MEDIA INFLUENCE ON REGIONAL GOVERNMENT DECISION-MAKING

MEDIA INFLUENCE ON REGIONAL GOVERNMENT DECISION-MAKING: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE NEWSPAPER'S RELATIONSHIP TO LOCAL COMMUNITY POWER STRUCTURES

By

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Abstract

It is often said that the media are one of the most powerful forces shaping contemporary political life. To explore this assertion, the following thesis considers the relationship of community decision-makers to dominant newspapers in two regional government systems.

The investigation begins with a theoretical review of community decision-making and media analyses and proposes to combine these in a unified study. Next, through the use of four case studies and personal interviews, it analyses the community power structures of the two regional government systems. Finally, it considers the media's influence upon decision-makers and policy outcomes.

The evidence uncovered suggests the media possess the ability to influence decision-makers in at least four ways: agenda-setting and building; publicizing decisions; controlling information; and legitimizing policy participants. Sometimes this power is used deliberately and on other occasions unwittingly. In none of the instances considered, though, were the newspapers capable of exerting influence when acting independently without the cooperation of some community influentials. For this reason, the media were collectively regarded by policy participants as either a useful ally or dangerous foe occupying an ambiguous place in relation to the community power structure.

At the same, this investigation also discovered that traditional elite and pluralist community power theories are inadequate for describing local decision-making. Instead, there appears to be a demand for an analytical approach that incorporates elements of both schools.

Acknowledgements

To give credit where it is due, the present writer must set aside not only the natural disinclinations arising from human vanity but also a newspaperman's reluctance to express gratitude to others for work appearing under his byline. In this case, however, the task is made pleasant by the extent of assistance rendered and the generosity with which it was offered.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Many would likely agree that little has really changed in the 100 or so years since American social reformer Wendall Phillips commented, not without misgivings, that ''we live under a government of men and morning newspapers.''(1) Certainly to the astute observer who recognizes in today's Opposition question yesterday's *Globe and Mail* editorial, or who detects in an ''informed source's'' musings a policy trial balloon, there can be little doubt a close connection exists between the media and government. What has not been fully determined, however, is the nature of this dynamic. Do the media stand sentinel over the public good, keeping a check on government activities? Or, have they been co-opted by society's governing forces and lured into a complicity unfavourable to the public weal?

The following study attempts to contribute some further understanding to these issues by considering how the media influence political decision-making. Given the enormity of the topic, however, it will confine itself to a narrow band of the political spectrum and look at case studies in two regional government systems in Ontario. The study will also be restricted in that it considers only one medium, the newspaper. Essentially the thesis consists of two smaller, complementary studies. Foremost, it seeks to be an exploration of the media, focusing on how they influence decision-makers and the political debate. Before this could be done, though, it was necessary to first identify who the key decision-makers were in each case that the media supposedly influence. To accomplish this, a community power study was undertaken.

The study considered two regional government entities, the

regions of Hamilton-Wentworth and Niagara, and looked at decision-making in four specific cases, two in each region. There are two main reasons for using regional governments. The first is that each is an identifiable political 'community', which is necessary to isolate if one is to properly apply community power theories. Second, undertaking an investigation such as this requires access to policy participants, because the bulk of the research involves personal interviews, and this would be more difficult to obtain at higher government levels. The use of the lowest tier, local governments was rejected because it would be difficult to find issues of the type needed (as will be shown later) that are restricted only to this level.

The present chapter is primarily a review of the relevant literature. It begins with a discussion of the main schools of thought on community power relationships, namely elite and pluralist theory. Next, it moves to consider some theories of how the media operate in society. It discusses such key issues as the role of news sources, the media's support of the *status quo*, and the effect of the community power structure on the functioning of the media. Finally, it will describe briefly how these two seemingly disparate studies are to be wedded into a single investigation.

COMMUNITY POWER STRUCTURES

Before turning to the question of the media's impact on the decision-making process it is essential some means be set out to establish who the decision-makers are that the media ostensibly influence. There are two basic types of analysis that can be adopted to examine community power structures. These are the reputational or positional approach, commonly called elite or stratification theory, and the pluralist approach. A third approach, class analysis, will not be used because its rigidity makes it unsuitable. It could limit the choice of issues to be looked at in each community (e.g. to those of a purely economic nature) and could also require lengthy digressions of economic and class analysis, which, while potentially fruitful, fall outside the ambit of the proposed study.(2)

To facilitate a discussion of community power, it will be useful to first briefly describe how the term ''power'' is used in this study. Power is an abstract concept with real world manifestations and any discussion of it invites the risk of a lengthy digression as books, indeed, entire systems of thought, have been given over to its contemplation. Simply stated, power will be used in this study in the less-complicated Weberian sense of ''the possibility of imposing one's will upon the behaviour of another, even against opposition.''(3) At the same time, it wants to recognize that power is seldom absolute and that the extent of one individual's or group's power is limited by circumstance, such as institutional arrangements or resources, and thus becomes negotiable. For this reason, it is important to keep in mind a second definition offered by Polsby, who sees ''power'', ''influence'', and ''control'' as interchangeable terms. He defines power as ''the capacity of one actor to do something affecting another actor, which changes the probable pattern of specified future events.''(4)

A review of the community power literature reveals that the subject is almost exclusively an American preserve, with most studies focusing on U.S. communities.(5) Still, the techniques should be transferable to the Canadian situation, albeit with some modifications, especially to allow for differences between the two countries in the laws regulating municipalities.

For many observers the elite theory of community power doubtless holds an intuitive appeal. There is something easy to grasp in the notion, akin to a conspiracy theory, that a coterie of people wields power in a community. In elite analysis the assumption is ''that in virtually all communities a relatively small group of individuals exercises control over dominant resources and personnel, and controls the outcome of all key decisions within the community.''(6)

Elite theorists concentrate on the individual as the basic unit of analysis. Key individuals are usually identified by either of two methods. The first, popularized by Hunter, is the reputational technique. One ascertains who has power by asking knowledgeable individuals in a community who they believe is

influential in the community power structure. Then one weighs each individual's influence based on the frequency of their name being mentioned.(7) A second approach is to refer to the positions individuals hold. As Dye says: ''Power is not an attribute of individuals, but rather of social institutions. Power adheres to institutional roles which give the people who occupy these roles control over valued resources.''(8)

Lest the case be overstated, elite analysts do not envision the dominant group as a formal oligarchy. Hunter sees the elites as consisting of ''overlapping pyramids'' of individuals among whom there can exist competition.(9) Furthermore, elite analysts also allow that in certain types of issues at the municipal level, such as allocational questions of where to build a sewer, the elite group does not dominate and others contribute to the discussion.(10)

One area where the ruling elite's paramountcy is pronounced is on the question of land development. Some elite analysts contend this is the most significant issue a community must deal with and is the only one of any consequence. Domhoff says attracting outside capital or preparing the ground to receive it is the main goal of local elites. Quoting Molotch, he writes: ''A community power structure is at bottom an aggregate of land-based interests that profit from increasingly intensive use of land.''(11) So defined is this group that Molotch coins the term ''growth machine'' to describe it.(12) While based on land ownership and development, the growth machine also comprises other related interests, ''all those who benefit from land use intensification, including realtors, mortgage bankers, and even retailers.'' It is, says Domhoff: ''The most over-represented group on local city councils, as numerous studies show, and it is also well-represented on planning commissions, zoning boards, water boards and parking authorities.''(13) However, it should be noted, and class analysts tend to neglect this nicety, that there is a distinction between the growth machine's members and members of the economic elite, because the latter group often operates on the national or international level. For this reason, wealth alone is not a reliable indicator of elite

membership.

In an assessment of elite analysis, Trounstine and Christensen commend the approach because it attempts to peer beyond government organization charts and describe how power is actually exercised. Elite studies, they write

> alerted us to the subtle exercise of power through informal consultation, anticipation, socialization, and the mobilization of bias. [They] succeeded in identifying latent and less visible holders of power, taking the study of power well-beyond the traditional preoccupation with positions of formal authority.(14)

Elite analysis has proven valuable for studying community power structures. In particular, it has contributed the reputational technique that will be invaluable to this study because it will help identify quickly and economically the relevant decision-makers.

Despite its appealing aspects, a general elite analysis will be rejected in favour of a pluralist approach. This is not to say there will not be a partial synthesis of the two, as theories or arguments will be borrowed from each school when deemed to satisfactorily explain phenomena. However, a pluralist approach holds additional advantages that give it greater utility. These will be elaborated upon after a brief discussion of what a pluralist analysis entails.

The pluralist approach arose in reaction to the elitists' methods and its appearance touched off a long-running, sometimes *ad hominem*, feud between the two schools.(15) Today, pluralism is more in vogue and with its ascendancy has begun a rapprochement between the two sides that has both acknowledging the other's merits.(16) In some cases, social scientists have argued that the two viewpoints occupy the extreme ends of the same continuum along which any community can be properly placed.(17) Pluralism also possesses an intrinsic appeal, but its attraction is for democrats. In its classic sense, pluralism ''holds that public policy is a tug of war between various interest groups that often ends in a delicate balance or

compromise.''(18)

Dahl, who was the first community power analyst to employ the pluralist approach, says any organized and legitimate group can have an impact on community politics. He qualifies this assertion, though, by imposing the caveat that being heard does not necessarily result in being heeded. Assorted groups are able to bring different resources to bear, meaning influence is both fluid and unequal.(19)

Along with differing in its basic premise about the power distribution in a community, pluralist theory also varies from elite theory in its methodology. Where elites focus on individuals, pluralists concentrate on decision-making or the ''exercise of power itself.''(20) Polsby, a disciple of Dahl who has taken up his mentor's pluralist standard, stresses the importance of studying and contrasting ''leadership roles'', both across diverse issues and within a given issue over time.(21)

Displaced from their pre-eminence as the leading school of community power thought, the elites attacked pluralism as representing a simplistic approach to studying the sometimes arcane world of politics. Elites said the pluralists' methods could not detect such subtleties as non-decisions, bias, and favouritism that often converge to shape policy outcomes. As a result, pluralists were said to be limited in the type of issues they could study to only those where concrete decisions were made.(22) In more severe criticisms, pluralists such as Dahl were accused of incompetently gathering data.(23)

Polsby devoted an entire book to defending pluralism and critiquing one-by-one seven of the more well-known community power studies by elite analysts. While its critiques need not be repeated here, he scoffed at elite theory, suggesting among other things that its adherents fatally prejudice their findings from the outset because of their initial assumption that a ruling elite does in fact exist.(25) In parrying criticism that pluralist techniques are incapable of detecting subtleties or non-decisions, Polsby derisively dismissed criticism of a technique because it cannot detect the undetectable.(26) Of more

interest, however, because it refines the pluralist position, is Polsby's explanation that often the decision-making process in a community can appear elitist. In many cases only a few groups are interested or involved in an issue and their decisions are not challenged by other groups provided the decisions remain within the orbit of what is acceptable to the greater community. Polsby says key decision-makers operate mindful that the public wields a greater power than theirs.

> In a wide range of community situations, participation in decision-making is limited to a relatively few members of the community, but only by the easily revoked consent of a much larger percentage of the local population.(27)

As stated earlier, this study will adopt a pluralist approach augmented by elitist techniques where they can be used profitably. Pluralism is preferable because, as Polsby shows, it does not preclude the discovery of an elitist power structure should such exist. Moreover, the pluralist concentration on decisions accords better with this study of decision-making than would an elite analysis.

Another expected advantage of the pluralist approach is that it should provide a more accurate description of the communities under study. Even were it the tendency of the system for certain groups or individuals to establish themselves as elite community leaders, given the relatively short, roughly 20-year lifetime of these regional structures, and the steadfast independence of some constituent municipalities, it can be reasonably postulated that no elite group has had time to coalesce and assert authority over the whole system. Also militating against the development of a ruling elite is the nature of regional government itself. With responsibilities divided between the upper and lower tier governments it is difficult for any one group to gain systemic control.

Two final factors that increase the likelihood of finding pluralist power arrangements are the economy and regulatory environment of Ontario. The bulk of community power studies are American and the elites most frequently cited are bankers,

developers and businessmen. However, in Ontario, and more generally Canada, the banking system is highly centralized (e.g. local managers have only limited discretion in approving loans); land development policy, along with most facets of municipal administration, is closely regulated by the province; and many holding prominent business or managerial positions work for national or multinational companies, which limits their interest in local affairs. This removes from the power structure many of the platforms from which elites normally command in American communities. It can be reasonably argued that the playing field is more level in Ontario municipal politics than in those of American communities and this creates greater opportunity for diverse groups to emerge.

THE MEDIA

Having settled upon an approach that will be largely pluralist (but with elite tools included) for examining the subject communities' power structures it is now appropriate to consider how the media, restricted in this study to the print media, fit into this framework. Traditionally, the media garner little attention in community power studies and, despite their ubiquity and putative influence, they are largely ignored in the study of municipal politics as they affect decision-making. For example, Hunter, while conceding that the press occasionally ''plays a major role'', scarcely discusses it, seeing it as a tool firmly in the grip of the elites.(28) Dahl is more appreciative of the media's function, devoting a chapter to information control, but he too attributes little independent power to them.(29) In a *Journalism Quarterly* article of 1989, Kanervo and Kanervo note in passing that few studies have looked at the municipal politicians' relationship to the press and Paletz too lamented the dearth of research in this area.(30)

In those studies where the press' activities are scrutinized at the municipal level, it is often found wanting with respect to its role as the fourth estate. What is revealed is not so much a press that behaves as a watchdog, but rather one that acts as a lap-dog; one that is comfortably ensconced at the feet of those

who wield power. As Murphy writes, ''the much-vaunted disinterested role in the functioning democracy claimed by the journalist is a myth. Whatever his intention, the objective outcome of his activities is frequently propaganda for the *status quo*.''(31)

Other writers concur with this assessment. Paletz argues that the media ''tend to protect community institutions,'' Fishman says they ''legitimate the existing political order,'' and Soloski found ''that the power structure in the community is reified for the paper's reporters and thus will be presented as a reified force to news consumers.''(32) Before considering how this situation may impinge on the media's ability to affect decision-making, it is worth exploring these assertions more deeply.

Assorted media studies suggest there are several inter-related reasons why the media play a supportive role in municipal politics. Institutional arrangements of the press and political system have created a dependency relationship between the reporters and the politicians and bureaucrats they write about. Each relies upon the other to varying degrees for their professional existence. At the core is the reporters' reliance upon societal institutions as sources of information and the institutions' need, in turn, for media reporting to help legitimize their activities.

While perhaps not evident to outside observers, the single most important factor that shapes a reporter's or editor's routine is economics. As Fishman notes, ''deadlines, story quotas, and the need for conveniently locatable, expectable, and dependable quantities of raw news all have their rationale in the capitalist economy of news enterprises.''(33) Limited budgets, especially for news staff, restrict the opportunities reporters have to seek out alternate information sources and consequently they are driven to collect news in time-tested locales. Foremost among these are city council meetings, board of education meetings, and police departments, which do much of the information gathering work for news organizations. Says Fishman, ''from the individual worker's perspective, bureaucratic

information is a practical necessity. From the organization's economic perspective, bureaucratic information is a welcome subsidy.''(34)

One consequence of this institutional reporting is that bureaucratic versions of events are passed onto newspaper readers as though they are reality. This in turn legitimizes ''institutions of social control by disseminating to the public institutional rationales as facts of the world.''(35) The upshot of all this, Fishman says, is

> not so much that the media convince news consumers that all is well with the present social and political order. Rather, news consumers are led to see the world outside their firsthand experience through the eyes of the existing authority structure. Alternate ways of knowing are simply not made available. Ultimately, routine news places bounds on political consciousness. (36)

While this interpretation may lead one to conclude that journalists and public officials whom they report upon have entered into a collusion to propagate a certain view of reality, Fishman asserts this is not so. Instead, ''news selectivity is a consequence of journalists' protecting their own methods of event detection.''(37)

Looking at this same issue of news sources in the Canadian context, Ericson, Baranek and Chan detect more tension in the reporter-official relationship than Fishman admits. They acknowledge that source organizations provide routine information and work to influence 'the spin' reporters will give stories. At the same time, the authors argue that officials must contend with the crusading proclivities of many in the media. Source organizations ''remain vulnerable to journalists' demands for news of deviance, and to the journalistic thrust for policing and reforming organizational life.''(38) What arises then is a struggle, or more properly a set of negotiations, between the sources and reporters, to arrive at a final version of events that will be reported as reality.

In this struggle the journalist, while limited sometimes,

often has the upper hand. There are multiple sources, each with its own interests, that a reporter can collect information from and the sources have no final control over how the information will be presented, if at all.(39) Taras sees this struggle as all-encompassing in the political realm. Dwelling almost exclusively on agenda-setting, he defines news as the product of an unending battle between the media and politicians over ''who sets the conditions and determines the issues for public debate.''(40)

Another consideration for source diversity is that in Ontario there are overlapping municipal, regional, provincial, and even federal bureaucracies. These often do not share the same view of an issue and frequently have conflicting interests, since the dispute often centres on the allocation of resources. For example, it is a common complaint of municipal officials in Ontario that the province shifts responsibilities onto them without corresponding means to raise the money to pay for them (e.g. recent requirements that municipalities provide their own police officers in court). Moreover, in a single government bureaucracy there are divergent viewpoints and tensions. In all these cases, journalists have an opportunity to find varied sources for their reports.

For an organization, controlling information is imperative, both to maintain internal harmony and discipline and to gain recognition from other organizations that one's group legitimately belongs in the decision-making sphere. Conversely, a group's inability to control messages sent out by or about itself can have harmful consequences. Inappropriate, incorrect or negative messages can undermine the claim to being an ''authoritative knower'' which can in turn reduce a group's influence in decision-making.

This concern about messages is most blatantly manifested in the political arena. For politicians, the media are so important that some observers contend ''without them, political activity could not be carried on at all.''(41) Whereas other entities such as the court system or the police can operate as well or better without the media, groups and individuals seeking to

influence policy, with few exceptions, compete to win their attention. Politicians and advocacy groups realize there is a glut of information relayed to the public daily and they labour tirelessly to get their particular agenda, policy, suggestion, or even name into the media.(42) As Fishman explains, ''to become a routine source for news is to have tremendous power in defining public knowledge of a world outside the individual's immediate experience.''(43)

Thus there are two forces at work that bring reporters and those desirous of shaping public policy together. Scarce newsgathering resources drive harried reporters to official sources because of the certainty that there news lies. At the same time, the need for publicity sends politicians and other policy participants in quest of the media.

While heavy reliance by the media upon official sources may serve to uphold the *status quo*, others feel more elemental forces are subtly at play. Paletz argues in a study based upon a year of observing a reporter covering a municipal council that the professional norms of journalism lead reporters to produce accounts that reinforce local political authority. Among these norms are: condensing and summarizing events to make them sound rational (even though the reporter and participants may not appreciate their significance); emphasizing in reports the council's decisions, not its other activities; and treating the council and its members with respect.(44)

For Paletz, the concern is that media coverage based on what he calls these ''journalistic canons'' ultimately serves to distance the council from those it governs. Tightly written reports, relating council's activities in such a way that it appears as an efficient, rational decision-making machine, depersonalize councillors and make them seem ''quasi-divine.'' Ultimately, this gap can lead the public to feel powerless and reduce interest in council's activities while rendering councillors unrepresentative, unresponsive and susceptible to influence by special interests.(45)

Given the foregoing, it appears the media can be considered a

part of the community structure and, more specifically, part of the political process, even though their interests need not be fully convergent. As Tichenor, Donahue and Olien write, the press is not an objective observer somehow removed from society. Instead, it is ''an integral subsystem within the total system, and its strong linkages with other system components impinge upon it as much as it impinges upon them, if not more.''(46) Dictating the extent of this influence is the nature of the community power structure.

> Newspapers will reflect the power structure and the concerns of the community structure. The saying that 'newspapers mirror society' does not mean that they give an accurate reflection of people's needs, but that they mirror the conditions of that system, including power conditions and power alignments.(47)

The community power structure influences content decisions. In smaller communities exhibiting elite power structures, the press will work to minimize conflict and support local institutions.(48) In larger, pluralistic communities, conflict will be widely reported. Paradoxically, the reporting of conflict in pluralistic societies also supports the existing power structure because it allows divergent views expression, while at the same time channeling and controlling them so they will not be overly disruptive. According to Tichenor: ''The 'rules of the game' that apply in reporting conflict (such as the ritualistic reporting Kearl found, letters-to-the-editor, and reliance on official documents) are all attempts to channel conflict so it will be less disruptive of the existing system.''(49)

As noted earlier, elite analysts view the media as merely an appendage of the ruling elite. Domhoff sees the press as a sometimes neglected, but nonetheless integral part of the growth machine. The motivation to support development is purely self-interest. Development brings people to the community, they subscribe to newspapers and the increased circulation translates into more advertising revenue.(50)

Apart from cheering on developers, the newspaper also supports the community elite through socialization. By eliding dissent, either by refuting criticisms with comments from official sources or by simply ignoring disruptive elements, newspapers can attenuate voices that arise to challenge the existing order. Trounstine notes that newspapers, ''have immense power to suppress issues by ignoring them or slanting or trivializing their coverage, thus robbing them of legitimacy.''(51) Some argue that this practice is not peculiar to newspapers operating in elite communities, that the denial of legitimacy to certain individuals or groups by depicting them as deviant, occurs in pluralistic communities as well.(52)

In his brief mention of the media, Hunter argues that they also bolster the elite by legitimizing their actions. While most decisions are taken by a small group there is often a need to ''clear all the way down the line'' the course of action proposed by community leaders. After the affected clubs and associations have been notified, these decisions can then be implemented, Hunter says, adding with a curious absence of elaboration, once ''no serious objections have been voiced.''(53)

In pluralist societies, the media perform a more complex function because they facilitate the dialogue between interests that promotes social stability. ''Pluralistic communities need a mass media system to become alerted to conflict in resource allocation and to observe how disagreements are settled.''(54) For small, poorly organized interests, the media are indispensable because they afford groups access to the decision-making arena quickly and inexpensively, compared with other modes of influencing decisions, notably the courts.(55) On the obverse, media recognition can sometimes be difficult to obtain, especially given reporters' inclinations to rely on official sources and their fickle attitude toward 'deviant' groups.

In summary, the media in a pluralistic society provide information, circulate new ideas, and enable decision-makers to gauge public reaction to initiatives. Yet there is an additional consideration that is fundamental to this study: Do the media

carry out these duties in a neutral manner or do they participate more fully, advancing their own ideas and contributing to the conflict that often accompanies pluralistic decision-making?

Tichenor found after studying a mixture of 22 elite-dominated and pluralistic communities that newspapers support interest organization, but do not create issues. Specifically, the ''media constitute a part which is necessary, but not sufficient in and of itself or causal in the conflict process.''(56) Nevertheless, the part the media choose to play, for instance granting or withholding coverage, can shape community conflict once it is underway. This is referred to as conflict acceleration, which means papers can carry a ''topic to a higher and wider level of public awareness, interest and intensity than it would have reached otherwise.''(57)

Closely related to this are the concepts of agenda-building and agenda-setting. The first term refers to the origin of issues, how the press ''interacts with other institutions in society to create issues of public concern.''(58) The second refers to the press' ability ''to effect cognitive change among individuals, to structure their thinking.'' Agenda-setting is the mental ordering and organization of the world in such a way for others to understand it. In McCoombs' famous phrase, the ''media may not be successful in telling people what to think but they are stunningly successful in telling them what to think about.''(59)

Together, agenda-building and setting are among the most efficacious means by which the media influence decision-makers and their activities. Researchers have found that key officials in pluralist societies are more prone to believe the newspaper ''is an important agenda-setter than are those in more homogeneous towns and are therefore more likely to try to build the newspaper's agenda by trying to get the paper to cover particular items.''(60) Dahl's research supports this proposition, although he frames it in a negative sense. He observed that the less faith a politician has in a newspaper's ability to manipulate public opinion, the more inclined he or she will be to risk a confrontation with it.(61)

In a Canadian study of the press' ability to set the agenda municipally, Black offers the tentative conclusion that ''the power of the press . . . is an unusual and sometime thing rather than commonplace.''(62) In the most pluralistic of communities his group examined it found the press only succeeded when aligned with other legitimate actors. For the most part, ''elite members saw the press *qua* political actor as an outsider to be excluded from the debate. It was accorded little or no legitimacy in raising issues on its own.''(63)

A SYNTHESIS

With the preceding discussion in mind, it is now fitting to turn to the central question of how the media affect political decision-making. By melding a community power analysis and a media study, it should be possible to discover whether the newspapers exercise influence over decision-makers in the subject communities. While the methodology of this study will be described in greater detail in the following chapter, the approach, simply stated, will be to identify key decision-makers on the four public policy issues chosen and from there, by means of personal interviews, an attempt will be made to ascertain what influence the media had on their thinking. Since 'influence' is a nebulous term and there is a need to ensure order in the investigation, the study will operate on the assumption that the media can impact on decision-making in any of five ways. Briefly stated, these are:

1) Before discussion of an issue begins, the media play a crucial gatekeeping role. Not only journalists, but editors and perhaps publishers are involved deciding whether an event or issue deserves coverage and, if so, how much. The media play a shared part in determining what is to be on the community's agenda. It is worth noting, as Tichenor points out, that it is difficult for the media's members to predict how important a given event or issue will be in the long run, so their building and setting of the agenda may be unwitting.(65) Additionally, it should be remembered that the selection of an item may be influenced by matters beyond the control of the newspaper, such

as a competing paper's reports.

2) Perhaps the most effective means the media have of influencing decisions lies in their ability to report upon these decisions once they are made. The promise of positive publicity or fear of negative coverage may incite or discourage certain activities. This is the so-called ''watchdog'' function of the media. Admittedly, this may be the most difficult type of influence to monitor, because it is difficult to detect and investigate measures not taken.

3) The media may also exert influence through their control of information. By digging out or suppressing sources or relevant facts, the media can supply arguments to support a particular course of action.

