media with respect to the publication of news and comment that may tend to prejudice the fair trial of an accused.... Honderich was interested in establishing a council with broader (and milder) objectives than disciplining media coverage of crime and the courts. He finally got his press council but there's no mention of the word discipline in the purposes of the Ontario Press Council and nothing about courts or crime coverage.

The council has seven objects:
a) to preserve the established freedom of the press; b) to serve as a medium of understanding between the public and the press; c) to encourage the highest ethical, professional, and commercial standards of journalism; d) to consider complaints from the public about the conduct of the press in the gathering and publication of news, opinion and advertising; e) to consider complaints from members of the press about the conduct of individuals and organizations toward the press; f) to report publicly on action taken; g) to review and report on attempts to restrict access to information of public interest; h) to make representation to government and other bodies on matters relating to the objects of the Ontario Press Council; i) to publish periodic reports recording the work of the council.

No one could quarrel seriously with those objectives, unless he believes Chief Justice McRuer had a point and there should be some way of disciplining the press for prejudicing the fair trial of an accused; or unless he believes that a reporter should have someone to complain to when he feels his publisher is giving too much space to Chamber of Commerce boosterism instead of investigating land speculation.

So far the council (21 members, 10 from the member papers, 10 from the public at large, and the chairman, Davidson Dunton) has received about 100 letters of complaint, a fifth of them against non-member papers. The council has made formal decisions on seven of these, all in private. The council has slapped the wrist of the Toronto Star for discriminating against homosexuals by refusing a classified
ed from a gay periodical; has criticized The Canadian Magazine for not paying more attention to a complaint from Kapuskasing's mayor that an article about the town misrepresented the facts and was misleading; took a swing at the Ottawa-Carleton regional planning committee for not drafting its official plan in open sessions (this was a result of a complaint from the Ottawa Citizen, the first complaint by a member paper against an organization attempting to restrict public information), dismissed a complaint by a reader against the Toronto Star on the grounds he did not "substantiate his accusation of inaccuracy and misrepresentations".

Perhaps not a banner year or an auspicious start but then, you have to start somewhere.

**CAN THE CBC BE SPOTLESS?** by Bruce Rogers

Radio and Television service are not free. The citizen pays whether the service is tax supported or paid for by advertising. But the argument continues about commercials on CBC. Now the debate over advertising is a heated one, even behind CBC executive office doors.

Some Canadians argue that rating concerns and the cost-per-thousand yardstick compromise the CBC's ability to serve the country in accordance with the mandate. Others fear the influence of the advertiser on program content. Many simply object to the cross importunities and program interruptions. Most recently the debate has focused on the impact of messages directed at children.

Private broadcasters have said for years that CBC should get out of the commercial field. In May 1973 Keigh Campbell, CTV Executive Vice President, suggested CBC should get out of commercial broadcasting. Of course, either way there are implications for programming.

If CBC did not carry advertising it could probably not afford to offer many of the light entertainment programs whether home-owned or imports unless its parliamentary grant was increased.

In areas where the only service provided is CBC, listeners and viewers would find their choices limited. Where CBC serves via privately-owned affiliates, CBC service would be reduced as local private outlets would buy their own low cost, mass audience shows to sell to local advertisers. Remember, most CBC TV network stations are actually privately-owned affiliates and their prime purpose is profit and dividends for shareholders.

In May, 1973, President Laurent Picard announced CBC's intention to remove all commercials from the English and French radio networks by January, 1974, except for special programs like NHL hockey and the Metropolitan Opera. That means clearing the radio network of virtually all advertising at a cost of only 13 cents per person plus the cost of filling the extra minutes thus gained by programming. A test run has been underway at CBC in Ottawa since June, 1973.