

The Myth of Media Objectivity

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Friday, February 09, 2007

<https://politicsrespun.org/2007/02/the-myth-of-media-objectivity/>

[Kevin Potvin's piece yesterday in *The Vancouver Courier*](#) [see below] is a welcome summary of the annoyance and offensiveness of [The Province](#) newspaper in particular and corporate media in general as they perpetuate the myth of their objectivity.

It is offensive to our democracy that is supposed to be enhanced by a "free" press for such a paper to actively promote the stadium development, collect mountains of ad revenue from its proponents, hold an online poll to gauge public opinion, then remove the poll when the untampered results do not support their political/marketing position.

I, however, enjoy the irony that the CanWest monster that owns *The Province* also owns the *The Vancouver Courier* where Potvin and others often take valid shots at the legitimacy of CanWest's major propaganda dailies.

A friend once mentioned to me that this proves that CanWest actually supports fairness and balance in the media because they own one paper that frequently criticizes the validity of its other papers. But with just over 250,000 copies distributed for free each week throughout the city, *The Vancouver Courier* does not quite have the readership or budget to authentically counter the mind-numbing propaganda of *The Province*, *The Vancouver Sun*, or *The National Post*, the first two with a circulation of 2,500,000 each week.

And in the end, even if allowing this criticism in a small community paper [that is incidentally outweighed each delivery day by the fliers contained within, making the paper ultimately possibly just a convenient delivery mechanism for advertising] proves CanWest actually listens to or respects its own internal criticism, they certainly do not change their illegitimate operations at their propaganda dailies. So it actually looks worse for them: CanWest owns a paper that legitimately criticizes its major dailies, yet it ignores the criticism and continues subverting the role the free press ought to play in a democracy.

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Whitecaps owe public a thank you

By Kevin Potvin

In the week before public speakers were scheduled to appear before council last fall to express their views on the waterfront stadium proposal, the Province newspaper staged an online poll asking what readers thought about it.

The Whitecaps sent an alert to everyone on its email lists urging them to go to the Province website and vote in favour. A link was conveniently provided. The results, which one could monitor as they were

coming in, showed early support reaching up to 70 per cent.

But as the day wore on and other people besides those on the Whitecaps' lists were alerted, the tide began to shift. By 5 p.m., the vote was nearing 70 per cent opposed. That's when the poll disappeared from the Province website, replaced by a note apologizing for technical difficulties. Final results were never revealed.

I made phone calls and confirmed that Whitecaps president John LaRocca was in touch with a Province sports editor when the decision was made to pull the poll. When I talked to the Province the next day, the paper confirmed it had pulled it because the results did not look right to them, though their technicians could provide no evidence hacking had occurred. The Province is an official "sponsor" of the Whitecaps, and the Whitecaps buy substantial advertising in that paper. Editorials in the Province heavily endorsed the Whitecaps' waterfront stadium proposal.

It was the public that drew council's attention to the myriad problems the stadium proposal contained, and not just problems for the public but also for soccer fans and the proposed stadium's owners as well. Chief among public concerns was the obvious safety hazard involved in packing in 30,000 people above an inaccessible storage area for train cars carrying such things as propane, bauxite and chlorine-the three ingredients in a train derailment in Mississauga that caused the biggest evacuation in Canadian history.

There was also the matter of there being only two exits from the proposed building, with no marshalling area outside the doors, meaning 30,000 fans would plug the streets of the Downtown Eastside, a neighbourhood with few people who could afford to go to events at the proposed stadium. And then there was the sheer ugliness of a massive stadium wall blocking the neighbourhood from any hint of the waterfront.

I spoke with the head designer of the project who reacted with indignation at my suggestion that it would be a blot on the landscape. He dismissed my safety concerns as those of someone who knows nothing about architecture.

Council voted unanimously to back the proposal.

Well, looks like the public was right. Last week, the Whitecaps, citing the same safety and public access issues the public speakers brought to their attention, abandoned the original waterfront stadium proposal-the same one the leading papers in the city, the leading councillors, the biggest of billionaires, the huffiest of architects and the most defensive of company presidents all assured me was not only the brightest idea in a decade, but the last possible chance we had to be blessed by the largesse of so wonderful a philanthropist as Whitecaps owner Greg Kerfoot.

The new proposal, to be built over the Seabus terminal, looks a lot better, better for the Whitecaps, for their customers, and for the neighbourhood. I'll be checking the Whitecaps website daily for the "thank you" to the public.

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