4) Influence also flows from the media's ability to help build the legitimacy of individuals or interest groups, either by quoting the person or group members as knowledgeable sources or simply reporting their activities. In Ontario, for example, the increasing prominence of taxpayers' coalitions may be inducing incumbent politicians to more willingly consider spending restraints.

5) While several of the researchers cited above doubt the possibility, the media can also influence decisions by developing their own issues or policy alternatives and advocating their implementation. Whether it be through a crusade to have a given constitutional change adopted or an independent investigation of a local agency the media do on occasion create valid issues.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter has been to establish a framework for the ensuing study by reviewing the relevant literature and discussing some of the basic theories of community power structures and the functioning of the media. These concepts will also be referred to as the study progresses, serving collectively as a guidebook to help identify phenomena encountered along the way. Before moving to consider the regional power structures in Chapter Three and the media in Chapter Four, however, it will be

necessary to digress in Chapter Two for a fuller explanation of the techniques employed in this study. The same chapter will also provide background information on the policy issues or case studies in the two regions that will be used to analyze the power structures and search for evidence of media influence. While conclusions will be drawn where appropriate, a final fifth chapter will pull together the key observations and offer further methodological considerations.

CHAPTER ONE ENDNOTES

1) Wendall Phillips, Speech, January 28, 1852

2) Robert Waste, *Community Power: Directions for Future Research*, p 14

3) Waste, *Ibid.* p 79

4) Nelson Polsby, *Community Power and Political Theory*, p 3

5) The major academic community power studies include: Hunter's *Community Power Structures;* Dahl's *Who Governs?;* Domhoff's *Who Rules America Now?* and Polsby's *Community Power and Political Theory*. All focus on American communities.

6) Waste, *Ibid.* p 14

7) Hunter, *Ibid.*

8) Quoted in Waste, *Ibid.* p 30

9) Domhoff, *Ibid.* p 160

10) Waste, *Ibid.* p 42-44

11) Domhoff, *Ibid.* p 167

12) See Harvey Molotch, ''The City as Growth Machine'' in *The American Journal of Sociology*, Sept. 1986, Vol 82, No. 4

13) Waste, *Ibid.* p 62

14) Philip Troustine, and Terry Christensen, *Movers and Shakers, The Study of Community Power*, p 36

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32) David Paletz, Peggy Reichart, and Barbara McIntyre, ''How the Media Support Local Governmental Authority'' in *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Volume XXXV, 1971 p 80; Mark Fishman, *Manufacturing the News*, p 154; and John Soloski, ''Sources and Channels of Local News'' in *Journalism Quarterly*, 1989, Vol. 6, No. 4 pg 868

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36) Fishman, *Ibid.* p 138

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39) Ericson, *Ibid.* p 377, 378

40) David Taras, *The Newsmakers*, p 3

41) Colin Seymour-Ure, *The Political Impact of the Mass Media*, p 62

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43) Fishman, *Ibid.* p 152

44) Paletz, *Ibid.* p 81

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46) Philip Tichenor, George Donahue, and Clarice Olien, *Community Conflict and the Press*, p 217

47) Tichenor, *Ibid.* p 80

48) Tichenor, *Ibid.* p 55

49) Tichenor, *Ibid.* p 84

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52) Murphy, *Ibid.* p 64

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54) Tichenor, *Ibid.* p 8

55) Gadi Wolffsfeld, ''Collective Political Action and Media Strategy'' in *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 28, No. 3 September 1984. p 363

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CHAPTER TWO

INTRODUCTION

In Chapter One the basic concepts of community power structures were introduced, along with a theoretical discussion of the working of the media. Briefly, the chapter argued there are two main schools of community power analysis, the elite and pluralist, and that while the assumptions underlying each and methodology each employs starkly contrast, it should be possible to borrow the best from both and incorporate them into this study. Chapter One also reviewed the main theories about the media, particularly their relationship to policy actors and their ambiguous place within the community, where they are both part of yet can also be separated from the power structure. Of special significance to the study was the fact the community structure itself can also affect how the media operate.

With this theoretical groundwork set out, it is possible now to turn in this chapter to considerations of methodology. Essentially, the following study consists of two smaller studies. The first examines community power structures and the second assesses the media's impact through a review of newspaper coverage of specific issues. While perhaps an unnatural union, it is believed these two can be crossbred successfully, as subsequent chapters will show.

The present chapter describes the subject units of government and explains why they were selected. As well, it discusses the newspapers analyzed in the study. After a brief description of the methods used for information gathering and the means by which the two studies will be synthesized, it ends with synopses of the four issues used to track the decision-making process and measure media influence. These reviews of events are somewhat cursory,

but space does not permit a fuller recounting. Additional details about both the political processes and media coverage will be supplied in later chapters where deemed appropriate.

THE REGIONS AND THE NEWSPAPERS

In testing for media influence the study looks at the Regional Municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth and the Regional Municipality of Niagara (See Appendix One). Regional government entities were the preferred units of analysis because access to significant players is more restrictive at higher levels of government. This is an important consideration in research of this type, based as it is on information gathered largely from personal interviews. A second consideration is that the political process is more easily followed municipally than at higher levels. While perhaps not 'purer', municipal politics are at least less arcane, since such factors as parties, ideology, regionalism, patronage, and even interference from the bureaucracy are less evident. Finally, since the study looks at power structures, it was necessary to keep the number of players manageable. Using the regional government unit insured that this investigation could be restricted to a defined community, although, even with this precaution, there was still spillover into the broader, provincial decision-making realm.

While it might be suggested that these benefits could have been multiplied by using the lowest tier of government, specifically the local municipalities, this approach was rejected. It would be difficult to find issues limited to the local sphere that would be likely to mobilize the power wielders and also generate the quantity of newspaper coverage necessary to undertake a meaningful media analysis. At the municipal level in Ontario, the most significant responsibilities and those likely to generate controversy, such as planning, roads, and garbage collection and disposal, are usually shared by the local and regional governments, with the latter often having the final say. On the issue of taxation, responsibility is again divided between both the municipality and the region, and there is the added fact of school boards and the province's role in establishing property

values.

Apart from their proximity, the Hamilton-Wentworth and Niagara regions were chosen for several reasons. The two have similarities that allow for a ready comparison of results. Hamilton-Wentworth occupies 280,000 acres and has a population of 414,000, while Niagara extends over 460,000 acres and provides services for 350,000.(1) In terms of socio-economic makeup, both regions have mixed economies of manufacturing, business or service industries, and agriculture. In Hamilton-Wentworth, 26 per cent are employed in manufacturing, 72 per cent in business, and about one per cent work in agriculture.(2) Comparable figures for Niagara are 34 per cent, 63 per cent, and three per cent.(3) The government institutions in each community are also similar, with 27 and 29 councillors respectively, the two perform the same types of functions, and both systems are about the same age, each having had about 20 years to establish themselves.(4)

Differences exist between both areas that cannot be controlled for but may provide compensation by enriching the study with diverse results. Perhaps the most salient of these is the number of municipalities within each region. Where Hamilton has six constituent municipalities, Niagara has 12. This difference is further accentuated by The City of Hamilton's dominance over its region compared with St. Catharines' less imposing position in Niagara. Set in the middle of the region, populated by three-quarters of its residents, and allocated 17 of 27 regional council seats, Hamilton figuratively and literally enjoys a central position from which to dominate regional affairs. St. Catharines, while the major urban centre in Niagara, has roughly a quarter of its region's population and only seven of its 29 council seats. This fact could have significant implications for the power structure in each region.

The differences between the two are noteworthy because these are mirrored in the newspapers under consideration. Before discussing *The Hamilton Spectator* and *The Standard* in St. Catharines specifically, however, more general comments on newspapers and other media are in order.

Admittedly, a study exploring the media would profit from the inclusion of all types of mass media, not only the newspapers, but also radio and television. From a practical standpoint, however, it would not be feasible, given the researcher's resources, to gather and review recordings of three years' worth of electronic coverage of two regional government systems. Assembling such data was possible with newspaper articles, albeit imperfectly, since neither of the sample publications is indexed. The decision to exclude the electronic media, while detrimental, is not fatal to the study. Surveys show that for information about community happenings Canadians rely most heavily on local newspapers.(5) If the media does influence political decision-making municipally then, it is expected that the medium wielding the most influence will be the local newspaper with the largest circulation. Another factor in discounting the electronic media is the size of the local news organizations. With an editorial staff of about 125 at *The Hamilton Spectator* and 40 at *The Standard*, these dwarf the newsgathering operations at the 22 local radio stations spread throughout both regions, which devote on average no more than ten people to news.(6) The only privately-owned television station in either of the regions, CHCH in Hamilton, has about 35 working on its newscasts, but television is more labor-intensive than print.(7) A consequence of this is that the electronic media tend to copy (in journalistic parlance 'scalp') the newspapers, or at best provide only basic, reactive coverage of events such as meetings or press conferences. During interviews several politicians stated that the subject newspapers command most attention in their region, although this was more often the case in Hamilton-Wentworth than Niagara.(8)

The Hamilton Spectator and *The Standard* are both quality dailies. The two routinely win industry awards for their editorial product and both maintain on staff senior reporters, those with at least five years' experience.(9) *The Hamilton Spectator* is owned by the media conglomerate, Southam Inc., and has a circulation of 136,000. It enjoys a high readership penetration throughout its region and a near-monopoly on

information. *The Standard* is owned by the Burgoyne family and it has a circulation of 45,000, limited for the most part to the north-eastern sector of the region. (See Appendix Two).

This disparity in circulation presents both problems and opportunities for the study. It is reasonable to assume a newspaper's size will in part determine its ability to influence political actors. Larger papers have more readers and therefore a better chance to shape public perceptions of issues or events. Moreover, larger newspapers have more resources to devote to issues, whether that be in terms of the amount of available column inches or the number of reporters and time that can be given to a particular story. Mitigating these differences, however, is the fact bigger papers also have more issues to follow by virtue of the larger area, measured geographically or by population, each has to cover. A smaller paper, covering a smaller area as *The Standard* does, could be expected to provide the same depth of coverage. In other words, quantitative superiority does not automatically translate in qualitative superiority. In the final analysis, though, even if no valid comparison can be made between *The Hamilton Spectator* and *The Standard*, then the findings should at least provide some insights into the effect of market dominance, which is itself a valid concern given the oligopolistic state of Canada's newspaper industry.

Both papers devote senior staff full-time to reporting on the activities of their respective regional governments, or covering the 'region beat'. *The Hamilton Spectator* operates a two-person bureau at Hamilton city hall (where the regional council also meets) and responsibility for coverage of both city and regional council is shared by the reporters.(10) In addition, *The Hamilton Spectator* employs three columnists (two of whom are former local politicians) to regularly write about regional government affairs. Supplementary coverage comes from other reporters when their beats are affected by regional decision-makers. *The Standard's* coverage is less intensive, as the paper has only a single reporter on the region beat. Unlike *The Hamilton Spectator*, however, the reporter is assigned to cover the

regional government exclusively while those of *The Hamilton Spectator* must also cover Hamilton city hall. *The Standard* has no columnists, but once again additional coverage comes from other reporters when regional government activities impact upon their beats.(11) More will be said in Chapter Four about how reporters perform their duties and their relationships with editors and sources.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

To generate a data base for this study two issues dealt with by each of the regional councils during the 1988-1991 term were selected. One issue, chosen in both regions, was the debate over allowing retail stores to open Sunday. The second issue in Hamilton-Wentworth was that community's response to the provincial government's cancellation of funding for the Red Hill Creek Expressway in late 1990. For Niagara, the second issue was the debate surrounding council's decision to relax land-use planning guidelines to permit more development on certain agricultural land.

The choice of each issue was based primarily on the quantity of items printed about them. Together, both newspapers carried in excess of 500 articles, columns, editorials and letters-to-the-editor on these four issues. Another consideration in settling upon the Sunday shopping issue was that it would allow comparisons between the two regional councils and the two newspapers' coverage. To a more limited degree, the Red Hill and farmland cases were also comparable because they were development issues of the type in which elite theory predicts community leaders will assert themselves.(12) Furthermore, decisions made by the regional councils on the Red Hill and farmland issues were overturned by the Ontario government, effectively circumventing the traditional decision-making structures in these communities.

With issues identified, the next step was to collect articles from both newspapers on these four topics. As stated previously, neither *The Hamilton Spectator* nor *The Standard* is listed in the *Canadian Periodical Index* therefore locating all of the articles appearing during the three-year study period was not possible. To

track down articles, clipping files at both regional offices were accessed and these were then cross-referenced with clipping files from public libraries to ensure as exhaustive a search as possible. Using the libraries of the newspapers themselves was not an option because during the collection period *The Hamilton Spectator* was computerizing its files and public access was not allowed. In the interest of treating each region the same, it was consequently decided not to use *The Standard's* library.

A total of 536 articles was collected. The placement of items in the newspaper, story length, and bylines (factors which tend to denote a story is considered significant by the newspaper) were recorded. The stories were then analyzed and a rudimentary content analysis performed by counting speakers quoted and designating them as favourable, neutral or opposed to the given issue. Assessing the bias of sources was an admittedly subjective exercise, but given that the norms of news writing dictate that reporters strive for balance by providing all sides of an issue, it was readily apparent why certain people were quoted and what their position was on a given issue. Each speaker was judged without regard to their comments in previous stories, so that if a well-known opponent were quoted only providing neutral information, such as court dates, then they were classed as neutral. The reason for this was to treat each story in isolation, as if one were reading about the issue for the first time and unaware of its history. Of course, a valid criticism of this approach is that quoting an individual on an issue, regardless of position, bestows credibility on the speaker and identifies him or her as an 'official knower' that may in turn affect their ability to influence decision-making.

Apart from their value in assessing the newspapers' performance, the collation of the news articles and sources aided in the next phase of the study: Identifying interview candidates. Individuals were selected on the assumption that they in some manner contributed to the decision-making process, if only by articulating opposition. While a proper community power analysis requires up to three months full time work and can involve several researchers, economic realities again intervened to force

modifications upon the author.(13) Notables were initially identified through newspaper accounts of policy development and by using the decision-making analysis favoured by pluralists such as Dahl and Polsby. This pool of players was then winnowed down by the reputational and positional techniques advocated by elite analysts such as Hunter and Dye.(14)

Ten individuals were interviewed for each issue. Five were chosen on the basis of being the most frequently quoted in the newspaper on their respective issue. The remainder were selected because of positions they held that either involved them directly in the issue or gave them special insight into it. Among the latter group were numbered public servants, interest group members and media representatives. As an additional control, those interviewed were asked to name significant players who contributed to the policy development and these names were then checked against the interview list. Due to an overlapping of candidates active across issues and regions, a final list of 34 people was drawn up. These were then interviewed in person for 45 minutes each. Questions were tailored to focus on each individual's role or behaviour, but interviews followed the same basic format. (See Appendices Three and Four).

The theoretical rationale for choosing candidates based upon citations is that the frequency of quotation is a reliable indicator of influence. Underlying this assertion are two considerations. First, there is the assumption, borne out by interviews, that an experienced reporter will identify and draw upon sources knowledgeable about issues due to their involvement in the decision-making process. Second, being a routine source for news, as Fishman and Ericson argue, is one attribute of a power-holder in a community. Getting one's ideas, opinions, or even objections quoted in the media is an important means of influencing decision-making.(15)

Selecting the balance of interviewees because of positions they held was a more subjective process. Some, such as chairmen of relevant regional committees, seemed obvious choices. In the case of lobby groups, the most active were readily identifiable because of either recurrent mentions in the press or, as in the

case of Niagara farmers' groups, because the constituencies they represented were most affected by decisions. The inclusion of lobby groups is justifiable because of their well-chronicled involvement in the modern political process.(16) As confirmation of this, regional officials expressed the opinion repeatedly through interviews that politicians at the municipal level are especially susceptible to lobbying.(17)

In keeping with the dual nature of this study, subjects were questioned about both the decision-making process and the influence the press had upon participants. The aim was to adumbrate the community power structure and determine the newspaper's place inside it or impact upon it. In this latter regard, special emphasis was given to such issues as: agenda-setting; publicizing decisions and thereby mobilizing the public to react; the bestowing or withholding of media recognition to certain individuals or groups; the degree to which the media support the *status quo;* and their ability to initiate or accelerate debate about issues.

THE ISSUES

To undertake this investigation four public policy issues (two in each region) dealt with during the 1988-91 term of the regional councils were identified for use as case studies. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to describing these four issues. As already stated, the foremost consideration in the selection process was the number of news items each generated. Two other important determinants were that definite decisions were arrived at by council in respect to the given issue and that in the working out of these decisions a variety of voices was heard, denoting it was a matter of general public concern. As will become evident, certain issues proved better choices as subjects for research. Some revealed much about community decision-making dynamics, while others better illustrated the media's influence. None, of course, yielded up enough information to allow definitive conclusions, but all contributed something of interest to the research.

The Red Hill Creek Expressway (Hamilton-Wentworth)

Although the project was originally proposed in 1957, it was not until 1979 that the Hamilton-Wentworth and City of Hamilton councils voted to proceed with the Red Hill Creek Expressway. The planned highway was to begin at the Queen Elizabeth Highway, on the north edge of Hamilton, and run in a north-south direction up the Niagara Escarpment following a forested valley in the city's east end. Once on top of the mountain, it was to connect with another highway, also to be built, that would then turn west to meet with the existing Highway 403. Once complete, the project would see the city encircled by multi-lane highways and at the same time open its south-east corner for development in a designated industrial zone.

Apart from planning, the 11 years between the approval and official groundbreaking in June of 1990 were taken up with environmental assessments and court challenges. A number of residents and environmental groups were determined to preserve the valley, the last substantial green space in the city's east end. Leading the fight was the Save the Valley Committee, a citizen's group that raised and spent nearly $30,000 battling the proposal.(18) Most of the group's activities occurred before the study period and it has been largely dormant since the mid-1980s. However, its last court challenge (a bid to win permission to appeal an Environmental Assessment Board's ruling) was lost in February 1990.

When the study period began, the $400-million project appeared a certainty. Provincial funding was in place, developers had begun projects in anticipation of the new access route, and public sessions were being conducted to gather input from citizens on the design of recreational amenities around the highway. Even a contest was underway to pick a name for the new route.

In September, 1990, the Ontario provincial election saw the ruling Liberals displaced by the more environmentally-sensitive New Democratic Party. Hamilton-Wentworth's six provincial ridings were swept by the NDP and among the MLAs sent to Queen's Park from the area were several known to staunchly oppose the expressway. By November, it became evident the new government was

reconsidering the provincial commitment to the project, even though construction was proceeding and $70 million in contracts had already been awarded.(19)

Prompted, it said, by regional council's insistence upon letting a tree-cutting contract that would destroy the valley's forest, the province announced on December 17, 1990, that it was withdrawing funding for the north-south leg of the route. Effectively this killed the Red Hill project because it was too expensive for the region to build alone. The province then invited the region to participate in a study of alternate north-south routes, even though cabinet documents showed no other was feasible.(20) In response, the region rejected the invitation and launched a lawsuit to get the funding reinstated.

Reaction to the cancellation of the largest-ever construction project in the region was loud from camps both opposed to and in favour of the expressway. Opponents hailed the move as a victory of environmental common sense over economic imperatives. Supporters of the expressway who spoke publicly on the issue, mostly business people and local politicians, termed the move an economic *gotterdammerung* for Hamilton-Wentworth that would result in $400-million worth of lost development.(21) Councillor Henry Merling attempted to broaden the base of support for the highway by calling for a plebiscite on the issue, but the suggestion was rejected by council. Conveying the delight and outrage to the public was *The Hamilton Spectator*, which carried 18 stories on the issue in the two days after the announcement. On day three it carried an unusual front page editorial demanding reinstatement of the project.(22)

At least three community groups formed to work for a reversal of the decision. The most successful of these was the Citizens' Expressway Committee, an organization that purported to represent the general citizenry but numbered among its founders such groups as the Chamber of Commerce, the construction association, the real estate board, and the automobile club. Although Art Frewin, a retired Stelco employee emerged as the spokesman for the group, one of its initial spokesmen was lawyer Milt Lewis, a prominent Liberal in Hamilton (incidently, the group's first guest speaker

was provincial Progressive Conservative leader Mike Harris). The CEC proved to be well-funded. It opened an information booth about the project, bought extensive advertisements in *The Hamilton Spectator*, produced pamphlets, ran buses to a Queen's Park protest, and supplied supporters with T-shirts and refrigerator magnets advocating the highway. Later, it would endorse candidates opposed to NDP sympathizers in the municipal elections of November 1991.

The spillover of provincial politics into the municipal arena continued at the city and regional councils, further souring relations between the region and Queen's Park. NDP aldermen on council, especially Brian Hinkley, were ostracized by their fellows once it became known the NDP contingent had gained advance knowledge of the cabinet's decision. This animosity induced the council to spend about $125,000 pursuing a law suit against the province. Eventually, though, the region lost its court case, failed to win an appeal, and abandoned its litigation to join the Ontario government's search for an alternate route, hoping all the while to persuade the government no feasible alternative existed.(23)

Sunday Shopping (Hamilton-Wentworth)

Debate about Sunday shopping in Ontario has a long history, with the municipalities' most recent involvement beginning in February of 1989. At that time, the province delegated responsibility for regulating store hours to the regional governments under the Retail Business Holidays Act. The revised act allowed some businesses, such as pharmacies or antique dealers, to remain open seven days a week but left it to the municipalities to decide whether other stores could open Sunday. The legislation required public meetings be called before each approval, although the act also permitted regional governments to develop general guidelines for allowing across-the-board openings.(24)

Throughout Ontario, municipal politicians almost unanimously condemned the initiative as an abdication of responsibility by the Ontario government. Mayors in the constituent municipalities

of Hamilton-Wentworth baldly asserted Sunday shopping would not be allowed in the region. Regional Chairman Reg Whynott was less peremptory, however, allowing the possibility of a domino-effect, whereby one region approving openings would force others to follow suit or stand accused of penalizing local retailers.(25)

Although large grocery chains had been agitating for permission to open Sunday, there was a lull initially as municipalities, retailers, and even the public waited to see what others would do with this new-found freedom. Battle lines began to shape up eventually, as province-wide the grocery chains formed an alliance called The Committee for Fair Shopping to lobby for permission to open in certain municipalities. Opposing them at both the provincial and local level were unions, small business owners, and church groups, such as People for Sunday, who already had long experience resisting the relaxation of Sunday regulations. In September, 1989, the phony war ended as stores began opening illegally across the province. Hamilton-Wentworth, though, seemed spared the controversy and council clung to its ''wait-and-see'' approach.(26)

By December, the Committee For Fair Shopping was lobbying politicians and buying large newspaper advertisements throughout southern Ontario. In Niagara and Halton, chain stores and others continued opening illegally to force a change in legislation. Only a few stores were breaking the law in Hamilton-Wentworth and lobbying was less intense, the chains explained, because the region's Legislation and Reception Committee was attempting to formulate guidelines for store openings. The committee was by this time receiving presentations on the matter, including one from a group of drug store owners who stormed away accusing the committee of having already decided against Sunday openings.(26)

In January, 1990, Hamilton alderman and legislation committee member Dominic Agostino proposed a region-wide referendum on the issue, an idea that was whole-heartedly supported by *The Hamilton Spectator*. While a self-professed opponent of Sunday openings, Mr. Agostino said the issue was too controversial for politicians alone to decide. This proposal was rejected by a vote of 18-1 at regional council in February, meaning in effect the politicians

were determined to settle the matter themselves. Meanwhile, at the legislation committee, those charged with formulating guidelines were no closer to a solution. They resorted to asking that an *ad hoc* committee be struck to deal with the thorny issue, but council denied the request. Eventually, in March, it brought forth draft regulations that tightly limited store openings but contained a provision for public meetings to grant exemptions. Before these regulations could be enacted, however, the question was rendered academic by an Ontario court ruling in June of 1990 that the provincial law was unconstitutional. As a consequence, the province's stores, unhindered by any legislation, were free to set any hours they wished.

The court ruling signalled the beginning of nine months of wide-open Sunday shopping in the province. It was not until March, 1991, that an Ontario Appeal Court restored the *status quo ante* by upholding the 1989 provincial law. While sales during the interval were lack-lustre enough to lead some stores and malls to close voluntarily Sunday, the general public had grown accustomed to Sunday shopping and, in the words of one politician, ''the sky hadn't fallen in.''(27)

Local leaders formerly opposed to Sunday shopping now appeared more amenable to the idea. Hamilton Mayor Bob Morrow, for example, told a small pro-Sunday shopping rally at city hall in April that he favoured a referendum on the issue. Prompted once more by alderman Agostino, regional council agreed to ask area municipalities to put the question on ballots for the upcoming municipal elections. Only Flamborough and Dundas refused, arguing a non-binding plebiscite would simply confuse matters further.

The issue did not rest there, however, as the region's legislation committee resumed its duties and once again received delegations from store owners seeking exemptions. After a particularly cogent presentation from the owner of a large drug store chain in September, 1991, the committee wrestled with the request and eventually moved to unanimously recommend that wide-open Sunday shopping be given a two-month trial in Hamilton-Wentworth. Six days later that recommendation was turned

down in regional council by a 17-9 vote, with one committee member switching sides to oppose the motion. Greeting council's decision with loud applause was a large gathering of union activists who had crowded the chamber to make known their displeasure. Councillors said they rejected the request in part because of the upcoming plebiscite, but also because of its dubious legality. Two months later, voters in the November municipal election voted 63 per cent in favour of Sunday shopping.(30)

Farmland Severances (Niagara)

Niagara's tenderfruit lands are located along the northern edge of the peninsula in the area between the Lake Ontario shore and the base of the Niagara escarpment. Although planning restrictions imposed on agricultural land by the regional and local governments have long been a contentious point with farmers, the situation reached a climax in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In those years, farmers found themselves losing $100 to $500 an acre on their crops and their woes were compounded by the influx of cheap American produce arriving duty-free under the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. For growers, a radical solution presented itself. If they could sever off and sell to developers a portion of their land they could inject badly-needed equity into their operations. The main obstacle to such moves were planning guidelines designed to protect agricultural land, which in some cases were so rigid as to preclude any use unrelated to agriculture.

During the study period, the issue first appeared before regional council in early 1990. Niagara-on-the-Lake farmer Vic Andres came to council seeking an exemption to the Agricultural Purposes Only (APO) restriction so he could sever off a portion of his land and devote the proceeds to keeping the balance in production. Although it violated the region's planning guidelines, an exemption was approved by the regional planning committee and council later sanctioned the move, ignoring contrary advice from its own planning department.

In February, 400 farmers met with regional officials

(including Niagara Regional Chairman Wilbert Dick and mayors from Lincoln and Niagara-on-the-Lake) to discuss means of saving the beleaguered tenderfruit industry. Afterward, regional representatives said the threat of relaxed land use guidelines, and the consequent destruction of highly-valued agricultural lands, might be necessary to spur the provincial and federal government to aid the area's farmers.(32) A regional report prepared by a 10-member committee, consisting of farmers and politicians, appeared the next month. It listed assorted options for helping that industry, including tax breaks, improved crop insurance, and long-term, low-interest loans (almost all areas where the upper tiers of government would have to become involved). Absent were any suggestions of selling off farmland.

At the same time, contrary pressure on politicians was being exerted by the Preservation of Agricultural Lands Society or PALS. It is 16-year-old interest group that claims a membership of 800 and has often intervened at Ontario Municipal Board hearings when farmland disposition was at issue. Worried by the suggestion that farmers might be allowed to sell off their land, PALS began pushing more avidly its idea for conservation easements, whereby farmers would be paid by the Ontario or federal government not to develop their land. Relations between PALS and the farmers ranged from cool to hostile, eventually culminating in an abortive effort by farmers to take over the largely urban-based organization at its annual meeting in 1991. PALS' effectiveness waned during the study period, especially after it was revealed in *The Standard* that a board member had sold farmland to a developer. (During interviews, politicians said their view of the group ranged from grudging respect to total disregard.(33))

As spring turned to summer and farmers realized 1990 would be another bad year, the urgency of the situation became apparent to politicians. In August 1990, a group of 40 farmers descended upon a sympathetic Niagara-on-the-Lake council to demand a relaxation of land use guidelines. Through the fall, area municipalities approved more severances contrary to the APO designation and by October regional council decided to act and call for public

consultation on the issue. That same month, another report, part of an overall series in a region-wide planning review, outlined ten options for helping farmers. These ranged from doing nothing to removing agricultural restrictions altogether. Ottawa and Queen's Park were asked to respond by November 30.(34)

The New Year arrived before the governments' responses and when they did come, in January, they amounted to little more than finger-pointing and promises of further study (although the provincial government did soon appoint a task force that included local farmers to examine the matter). Some councillors were so angered by the inaction that suggestions were made to remove the guidelines forthwith, but council decided to prepare one final report on the issue.(35)

Aware that the Municipal Act left the Ontario government with the final say on land use matters, thereby rendering the threat of relaxed guidelines hollow, the regional government pressed on nonetheless with loosening restrictions. In March, it set out a timetable for the plan, giving Queen's Park a June 30 deadline to produce a bailout program. The province was unmoved, however, and ignored both the deadline and its own task force's report, released in May, which called for $90 million to be spent on a conservation easement program. In an editorial, *The Standard* endorsed the region's confrontational approach.(36)

By September, following a series of public consultation meetings, the region unveiled Amendment 60, its plan to allow up to seven severances on land designated APO. The move was applauded by 40 farmers in the gallery when it was approved by council in October 1991. As it had announced it would do earlier, however, the province declared in November that it would use its planning powers to override the new guidelines and the stage was set for an appeal by the region to the Ontario Municipal Board.

Sunday Shopping (Niagara)

The Sunday shopping issue in Niagara parallels that of Hamilton-Wentworth in that both regions found themselves with new powers that formerly lay in the provincial government preserve. In Niagara, however, the debate was more intense. Unlike shoppers

in their neighbouring region, peninsula residents had for a long time lived with Sunday openings in tourist areas and feelings on council were polarized to a much greater extent. Adding further pressure upon politicians was the proximity of the United States, which gave rise to added concerns among retailers about cross-border shopping.

Following the revisions of the Retail Business Holidays Act in February of 1989, stores in Niagara adopted a go-slow approach to Sunday openings. It was not until September, with the grocery chains' formation of the Committee for Fair Shopping, that regional council asked its solicitor to investigate the matter. Even then, though, Regional Chairman Gilbert Dick insisted it was not a priority and a policy would not be prepared before Spring 1990.(37)

To develop region-wide criteria for openings, an *ad hoc*, five-member committee was struck, comprised of councillors from across the region. Before it had managed to convene any public meetings, however, stores began to demand permission for Sunday openings. Initially, the requests came from outlet stores at wineries that wanted to cater to visitors, but soon grocery stores became anxious to have seven-day shopping and, in December, they announced they would break the law by opening without regional consent.(38)

Regional councillors too began voicing frustrations with the committee's vacillations. Area municipal councils in Niagara-on-the-Lake and St. Catharines started asking for exemptions for wineries and tourist areas, even though the committee had yet to set criteria to allow such openings.

With the hope of achieving a broad consensus on regulations, the region's Sunday committee finally called four public meetings to gather input. The first of these, held in February 1990, drew 150 people and interest group representatives speaking to both sides of the issue. Meanwhile, stores continued opening illegally, leading to 169 charges being read out in a St. Catharines court one day in March.(39) Further pressuring politicians (who had already been bombarded by 6,000 letters from

people on both sides of the issue) was a survey by the Committee for Fair Shopping that concluded consumers crossing the border cost the region $115 million a year and 1,100 jobs.(40) The financial stakes were driven higher by a Niagara Falls developer who offered to build a $20-million mall if assured beforehand it would be allowed to open Sunday.

May found the committee still groping for an acceptable compromise. Finally, it proposed that stores be allowed to open Sunday in areas where they would ''promote and enhance'' tourism. Exactly what ''promote and enhance'' meant was to be sorted out by regional staff, committee chairman Doug Mann explained to skeptical councillors. The committee promised a recommendation before year's end, but a *deus ex machina* intervened to save the floundering committee in the form of the Ontario court ruling declaring the provincial law unconstitutional.(41)

Between the initial ruling and the law's restoration in March 1991, the economy worsened as Canada slid into a recession that hit southern Ontario particularly hard. With the return of store closings, political representatives from Ontario border cities gathered to discuss their mutual concerns. Niagara politicians emerged from that meeting seemingly determined to allow Sunday openings, so the shopping committee was recommissioned and asked for a recommendation by May.(42)

With the arrival of July and still no report from its committee, regional councillors circumvented their own process and called a statutory public meeting to discuss an exemption for both the proposed $20-million mall and a large drugstore chain. Thirty-six people attended the meeting, again voicing concerns about and approbation of Sunday openings, and in August both applications were approved, leading to a deluge of other requests.(43) For its part, the committee decided a consensus was impossible and wound up its affairs without conveying any recommendation to regional council.

That September, during a heated debate about Sunday exemptions, Councillor Mann responded to a ''dare'' laid down by a another councillor and moved that the entire region be declared

a tourist area.(44) The motion was quickly seconded and, after the requisite public meeting, councillors held a long-awaited vote on November 7, 1991. Following three hours of debate, a vote was held and yielded a 13-13 tie, leaving it to the regional chairman to cast the deciding ballot. Stipulating that he was doing so only because it was a two-month test, Mr. Dick voted in favour of the motion. Two weeks later, Ontario's NDP government passed new legislation that sharply curtailed Sunday openings and slammed shut the doors of Niagara's retailers.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has served something of a housekeeping function, describing the methodological approach to be adopted and providing background information on the issues that will be subject to treatment. The stage is now set to begin answering the questions posed in Chapter One about the community power structures in Niagara and Hamilton-Wentworth and the media's influence on public policy decisions made in these communities.

The methodology required certain kinds of issues be selected. In particular, the issues had to generate a good deal of local interest so as to be certain that community notables (the elite, if such exist) would be provoked to participate and thereby be brought into the light for scrutiny. A second requirement was that these issues be ones where councillors had to make policy choices so that their decision-making can be examined. A final prerequisite was that these issues garner media coverage to make possible an assessment of the press' role. The issues selected appear to satisfy all these criteria.

Alone, the synopses that were provided in the second half of this chapter do little to further understanding of the community power structures or the media's role. It will be the task of the next two chapters to more fully address these concerns. Chapter Three will examine the community power structures and attempt to determine how public policy decisions were made. After that, Chapter Four will deal with the media's role in the playing out of these issues. Guiding the explanations offered in these chapters will be the theoretical discussion of Chapter One.

CHAPTER TWO ENDNOTES

1) The Regional Municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth Directory 1986-88 and 'Regional Niagara: Facts, Figures, Functions'

2) Hamilton-Wentworth Economic Development Department

3) 'Niagara Canada, Statistical and Demographic Market Data 1992,' Niagara Regional Development Corp.

4) The Regional Municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth Directory 1986-88 and 'Regional Niagara: Facts, Figures, Functions'

5) *Adding Value and Keeping Faith: Draft report of the Southam readership task force*, by the Southam Newspaper Group, p 23

6) Interviews, March 30 and May 14, 1991

7) Interviews, May 7, 1991

8) Interviews, May 7,1991

9) 'Western Ontario Newspaper Awards 1992' booklet

10) Interview, March 30, 1991

11) Interview, May 14, 1991

12) Harvey Molotch, ''The City as Growth Machine'' in *The American Journal of Sociology*, September 1986. Vol. 82, No. 4

13) Philip Trounstine and Terry Christensen, *Movers and Shakers, The Study of Community Power*, p 55.

14) See Chapter 1, p 3-4, 6-7

15) Mark Fishman, *Manufacturing the News*, p 152; Richard Ericson, Patricia Baranek, and Janet Chan, *Negotiating Control: A study of news sources*, p 182. (See Chapter 1, p 13-14)

16) See for example Paul Pross, *Group Politics and Public Policy*

17) Interview, March 15, 1991

18) *The Hamilton Spectator*, July 5, 1990

19) *The Hamilton Spectator*, December 15, 1990

20) *The Hamilton Spectator*, March 20, 1991

21) *The Hamilton Spectator*, December 19, 1991

22) *The Hamilton Spectator*, December 18, 19, 20, 1991

23) *The Hamilton Spectator*, August 21, 1991

24) 'Retail Business Holidays Act: Revised statutes of Ontario', 1989, p. 12

25) *The Hamilton Spectator*, January 21, 1989
26) *The Hamilton Spectator*, September 28, 1989
27) Interview, April 2, 1991
28) *The Hamilton Spectator*, July 18, 1991
29) Interview, April 3, 1991
30) *The Hamilton Spectator*, November 30, 1991
31) *The Standard*, December 11, 1990
32) *The Standard*, February 7, 1991
33) Interviews, April 13, 16, 1991
34) *The Standard*, October 11, 1990
35) *The Standard*, January 10, 1991
36) *The Standard*, July 25, 1991
37) *The Standard*, November 14, 1989
38) *The Standard*, December 8, 1989
39) *The Standard*, March 13, 1990
40) *The Standard*, March 29, 1990
41) *The Standard*, May 18, 1990
42) *The Standard*, April 4, 1991
43) *The Standard*, July 17, 1991
44) *The Standard*, September 16, 1991

CHAPTER THREE

INTRODUCTION

The study will now shift to specific consideration of decision-making in the Regional Municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth and Regional Municipality of Niagara. It will apply community power theories described in Chapter One to the political issues summarized in the four case studies of Chapter Two. By way of clarification, it should be noted that the term 'decision-making process' includes not only the formalized structures and processes by which regional governments operate, but also their informal aspects, such as lobbying, that are a recognized although not-necessarily institutionalized part of modern political systems. The media, too, can be counted among the non-formalized actors, but, given that they are the main focus of this study, a separate chapter will be devoted to their examination.

The present chapter has two aims. First, it will explore more deeply the decision-making process and attempt to determine what factors contributed to the decisions made by councillors. Special attention will be paid to who was listened to by politicians and who had influence. Also to be noted is who was ignored, or shut out of the process, and why. This done, it may be possible to achieve the second goal of drawing tentative conclusions about the community power structures in the regions, whether they are elite or pluralistic. This will contribute to the media analysis in Chapter Four because, as Black and Tichenor demonstrate, the nature of the power structure can be a determinant of the media's role in decision-making.(1)

So that the reader may more easily follow its arguments, this chapter is divided into three sections. It begins by discussing

the four issue areas individually. Next, it will pull these findings together for comparison and further analysis. Finally, it will offer some observations about the issues themselves, the problems these presented to the researcher and the general application of community power theory to the regions.

THE RED HILL EXPRESSWAY

It is regrettable to begin by imposing a caveat, but the Red Hill Creek case was to some degree limited in its usefulness. The issue's major events, the decision to build the highway and attendant debate, occurred well before the study period. By the time the survey began the issue was settled and participants had for the most part retreated from the field (albeit expressway opponents only had their last avenue of appeal closed by the courts in February 1990). While it is true the project's cancellation revived these interests, the ensuing debate was less illuminating than the original might have been for the purposes of a community power analysis for two reasons. First, local politicians had made up their minds on the project and groups both supportive and opposed to the highway expended little effort in further lobbying locally.(2) Second, because the expressway was killed by the Ontario government it was diminished as a community issue. The decision-making was now taking place on a higher governmental plane, beyond the reach of many local influentials.

This is not to say the events that followed the cancellation can be dismissed as epiphenomenal. Representatives on both sides of the issue continued to articulate their concerns and the underlying motivations of area politicians remained unchanged, namely the desire to see the roadway built or stopped. For these reasons, the Red Hill Creek issue merits exploration.

From an elite analyst's viewpoint, the Red Hill is the type of case study ideally-suited for exposing the ruling group in a community. It is a development issue; the building of the expressway would have opened the south-east corner of the City of Hamilton for an industrial park. Such issues, says Dye, are useful for uncovering elite groups because ''the direct

involvement of community elites in policy-making is more likely to occur in developmental policy.''(3) His fellow elite theorist, Domhoff, states the case more forcefully using the growth machine concept. ''A local power structure has at its core a set of real estate owners who see their futures as linked because of a common desire to increase the value of their individual parcels.''(4)

In Hamilton-Wentworth, expressway critics and supporters agreed that development of the industrial park, and the supposed boon it would bring, were its *raison d'etre.* ''The road meant growth, the road meant expansion, and overall most of the council would be sympathetic to that,'' said a member of the Save the Valley Committee.(5) Another participant, a politician who helped oversee the Red Hill project, frankly admitted that developers wanting to open the industrial area were a driving force behind the expressway.(6)

The cancellation of the highway brought these same developers to the fore again, as their representatives coalesced into the Citizens Expressway Committee. While the group did have some 'ordinary' citizens, mostly Stoney Creek residents afraid that an alternate route would run through their community east of the valley, the CEC was the child of business groups such as the local chamber of commerce and homebuilders association. It also had several businesses backing it, including Hamilton General Homes, which planned a $2.5 million development in the southeast area. Missing from this array of business interests, however, were Hamilton's two largest companies, the steelmakers Stelco and Dofasco.(7) In an effort to appear as a populist organization the CEC recruited a retired Stelco employee to be its spokesman after the original spokesman, corporate lawyer Milt Lewis, was identified too closely with development interests.(8)

Politicians in favour of the project greeted the CEC as a useful ally in the battle with the province.(9) Opponents, however, scoffed at the CEC's pretensions as a grass roots organization. They cited its ability to finance a costly public relations campaign (including elaborate newspaper inserts, billboards, buses for taking protesters to Queen's Park, and

pro-expressway memorabilia) as evidence of the group's connections to wealthy business interests.(10) A CEC spokesman denied these allegations, but the group's failure to maintain a membership list suggests there is a small core financing and running the CEC rather than a large pool of like-minded ordinary citizens.(11)

In opposition to the CEC no group was advancing a spirited case for preserving the valley. The Save the Valley Committee was by this time inactive, its energies and resources spent after nine years of fighting.(12) Environmental or naturalist groups, such as the Conserver Society of Hamilton and District Inc. and Bruce Trail Association, voiced occasional criticisms, as did random individuals, usually in letters to *The Hamilton Spectator*, but these appeals were ineffectual. The Hamilton Region Conservation Authority also waded back into the fray (there was speculation the Red Hill Creek Valley would be transferred to its ownership for safekeeping), but a sharp rebuke from council silenced criticism from this quarter.(13)

In respect to the public, there were conflicting interpretations of its opinion. Opponents argued that, except for a small minority virulently split on the issue, 80 per cent or more of the general citizenry was indifferent to the project.(14) Highway advocates countered that the majority of the region's populace desired the roadway.(15) It should be remembered, though, that when Hamilton Councillor Henry Merling, an expressway supporter, suggested a plebiscite on the matter the idea was rejected by councillors.(16) Critics concluded from this that project boosters were unsure of their support, but politicians in favour of the Red Hill explained there was no need for a plebiscite since people's feelings were already well known.

On regional council a small contingent who supported the NDP, led by Hamilton alderman Brian Hinkley, offered the only sustained resistance. However, this group of about six councillors was easily outvoted on issues pertaining to the highway. In all, said one prominent politician, opposition to the Red Hill Creek Expressway was negligible. The region's problem was that Hamilton-area MLAs enjoying the high ground in

Toronto had convinced their NDP colleagues in caucus that the project was environmental folly.(17)

What effect these disparate groupings, the CEC, environmentalists, the public, and dissenting councillors, had on council's decision-making is difficult to determine. The majority of politicians were by this time (1991) adamant in their resolve to see the expressway constructed. Consequently, they would need little prompting from a community elite. Of their own volition, politicians would vote routinely for measures to promote the highway, such as the decision to spend $120,000 in a largely futile lawsuit against the province. In Hamilton-Wentworth the bulk of the politicians appeared, on this issue, to have been 'captured' by development interests.

In assessing the Red Hill situation, elite analysts could conclude the constellation of political actors accords with their theory. Domhoff's observation that ''leaders within the local area join together because they share a mutual interest in increasing the value of their land'' appears borne out.(18) Moreover, Red Hill opponents, particularly The Save the Valley Committee, faltered because they commanded inadequate resources to generate and sustain broad enough support to successfully oppose the expressway. This too fits within the elite *weltanschauung* where ''community groups usually mobilize only when their own particular turf is threatened. Lacking overall interest in the use of the metropolis as a whole, they are not a source of ongoing resistance.''(19) Compounding the neighbourhood group's problem was that the east end of the city is generally poorer, thus more difficult to politically organize. As a Save the Valley Committee member said: ''They didn't pick the east end because less well-off people live there, but there's no doubt that's a fact. . . I have no doubt proponents of [the expressway] were not insensitive to these facts.''(20)

The Red Hill case suggests then that an elite group was active in the region pursuing its pro-development agenda. Any efforts to encourage broader public participation, through such means as a plebiscite, were rejected. Most council members were solidly in favour of the project and the CEC helped ensure they

remained that way. According to once CEC member, ''I think we're keeping the heat on local politicians. . . we might be keeping a few of them in line. . . it would be a lot easier for some politician to flop around on this issue if we weren't here.''(21)

However, a pluralist analyst could take these same findings and argue that in this case it was simply the pro-development node, one of many nodes in the community, that had won the day.(22) Dahl and Polsby allow for such an eventuality when they note community groups are normally unequal in their influence, sometimes in an absolute sense or only in respect to certain issues.(23) Moreover, the argument could be advanced that earlier in the Red Hill case, before the study period, expressway opponents were involved in the decision-making and managed to delay the project by nearly a decade through the courts and the Environmental Assessment Board hearings. Once again, though, opponents had to resort to mechanisms outside the local community and this may indicate these were non-elites excluded from the region's decision-making.

SUNDAY SHOPPING (HAMILTON-WENTWORTH)

The decision-making process evinced during the Sunday shopping debate could easily be characterized as pluralistic. Indeed, it was almost classically so in that it was ''a tug of war between various interest groups'' that ended with neither side fully satisfied.(24) In observing the intense interplay of lobbyists and interest groups one notes that the only thing missing from the Lord's Day debate was a Christian spirit of goodwill and compromise among the battling parties.

As recounted in Chapter Two, the issue saw most local politicians move away from a stance resolutely against Sunday shopping. Where in early 1989 area politicians seemed immovably opposed, by the end of term, in fall 1991, it was by a narrower margin that councillors defeated a recommendation to permit it and most indicated a willingness to consider the matter further by approving the plebiscite. During this migration there were false starts and reversals, as council first disagreed then agreed to the plebiscite, and a committee recommended, but was

outvoted on, a plan to experiment with openings. This erratic behaviour suggests a deep division of opinion on this issue, which was maintained in large part by lobby groups and other external events.

The nature of the issue itself contributed to council's indecision. Neither a development nor allocational issue, councillors were deprived of the traditional criteria, such as investment or new jobs created, by which to determine a position. Ideology too proved inadequate. Unions were opposed but many workers liked the job opportunities presented by a seventh day of shopping. For those with a business orientation, store owners were split on the issue with small establishments opposed and larger, chain-owned operations in favour. Even personal morality and Christian values, while relied upon by some, proved inadequate. One politician, who attributed his initial opposition to his Catholic upbringing, described his road to Damascus thusly:

> It just came down to a belief, I talked to enough people. It's a matter of political process, when you begin you see things black and white. Then, after a while, you realize things aren't black and white. . . I think a lot of people are just on the fence on it, it's just one of those issues where lots of people were on the fence.(26)

During interviews, several municipal representatives said lobbying on the Sunday shopping issue was the most intensive they had ever experienced.(27) Politicians listened to different groups and the success of each seemed to have been dependent on the predilections of individual councillors. Two said they were particularly impressed by religious groups (which tended to work through phone calls and letters, but would resort to the pulpit on occasion.(28)) . Another said politicians were swayed by unions, particularly the United Food and Commercial Workers Union, which represents grocery store employees.(29) While the grocery chains' lobby group, the Committee For Fair Shopping, did not concentrate on Hamilton-Wentworth, some councillors found business people convincing on both sides of the issue.(30)

It should be mentioned that politicians and political observers in both regions said the presence of people at meetings is a powerful force in municipal politics. A Hamilton-Wentworth councillor explained the effect this way: ''Write a letter and it's just a letter, but go and sit in the same room where the committee is meeting. . . municipal politicians are the most susceptible to lobbying. . . when you're sitting down in a room with eight, nine people, it has a lot more impact.''(31) Agreeing with this sentiment was spokesman for the UFCW who attributed the defeat of the Legislation and Reception Committee's Sunday opening recommendation to her union's presence at the crucial council meeting. The union arranged to have its members pack the gallery at city hall the night of the vote and this is what happened.

> There were a lot of retail workers in the gallery at city hall. We thought it would pass with no trouble at all. So the debate started, and, of course, there were some councillors like Brian Hinkley and Dave Wilson saying they were opposed. They got loud cheers, which didn't help the decorum. . . on that particular evening, I am confident in saying, it was the fact we were there and we were strongly opposed to anyone in favour of opening the stores that led to the decision.(32)

The council's rejection of the committee's recommendation was especially galling for store owner Eric Adams. He said afterward that the majority of councillors had indicated to him that they would support the measure.(33) Despite this setback, Mr. Adams may have been responsible in part for the evolution of some councillors' opinions as he had spearheaded a campaign to allow Sunday openings. It had included a march on city hall that had culminated in a small rally where Hamilton Mayor Bob Morrow, originally a Sunday shopping opponent, declared his willingness to reconsider the matter.(34) One councillor, however, insisted such public protests have only an ephemeral impact, and, as if bearing this out, another who played a pivotal role in the legislation committee could not remember who Mr. Adams even was.(35)

The issue of the plebiscite is of interest because it marks a full *volte face* by regional council. None of the interviews yielded up a clear explanation of why the proposal was rejected in February 1990 to be later adopted in July 1991, but some theories suggest themselves. It should be kept in mind that when the plebiscite was first mooted, the issue of Sunday shopping was still relatively new. The brave initial denunciations may indicate the unsuspecting councillors did not foresee how controversial the issue would become. Additionally, holding a plebiscite would have cost an estimated $500,000, which could hardly be justified to settle a problem councillors themselves could reasonably be expected to handle.(36) Beyond this, there were questions about Mr. Agostino's motives for suggesting a plebiscite. The Hamilton alderman is a well-known Liberal supporter with thinly disguised ambitions for higher office. Given this, one councillor concluded, the real reason for the plebiscite was to move the item off the agenda and spare the provincial Liberal government the embarrassment of having the region castigate it each time the issue surfaced at council meetings.(37)

As time wore on, councillors may have begun to appreciate the impossibility of finding middle ground on the issue. With an election looming there were heightened fears of alienating large segments of the electorate, which appeared deeply split on the issue. (Recall that during the nine-month period when the provincial law was in limbo, malls began shutting Sundays because of a dearth of shoppers, yet 63 per cent of people still voted for openings in the eventual November plebiscite.) As a result, the plebiscite, which at the end of term could be piggy-backed inexpensively on the municipal ballot, probably seemed an attractive way for councillors to avoid a decision, much as the provincial government had lobbed it to them originally.

Despite formidable lobbying by Sunday shopping opponents there was a detectable tilt by councillors toward seven-day-a-week openings. In part, this was due to lobbying by advocates, yet there were exogenous factors at work that proved persuasive. The foremost among these was the economy and its

slide into a stubborn recession. Several councillors cited the weak economy and fear of consumers shopping outside the region as the main reasons they changed their minds on the issue.(38) Longer term considerations were the change in mores in society and the increasingly heterogeneous make-up of the population. Where two decades ago the citizenry overwhelmingly consisted of Christians for whom rest on Sunday was an axiom, this is no longer true in Ontario of 1993. Politicians and observers admitted as much, saying church groups' clout had diminished considerably over the years and, regardless of their own feelings, they were reluctant to impose their views on society.(39)

As stated at the outset of the Sunday shopping discussion, there is a *prima facie* case to be made that the community power structure was pluralist in terms of decision-making. Notably, the process was marked by the participation of what Polsby would describe as a congeries ''of small special interest groups, with incompletely overlapping memberships, widely differing power bases, and a multitude of techniques for exercising influence.''(40) In the short term, at least, groups other than those that elite theorists say rule in a community scored a significant victory by persuading council to turn down the legislation committee's proposal for Sunday openings.

Elite analysts, however, could arrive at different conclusions. They may counter that this is simply not the type of issue where a community elite would exert itself. Dye, for example, says that in some types of decisions, such as allocational questions of where to put a sidewalk or organizational issues of how to structure decision-making, elite groups are generally disinterested bystanders.(41) Sunday shopping affected only a segment of the community's elite group, presuming it encompasses some of the larger retail store owners in the region, and they were divided on the issue. Furthermore, many of the stores in favour of Sunday shopping, including the most importuning, the large grocery stores, are owned by corporations based outside the community. Thus, elite analysts could plausibly argue, the community elite simply chose not to

mobilize around this issue.

FARMLAND SEVERANCE (NIAGARA REGION)

The relaxation of farmland severance guidelines in Niagara is a good example of decision-making in pluralist community. It was a case of the type described by Polsby where ''decision-making is limited to a relatively few members of the community, but only by the easily revoked consent of a much larger percentage of the local population.''(42) More specifically it was a an example of ''privatized pluralism'' where ''a limited number of participants have usurped the authority and resources of public policy-making for private ends.''(43)

In this case, Niagara Region's policy process was led by an informal group of fruit farmers. They 'captured' a core group of politicians and persuaded it to act on their behalf. Among these politicians were such notables as regional chairman Wilbert Dick, and mayors from Lincoln and Niagara-on-the-Lake.(44) As one mayor from a fruit growing community in the peninsula described it, there were several meetings with farmers in 1990 and his role was to get the land use reforms onto the political agenda. He said

> we discussed a position to be taken and the best way to approach the position. They gave me what they wanted to do and we tried to put it in as non-offensive a manner as possible. You have to make it non-offensive to other politicians or they'll go across to the other side and be against you.(45)

Apart from putting forth the severance plan and other remedies, councillors from the fruit growing towns also lobbied their urban counterparts on council. One councillor explained her support role this way: ''Where I came in was I felt I could say to my colleagues on council, 'hey, they're telling the truth. This isn't just a gnashing and grinding of teeth,' because farmers have always been accused of being whiners.''(46)

Although their numbers are relatively small, making up about three per cent of the work force, the farmers enjoy considerable

clout with the regional government, said a well-placed bureaucrat.(47) This is evidenced in the financial support the region gives the peninsula's two agricultural federations. They received $62,000 in grants in 1991, a fact that chagrined other groups in the region since it represented a five per cent increase over 1990 at a time when other associations had to accept grant freezes or cuts.(48) In addition, representatives from the federations also sat with councillors on *ad hoc* committees to study agricultural issues. Farmers groups are what Pross would describe as members of the policy community since they were formally incorporated into the decision-making process.(49)

There were several explanations offered for the farmers' influence, but foremost among them was that many councillors had an agricultural background or were at most only a generation or two removed from the farm.(50) Others noted that despite their small numbers, farmers do constitute an appreciable percentage of voters in the smaller rural municipalities, notably Niagara-on-the-Lake, home of then-regional chairman Wilbert Dick.(51) Some suggested that farmers received a sympathetic response because of the inequity of the situation, wherein they were forced to farm themselves into bankruptcy but were forbidden to sell their land. This argument was especially effective on urban councillors, who believed their constituents were largely indifferent or mildly sympathetic toward the farmers.(52) Yet another felt that the farmers are widely viewed as stewards of the land and this close identification with environmentalism put them 'on the side of the angels' in the public's perception.(53)

Plans to help the farmers, especially amendments to relax land use restrictions, had to be steered cautiously through the shoals of public policy debate. To legitimate its proposals the council held a series of open forums in the spring of 1991 designed to gather feedback. For the most part, though, these were ignored by the non-farming public and the silence was construed as consent.(54) The farmers, meanwhile, even though council was largely 'on side' on the issue, continued to display their disaffections. They secretly hired a public relations

company to orchestrate a campaign that included mock 'For Sale: Developer Wanted' signs placed on farm properties and that also saw the province's agriculture minister chased by a chicken manure spreader.(55)

Counterpoised to the farmers on the issue were the Preservation of Agricultural Lands Society and the regional bureaucracy. As mentioned in Chapter Two, PALS was a reduced force in the debate by late 1991 and its own members admitted its ineffectiveness on the amendment plan.(56) The group had a budget of $21,000 and claimed a membership of 800 in 1991, but its critics insisted they had never seen more than twenty people at its functions.(57) Farmers said they viewed the group dimly because its largely urban membership exuded unreasonable zeal to preserve farmland, usually at the farmers' expense. Complained one: ''PALS. I doubt if there's more than 13 real members and most of them are in wheelchairs. PALS is [President] Gracia Janes and one other gentleman and for some reason they have a tremendous amount of clout.''(58)

In some respects, the farmer's observations about the group's influence are correct in that PALS does enjoy the ear of the provincial government. On one occasion, local political hackles were raised in St. Catharines when the NDP, Ms. Jane's preferred party, sought the unelected group's opinion on the location of the Ministry of Transportation's planned office in the city.(59) However, among local politicians, opinions of the group ranged from ''utter condemnation to grudging acceptance'' largely because of the group's frequent past involvement in fighting individual farm severances.(60) Another councillor, representing an urban municipality, said simply: ''I don't think the local politicians care too much for the views of PALS.''(61) It should be noted too that the group's opposition to the land use relaxation scheme diminished over time, partly because it realized the province would never permit the severances, but also, according to one farmer, ''because they [PALS] trusted us on this one, that we knew what we were doing.''(63)

Among the region's bureaucracy there was also resistance to the severance plan. ''Most of the recommendations from planners

were not sympathetic,'' recalled a farmer. ''Mainly it was the elected people telling them what to do. Originally, they were taking orders from the planners, but because of our movement there were telling the planners what to do.''(64) Instrumental in getting the planning department to take part fully was regional chairman Wilbert Dick. Bureaucrats, politicians, and farmers agreed that without his involvement regional planners would have been more difficult to bring around. ''I think quite frankly he may have put some direct influence on some of the staff people. . . there was some behind the scenes pressure to make them see things in a different light.''(65)

A final group to consider briefly is land developers. Logically, one might have surmised that developers would have eagerly anticipated the loosening of land restrictions. However, the economy was steadily worsening at this same time leading to depressed prices for residential and commercial developments, and this may have cooled some developers' ardor to bring more land on stream for development. Policy participants themselves said that developers were uninterested in the move because it promised to bring only scattered lots onto the market that might only drive down land prices. One politician active on the region's planning committee remembered

> The only comment I ever heard from developers were certainly not positive comments. It was 'if these things are loosened up then there will be great pressure for development' and he wasn't sure if it was all good. . . there was no overt, or covert, or any influence placed on me by the development community to influence the loosening of development restrictions.(66)

In the severance issue farmers, a group not normally associated with the community elite, managed to lead the policy process. This was possible because other segments of the community power structure, such as developers, and the general public, were inactive or indifferent. As noted earlier, this seems a typical case of Waste's ''privatized pluralism'' which ''envisions the capturing of pieces of the governmental policy-making apparatus by different groups that are not

challenged.''(67) Polsby may have had Niagara farmers in mind when he wrote a prescription for accomplishing one's goals in public policy debates. He said

> resources and skill and diligence in exploiting them are three conditions which make for success in influencing community decisions. A fourth is the ability to choose goals that do not strain the compliance of others in the system. A fifth condition of successful participation is the capacity to form coalitions with other participants in order to achieve one's goals.(68)

An elite analyst might not readily concede. In this instance, as in the case of Sunday shopping, it might be argued traditional elites chose not to use their powers or that they may have welcomed the easing of restrictions, mild as they were, because they held the prospect of intensified land use.

SUNDAY SHOPPING (NIAGARA REGION)

If the farmland severance debate was an instance of privatized pluralism, then the issue of Sunday shopping in Niagara can be properly placed at the other extreme of the theoretical continuum suggested by Waste to measure participant inclusiveness. There, pluralism takes on a form known as ''hyperpluralism''. The term, as defined by Wirt, denotes ''an exaggerated, extreme, or perverted form of pluralism; it is so decentralized and pluralistic that it has trouble getting anything done. . . Too many groups, each refusing to take 'no' for an answer, are at the root of hyperpluralism.''(69)

This assessment is based on the region's Sunday shopping committee's inability to arrive at a recommendation for council. Such an impasse is exceedingly rare in Niagara and suggests the extent of disagreement on the issue among councillors.(70) The failure to work out an acceptable compromise was also manifested at the council level in the 13-13 final vote on the issue in November, 1991, which left the regional chairman uneasily siding with the Sunday opening advocates. A bureaucrat who watched the politicians grapple with the question for the three years observed: ''I would say they were listening to both sides, in

some cases they had a great deal of difficulty. . . they were all listening to all of the arguments.''(71)

Policy participants and observers suggested three reasons for the committee's catatonia. The first of these lay in the make-up of its volunteer membership, which was split between those in favour and those opposed to Sunday shopping.(72) Another reason is that well-organized lobbying campaigns from both sides (the anti-Sunday shopping contingent was by most accounts better orchestrated) made it difficult for all but the most dogmatic of councillors to decide on the proper course of action. Finally, as a concomitant to the second reason, councillors said they began to suffer from overload on the issue. In an exasperated voice, one committee member, who never wavered from his anti-Sunday shopping position, described the mood in this way

> It's very onerous to have to listen to brief after brief, speech after speech, and sit there hour after hour, arguing and rehashing. Some of the councillors said, 'I've got it in Niagara Falls, but not on McLeod Road'; and 'You've got it in Port Dalhousie but not in Port Colborne'; and someone said, 'it's not fair'; and then they said, 'the hell with it, we'll open it all up, because why shouldn't Port Colborne be treated the same way as Port Dalhousie?' It's like pulling a string on a sweater. You keep pulling and eventually there's nothing left of the sweater.(73)

Lobbying was heavy, especially by a business community forced to watch consumer dollars drain across the U.S. border. There were more illegal store openings by the large grocery chains in Niagara than in Hamilton-Wentworth and the Committee For Fair Shopping ran a fuller publicity campaign. Both pro- and anti-Sunday shopping groups bought full page advertisements in *The Standard*.(74) In all, the region committee received hundreds of submissions and delegations from business, union, church, and student groups, as well as pleas from individuals. Perhaps it is a testament to the committee's even-handedness that both business and union spokesmen complained that it ignored their briefs.(75)

For business people, their strongest ally in the fight was

the recession. They used it in tandem with the promise of more jobs and investment (such as the proposed $20-million mall in Niagara Falls) to wear down councillors. A committee member from Niagara Falls summed up his change of heart this way: 'I think I came around because of the economy in our area. Cross-border shopping had a lot to do with it. . . I didn't always feel that way, but I kind of mellowed because of the economy.''(76) Some felt the grocery chains' advertising was also telling. ''I think they were effective,'' conceded a committee member opposed to Sunday openings. ''I think people read an ad and it says: 'You should have the right to buy bread and milk on Sunday' and it's hard to argue against that.''(77) Mall managers also resorted to lunches with politicians, where they would bemoan their high taxes and make a pitch for Sunday law relaxations.(78)

Yet businesses were not uniformly in favour of Sunday shopping. A group of mall tenants opposed to the idea organized secretly, fearing discovery and expulsion by the mall owners, and raised money to finance a 'no' campaign.(79) Joining the dissenting business people were church groups and unions. Niagara church groups were less active than those in Hamilton-Wentworth, said a unionist who worked in both regions on the issue.(80) One church activist in Niagara lamented this quiescence, explaining, ''I think the church today is very weak in terms of its effect on society. I think they could present a much stronger voice, but they're too over-anxious about things inside the walls.''(81) Even a high profile Anglican church member sitting on regional council actively cajoled a recalcitrant colleague to drop his opposition to Sunday openings.(82)

Still, members of the region shopping committee acknowledged that certain sections of St. Catharines and rural municipalities, such as Lincoln and Pelham, possess strong church-going segments. These, coupled with the heavily-unionized workforce in St. Catharines (where 7,000 belong to the CAW alone) prevented councillors from voting *en masse* for Sunday shopping despite a sea change among them to favour the idea. In a committee member's opinion, ''one of the reasons was the [municipal]

election coming and some of the councillors would rather upset the A&P head office than some of their constituents.''(83)

The pluralist case for this issue seems self-evident. An assortment of groups was recognized as having legitimacy and took part in the public policy melee. While opponents of the proposal lost in the end, they battled with Sunday shopping advocates to a standstill at the committee stage and were defeated by the narrowest possible margin at the council level following a three-year campaign. For their part, elite analysts could put at least two interpretations on the issue's unfolding. On one hand they could say the situation was clearly a case of the largely business-dominated elite winning the policy battle. On the other, an elite theorist could also conclude that, as in Hamilton-Wentworth, it was not a typical elite-dominated issue and this explains why the vote in favour was so narrow.

COMPARING ISSUES AND REGIONS

Hamilton-Wentworth region

As the foregoing case studies suggest, it is difficult to conclude definitely whether the Hamilton-Wentworth region operates under an elite or pluralist community power structure. In one instance a coterie of developers pushed for the Red Hill Expressway development, suggesting control by an elite. On the question of Sunday shopping, however, no one group seems to have dominated, indicating the decision-makers operate in a pluralistic environment. When asked to generalize, politicians and others interviewed in Hamilton-Wentworth responded that regional councillors listen to different segments of the public both on a given issue and across different types of issue. One councillor, who had been recently defeated in the municipal election and could therefore afford to be candid, said

> It depends upon the issue. To say the council is at the beck and call of one group I don't think is correct. . . I would say that there was a day in Hamilton when all the decisions in the community were made at the Hamilton Club, but that day has been gone for maybe ten years. Now what happens is

> that groups have a little more balance in terms of input into community decisions.(84)

Between the two issues there was no strong evidence of overlapping groups trying to influence policy outcomes. Those groups lobbying on the Red Hill were distinct from those mobilized around the Sunday shopping issue. This is similar to what Dahl found in his landmark pluralist study on New Haven.(85) Moreover, even supposing a business-oriented, pro-development ruling group exists, it should be remembered that while it 'won' in the Red Hill case, it essentially 'lost' on the issue of Sunday shopping. This is significant because a cohesive elite group could be expected to favour Sunday shopping since it would provide economic benefits. Instead, business people were divided on the issue, although it should be noted that elite theorists like Domhoff allow for intra-elite competition and differences.(86)

Elite analysts recognize that on certain types of issues a community's ruling group will not exercise its power. As mentioned, this could explain its non-participation in the Sunday shopping debate. In addition, this could also be used to interpret the council's decisions on the two plebiscites. From the elites' perspective, a plebiscite would have been unwelcome on the Red Hill Creek Expressway, since that could open the door for greater, possibly negative citizen input, something they may view as being of no matter on the Sunday shopping question. Dye notes that one way an elite group maintains its dominant position is by organizing certain issues out of politics.(87) Again, however, no evidence was uncovered of 'backroom' machinations.

Niagara Region

Although it cannot be stated definitively, one could conclude based on the evidence gathered and presented that the Niagara Region has a pluralist community power structure. In both cases studied it manifested variants of pluralism: 'Privatized pluralism' in the farmland issue and 'hyperpluralism' on the question of Sunday shopping. Unlike their counterparts in Hamilton-Wentworth, regional councillors in Niagara encouraged

and responded to meaningful citizen participation on both issues. Nor is this unusual, said a politician, offering a generalization on the councillors' willingness to consider various sides to an issue. ''When a vote is taken at the regional council you usually don't know how people are going to vote until the debate begins.''(88)

Again, the study found no evidence of overlapping interests between the two issues studied. On the severance question it was possible for farmers to dominate the debate because of the public's acquiescence and the inability of PALS, primarily an urban group, to convince politicians it should be heeded on the issue.(89) In terms of Sunday shopping, the pluralism was more evident, with unions, business groups, churches and individuals all 'tussling in the policy scrum'. Both cases accorded with Dahl's observation that in pluralistic communities any organized and legitimate group can have an impact on policy.(90)

Elite analysts could respond that these issues are inappropriate for a community power analysis. Neither is what they would consider a true development issue, such as the Red Hill Creek Expressway, which involved the intensification of land use. To a certain degree such criticisms are valid, hence the tentative nature of these conclusions. Yet, in another sense, Sunday shopping should have been of interest to at least segments of the elite. The farmland issue too promised to ease development restrictions and that could be used by developers as a precedent for the loosening of other restrictions in the future.

Regional Comparisons

In comparing the handling of these issues by the two regional governments similarities and differences are immediately evident. These are more obvious in the instance of Sunday shopping, yet commonalities are discernible in the development cases too. In the course of interviewing policy participants differences between the two regional systems also became apparent. Since these have relevance to the media analysis that follows in Chapter Four, they will also be briefly discussed.

The most obvious similarity between the two councils in their handling of the Sunday shopping issue is that both found it difficult to arrive at a policy. It took nearly three years for Niagara's council to come to a decision and Hamilton-Wentworth essentially deferred the matter by holding a plebiscite in the municipal election. Debate in both regions was also marked by heavy participation of interest groups, giving the decision-making a decidedly pluralist hue. In addition, both councils tried to maximize public participation; in Niagara by holding four public meetings throughout the region and in Hamilton-Wentworth by running a plebiscite.

The politicians' desire for public participation is a result of the issue itself. Sunday shopping has the potential to affect the work and leisure hours of most the populace. More fundamentally, it is an issue that touches upon peoples' moral and religious beliefs, as well as their rights, especially the rights of property owners to do what they will with their businesses. Understandably then, a politician would encourage maximum participation to be sure of disappointing the fewest possible and to assuage the feelings of those offended by extending to them an opportunity to participate.

In both cases the politicians also had to contend with external considerations. There was the threat of lost tax revenues, investment, and jobs to neighbouring areas. Hamilton-Wentworth councillors had to be concerned about what nearby Halton Region would do, while Niagara councillors were ever-mindful of cross-border shopping. An impending election also constricted the councillors. It helped stay the hand of Hamilton-Wentworth politicians, who did not want to pre-empt their own plebiscite, and forced some Niagara councillors to second guess themselves and vote against Sunday openings. Looming over all, of course, was the recession ravaging the retail industry.

Yet, Niagara politicians said yes, however narrowly, to Sunday openings while their counterparts in Hamilton-Wentworth rejected it. This is explicable in part by the peninsula's proximity to the border and its previous experience with Sunday

shopping in designated tourist areas, such as Niagara Falls and Niagara-on-the-Lake. In turn, this split council from the outset in a way Hamilton-Wentworth was not and fewer of its members had to be convinced of Sunday shopping's merits. Along with these factors, there was a more extensive campaign in the region by stores wanting Sunday openings.

On the Red Hill and farmland issues comparisons are admittedly more inexact. The two issues are similar in that core groups in both communities were furiously lobbying councillors and the public seemed largely indifferent. The policy circle was tighter than in the Sunday shopping debate; opposition groups were relegated to at best secondary positions. The Save the Valley Committee and other anti-expressway groups were denied access in Hamilton-Wentworth and PALS was reduced to a marginal role in Niagara. In both cases, too, the regional governments' target was the provincial government. Perhaps this reduced internal debate as the communities rallied behind their representatives in their fight with the interloper for reinstatement of funding for the Red Hill Creek Expressway or to secure aid for local farmers.

The issues have a fundamental difference, however, and that relates to the interests involved. In a sense, the farmland issue saw a relatively small group of farmers arguing over the disposition of their own land in what was basically an attention-seeking threat. The Red Hill presented a more serious public policy problem in that it entailed the destruction of a major greenspace in the community and the building of an expressway that would be used by millions of people each year. It was an issue that presented real choices for the community, but the community was largely absent from the debate.

There are also other differences between the two regions, rooted in the systems themselves, that shape the councils' decisions. The most salient of these is the number of municipalities in each region and the fact Hamilton city councillors sit on and dominate their regional council. Often, animosities are transferred from city council to the regional arena. Several politicians interviewed referred to the existence

of partisan blocs on the councils.(91) These were evident to some degree in the Sunday shopping and farmland debate, and became especially pronounced in the Red Hill case, where provincial government representatives took the unusual step of sharing cabinet secrets with select local politicians. One high-profile councillor said some of his fellows watch how he votes and then vote the opposite way. These 'personality blocs' at times colour the debate and can lead to such scenes as personal attacks in council, and even fisticuffs in the parking lot.(92)

It would be naive to suggest that life on Niagara regional council is peaceful and some politicians complained that partisanship is creeping into the decision-making process (although others denied it and there was little evidence).(93) The fact there are twice as many municipalities in the region does, strangely enough, contribute to the harmony. As several politicians noted, no one municipality dominates the council so the approval of any motion requires careful coalition-building. ''If you do make a statement opposed to anything brought up by any area you have to do it in a shrewd way that's non-offensive,'' said a councillor, explaining one never knows whose vote will be needed some day.(94) Another added that ''as long as the money is getting spread around geographically and the needs are being met'' then harmony generally prevails.(95) Contributing to this equanimity is the electoral system, which sees regional councillors (excepting area mayors) sit only on regional council. This possibly gives Niagara politicians a broader perspective or 'regional mindset' and may keep animosities from the local councils from spilling onto the regional council table.

This last point leads to a final theoretical consideration that will also serve to end this chapter. As shown, the evidence so far presented suggests the two regional systems appear to be pluralist rather than elite-dominated, although nothing conclusive can be said based on only four case studies. Still, it might be asked if an elite power structure could even emerge in the province of Ontario or the Canadian context. Consider,

for example, Dye's observation that elites are normally bankers, developers, and company executives who exercise their power to minimize taxes, cut land prices, and escape environmental and other costs.(96) This simply does not apply in Ontario, where local bank managers are strictly controlled by highly-centralized head offices and company executives are often compradors merely overseeing businesses for far away head offices. In addition, Canadian laws restrict a municipality's ability to jiggle its tax structures and ignoring environmental or building codes is done only at the peril of stiff fines or jail terms. Developers too, while decidedly enjoying clout disproportionate to their number must also face numerous planning restrictions.(97) As Red Hill Creek enthusiasts learned, opponents to development projects have courts and quasi-judicial bodies, such as the Ontario Municipal Board, to appeal to when they feel aggrieved. Over-arching above all is a provincial government empowered to intervene in almost all local affairs, which happened in the case of the expressway in Hamilton-Wentworth and the land severance issue in Niagara. For these reasons, many of which do not hold in the United States, it is possible that elite theory may be inapplicable to the Canadian situation at the local or regional level.

CHAPTER THREE ENDNOTES

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5) Interview, March 27, 1992

6) Interview, April 1, 1992

7) *The Hamilton Spectator,* February 5, 1991

8) Interview, April 3, 1992

9) Interviews, March 25 and April 1, 1992

10) Interview, March 27 and 28, 1992

11) Interview, April 3, 1992

12) Interview, March 27, 1992

13) *The Hamilton Spectator,* January 11, 1992

14) Interviews, March 27 and 28, 1992

15) Interviews, March 25 and April 1, 1992

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17) Interview, March 25, 1992

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27) Interviews, March 25 and 30, and April 2, 1992

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49) A. Paul Pross, *Group Politics and Public Policy*, p. 131

50) Interview, April 14, 1992

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53) Interview, April 14, 1992

54) *The Standard*, May 30, 1991

55) Interview, April 16, 1992

56) Interview, April 10, 1992

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61) Interview, April 13, 1991
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69) Waste, *Ibid.*, p. 123
70) Interview, June 5, 1992
71) Interview, April 14, 1992
72) Interviews, May 14 and June 5, 1992
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CHAPTER FOUR

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter the study examined the two regions' power structures and some of the factors working within and upon them to influence the political decision-making process. One significant component of that process, the media, was deliberately excluded from the discussion. Apart from the fact that they are the object of this inquiry, the rationale for isolating them for individual treatment is that they occupy an anomalous place in society, playing a part in, yet existing separately from, community power structures.

To investigate the media's impact on decision-makers, the study will now look at the subject newspapers' coverage of the Red Hill, farmland severance, and Sunday shopping debates. Did the press act as a watchdog observing and faithfully reporting events? Or, did it involve itself more deeply to become what Tichenor describes as a ''subsystem within the total system''?(1) To answer these questions this chapter will focus on the behaviour of the newspapers and assess the coverage in terms of bias, sources, and the stated objectives of reporters and editors. Crucial to this evaluation will also be the impressions of policy participants.

If the media did influence the politicians, it is expected that this will have happened in one of the five ways hypothesized at the conclusion of Chapter One. Briefly restated, these include the media:

1) agenda-building and agenda-setting

2) publicizing decisions and thereby mobilizing the public to react

3) controlling information

4) affecting the legitimacy of would-be policy participants by recognizing or ignoring their claims to speak on an issue

5) acting independently to introduce issues, or contribute new information to existing issues

As explained in Chapter Two, the selection of issues was dictated by the amount of media coverage each received. This was necessary to generate sufficient data for assessments about each paper's coverage. Also, there was an underlying assumption that a correlation exists between the quantity of items about an issue and its relevance to the community, which would in turn be expected to indicate the extent of participation by community power-holders. Editors at both papers said the four issues received relatively heavy coverage so they are comparable in terms of the importance assigned them by the two media organizations.(2) In total, 536 items published during the study period were reviewed, including news articles, editorials, letters-to-the-editor, columns, and opinion pieces written by those other than staff at the paper.

The outline of this chapter is as follows. After a brief description of each paper's newsgathering operations, the coverage each issue received will be considered individually with reference to the theoretical discussion of Chapter One. Included in the analysis will be a look at what was written, how the news texts were viewed by participants and newsworkers, and then a search for evidence of the reports influencing decisions in accordance with the five hypotheses. Ending the chapter will be comparisons of the coverage and an assessment of the news stories' overall impact.

THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

The Hamilton Spectator assigns two senior reporters full time to covering regional and Hamilton city hall politics. Supplementing this coverage are three columnists who write several times a week about regional issues. In the local news hierarchy, municipal politics enjoys an important place, but not

top priority, which is usually reserved for breaking news and special investigations.(3)

Story ideas come primarily, 90 per cent, from reporters themselves, although editors may suggest angles and tactics to be used.(4) On occasion, editors, senior editors, and even the publisher of the paper suggest topics (although the latter does not contact reporters himself). Overt interference in the forms of extensive rewriting to change a story's slant or the outright killing of stories or columns is rare. On the Red Hill and Sunday shopping issues writers from *The Hamilton Spectator* said they experienced no censoring of their stories or columns. ''I never felt direct pressure on the Red Hill Express,'' said one. ''I can't say they were ever edited to take a particular slant. . . I've been able to get stories leading off with either point of view.''(5)

The editorial page is put together by a separate editor, who has a staff of three and a cartoonist. Sometimes the paper's managing editor and publisher are involved in determining the stance to be taken. The local news editor, who assigns and oversees local coverage, including the regional government, normally declines to participate in these decisions lest they colour his news judgment. Letters-to-the-editor are generally edited for space requirements.(6)

Story placement is determined largely by the night staff. Their decisions are guided by instructions from senior editors working the day shift who meet several times to discuss the next day's edition. While Page One is reserved for the most important stories (determined by the subjective, almost quixotic criteria of what strikes the fancy of whomever is in charge that evening) independent readership surveys show the front page and the Metro Page inside section front are read almost equally. Editorially, *The Hamilton Spectator* tries to position itself between the general market newspaper *The Toronto Star* and that city's racier tabloid, *The Sun*.(7)

While the paper has no other direct newspaper competition, attention is paid to the television station CHCH and to a lesser degree area radio stations. Reporters are cognizant that they

cannot compete in terms of timeliness reporting on council's meetings, so *The Hamilton Spectator* staff have adopted an approach of giving advance coverage to what they think are important stories. Apart from improving their stories' timeliness, this tack also affords the newspaper an opportunity to influence politicians. As one employee explained

> You can rely on the hackney phrase, but we're here partly as a watchdog role, partly in an information role, and partly to influence. We're not here just to report on what the politicians are doing, we're here to report issues and explain issues and not necessarily the way the politicians want them to be explained. . . if we take an issue before it hits committee, people have chance to react and call the politicians. . . we become part of the process and, by being the vehicle we are, we invoke change. Not because we took a particular slant, but because we explained to people what's happening.(8)

One constraint reporters find is the a lack of time to work on stories. Editors expect stories of 12 to 15 inches daily and it is difficult, although not impossible, for city hall reporters to convince editors to give them several days to prepare an article.(9) These time constraints mean reporters can only give advance or in-depth coverage to select issues. Choosing which issues get special attention was admittedly subjective, but those that are perceived to affect larger rather than smaller numbers of people directly are the preferred candidates for such treatment.

Politicians said they all read *The Hamilton Spectator* and for the most part it is viewed as a competent newspaper that does a good job covering local news.(10) Attention is paid to the front page, Metro Page, and editorial page. Letters-to-the-editor were several times cited as the most read items because they are viewed as the voice of the people. None would admit to being swayed by an editorial or article, but most said they knew other councillors who were. In the words of one defeated politician, ''the response is usually one of three things. One, they agree with me aren't I wonderful? Two, they don't agree with me and

how can I get out of this so it doesn't hurt me? Or three, I don't care.''(11)

A bureaucrat who has watched politicians for several years said many arrive in office ignoring the paper, but quickly begin paying it a lot of attention.(12) Most politicians also complained that *The Hamilton Spectator* was too often in the business of making news rather than reporting it.(13) Perhaps this is a result of its efforts to give pre-publicity to issues.

THE RED HILL EXPRESSWAY

The study looked a total of 226 items on the expressway published by *The Hamilton Spectator* between November 28, 1988, and November 11, 1991.(See Appendix Five). Of these, 180 appeared after the cancellation of the provincial funding on December 17, 1990. Only twelve stories related to the expressway ran on the front page of the paper and these were all written after the cancellation. Fifty-five stories were located on the front of the Metro section, while 56 more were dispersed throughout inside sections. There were 17 columns, all but three voicing opposition to the scheme. The most intensive coverage came in the two days following the province's withdrawal of the funding, when 18 items appeared, five of them on the front page. *The Hamilton Spectator* also carried 18 editorials on the topic, all in favour of the project. Only two of these ran before the cancellation and they dealt with a squabble over the name of the highway. In a move staff members remembered as unique, an editorial was published on the front page of the December 20, 1991, edition imploring the province to reinstate the project's funding. Letters-to-the-editor collected were exactly even, 31 each opposed and supportive, with six others conveying neutral views.

To search for bias, people quoted in the stories were counted and their comments assessed as favourable, unfavourable, or neutral. (See Appendix Six). Statements from known proponents or opponents were classed as neutral if they conveyed factual information only, such as providing court dates. Excluding letters-to-the-editor, there were 218 people quoted in favour of

the Red Hill Creek Expressway, 102 opposed, and 18 offering neutral statements. Four of the five most frequently quoted were proponents of the expressway. Only the third most quoted, Hamilton alderman Brian Hinkley, was against it. The most frequently cited, Hamilton alderman and freeway steering committee chairman Don Ross, was quoted 36 times, twice as often as Mr. Hinkley. All five individuals occupied official positions with four of them holding elected office and the fifth, Art Frewin, being the head of the Citizens Expressway Committee.

As the front page editorial indicates, *The Hamilton Spectator* decided immediately after the cancellation to back local politicians in their quest to get the province to reverse the funding decision. One staff member said: ''That was one of the few times in The Spec's history that we had a conscious decision at the senior levels of the newspaper to advocate something.''(14) Support for the project was to be expressed through the paper's editorials and a constant badgering of local and visiting MLAs, including the premier, with questions about the expressway. Stories themselves, however, were to be written according to the traditional criteria of balance and fairness that are supposed to govern regular news reports at the newspaper. An employee said *The Hamilton Spectator* managed to do this and insisted ''if our newspaper had been anti-Red Hill and pro-NDP, I don't think our news coverage would be any different than it was.''(15) A writer agreed, noting that the day after the cancellation a front page picture showed a boy and his dog overlooking the verdant valley. ''If we had wanted to we could had a developer standing by an unfinished highway overpass.''(16)

The fact highway supporters were quoted twice as often as opponents was unrelated to the paper's position, said an editor. Instead, it was described as a reflection of the community's feelings. ''The amount of opposition was not insignificant, but it was minuscule compared to those who wanted it,'' said an employee. ''We did stories about people who were happy, but the fact of the matter was there was a ton of people that were upset. . . naturally, in our coverage then, there were more stories about people unhappy.''(17)

Story placement, which can affect readership, is another source of bias, but one that is harder to detect. Front page treatment is determined by many factors, including an editor's mood, competing stories that day, writing quality, and even story length. Yet, when a reporter unearthed a cabinet document at Queen's Park revealing no feasible alternative to the expressway was possible, this was played on the front with an accompanying story on the Metro Page. Two months later, when another cabinet document was discovered by the same reporter, this one showing the expressway would not be approved by current environmental standards, the story ran on the Metro Page.(18)

The decision to support the project so unabashedly caused dissension among editorial employees, some of whom could be heard to grumble around cafeteria tables. In May, 1991, the reporters' union, the Southern Ontario Newspaper Guild, wrote a letter-to-the-editor complaining about a special supplement paid for by the Citizens Expressway Committee. Guild representatives at the paper decried the running of the supplement because the issue was seen as too political and there were fears the section would compromise *The Hamilton Spectator's* integrity.(19)

The paper's coverage did colour the ensuing debate about the project. One high-ranking politician who favoured the highway said:

> Council had a position that was very firm and the fact The Spectator supported it was an encouragement to them. . . I think if *The Hamilton Spectator* had, from Day One, gone and taken a strong position in support of the Ontario government, they may have had an impact on the members of council.(20)

Opponents of the project said coverage of the Red Hill fallout discouraged them from speaking their minds. A politician who voiced approval of the cancellation described the reaction graphically

> Every single sector of the media was against the decision of the provincial government and anyone who spoke out, they were ready to nail them to the wall. It was very vicious and angry. I wouldn't

> hesitate to say it was the most personal, vicious attack on me that I've ever experienced in my life in politics. For standing up and expressing your opinion it was like a whole slew of angry animals ripping you up.(21)

Interest groups that mobilized around the issue had predictably divergent views of *The Hamilton Spectator's* coverage. For the Citizens Expressway Committee there was instant access and recognition as an important participant in the policy discussion. Art Frewin, the CEC spokesman, did not enter the debate until after February, 1991, yet he was quoted more often on the issue in the following ten months than Hamilton mayor Bob Morrow in the entire three-year study period. Mr. Frewin was sought out by the paper's reporters for his response to developments related to the highway, even if only tangentially. When his group ran buses to Toronto for a rally at Queen's Park the paper publicized departure points and times.(22) Notably, the CEC was the third pro-expressway group to form, but the first two were ignored after initial stories.(23)

As described in Chapter Three, the CEC was formed by developers whose interests were adversely affected by the cancelling of the highway project. *The Hamilton Spectator* did not ignore this fact and undertook a story on the group's financing and connections.(24) The writer said he was unsatisfied with the result because he did not get sufficient time to delve into the group, yet he saw nothing sinister in his editors' reluctance to give him more time for the story.(25) Nonetheless, the relationship cooled between the CEC and *The Hamilton Spectator* shortly after this time, leaving a CEC member lamenting that it was increasingly difficult for his group to get coverage.(26)

Among opponents of the Red Hill Expressway feelings toward *The Hamilton Spectator* were ambivalent, but generally negative. A member of the Save the Valley Committee conceded, though, that the newspaper aided his group.

> There's no doubt our influence, even though at the end it was unsuccessful, the influence we had

> in the whole process was due to our ability to have an influence on the media coverage. . . The media would respond to our press conferences and that put our case forward and increased our credibility and the perception of our group by the politicians.(27)

The Save the Valley Committee did get access. On one occasion the group's lawyer, Herman Turkstra, was allowed half of an op-ed page to state the case against the expressway.(28) Committee members said, however, that such articles are dismissed as propaganda by the general reader. For these types of exposes to carry weight they have to be written by news staff, who are viewed as being more impartial, they believed.

Group members were dissatisfied with what they perceived to be *The Hamilton Spectator's* reluctance to dig more deeply into the issue. Rather than uncritically accept bureaucrats' predictions about the highway's economic benefits, reporters should have more fully examined the project, they said. ''*The Hamilton Spectator* did an abysmal job of reporting it. It got sucked right into the project's PR campaign and played the role of economic hometown booster,'' observed another associated with the group. He accused the paper of ignoring a report by the Ministry of Transport that showed there was no transportation need for the highway.(29)

From a theoretical viewpoint statements such as the one about *The Hamilton Spectator* playing ''hometown booster'' are of interest in terms of the paper's economic role in the community. As Domhoff writes: ''There is one other important component of the local growth machine and that is the newspaper. The newspaper is deeply committed to local growth so that its circulation and even more important its pages of advertising will continue to rise.''(30) Domhoff argues that the newspaper is often a disinterested voice in the community, advocating growth but without a vested interest in any particular parcel of land. As such, it is sometimes an ombudsman and arbiter of internecine bickering among elites.(31) In the Red Hill case, *The Hamilton Spectator* played this role, preaching restraint to angry councillors and championing moderates seeking to bring the

province around by use of reason.(32)

The Hamilton Spectator's behaviour also complies with observations made by Murphy, Paletz, and Fishman that newspapers uphold the *status quo* and support local institutions and community leaders.(33) In the case of the Red Hill this occurred because reporters relied upon 'official knowers' for much of their information. Local politicians were the most frequently quoted and they readily provided studies to support pressing ahead with the roadway. In contrast, forces opposed complained their arguments were usually boiled down to concerns ''about squirrels and trees'' while more complex ecological arguments were ignored.(34) In Fishman's words ''news consumers [were] led to see the world outside of their first hand experience though the eyes of the existing authority structure.''(35)

Concerns that *The Hamilton Spectator* too willingly accepted bureaucratic reports and studies are also noteworthy. Both newspapers considered in this investigation tended to accept uncritically statistics provided by public and private bureaucracies, or at best only offset them with counter-claims by opponents with no apparent effort to independently assess them by such means as consulting academics. In one particularly striking instance of this, *The Hamilton Spectator* carried a report on the economic impact of the Red Hill cancellation that stated 700 jobs and $600,000 in taxes would be lost.(36) Only two people were quoted in the story, the region's economic development officer and the chairman of the highway committee, and these two had an obvious interest in seeing the highway advance. In Niagara during the Sunday shopping debate, *The Standard* uncritically accepted and incorporated into later reports estimates provided by the grocery store chains about the impact of cross-border shopping. (More will be said on this below).(37)

Fishman identified this phenomenon, noting that bureaucratic accounts are usually received as if they are truths while most other people's claims are subject to additional scrutiny.(38) He offered two explanations for this. First, journalists ''participate in upholding a normative order of authorized knowers'', operating on the assumption that bureaucrats are paid

to ''know'' about their area of expertise. To question this would be for journalists to throw into doubt one of their prime methods of gathering information. Second, bureaucratic accounts have a peculiar nature in that they are often what Fishman calls ''performatives'', meaning they do not merely recount an event but also contribute to its unfolding. Police reports, for example, are part of the arrest process and justice system.(39) Ericson had similar findings about the treatment of bureaucratic accounts although his study tempered its conclusions, allowing that reporters sometimes search for deviance in bureaucratic organizations.(40)

A corollary of this reliance upon official sources is that public debate can be circumscribed because alternative solutions are not made widely known. This is one point where theorists have connected community power structures and the media. Trounstine and Christenson argue that newspapers

> are usually owned by members of the elite and have immense power to suppress issues by ignoring them or slanting or trivializing their coverage, thus robbing the issue of legitimacy. This view emphasizes that the ultimate suppressant is socialization and the mobilization of bias the establishment of a set of values that systematically serve one group at the expense of others.(41)

Helping determine what knowledge will be disseminated, says Tichenor, is the nature of the community power structure itself. In pluralist systems the media will circulate information and thereby increase community conflict. In elite systems, the opposite will be true.(42) *The Hamilton Spectator's* performance accorded with the observations made in Chapter Three that with respect to the Red Hill issue the Hamilton-Wentworth region's community power structure appears elite-dominated.

The discussion has already touched upon *The Hamilton Spectator's* role in influencing the behaviour of the politicians by encouraging supporters and dissuading detractors. What is more difficult to determine is whether the paper actually influenced the decision-making by the politicians. Consulting

the five hypotheses of Chapter One should be helpful in exploring this issue.

The papers can be expected to influence decision-making by their agenda-setting and agenda-building abilities. The first refers to how the press affects people's thinking while the second relates to how the press interacts with other institutions to create issues of concern. In the Red Hill case, *The Hamilton Spectator* performed both functions by heavy coverage of the issue, especially its focus on the necessity of the expressway for the region's economic well-being. However, it did not undertake this course of action independently. The politicians and other institutional actors were already fervidly lobbying the province and *The Hamilton Spectator's* role was reactive not initiating.

By publishing decisions in a favourable way, *The Hamilton Spectator* emboldened the politicians to maintain their insistence the province reverse itself. Two examples of this second way a newspaper can exert influence are the coverage of the lawsuit and the decision on a plebiscite. In not criticizing the region for spending $120,000 on the futile suit and ensuing appeal this may have made it easier for the region to keep up its campaign. With respect to the plebiscite, *The Hamilton Spectator* said little (in contrast to its urging of a Sunday shopping referendum) and this could have kept the public placated about not being asked its opinion on this costly and environmentally detrimental project. Again, however, this made it easier for politicians to behave as they wished but may not have influenced the decisions directly.

A third way the paper can influence policy is by controlling information. In the case of the Red Hill the Save the Valley Committee repeatedly accused the paper of ignoring or suppressing information damaging to the project. Even when it did publish negative stories about the highway, for example the cabinet document on its inability to meet environmental standards, these were played less prominently than positive stories. As noted, this sharply delimits debate about an issue and makes certain policy choices more attractive because others may be unknown or not fully understood.

Another method by which the newspaper can influence decision-making is by controlling the number of policy participants. In bestowing or withholding recognition to groups and individuals, the media affects their legitimacy and right to be heeded in policy deliberations. The Citizens Expressway Committee was immediately dowered with such recognition and this gave it an entre into the debate. Opponents too, such as the Save the Valley Committee, enjoyed media recognition, although their spokesmen were quoted less often. Politicians agreed that the presence of the CEC helped them in their fight with the provincial government because it broadened the base of their support.(43)

In terms of the final way papers can influence politicians, by introducing issues, there was no evidence *The Hamilton Spectator* did this in its coverage of the Red Hill debate. The paper played a supportive rather than initiating role and, while it did uncover significant cabinet documents, these contributed little new to the discussion. Tichenor discussed this phenomenon, writing: ''Rather than be an initiator of basic positions, the press is normally pushed into reporting events by organized forces in the system and its reports become an integral part of the social processes which bear on the nature of future events.''(44)

SUNDAY SHOPPING (HAMILTON-WENTWORTH)

On the Sunday shopping issue the study collected and reviewed 115 related articles that appeared in *The Hamilton Spectator* between January 21, 1989, and November 12, 1991. (See Appendix Seven). Of these stories 23 appeared on the front page at various times throughout the survey period. A further 21 stories ran on the Metro section's front page and 38 on other pages. There were nine editorials, whose positions evolved from neutrality to support for Sunday shopping. There were four columns and 20 letters-to-the-editor, nine in favour and 11 opposed to Sunday openings.

Unlike the Red Hill issue, sources quoted for Sunday shopping stories were more evenly divided between viewpoints. (See

Appendix Eight). The paper quoted 105 people in favour, 100 opposed, and 68 expressing neutral views. Of the five most frequently quoted three were politicians and the other two were businessmen. The most quoted was Hamilton Alderman Dominic Agostino, who was initially opposed but later in favour.

Editorially, the paper arrived a position supporting Sunday shopping after politicians appeared to be moving in that direction. For example, Hamilton mayor Bob Morrow, who declared flatly in January 1989 that Sunday shopping would not come to the city, indicated he was willing to reconsider the matter by May 1991. It was not until a month later that *The Hamilton Spectator*, which hitherto had counselled holding a plebiscite, editorialized openly for Sunday shopping.(45) An employee of the paper attributed its ambivalence to the nature of the issue itself, which entails personal feelings and mores more than most political issues.(46) Nonetheless, the paper did have a vested interest in the matter. Explained another of its workers: ''Our paper is definitely in favour of Sunday shopping from an ad revenue point alone. There's talk of the paper going Sunday, but that will depend on Sunday shopping.''(47)

One consequence of this non-committal approach was that *The Hamilton Spectator* had less of an impact on the debate than it did with the Red Hill expressway. ''The only influence it had was in generating a lot of discussion,'' said a staff member. ''I don't think on an issue like Sunday shopping a medium like a newspaper has the ability to really sway people. I don't get the feeling there's a ton of trust.''(48) Members of the region's legislation committee dealing with Sunday shopping agreed *The Hamilton Spectator's* influence was minimal on this issue, as did store owners and unionists.(49)

Apart from the decision not to take a strong stand on the issue, *The Hamilton Spectator's* ability to influence debate was impaired by other factors, said policy participants. The nature of the issue is one where opinions are shaped by socialization; a person's stance is often pre-determined by upbringing or socio-economic status. In addition, there were more powerful influences shaping perceptions, such as the deteriorating economy

or the nine-month interregnum where the provincial law was suspended. Lastly, as one of the paper's writers noted, the issue was one that affected the entire province so regional and national media were also involved forming and reforming people's opinions and this further diluted the local press' impact.

Despite, or more likely because of, *The Hamilton Spectator's* reluctance to take a firm editorial line, policy players said they were generally satisfied with its coverage of the issue. ''The Spec's role is to print whatever is. . . I think they printed the facts, but as far as our campaign in favour of Sunday shopping, I don't think The Spec did a lot,'' said the leader of an ad hoc pro-Sunday shopping group.(50) Among opponents, however, there were complaints similar to those made by Red Hill expressway critics that the paper gave the story shallow treatment. One unionist said

> What I felt was the real issue wasn't getting covered, the effect that it has on people's lives. It was turned more into one of those labour things where the union was always screaming, picketing, and getting into shouting matches with shoppers, and it went quite a way from what the real issue was, which is the effect on workers.(51)

An employee at *The Hamilton Spectator* agreed with these criticisms and regretted that the impact upon workers had not been more deeply explored. Similar misgivings were expressed about the coverage given religious groups. ''I think we were so worried about being politically correct and not to be seen as too Christian,'' he admitted. ''But you can go too far the other way and become alienated.''(52)

Those in favour and opposed said the coverage given them by the paper helped their protests. The rally at Hamilton City Hall, even though it drew only 60 of the promised 1,000 people, garnered front page treatment. Similarly, unions said their events were covered, although as the fight wore on they found the media paying less and less attention. A writer at the paper said this was partly due to efforts to diversify sources and get away from predictable voices, such as church groups. On the obverse,

though, he said sometimes reporters are forced to go to the same people, such as Alderman Agostino, who was the most frequently quoted.

> Some people are saying we quote him too much. It's a matter of him being well-informed, plus he knows how the media works. He knows when our slow days are and he knows how to be quoted and he's always feeding us stuff. If you go to one guy and he doesn't know the ins-and-outs of an issue and then you go to another guy and he's going to prepare the material for you and he's got the answers, who are you going to quote? And who are you going to quote especially when your editor is looking for a story? There are times, though, when we won't quote him just to keep him out of it.(53)

The foregoing explanation of news sources illustrates arguments made by Fishman and Ericson that reporters are often driven by institutional arrangements to rely on certain individuals within the policy community for their information.(54) Apart from leading readers to share in the source's view of the issue, it also enhances the source's authority by designating him or her as an informed policy participant. Sometimes sources exploit this position to change the agenda. In the case of Sunday shopping this happened with the plebiscite proposed by Alderman Agostino in early 1990. It was at first rejected by an 18 to 1 vote, but later the idea was adopted and reintroduced in July, 1991. As the motion's sponsor explained, it was obvious the plebiscite would not be approved first time around but once the idea was on the table for discussion the public began clamoring to have a say in the matter.(55)

All politicians interviewed from both regions said they use the media to build support for the policies, undermine others' positions, or introduce topics for discussion. ''Politicians learn to use the media and you learn early in life that you have to use them,'' said one. ''I think sometimes you can second guess a question and you may not relate back to the media exactly the way you feel.''(56) Others accused their political confreres

of grandstanding to gain publicity. ''They will decide what end of an issue they're going to be on so they get their name in the paper. They will say things that are controversial so they get their name in the paper.''(57) Yet another said simply: ''Politicians know if you throw the media a pound of meat, they will return it to you in lineage.''(58)

In Chapter Three the study concluded that on the Sunday shopping issue the Hamilton-Wentworth region exhibited pluralist decision-making. The performance of *The Hamilton Spectator* matched that which Tichenor ascribes to newspapers in such communities. He found the media report conflict widely but do not create issues, preferring instead to support interest organizations. As well, they circulate ideas and allow decision-makers to gauge public reaction.(59) In this case, *The Hamilton Spectator* reported varying viewpoints almost equally, and gave informal groups such as Mr. Adams' *ad hoc* committee support by pre-publicizing and respectfully covering its rally, even though it misfired, and it also provided politicians with feedback on such things as the proposed plebiscite.

Looking for evidence of the newspaper's influence or decision-making by consulting the study's five hypotheses, it could be argued that regardless of assertions from politicians and media representatives to the contrary, *The Hamilton Spectator* did in fact influence decision-makers, at least indirectly. Perhaps the most blatant manifestation of this was its publicizing of the Legislation and Reception Committee's decision to recommend wide-open store openings. Between the time when the committee made its recommendation and the council met to vote on them, heavy lobbying was undertaken. As recounted in Chapter Three, opponents made their presence felt at the crucial council meeting where the recommendation was defeated.(60)

In other ways, too, *The Hamilton Spectator* may have affected decision-making. It helped build and set the local agenda by keeping Sunday shopping in the public eye. As one employee said, paraphrasing McCoombs: ''I choose to think people don't change their mind just because of an editorial, if I was an editorial writer my ideal would be to get them talking about something.

writer my ideal would be to get them talking about something. The more an issue is exposed to the light of day, the better.''(61)

The paper also helped legitimize groups such as Mr. Adams', through front page coverage of its activities. Moreover, it gave members of The Committee for Fair Shopping exposure disproportionate to their local activity by using wire stories about their efforts.

While *The Hamilton Spectator* did not introduce issues of its own, it may have shaped the debate by giving decision-makers information on which to assess the options. One highly-placed politician staunchly opposed to openings said he found human-interest stories about concerned small store owners particularly persuasive.(62) It was also found that unions and church groups (much like the Save the Valley Committee in the Red Hill issue) felt information they considered crucial and relevant was being suppressed and that may have altered outcomes.

THE STANDARD

Being a smaller paper, *The Standard* has fewer resources to devote to coverage of its area's regional government system. A single, senior reporter works on the region beat, which is accorded high, but not the highest priority, in the news hierarchy.(63) *The Standard* was described by employees as a ''writer's paper'', meaning that reporters are largely self-assigning and they endure light editing.(64) ''[On] something like the municipal beat, particularly the region, I rely on reporters, they're much closer to the scene,'' said one editor. Nonetheless, editors are sometimes involved in developing story ideas or they suggest a focus and sources for a story. Involvement by the publisher is rare, but not unheard of.(65) In the farmland issue, editors were involved, most notably in initiating the idea of a three-part series that investigated the plight of farmers and the ramifications of a collapse of the tenderfruit industry. For Sunday shopping coverage the editors insisted upon varying sources, particularly of store owners, so as to provide fresh insights and geographic

area.

The editorial page of *The Standard* is produced by a single person. Until recently, the job was usually reserved for a more senior staff member winding down his or her career and so the position of editorial page editor was viewed as something of a sinecure. Editorials published during the study period were often diffident, their intent obscure, and it was sometimes difficult to determine which side *The Standard* was taking on both issues. Most politicians interviewed said they read but attached little weight to editorials, certainly not as much as is given to letters-to-the-editor, which are treated as a reliable barometer of community feelings. Cognizant of this, *The Standard* endeavours to run each letter received.(66)

Story placement is decided by a committee made up of the managing editor, assignment editor, news editor, assistant managing editor, and next day supervisor. The front page is more heavily read than any other in the paper, so it is reserved for the most important stories of the day. *The Standard* is conscious of its role as a community paper and as such it has moved over recent years to place local stories on the front page. Due to this emphasis, the farmland and Sunday shopping stories received heavy front page play.(67)

Competition is less a concern of *The Standard's* reporters than it is for their Hamilton counterparts. There is no TV station in the region and even cable TV coverage of the council does not extend to all corners of Niagara. The two other dailies published in the region, *The Niagara Falls Review* and *Welland-Port Colborne Tribune*, overlap only peripherally in circulation with *The Standard* and these are both smaller and ''inferior'' products. Similarly, the peninsula's seven community newspapers are also limited in their circulation and resources.(68) For editors, this lack of a rival is a concern because there is a conviction that competition prods reporters to dig more deeply and work more quickly. For this reason, an editor said he keeps and eye on *The Hamilton Spectator* whenever the paper ventures into the region. ''Whether that's artificial competition in my head, I don't know. I think in this business,

for good reason, we should be on our toes to create some kind of competition. . . I don't know if the people in our readership area are as aware of The Spectator as we are.''(69)

One area where the lack of competition is reflected is in the paper's approach to covering regional council. Unlike *The Hamilton Spectator*, which attempts to give issues pre-coverage, *The Standard* is more passive. Without a television station to concern them, reporters are less worried about other media beating their coverage of council meetings. This means *The Standard* often forgoes an opportunity to influence decision-making by pre-publicizing issues. To a great extent, this is ingrained in the philosophy of the newspaper, where reporters and editors say they do not attempt to shape the agenda, except on rare occasions. The paper instead tends to be a follower, reflecting the community because ''you can only go so far as what the public wants. . . my feeling is that a newspaper can go just so far with a story and it just looks kind of silly if you're flogging a dead horse. . . in the end you have to rely on what your readers can sustain.''(70)

Politicians and other policy participants interviewed in Niagara said they had a generally favourable view of *The Standard* and its coverage of the regional government. ''I think most people, regardless of political stripe, would recognize *The Standard* as being fair,'' said one St. Catharines councillor.(71) During interviews politicians said they routinely read letters-to-the-editor, the editorials, and the paper's front page. None said they ever had their minds changed by an editorial and they were instead read mostly to see what was being said. One long-time councillor rejected this view, saying his fellows were sensitive to the paper's position on issues.

> Councillors are usually talking about them [editorials] by nightfall the same day they come out and if a councillor is attacked in an editorial some of them think it's a badge of honour. . . There are some who want to be attacked, they think it will win them sympathy. But I don't think, deep down, that many relish being attacked.(72)

FARMLAND SEVERANCE

There were 111 news items collected and reviewed from *The Standard* during the study period. (See Appendix Nine). Included were stories indirectly related to the issue, such as the paper's investigation of the subdivision of farmland through wills by means of a legal device known as testamentary devise. The rationale for including these stories was that the issue was a direct consequence of the farmers' plight, brought about in large part by an inability to raise cash.

Thirty-nine stories appeared on the front page and 34 were placed on Page Nine, the main page for local news. Sixteen stories appeared on other pages. *The Standard* also carried five editorials on the topic. Three of these were neutral, explaining the situation rather than advocating a particular course of action, while the final two of the study period supported the regional government's plan to relax land-use guidelines.(73) The paper also printed 17 letters-to-the-editor on the topic, 12 supportive of the farmers and five siding with preservationists.

In the news articles alone, there were 90 people quoted in favour of severances, 31 quoted who were opposed, and 19 who expressed neutral opinions.(See Appendix Ten). Among the five most quoted individuals, three were in favour of loosened severance rules, one opposed, and another, regional planning director Alan Veale, was initially opposed but generally ambivalent. The most frequently quoted person was Gracia Janes, president of the Preservation of Agricultural Lands Society. She was cited 22 times. The five most frequently quoted all held official positions, either as interest group leaders or as occupants of public office.

The two most frequently quoted, Ms. Janes of PALS and the Niagara North Federation of Agriculture's president Arnold Lepp, illustrate Fishman's findings that institutional arrangements drive reporters to certain sources. Both groups designated these individuals as their spokespeople and as such they alone would comment on developments related to the issue. An employee at the *The Standard* said reporters covering the debate found this

frustrated the paper's efforts to diversify sources. This was especially true in regard to the farmers, who, unknown to *The Standard*, had hired a public relations firm to coordinate communications and ensure a constant message was delivered by having only one spokesman, Mr. Lepp.(74)

Views of *The Standard's* impact upon decision-making and the policy outcome varied. Some policy participants expressed the belief that the paper's effect on decision-makers was negligible. For example, a politician involved in the planning process said of *The Standard's* coverage: ''No question it was balanced, fair, and complete, and well-researched, but as far as being compelled to do what was done, I would say it had little to do with it.''(75) Another, though, speaking from the farmers' perspective, felt the coverage given the issue was instrumental in getting the planning restrictions amended.

> It was the media that created the pressure. . . There were several publicity stunts that we thought up and did, like the 'For Sale: Developer Wanted' signs. . . it hit the front page and it got a lot of people calling in, not only to the newspaper, but the politicians got calls too. . . people wanted to know if the farmland was going to be paved over, they were really threatened and that created the pressure.(76)

At *The Standard*, reporters and editors said there was no conscious effort to push politicians to relax the regulations. Instead, the paper followed its philosophy of reporting events rather than attempting to redirect them. On two occasions, though, the paper did make an effort to set the agenda. One of these was a three-part series published in August 1990 that explored the impact of disappearing farms. The second was an investigation into the developers' use of testamentary devise to subdivide farmland.

The three-part series revealed that a great deal of farmland in the west end of the peninsula along the Queen Elizabeth Highway had been bought by speculators. As well, it looked at such issues as the impact of urban development on the quality of life in the area and the consequences for fruit prices should the

tenderfruit industry disappear. *The Standard's* goal was to convince the public there was a serious threat to farmland, but it was also aiming to influence the agenda for provincial politicians. In this latter respect it succeeded, at least initially, because the stories were deliberately timed to appear during a provincial election campaign. After the first story ran, NDP leader Bob Rae's advance people called the paper to find the location of a threatened peach orchard. That evening, supper hour newscasts across Ontario carried pictures of the soon-to-be-premier standing amid peach trees, a six-quart basket in hand, denouncing the Liberal government's inaction on the tenderfruit industry.(77)

While the new NDP government was no quicker to help farmers than its predecessors, politicians, farmers, and preservationists said the series heightened awareness of the issue locally.(78) This in turn made it easier for regional council to take a confrontational approach in its dealings with the province, because Queen's Park was viewed as being indifferent to the farmers' predicament. Said one regional politician: ''Where the newspaper came in is basically they pointed out that the farmers were in trouble. That didn't do the upper levels of government any good.''(79)

The second instance of *The Standard* attempting to set the agenda occurred in April 1990, when an expose appeared on Page One detailing developers' use of testamentary devise to subdivide farmland. Under these dubious schemes, developers would buy a farm, find a dying person, and then sell them the farm for a nominal sum. In return, the moribund individual would give the farm back to the developer in his or her will after using a little known legal device to subdivide it into housing lots. This allowed developers to circumvent planning restrictions and the dying people were able to enrich their heirs by giving them a few lots as well.

While the story won for their author several newspaper awards, the source of much of his information was the regional planning staff itself. Frustrated at the government's refusal to close the loophole, regional bureaucrats decided to encourage *The*

Standard to write stories about it to bring pressure on the province to remedy the situation. ''We made it easy for them,'' said one regional official, remembering how maps and documents were generously left out for reporters to find. ''We had to do it to get the wretched thing changed and I understand it had an effect.''(80) Indeed, within days of the stories appearing the province announced, after years of ineffectual pestering by the regional government, that the Planning Act would be amended.(81)

Among interest groups involved in the issue, *The Standard* was viewed as a competent, but not particularly efficacious in shaping policy. Both farmers and preservationists criticized the paper for not fully telling their side of the story and made tempered accusations of bias. The two groups also said they had access to the media, although this became increasingly difficult to attain as the issue wore on.(82)

Unlike other interest groups considered in this study, the loose coalition of farmers pressing for the land use relaxation did not court the media at the outset. A politician who consulted with the group explained

> We didn't use the media in the sense of letting them know beforehand. That was a conscious decision of the group. They felt that they wanted to be judged on the facts they presented. They didn't want to be pre-judged by the media and the way they wrote it. They put it on the table and the media picked it up.(83)

Once the farmers did decide to go to the media, they did so in grand style, hiring the Ontario Editorial Board to map out a communications strategy. It wrote press releases for the Ontario Tenderfruit Marketing Board and focussed the group's message, all without letting the public know of its involvement. A farmer who helped lead the crusade said the firm was necessary to win the policy battle. ''Every politician who walks the street has a PR man, so if you want to fight them on their own turf you need you own PR person.''(84) This selective use of the media brings to mind observations made by Wolfsfeld in his study of political action and media strategy. He said the ''mass media can be seen

as one of a number of overlapping arenas for conflict that serve as gateways to the government.''(85)

PALS presents a contrast to the farmers' group. It enjoyed good media access and received sufficient coverage to propel its spokesperson to the top of the most frequently quoted list. Yet, as shown in Chapter Three, the group does not possess much influence over regional politicians. This suggests the group may be a media phenomenon whose reputation is disproportionate to its actual clout in decision-making. One possible explanation for this situation is found in Fishman's analysis of the news dynamic, where he notes institutional arrangements often work to a source's advantage.(86) In this case, journalistic demands for balance and, perhaps more importantly, conflict, forced reporters to turn to PALS because it could be counted upon to articulate an opposing view to that of the farmers. This caused consternation among the agricultural community, one of whose members confessed: ''I can't really see two sides to the issue. I can't see where someone can say, 'that's unique, you have to farm it'.''(87)

Despite extensive coverage, PALS still had complaints about the reporting of its activities. At one point, prior to the study period, relations between PALS and the newspaper were so embittered that PALS threatened to bring a libel action against *The Standard* over a harsh editorial. One of the group's members, echoing criticisms made by the Save the Valley Committee, complained the paper was fundamentally pro-development and that it regarded farmland preservation as a ''socialist plot''.(88) In respect to revelations by *The Standard* that a PALS director had sold farmland to a developer, a group member's comments reflected often-voiced accusations of editorial manipulation from those who feel treated unfairly by the press

> [The reporter] didn't look into it the way she should have. I could feel her wanting to make this a lot worse than it really was. That story was very damaging to us and we had to do a lot of damage control. . . It was something she could use to make a smashing story that would please the people who write the editorials. . . it was something she could use to make a name for

herself.(89)

The study concluded in Chapter Three that in the case of the farmland severance issue the Niagara Region's decision-making was pluralistic. It was found to be a peculiar strain of pluralism, however, a form identified as privatized pluralism. *The Standard* in this case behaved as Tichenor predicts a newspaper will operate in a pluralist community power structure. It sought, to the extent that was possible given the farmers' and PALS' preference for a single spokesperson, to provide a diversity of voices and circulate information widely. While its coverage favoured those advocating an easing of land use restrictions (proponents were quoted three times for each opponent) the paper gave opposition voices coverage disproportionate to their actual clout.

Politicians insisted repeatedly that *The Standard's* coverage made no difference to the policy outcome. These same people, though, when asked what effect the newspaper would have if it did not support the regional government's position on upcoming land use hearings at the Ontario Municipal Board, conceded it could have a negative impact on the region's efforts. Several said the politicians would be sensitive to the media's stance given public dismay over costly and protracted hearings already underway in region looking into the Niagara Regional Police Force and the Ontario Waste Management Corporation's hazardous waste disposal facility proposed for the west end of the region.(90)

Measured against the test of the five hypotheses of media influence, it appears that *The Standard* had its greatest effect upon decision-making by agenda-setting and agenda-building. The paper's three-part series on the crisis in farming, its investigation of the testamentary devise, and repeated stories on troubled farmers, all helped to increase public awareness of the issue. As one politician involved in the farmers' group noted, by informing the public about the farmers' troubles, *The Standard* helped legitimize decisions taken because the politicians could be certain a full debate had preceded their actions.(91) A writer at the paper also endorsed this view, saying

I think it [the coverage] had everything to do

> with it, because if they were going to start not protecting what they had been protecting for the last two decades with the land use regulation, it was to the farmers' benefit to get the message out.(92)

The phenomenon of agenda-building was most evident in *The Standard's* stories about willed lots, which prompted local municipalities and the provincial government to act quickly to plug the legal loophole. As shown, the reporters worked closely with institutional actors to make this issue one of greater public concern.

With respect to the remaining four hypotheses, there is little evidence that the newspaper had a significant amount of influence upon decision-makers. While *The Standard* publicized the policy-makers' intentions and decisions made, these reports evoked little response from readers, who were seen by decision-makers as largely indifferent or sympathetic toward farmers.(93) Observers both in favour and opposed to the reforms agreed the paper did a reasonable job of conveying information to the public, but they said that it did little independent investigation of the issue. (The notable exception to this observation was the three-part farm series which was frequently lauded for bringing the issue to the public's attention.) Finally, in terms of legitimizing interest groups, *The Standard's* impact also seemed slight. The farmers' group shunned publicity until well after key politicians had been brought on side. PALS, in contrast, was repeatedly described as ineffectual by politicians despite the paper's frequent reporting of its leader's views. Moreover, the paper undermined the group, but not fatally, when the expose appeared about the sale of farmland by one of its members.

SUNDAY SHOPPING (NIAGARA)

The study collected 94 news items related to Sunday shopping published during the survey period. (See Appendix Eleven). These appeared regularly between December 23, 1988, through to November 11, 1991. Of these, 28 stories appeared on the front page, 38 on the Page Nine local page, and 16 others were placed on pages

other than these. *The Standard* also had four editorials, which expressed ambivalence toward but finally acceptance of Sunday openings. There were eight letters-to-the-editor collected, five opposed and three in favour.

The Standard attained more balance in sources on the Sunday shopping issue than the farmland severance question. (See Appendix Twelve). There were 141 people quoted in favour versus 84 against. A further 51 people expressed neutral views. The most frequently quoted person was Michael Collins, a St. Catharines regional councillor resolutely opposed to Sunday shopping. He was quoted 17 times. Four of the five most quoted were politicians, and three of the five were opposed to Sunday shopping.

In its editorials, *The Standard*, like *The Hamilton Spectator*, was initially non-committal, preferring to excoriate the province for abdicating its responsibility. Only over time did it become reconciled to wide-open Sundays, arguing in the end that consumer preference should determine store hours.(94) It appears the paper may have sacrificed an opportunity to influence the debate because, as one member of the shopping committee noted, the paper could have had an impact if it spoke up on the issue early and firmly.(95)

This reluctance to choose a side can be attributed to several factors. First, the editorial approach of the paper is generally one that seeks to report rather than influence. As one employee explained: ''Professionally, I have no desire one way or the other to impose what my feelings would be on the [Sunday shopping] issue. . . I was attempting to achieve some sort of balance between mentioning those who were in favour of it and those who were opposed.''(96) The second factor is that *The Standard* was facing the same dilemma as the politicians. It did not want to alienate its constituents, namely subscribers and advertisers. A sharp critic of Sunday openings saw it this way: ''I don't think the newspaper has tried to take sides on the issue. They realize a lot of their advertising dollars in the community come from business. By the same token, they realize many of their readers have strong Christian values.''(97)

Finally, as in the case of Hamilton-Wentworth, reporters and editors at *The Standard* said whatever effect the paper's reporting might have had was overwhelmed by the coverage given the issue by the regional and national media and by more fundamental forces, primarily the deteriorating economy.

Policy participants described the coverage given the issue as fair and those interviewed for the study pronounced themselves satisfied with the paper's performance. The grocery chains' group, The Committee for Fair Shopping, received less coverage than it may have wanted, but *The Standard's* employees and politicians noted that its self-interest was so obvious that anything it said was heavily discounted. An observer noted: ''They were looking out for Number One and they came across that way until the economy weakened and that played into their hands.'' (98)

Nonetheless, the committee repeatedly used the media to spread its message, either by purchasing advertisements or issuing press releases. One member of the region's Sunday shopping committee said these had an impact and were possibly responsible for the change of public opinion toward supporting Sunday openings.(99) One particularly effective device employed by the stores' committee was a cross-border shopping survey it commissioned. The survey concluded that cross border shopping was costing the economy $115 million and 1,000 jobs and these findings were reported uncritically on Page One of the paper in March 1990. These figures were subsequently repeated several times by *The Standard* and by July, 1990, they were included as an unattributed, objective fact in Sunday shopping reports. Interestingly, the initial survey said Sunday openings in the United States were not a major contributor to cross-border shopping, yet the chains managed to hitch their issue through the media to one that was of great concern to Niagara politicians.(100) So complete was this blurring of issues that when council finally approved Sunday openings in November, 1991, *The Standard's* report of the decision led with the sentence: ''Christmas shoppers in Niagara won't be forced to cross the border this year to shop on Sundays.'' (101)

Union representatives said *The Standard* bolstered the workers' fight against Sunday openings. The paper faithfully reported on their demonstrations and sought out their viewpoints, although its coverage waned as the issue dragged on. Complaints already noted about *The Hamilton Spectator's* coverage were repeated in Niagara, these being that workers' concerns were not properly portrayed. ''There were so many arguments so many times during interviews that the major issues were omitted. . . they did not get to the heart of the concerns that we had.''(102) An employee at *The Standard* agreed with this criticism.

The Standard followed its policy of diversifying sources to a much greater extent than was possible with the farmland severance issue. Throughout the study period, *The Standard's* reporters quoted 63 people with official positions and many others, such as shoppers and clerks. Most people were cited once or twice, and even among the ten most frequently quoted the top individual was cited only 17 times in three years while the tenth most quoted was cited only four times. (The top individual, Councillor Collins, attributed his popularity with reporters to his consistent opposition and experience working in the media, which taught him to speak in a colourful, quotable manner.(103))

One consequence of this diversity is that few if any individuals came to be recognized as 'official knowers'. The broad range of people drawn upon to make comments meant that a mix of viewpoints were taken into account by the paper and disseminated. This complies with findings of Chapter Three, where it was determined that on the Sunday shopping issue Niagara appeared to have operated pluralistically. *The Standard* performed the role Tichenor ascribes to newspapers in such communities, which is to provide information, circulate ideas, and allow decision-makers to measure the public mood.(104)

Policy participants insisted repeatedly that *The Standard* had little influence upon them or decisions made. A paper's normal ability to shape policy outcomes was superseded they said, by other factors such as the onset of the recession and the nine-month period of open Sundays in Ontario.(105) Still, in terms of the five hypotheses of how a newspaper can influence

decision-making, there is evidence *The Standard* had some effect through agenda-setting, by publicizing decisions, by controlling information and by building the legitimacy of certain groups. In terms of the last method, independent investigation, there was no indication the paper had an impact.

Given that *The Standard* carried over 100 items on Sunday shopping during the study period, it is reasonable to conclude it helped keep the issue in the public eye and thereby played a part in agenda-setting. Despite protestations from the paper's employees that there was no intent to change people's outlooks, the sheer weight of front page stories devoted to the debate must have given some readers pause to consider the matter. One highly-placed bureaucrat agreed this was likely, saying: ''Mostly [the media] are working at the edge rather than being the primary source of creating or resolving an issue. The issues are inevitably there and it depends on the profile it gets in the press.''(106)

Related to this phenomenon is the public's reaction to decisions made by the region's Sunday shopping committee and the whole council. While some people may have only read the stories, others were perhaps galvanized to take part in the process. Notices of meetings, and stories about council preparing to make a decision, were a key link between the politicians and the public. Consequently, any meeting on the issue was well-attended and as one politician said, voicing the sentiments of others interviewed, ''councillors are quite aware when there's a lobby there. They say it doesn't have an effect, but I'm quite sure they influence people.''(107)

Apart from agenda-setting, the preponderance of Sunday shopping stories also had the effect of giving influence to groups such as the Committee for Fair Shopping. By frequently citing interest groups' positions, *The Standard* familiarized people with the different viewpoints on the issue and perhaps even swayed a few. A member of the Sunday shopping committee said he believes the advertisements by and stories about the grocery chains' group were instrumental in shifting public perceptions.

> About a year-and-a-half ago there was a major shift in public opinion. People that weren't in retail, about 1991, all of a sudden said: 'What's wrong with it?' That may have been a residual effect of the campaign for Fair Shopping. People were saying,'the A&P wants to be open so what's wrong with it?' There's no question a can of soup is cheaper at A&P than at Joe's corner store.(108)

CONCLUSION

This final section will serve the dual purpose of pulling together the key observations made in the present chapter and offer some tentative explanations. As evidenced by the foregoing discussion of the coverage given the four issues, nothing definitive can be said about the newspapers' performances. Influence, as Black found, has proven to be ''an unusual and sometime thing rather than commonplace.''(109) Thus, while it was possible to show the newspapers did have some influence over the behaviour of political actors, taking the measure of this influence is exceedingly difficult.

The study hypothesized that the media could influence decision-making in five ways. In applying these five hypotheses to the case studies, it became apparent that the newspapers were involved in the policy process. For the Red Hill and Sunday shopping issues the newspapers were active in four of these areas, while for the farmland severance case *The Standard* only registered in two. All the papers showed evidence of agenda-setting and agenda-building and each controlled information in a way participants thought may have influenced decisions. The one area where the papers did not have a demonstrable impact was in introducing new issues. Tichenor and Black had similar findings.(110)

Evidence collected during the study suggests *The Hamilton Spectator* appears to have had the most effect on the policy process with respect to the Red Hill issue. Significantly, this is the only case where the newspaper deliberately advocated a course of action, the course preferred by the decision-makers. The issue was unique, too, in that it was the only one where

decision-making appeared to be elite-dominated. This echoes Tichenor's assertion that ''within the local community, it is the power elite that ultimately shapes the media outlook and which therefore receives reciprocal reinforcement from those media.''(111)

Based on only four studies one is reluctant to draw conclusions, but *The Hamilton Spectator*, over all, appeared to have more influence than *The Standard*. This can be explained in part by the prevailing philosophies at the papers. Where *The Hamilton Spectator* deliberately seeks to shape debate by pre-publicizing events, *The Standard* is content to play a more passive role, usually serving as a journal of record.

Another important factor is the demography of the two regions. The population of Hamilton-Wentworth is concentrated in The City of Hamilton and this presents a single newspaper market that *The Hamilton Spectator* has been able to capture. Niagara's population is more diffuse and *The Standard*, while enjoying high penetration in St. Catharines and the north-east portion of the peninsula, is not distributed widely throughout the region. This fragmentation means that residents in Niagara have news sources other than *The Standard* and this fact is reflected in the reception given the two papers. In Hamilton the first thing politicians do in the morning is read *The Hamilton Spectator*.(112) In Niagara, politicians from outside St. Catharines (of which there are 22 on a council of 29) said they regard *The Standard* as the most competent local medium, but rated it lower in terms of influencing them personally than their own local daily and weekly papers.(113)

The newspapers also had some similarities that are noteworthy and may have affected their ability to shape events. Of these, the sources of information each used were the most obvious. The preponderance of those quoted were elected officials or occupants of official positions. This relates to observations made by Fishman that reporters rely on those upon whom they report for much of their information. Consequently, ''news consumers are led to see the world through the eyes of the existing authority structure'' and the *status quo* is

reinforced.(114) In the Red Hill and farmland cases this was particularly pronounced because the public was largely unqualified to comment meaningfully on these issues and it was therefore excluded.

Another similarity is that the editorial policies of the newspapers were in agreement with the council in three of the four issue areas. In the fourth case, Sunday shopping in Hamilton-Wentworth, politicians were moving to support store openings. (As shown, they were even ahead of *The Hamilton Spectator* in this regard, but near the end of term opinions changed again, mostly because of the impending plebiscite.) This congruence of council policies and editorial position further supports the notion of the media upholding the *status quo* and serving as a subsystem within the greater societal decision-making apparatus. One observer might have been describing both papers when he said of *The Hamilton Spectator*: ''It picks its issues with care and I don't find them very often on a hobby horse, they're usually riding the winner.''(115)

It appears, then, that while the media had influence on decision-makers the extent of this influence is difficult to assess accurately. One cannot enter into the heads of decision-makers and learn by what complex calculus they arrived at the decisions they do. What is clear, however, is that the media is one part of that equation, but it is a part determined by a host of competing factors. The following, final chapter will attempt to refine these conclusions and suggest ways a study such as this could be improved.

CHAPTER FOUR ENDNOTES

1) Philip Tichenor, George Donahue, and Clarice Olien, *Community Conflict and the Press*, p. 217
2) Interviews, March 27 and 30, 1992
3) Interview, March 27, 1992
4) Interview, March 30, 1992
5) Interviews, March 30, 1992
6) Interview, March 27, 1992
7) Interview, March 27, 1992
8) Interview, March 30, 1992
9) Interview, March 30, 1992
10) Interviews, March 25 and 30, and April 1, 1992
11) Interview, March 30, 1992
12) Interview, April 2, 1992
13) Interview, April 1, 1992
14) Interview, March 27, 1992
15) Interview, March 27, 1992
16) Interview, March 30, 1992
17) Interview, March 27, 1992
18) *The Hamilton Spectator*, March 20 and May 2, 1990
19) *The Hamilton Spectator*, May 8, 1991
20) Interview, March 25, 1992
21) Interview, April 3, 1992
22) *The Hamilton Spectator*, April 3 and May 11, 1991
23) *The Hamilton Spectator*, December 19 and 24, 1990
24) *The Hamilton Spectator*, May 4, 1991
25) Interview, March 30, 1992
26) Interview, April 3, 1992
27) Interview, March 27, 1992
28) Interview, March 28, 1992
29) *The Hamilton Spectator*, February 2, 1991
30) Robert J. Waste, *Community Power: Directions for Future*

Research, p. 59

31) Waste, *Ibid.*, p. 60

32) *The Hamilton Spectator*, March 9, 1991

33) See Chapter One, p. 10

34) Interview, March 27, 1992

35) Mark Fishman, *Manufacturing the News*, p. 138

36) *The Hamilton Spectator*, December 19, 1990

37) *The Standard*, March 29, 1990

38) Fishman, *Ibid.*, p. 92, 119

39) Fishman, *Ibid.*, p. 96, 97

40) Richard Ericson, Patricia Baranek, and Janet Chan, *Negotiating Control: A study of news sources*, p. 1, 377

41) Philip J. Trounstine and Terry Christensen, *Movers and Shakers: The study of community power*, p. 34

42) Tichenor et al, *Ibid.*, p. 224

43) Interview, March 25, 1992

44) Tichenor et al *Ibid.*, p. 224

45) *The Hamilton Spectator*, May 8 and June 6, 1991

46) Interview, March 27, 1992

47) Interview, March 30, 1992

48) Interview, March 27, 1992

49) Interviews, March 30 and 31, and April 2 and 3, 1992

50) Interview, March 28, 1992

51) Interview, April 3, 1992

52) Interview, March 27, 1992

53) Interview, March 30, 1992

54) See Chapter One, p. 11 to 13

55) Interview, March 30, 1992

56) Interview, April 13, 1992

57) Interview, April 1, 1992

58) Interview, April 3, 1992

59) Tichenor et al, *Ibid.*, p. 8

60) Interview, March 30, 1992

61) Interview, March 27, 1992

62) Interview, March 25, 1992

63) Interview, June 5, 1992

64) Interview, May 14, 1992

65) Interview, June 5, 1992

66) Interview, June 5, 1992

67) Interview, June 5, 1992

68) Interview, May 14, 1992

69) Interview, June 5, 1992

70) Interview, June 5, 1992

71) Interview, April 13, 1992

72) Interview, June 5, 1992

73) *The Standard*, October 30 and November 4, 1991

74) Interviews, April 16 and May 14, 1992

75) Interview, April 13, 1992

76) Interview, April 16, 1992

77) Interviews, May 14 and June 5, 1992

78) Interviews, April 10 and 14, 1992

79) Interview, April 16, 1992

80) Interview, April 14, 1992

81) *The Standard*, April 26, 1990 (check)

82) Interviews, April 10, 1992

83) Interview, April 13, 1992

84) Interview, April 16, 1992

85) Gadi Wolfsfeld, 'Collective Political Action and Media Strategy' in *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 28, No. 3, September 1984, p. 364

86) Fishman, *Ibid.*, p. 146

87) Interview, April 10, 1992

88) Interview, April 10, 1992

89) Interview, April 10, 1992

90) Interviews, April 13 and 14, 1992

91) Interview, April 16, 1992

92) Interview, May 14, 1992

93) Interview, April 13, 1992

94) *The Standard*, September 5, 1991

95) Interview, April 16, 1992

96) Interview, June 5, 1992

97) Interview, April 13, 1992

98) Interviews, May 14 and June 5, 1992

99) Interview, June 5, 1992

100) *The Standard*, March 29 and July 6, 1990

101) *The Standard*, November 8, 1991

102) Interview, April 3, 1992

103) Interview, June 5, 1992

104) Tichenor et al, *Ibid.*, p. 8

105) Interviews, April 13, 14, 16; May 14; and June 5, 1992

106) Interview, April 14, 1992

107) Interview, April 13, 1992

108) Interview, June 5, 1992

109) Edwin Black, *Politics and the News*, p. 203

110) Tichenor, *Ibid.*, p. 119 and Black *Ibid.*, p. 201

111) Tichenor, *Ibid.*, p. 226

112) Interviews, March 30 and April 2, 1992

113) Interviews, April 14 and May 14, 1992

114) Fishman, *Ibid.*, p. 138

115) Interview, March 30, 1992

CHAPTER FIVE

INTRODUCTION

With the investigation complete this final chapter will now pull together its main findings and further reflect upon the study of community power structures and media influence. It will also advance ideas for the direction of future research of this nature, including practical suggestions on how a study such as this could be improved. Recurring through the thesis has been the cautionary note that any conclusions reached are tentative, almost impressionistic, given the limitations faced by the researcher. Nonetheless, it is prudent to reissue this disclaimer and adopt as the *leitmotif* of this chapter the warning that the study's findings hold for specific cases examined and should be viewed as broader theoretical generalizations with circumspection.

The outline of this chapter is as follows. It begins with a discussion of the community power and media studies of Chapter Three and Chapter Four and relates these to the theoretical discussion of Chapter One. It will next consider the methodology employed in the study, noting both the shortcomings and virtues of its approach. Finally, it will offer some summary remarks.

COMMUNITY POWER STRUCTURES

As noted repeatedly in Chapter Three, it was impossible to conclude definitively, based on the four case studies, what type of community power structures exist in the two regions. In Hamilton-Wentworth the decision-making appeared elite-dominated on the Red Hill issue and pluralistic in respect to Sunday shopping. Niagara, on the other hand, exhibited pluralism in

both cases, but these were two extreme forms: privatized pluralism in the case of the farmland debate, where a small group was able to capture the decision-making apparatus, and hyperpluralism in the handling of Sunday shopping, where a large number of competing voices overloaded the decision-making process. Importantly too, advocates of the contending school in each instance could easily argue that in the examples chosen for the study there were reasons why their community power structure was not evident in the decision-making. For example, in Niagara's farmland debate the decision-making suggested a pluralist approach but elite theorists could plausibly argue that the community elite chose not to mobilize because the farmers were already acting in their interest by undermining land use restrictions. In the Red Hill case, pluralists could respond by saying it was the 'pro-development node', one of many such nodes in the community, that won.

One explanation for this difficulty could be that there were simply too few or inappropriate public policy case studies chosen for investigation. Elite analysts could argue that if more cases were drawn upon a pattern would have emerged showing select individuals representing the community elite were repeatedly involved in decision-making, influencing politicians. Another explanation, which deserves more consideration, is that the pluralist-elite models do not 'fit' the social reality. Communities may be more complex than either school allows and a synthesis or totally new theory is required.

While pluralist explanations seemed to apply in three of the four case studies, the findings suggest powerfully that the concept of pluralism has so many variants that it is almost valueless as an analytical tool. This is an observation made by other community power students.(1) The extremes of all-inclusive hyperpluralism and highly-restrictive privatized pluralism identified in this study show there can be greater differences, measured in terms of participation, between supposed pluralist communities than between certain pluralist and elite communities. It may sound glib, but a theory that can be stretched and reworked to account for almost anything, ultimately accounts for

nothing.

Elite theory appears to suffer from the opposite problem. This study did not set out to critique elite theory, but more often its proponents were left explaining why their theory did not appear to apply to these particular issues. If, as elite theorists such as Domhoff argue, the only issues of real importance in a community are development issues, then the elite theory is in serious danger of becoming tautological.(2) By setting narrow parameters on which issues are worthy of inclusion in a community power study, one can almost pre-select those individuals whose names will recur in lists of community notables. Is it really any surprise and does it further our understanding of decision-making to learn developers participate in development issues?

In looking for alternate ways to understand community decision-making, one option that presents itself is to adopt a different analytical approach and use a Marxist interpretation. In each of the four cases looked at in this study the dominant policy players are in some sense property owners. With the Red Hill, many of the key actors appeared to be developers looking to open new industrial parks and residential subdivisions, and in Niagara, the farmers determined the outcome of the land use debate. With Sunday shopping in both regions store owners held sway. That the property-owning class debated amongst itself is accounted for by such theorists as Poulantzas, who allows for competing factions within this class.(3) Another consideration is that 'the state' (represented in this investigation by the regional governments) acted in the overall interest of private property holders. For these reasons, one can see how a Marxist paradigm could be used to interpret and explain the behaviour of various actors.

Neither elite nor pluralist theorists are overly enamoured of the Marxist approach to community power analysis. Domhoff agrees they offer significant contributions, such as an emphasis on markets, but they fail to make the necessary distinction between the economic and political elite.(4) The pluralist Polsby sees no strong relationship between class membership and political

action. ''It is the claims of small, intense minorities that are usually attended to, hence it is not only inefficient but usually unnecessary for entire classes to mobilize.''(5) Applying Polsby's critique to the present study, one is forced to agree that class membership is an unsatisfactory predictor of political activity. In the Sunday shopping debates class lines were crossed as some workers favoured openings while small store owners and even some large corporations (notably Eaton's) were opposed.(6)

Another alternative for analyzing community decision-making is to modify existing theories of power structures by combining the two schools. Hawley and Wirt recommend this and contend ''the distinctions between elite and pluralist systems are matters of degree rather than mutually exclusive contrasts.''(7) At the same time, it might also be beneficial to abandon the term ''structure'' when discussing community power because it connotes a rigid or static system through which public policy decisions are processed. Although based on only a small sampling, this study revealed the decision-making in the two regions was anything but routine. Each issue was approached differently and each brought with it its own dynamic and a new constellation of policy participants.

This study indicates that politicians are not controlled by a shadowy elite nor are they simply empty vessels whose vote can be won by any group or interest that approaches them properly. Instead, the decision-making calculus is much more complex and takes into account a host of factors, for instance philosophical predisposition (which in most cases municipally means favouring job creation, economic growth, and increased tax revenue). Additionally, and this may sound naive in an age when so much criticism is directed at public office-holders, municipal politicians are ever-mindful of public opinion. Repeatedly through interviews politicians and bureaucrats stressed the importance of the voting public's feelings on issues.

These last points notwithstanding, there are instances and types of issues where certain groups seem to arise to capture the policy process. Public apathy, ignorance, and indifference often

create vacuums that interest groups rush to fill. The most obvious example of this may have been the Red Hill issue, where the public was largely quiescent and politicians, by rejecting the proposed plebiscite, showed no inclination to arouse it and risk complicating matters. Such circumstances open a community to domination by certain groups, but only on specific issues for a limited period of time.

The line between elite and pluralist analyses is further blurred because, as Dahl notes, groups in pluralist systems do not necessarily possess equal resources.(8) Small, monied groups, such as the Citizens Expressway Committee, are easier to organize and can be more effective than larger, poorer groups, such as the Save the Valley Committee, especially when these are aligned with the majority opinion on council. This can often give the policy process the appearance (and reality) of being controlled by a single interest. Yet, it is not only money or a group's size and cohesiveness that determines its clout. As the case of Niagara's farmers shows, a group that was not powerful when measured by the traditional indices of money or size of membership, can derive power from the 'justness' or 'rightness' of their cause. This can then be used to capture relevant aspects of the decision-making apparatus. (A similar example may be the success of aboriginal groups in winning recognition for the idea of self-government in Canadian constitutional discussions.)

Although it is beyond the scope of this study to suggest a new theory of community power analysis, any new formulation would of necessity resemble a pluralist rather than elite analysis. In the four case studies, pluralist explanations, hopefully because of their descriptive ability but probably more because of their elasticity, better encompassed the decision-making in the two regions for the most part. Politicians did listen seriously to a variety of interests on these issues and efforts were made to find a compromise to satisfy competing groups.

Nonetheless, it would be misguided to reduce elite theory to simply a label at one extreme of the pluralist spectrum. Elite theory, as noted in Chapter One, attempts to explore the

'behind-the-scenes' activity involved in political decision-making. It accounts not only for some choices made, but also delves into the political netherworld of the non-decision. Another significant contribution elite theory makes is its focus on individuals and personalities. The importance of personality cannot be ignored, as illustrated by the willingness of certain Niagara councillors to become involved helping farmers organize because of their own agricultural backgrounds. Moreover, personality is also important in coalition-building on council. Finally, and more will be said on this below, elite theory makes a valuable contribution through the reputational and positional approaches to identifying key policy participants and these too should be incorporated into any revised theory of community power analysis.

One other important dimension that a new formulation should allow for is the impact of outside forces upon the community. As noted elsewhere in the study, community power theories treat communities as though they exist in isolation. In reality, as the case studies demonstrated, in jurisdictions such as Ontario other governments, the courts, and quasi-judicial bodies such as the Ontario Municipal Board, can intervene, severely restrict, and even overturn the policy choices of local governments, upsetting the best-laid plans of community power holders. This possibility of 'outside' interference complicates the decision-making processes of communities and makes it especially difficult to devise a grand theory to explain their workings. It may be that given (at least in the case of Ontario) the heavy overlap of provincial and municipal affairs, the 'community', defined as a municipal entity, is an inappropriate unit to use in an analysis of community power and decision-making.

THE MEDIA

One of the questions posed at the beginning of this inquiry concerned the role of the media in society. Do they act as a watchdog or are they part of the decision-making process and consequently less effective in overseeing the public interest? The expectation was that in answering this question it would be

easier to determine if the media influence political decision-makers and, if so, in what ways. As with other conclusions so far reported, findings for the media's workings in this study must be accepted as tentative. Still, the evidence uncovered suggests that the media tended to support community decision-makers and the *status quo* as predicted by researchers such as Murphy, Fishman, and Paletz.(9) In all of the issues, save Sunday shopping in Hamilton-Wentworth, the editorial stance of the newspapers conformed with the majority of politicians on the regional councils. Individuals quoted in favour of the policies that were eventually decided upon significantly outnumbered opponents.

To understand this phenomenon one should begin by referring to the lament of a writer at *The Hamilton Spectator* describing the difficulties of finding knowledgeable people to quote, especially with deadlines looming.(10) Reporters in both communities experienced this problem and were driven to politicians, bureaucrats, and interest group leaders involved with the issue for up-to-date and accurate information. The preponderance of information relayed to the public about these issues came from the individuals handling them and who, therefore, also had a vested interest in a particular resolution. While reporters usually sought out alternate viewpoints, advocates outnumbered critics. For example, in the Red Hill case those in favour of the highway were quoted twice as often as those opposed.

Not only were 'official' sources relied upon disproportionately, but the information they supplied was often accepted uncritically. Statistics presented by public and private bureaucracies were unchallenged by reporters, who, lacking the resources or expertise to corroborate them, had little choice but to accept them at face value. As noted, *The Standard* accepted and later used without attribution cross-border shopping statistics prepared by the grocery chains' lobby group.(11) *The Hamilton Spectator* also received statistics blithely from public and private sources in its coverage of the fallout from the Red Hill cancellation.(12) These findings

illustrate well the point made by Fishman that ''[i]nformation which is bureaucratically organized, produced and provided is hard fact; it is the stuff that makes up straight reporting. Any other kind of information (not subjected to further investigation) does not have the character of hard fact; it is the stuff that makes up interpretive reports or news analysis.''(13)

Reinforcing the selection of sources was the ideological outlook of the reporter and perhaps, to a lesser extent, the news organization. In the battle over public policy the first engagement is often over setting the boundaries for debate.(14) As noted on the Sunday shopping issue in both regions, union members felt aggrieved that the issue of quality of life was downplayed (editors at both papers acknowledged this shortcoming) while the economic arguments of jobs, cross-border shopping, and the rights of store owners formed the crucible of the discussion. Similarly, the case of the Red Hill left the Save the Valley Committee feeling its ecological arguments were deprecated and trivialized as the newspaper focused on economic development. The farmland dispute in Niagara saw the preservation of agricultural land relegated to secondary importance behind the economic well-being of farmers. In each of these instances the debate was framed in the preferred terms of the authority structure. The *status quo* was reinforced because reporters and their papers shared the view of politicians, bureaucrats, and business people that concerns about growth and jobs supersede quality of life and environmental issues.(15)

While one might form a dim view of the press as being subsumed into the decision-making process based on the foregoing, it does not present a complete picture. As noted, the newspapers attempted to give dissonant voices an opportunity to express their concerns. A Save the Valley member agreed that what clout the group enjoyed in the Red Hill decision-making came in part from coverage by the media.(16) More generally, the newspapers made efforts to balance their coverage by quoting opponents or summarizing their concerns in stories, although this was done more equitably in the Sunday shopping debate than in the Red Hill

and farmland issues. Another way the papers attempted to balance their coverage was by giving representatives of opposing viewpoints access to the letters-to-the-editor and op-ed pages so that they could explain their positions in their own words, unfiltered by the media.

Although in three of the four issues studied the media supported the councils' decisions, their support is not axiomatic and politicians are aware it cannot be assumed. Every politician interviewed confessed to massaging the media to win support for positions or to manipulating it to undermine opponents. Moreover, there was evidence that politicians pay close attention to what the press is reporting and respond to unfavourable coverage by redoubling efforts ''to correct the message'', in some cases by going so far as to call public meetings, or by modifying their stance to harmonize it with the prevalent view.

Compounding the policy actors' dilemma, though, is that the media can find alternate authority structures through which to gather information or discover varied interpretations of events. As Ericson observes: ''At the fulcrum of a variety of institutions attempting to capitalize on publicity and secrecy, the news media maintain a 'positional advantage' over these institutions.''(17) Admittedly, there was little evidence of this in the four issues studied, but the possibilities existed. In the Red Hill case, for example, the media found alternate sources of information in provincial politicians and the provincial bureaucracy but did not exploit them fully. A study found showing the highway fell short of current environmental standards was downplayed. In the farmland debate the province could have again served as a counterweight, but rather than attempt to explain the government's position, *The Standard* seemed content, for the most part, to lash it in editorials.(18) Alternate sources were also available within local authority structures, the regional conservation authority opposed the Red Hill expressway plan and in Niagara, regional planners were wary of relaxing land use controls.

It is evident that despite the media's proclivity to support the *status quo* and extant authority structures there need not

always be a convergence of the politicians' and the media's interests. If this is so, can the media influence decision-makers and alter their policy choices to make them more amenable to the media's preferred policy outcomes? Do the media have any power over decision-makers or, recalling Polsby's definition of 'power' from Chapter One, do they have ''the capacity. . . to do something affecting another actor, which changes the probable pattern of specified future events''? (19)

The study postulated that the media have the ability to influence politicians in any of five ways. Briefly listed, these include: Agenda-setting and building; publicizing decisions; controlling information; helping legitimize policy participants; and independently introducing new information. In the media analysis of Chapter Four it was concluded that the media were active in helping shape decision-making in all ways except through the uncovering of new information gathered independently (although there was some evidence of this).

The media were deeply involved through agenda-setting and building by putting issues in the forefront of the public's mind, often with the help of other institutions. *The Standard's* publicizing of the farmers' problems helped secure the public's acquiescence to the course of action taken by Niagara Regional Council. By making known the politicians' intentions the media also had some impact on these decisions. *The Hamilton Spectator's* stories on the regional committee's decision to introduce Sunday shopping galvanized labour and church groups and contributed to the rejection of the recommendation at the council level. In respect to controlling information, groups such as The Save the Valley Committee and unions believed their inability to 'get out preferred messages' curtailed their influence over policy outcomes. Finally, and perhaps less certainly, the media gave some groups such as the Citizens Expressway Committee a higher profile through coverage and so helped legitimize them as policy participants. At the same time, though, the farmland issue in Niagara suggests coverage does not automatically translate into clout. The farmer's group initially shunned the media yet was highly-regarded by the politicians while the

Preservation of Agricultural Lands Society, despite respectful and generally positive coverage, was accorded little legitimacy.

Since not all cases showed each type of media influence, it appears that certain conditions must obtain before the media can affect decision-makers. The findings of this study suggest at least five preconditions, operating in tandem or alone, are necessary for the media to have influence.

The most self-evident of these is that the course of action advocated by the media must be rational. Like policy actors in pluralist systems as described by Polsby, the media is limited in the ideas it can expect to see adopted by the more general willingness of the public to accept them.(20) This explains why *The Hamilton Spectator's* initial suggestion to hold a referendum, at an estimated cost of $500,000, was rejected by council despite the paper's editorializing in its favour.

Related to this point is the fact that the media should have like-minded thinkers on council with whom to build support for the policy. In the case of the Red Hill, one highly-positioned politician said *The Hamilton Spectator's* stance in favour of the expressway was welcomed by staunch advocates of the project but more importantly it helped the nucleus shore up support among quavering council members.(21) Black reached a similar conclusion in his study of the media in three Ontario cities. He found the press was perceived as an outsider by politicians and it only succeeded in agenda-setting when aligned with 'legitimate' political actors.(22)

A third determinant of the press's ability to affect decision-making is the nature of the issue itself. Often during interviews politicians expressed the view that none of the case studies used in this study was the type on which the media normally have a great impact.(23) Instead, politicians said they tended to be more wary of the press on issues such as remuneration for themselves or staff. The explanation for this may be psychologically complex or it may simply be that people can identify with and take umbrage more easily over chauffeured limousines than a $400-million expressway. Nonetheless, to coin

an axiom, media influence varies proportionately with the degree of discredit an issue brings directly to a politician.

The final two factors relate to the news organizations themselves. One difference noted between the two newspapers is their philosophy. *The Hamilton Spectator* is more aggressive than *The Standard* in that its reporters and editors regularly set about to influence decisions. In the Red Hill case, *The Hamilton Spectator* editorialized heavily in favour of the undertaking, going so far as to publish a front page appeal, and it persisted in frequently writing stories on the project well after the initial shock of the cancellation had subsided. More generally, its reporters like to alert the public to policy proposals before they reach the council or the committee stage. This gives individuals and interest groups time to lobby politicians and thereby contribute to a policy's development. In contrast, *The Standard* prefers to serve as a journal of record and will only occasionally attempt to influence decision-makers.(24)

A more important factor in a newspaper's ability is its market position. *The Hamilton Spectator* dominates Hamilton-Wentworth, being the only daily newspaper published in the region and distributed throughout. *The Standard's* circulation is limited to the north-east portion of the peninsula and there are other, albeit not directly competing, daily newspapers published in Niagara. The smaller size means *The Standard* has fewer resources to commit to covering regional affairs and resultant time constraints may force the paper's writers to rely more heavily than those of *The Hamilton Spectator* upon ''official sources'' (although there was no evidence of this uncovered).

The truly significant implication of this situation for the study, however, is that while all politicians in Hamilton-Wentworth represent areas served by *The Hamilton Spectator*, less than half of Niagara's politicians come from municipalities where *The Standard* is the dominant local media outlet. Politicians remarked on this. Each of those from Hamilton-Wentworth said they felt *The Hamilton Spectator* was the most important newspaper whereas fewer in Niagara accorded the

same weight to *The Standard*, although they agreed it was the most competent local medium. Thus, while *The Standard* seemed to carry the same relative clout as *The Hamilton Spectator* with the politicians whose areas it serves, region-wide its influence was weaker.

METHODOLOGY

It is perhaps not uncommon in research that the tinges of self-doubt that attend the beginning of a project blossom by its conclusion into the conviction that one's efforts have been misdirected. As the numerous caveats, speculative explanations, and hesitant conclusions posted throughout this thesis suggest, the methodology has not been wholly satisfactory. In this, the penultimate section, some difficulties experienced by the researcher will be noted and suggestions offered for their amelioration. At the same time, happily, in conducting an honest critique one also has the opportunity to underscore the subject's good qualities and these will be noted in due course.

Researchers planning to replicate a study such as this might consider limiting their investigation to a single regional government system. While this would remove the advantage this study had of being able to compare and contrast communities and newspapers, it would also permit a deeper exploration of the community decision-making process and newspaper's operation. By restricting oneself to a single region one could subject more issues to analysis and at the same time choose issues that are less protracted. This would help confine the decision-making to a single term of council and reduce the ''outside'' interference that disrupted decision-making in the cases studied above. The Red Hill expressway debate, for example, has been ongoing since 1957, so the number of actors who along the way contributed to the final decision is perhaps too large for anyone to arrive at a full understanding of the decision-making process.

In this same vein, a repeated problem through the study was that many of the decisions affecting the policy outcome were not made locally. The provincial government was either involved setting parameters for decision-making, as in the case of Sunday

shopping, or it vetoed decisions outright, as in the Red Hill and farmland severance issues. Selecting more localized issues could reduce this phenomenon. At the same time, though, this could diminish an issue's reliability in terms of being representative of the full range of political actors since the more controversial the issue (perhaps the more interests affected or more pluralistic the debate) the greater the likelihood a disaffected party will resort to 'outside' mechanisms such as the Ontario Municipal Board.

While the four cases studied here were chosen because of the large quantity of newspaper reports about them, the same amount of stories could be generated by having more issues with fewer stories on each. This would also have the salutary effect of providing the researcher with more political actors to interview. In turn, the chance of discovering a crossover of notables would also be increased. In this study, because of time constraints, only about 35 people were interviewed (50 were accounted for if one allows for overlapping players between issues). By way of comparison with more formalized community power studies, Trounstine suggests that a proper investigation in a medium-sized American community should begin with a prospective list of 200 community notables.(25) Perhaps, since the focus of this study is on decision-making, one should endeavour to at least speak to all the members of council and discover their voting rationale.

Another obstacle encountered by the researcher stemmed from the fact that community decision-making is much more complex than the pluralist and elite models suggest. In addition to the impact of extra-community forces such as provincial government involvement, the process is further distorted by a host of factors that are not only difficult to control for, but perhaps impossible to detect. Among these one would include partisanship, personal animosities and friendships, the giving and repaying of political favours (noted especially in Niagara where the more equal apportionment of council seats among municipalities forces coalition-building), the proximity of elections, and even the state of the economy. There was evidence of all these factors having an impact on the policy outcome, but

to what degree and how these combined with more 'traditional' aspects of decision-making, such as lobbying, is difficult to discern.

Related to this point was the difficulty of using the personal interview as the primary method of gathering information. Although the researcher followed the same basic interview format, the quality of responses from individuals varied widely, affected by such factors as the ability to build trust and a rapport, timing, interest in the subject, even the mood of the respondent. Some of those interviewed emerged as key informants, freely offering their views; others were guarded, providing only socially sanctioned answers such as 'I listen to everybody'. Another common problem was that those interviewed could not remember details of a debate or the circumstances surrounding the issue.

In defence of the methodology used in this study one should note that the elite technique of identifying community notables by position and reputation worked well. Its success was especially evident in the farmland severance issue, where the informal farmers' coalition was discovered unexpectedly by the researcher. While *The Standard* had reported on the farmers' participation in the land use policy debate, the group was more structured and better organized than what its reports would have led the general reader to conclude. Moreover, the group's hiring of a public relations firm unbeknownst to *The Standard* suggests more behind-the-scenes activity than the paper's reporters suspected. In other cases, the identification of policy participants also worked well. When interviewees were asked to name other actors they felt played a major role in the decision-making, they rarely named anyone not already identified by the researcher.

Its limitations already noted, a good word should also be spared for the technique of using personal interviews. Too often in discussing politics the aspect of personalities is ignored and political decision-making is regarded too mechanistically. Although interview subjects were sometimes less than prolix, their answers did clearly convey that factors such as

friendships, enmities, partisanship, personal bias, and other subjective elements informed their decision-making to varying degrees. More practically, the interview approach also enabled the researcher to tap into a wealth of primary data unavailable through any other means.

On a general level the thesis also succeeded in its approach of integrating a community power study and media analysis. Although the case studies only amounted to a few snapshots of a moment in the working of each community, they did provide a glimpse of how decisions were made and how the media fit into or affected the process. The marriage of the two types of study provided a perspective that neither alone was capable of. It was also efficient in that a researcher could quickly identify pertinent policy actors and from there test for media influence on those individuals.

ENVOI

This study has found that the media possess the ability to influence decision-makers and thereby help shape policy outcomes. In some cases, it seems, as with the Red Hill Expressway, this power is used deliberately. Other times the effect appears unwitting, as in the instance of the Sunday shopping and farmland severance questions, where continual media reports created a political climate conducive to certain policy choices. In none of the cases, however, did the newspapers demonstrate the strength to have an effect when acting independently. Instead, the presence of either sympathetic council members or other influential individuals or groups in the community was a necessary pre-condition for the newspapers to have a significant impact on the debate.

Essentially, this harks back to the discussion of community power structures and who in the community are the influentials to whom decision-makers pay attention. While elite theorists would have us believe that decisions are worked out in a cabalistic fashion and pluralists contend that policy choices are dictated by the most strident voice in the cacophony of public debate, neither description, as has been shown, is wholly accurate.

Instead, decision-making of this sort takes place when the sovereign voice in the community, that of the citizenry, goes silent through ignorance or apathy and its members allow special interests to seize the levers controlling the public policy process.

This brings the study to its final, and admittedly unexpected conclusion. Repeatedly through interviews politicians said they were susceptible to lobbying; the presence of people at council meetings, the phone calls they received at home, even the people they met while out buying groceries, all shape their thinking on issues. While popular wisdom dictates that politicians are unconcerned with the public's wishes, the evidence assembled during this study suggests otherwise. This is significant, especially in an age when cynicism toward politicians is endemic and people are turning away from public life and public institutions.(26) It suggests that 'ordinary people' have more political efficacy than they allow themselves to believe. In the words of one politician, ''I think the public doesn't realize the amount of influence and power they have.''(27)

CHAPTER FIVE ENDNOTES

1) Robert J. Waste, *Community Power: Directions for Future Research*, p 118

2) G. William Domhoff, *Who Rules America Now? A View for the 80s* p 167

3) Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power & Social Classes*, p. 84-89

4) Waste, *Ibid.*, p 73

5) Nelson Polsby, *Community Power & Political Theory*, p 118

6) *The Hamilton Spectator*

7) Willis Hawley and Frederick Wirt, *The Search for Community Power*, p 4 and Philip Trounstine and Terry Christensen, *Movers and Shakers: The Study of Community*, p 38

8) Waste, *Ibid.*, p 184

9) Mark Fishman, *Manufacturing the News*, p 138; David Paletz, Peggy Reichart and Barbara McIntyre, 'How the Media Support Local Government Authority' in *Public Opinion Quarterly* Vol. XXXV 1971, p 152; David Murphy, *The Silent Watchdog* p 31

10) Interview, March 30, 1992

11) *The Standard*, March 29, 1990, and July, 6, 1990

12) *The Hamilton Spectator*, December 19, 1990, and April 15, 1991

13) Fishman, *Ibid.*, p 92

14) Richard Ericson, Patricia Baranek, and Janet Chan, *Negotiating Control: A Study of News Sources*, p.17

15) Ericson, *Ibid.*, p. 385

16) Interview, March 26, 1992

17) Ericson, *Ibid.*, p 397

18) *The Standard*, November 4, 1991,

19) Polsby, *Ibid.*, p 3

20) Polsby, *Ibid.*, p 128

21) Interview, March 25, 1992

22) Edwin Black, *Politics and the News*, p 201

23) Interviews, March 25, March 30, April 13, 1992

24) Interviews, March 30, and June 5, 1992

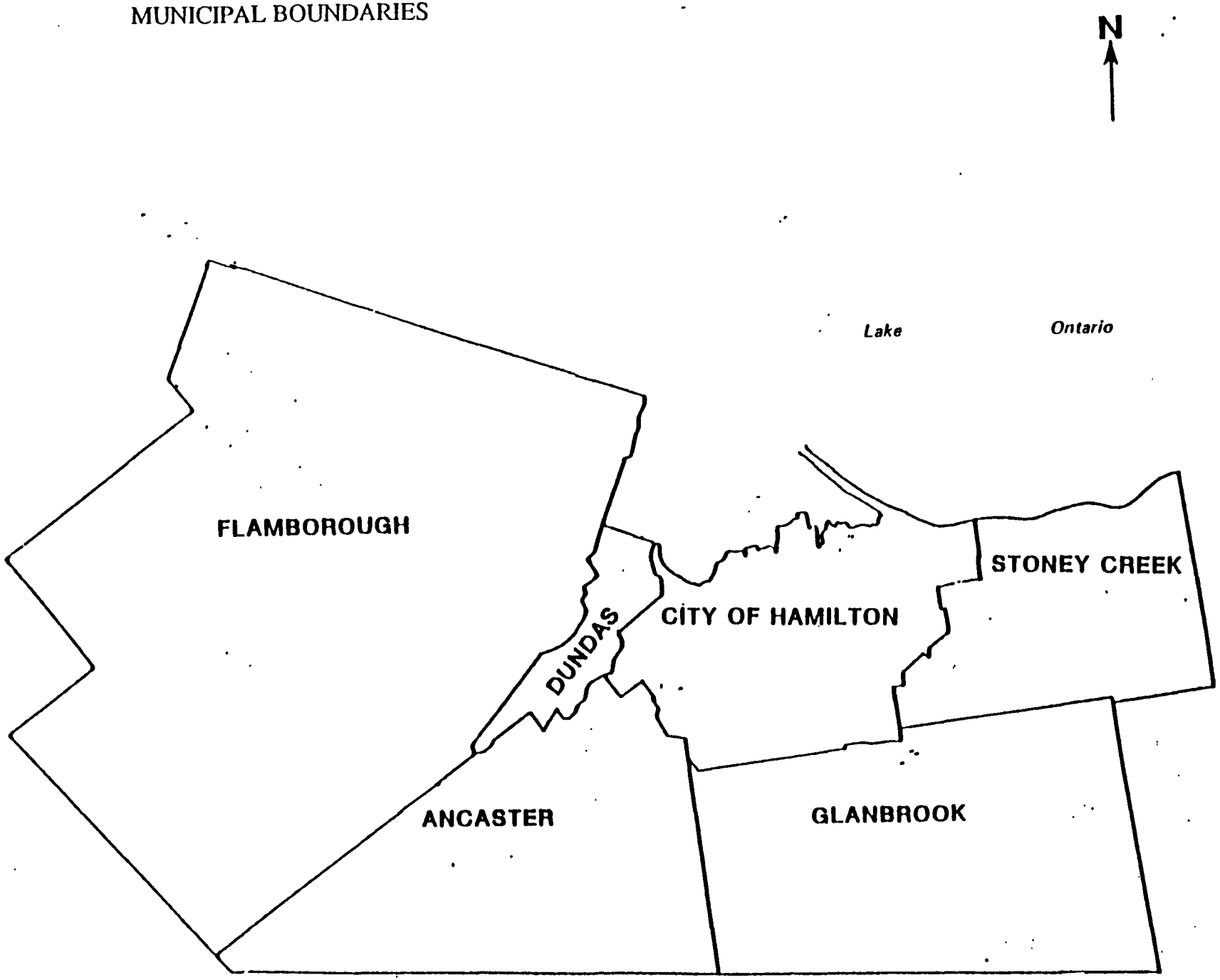
25) Trounstine, *Ibid.*, p 60

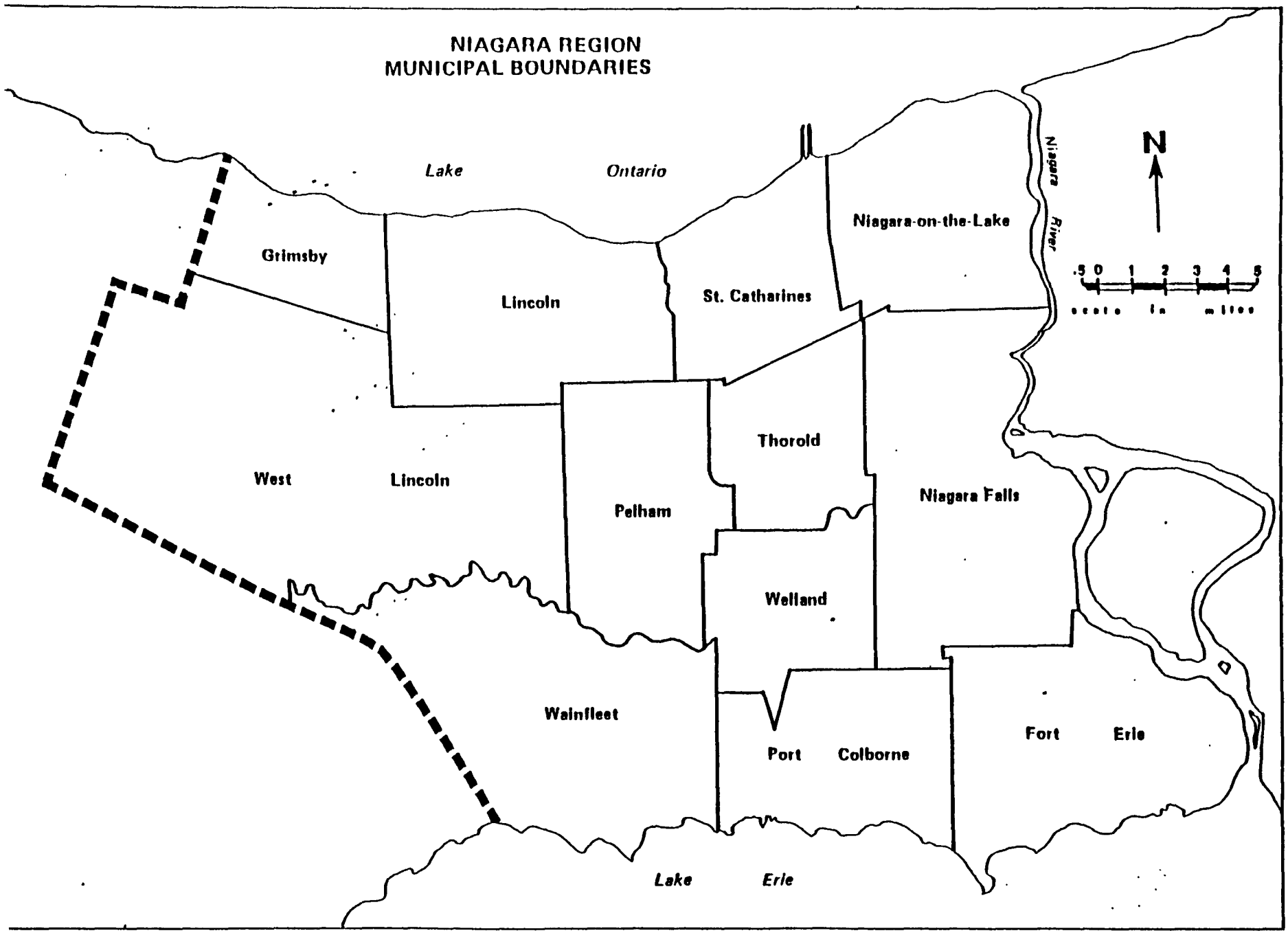
26) Gallup polls such as the one in *The Gazette*, July 6, 1992 repeatedly show public disenchantment with politicians.

27) Interview, March 30, 1992

APPENDICES

HAMILTON-WENTWORTH
MUNICIPAL BOUNDARIES

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MUNICIPAL BOUNDARIES
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Niagara River
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scale in miles
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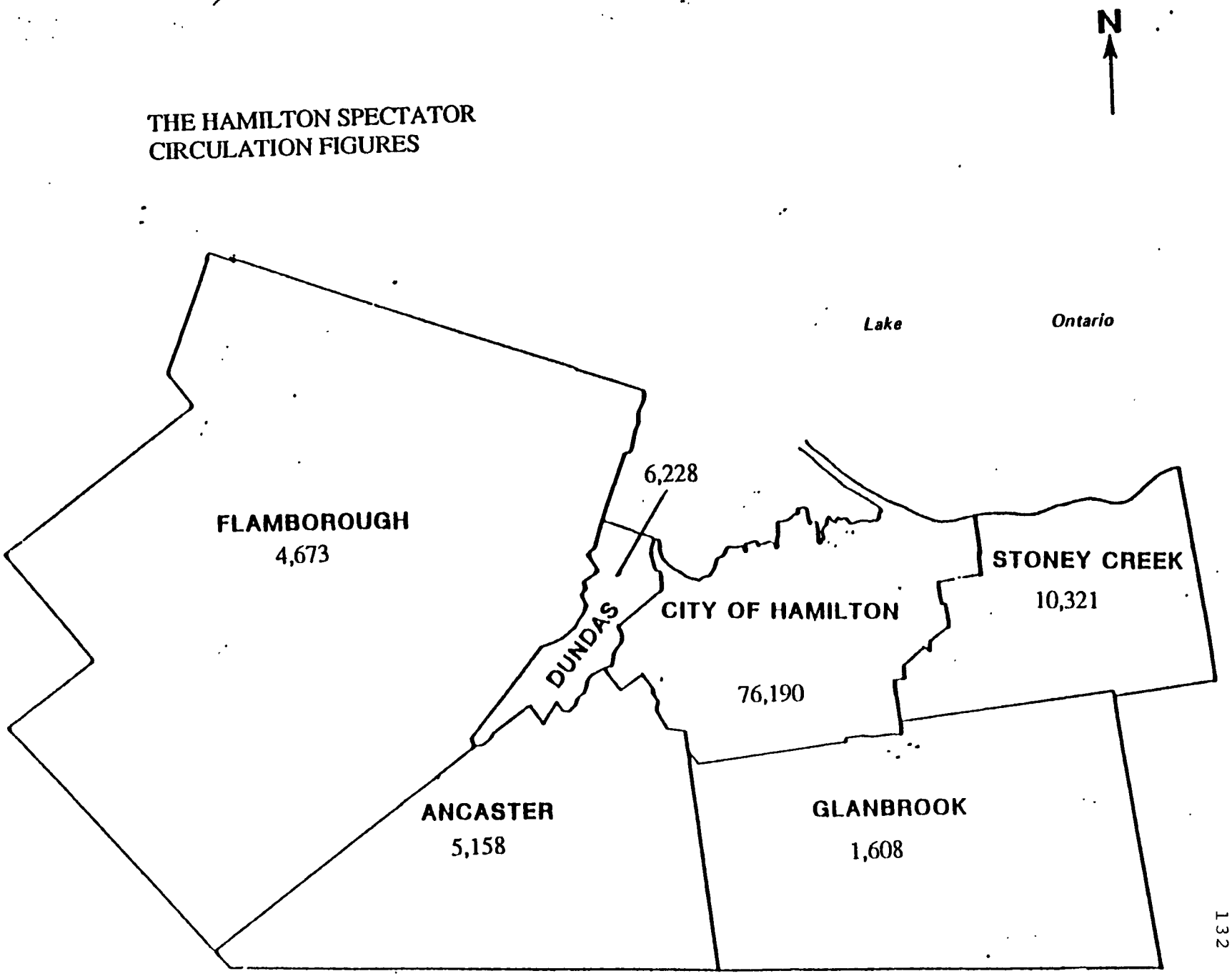
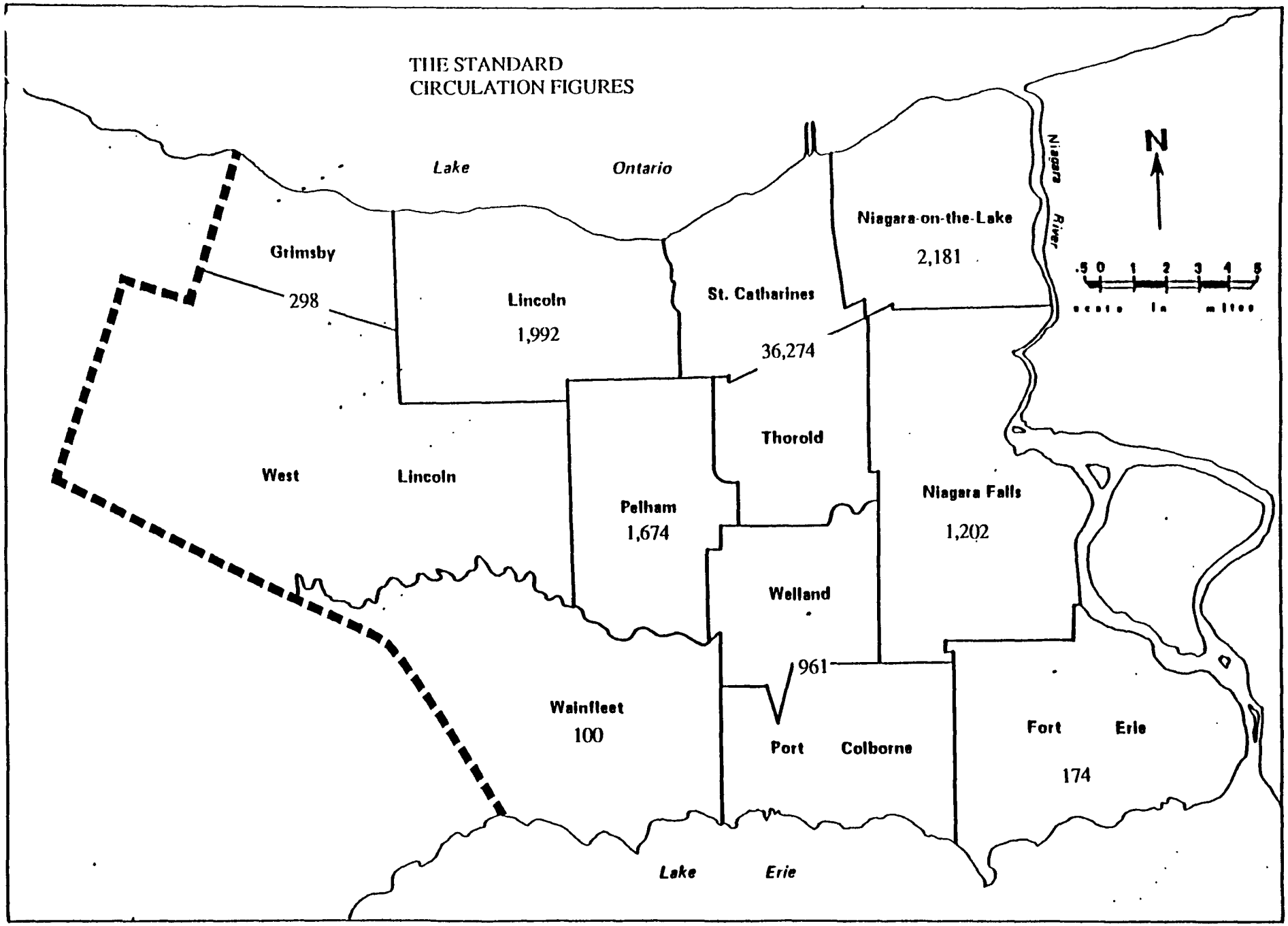
Lincoln
St. Catharines
Niagara-on-the-Lake
West
Lincoln
Pelham
Thorold
Niagara Falls
Welland
Wainfleet
Port
Colborne
Fort
Erie
Lake
Erie

THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR
CIRCULATION FIGURES




THE STANDARD
CIRCULATION FIGURES
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Niagara River
N
.5 0 1 2 3 4 5
Grimsby
298
Lincoln
1,992
St. Catharines
36,274
Niagara-on-the-Lake
2,181
Thorold
West Lincoln
Pelham
1,674
Niagara Falls
1,202
Welland
961
Wainfleet
100
Port Colborne
Fort Erie
174
Lake Erie

APPENDIX THREE

(List of interviewees and positions held in 1988-91. Individuals were interviewed on the condition that quotations not be attributed to them to encourage candor.)

Hamilton-Wentworth

1) Reginald Whynott, Hamilton-Wentworth Regional Chairman
2) Howard Elliott, city and region editor, The Hamilton Spectator
3) John Ellis, chairman of The Save the Valley Committee
4) Herman Turkstra, lawyer for The Save the Valley Committee
5) Eric Adams, store owner and pro-Sunday shopping activist
6) Dominic Agostino, Hamilton alderman
7) Jim Poling, reporter, The Hamilton Spectator
8) Michael Davison, columnist, The Hamilton Spectator
9) John Gallagher, Hamilton alderman
10) Zel Goldstein, president, Hy & Zel's drug stores
11) Don Ross, Hamilton alderman
12) Bob Morrow, Hamilton mayor
13) Dale Turvey, Red Hill Creek Expressway manager
14) Mac Carson, Chief Administrative Officer, Hamilton Wentworth region
15) Helen Bell, Glanbrook mayor
16) Maureen McCarthy, United Food and Commercial Workers Union representative
17) Brian Hinkley, Hamilton alderman
18) Art Frewin, chairman of Citizen's Expressway Committee

Niagara Region

1) Sharon Gall, United Food and Commercial Workers Union representative
2) Gracia Janes, president, Preservation of Agricultural Lands Society
3) Dick Teather, Niagara-on-the-Lake farmer
4) Stan Brickell, member of People for Sunday

5) Rob Welch, St. Catharines regional councillor

6) Ray Konkle, Lincoln mayor

7) Michael Boggs, Chief Administrative Officer, Niagara region

8) Stan Ignatczyk, Niagara-on-the-Lake mayor

9) Arnold Lepp, president, Niagara North Federation of Agriculture

10) Jill Hildreth, Lincoln regional councillor

11) Alan Veale, planner, Niagara region

12) Doug Mann, Niagara Falls regional councillor

13) Carol Alaimo, reporter, The Standard

14) Doug Herrod, assignment editor, The Standard

15) Mike Collins, St. Catharines regional councillor

16) Les Kingdon, president People for Sunday, (refused)

17) Wilbert Dick, Niagara regional chairman, (refused)

18) Rob Dobrucki, St. Catharines regional councillor (refused)

APPENDIX FOUR

(Sample schedule of questions to which unrecorded follow-up questions were added. Each interview ran about 45 minutes.)

1) General questions about the subject's background.

2) Who do you think councillors listened to on these issues: Sunday shopping: protest groups, unions, labor council, churches, business groups, other councillors bureaucrats?

3) What groups do councillors pay more attention to? Why?

4) Which groups were ignored? Why?

5) Who did you pay attention to? Why?

6) Do other councillors follow what you do? On this issue?

7) Does council have a pattern for decision-making, i.e. do certain members lead? Describe it?

8) What about the media, do councillors pay much attention? To which things do you see councillors responding, letters, editorials, articles, columns?

9) Does media support change people's minds? Can you remember an instance during the Sunday shopping debate when councillors were moved by an article? Tell me about it.

10) Does the paper have the power to set the agenda? Too much power? Did it do so on the Sunday shopping issue?

11) Do you ever see your colleagues using the paper to forward their positions? Have you? How and with what success?

12) Are there certain types of issues where the paper has more or less influence? Which?

13) How did paper treat you or your group on this issue?

14) Overall, how do you assess the paper's performance?

15) Who else was influential on this issue?

16) Additional comments?

APPENDIX FIVE

(Analysis of The Hamilton Spectator's coverage of the Red Hill issue.)

Total items found: 226

STORY POSITION

Page One 12

Metro Section Front 55

Other 56

Editorials 18

Columns 17

Letters 68

STORY SOURCES*

For 250

Against 138

Neutral 24

* Includes letters-to-the-editor.

APPENDIX SIX

Five most quoted individuals by *The Hamilton Spectator* on the Red Hill issue. (Number) indicates the number of times quoted directly. (F) or (N) indicates in favour or not in favour of the project.

1) Don Ross, Hamilton alderman and highway steering committee chairman (36) (F)
2) Reg Whynott, Hamilton-Wentworth regional chairman (23) (F)
3) Brian Hinkley, Hamilton alderman (18) (N)
4) Art Frewin, chairman of the Citizen's Expressway Committee (13) (F)
5) Bob Morrow, Hamilton mayor (10) (F)

APPENDIX SEVEN

(Analysis of The Hamilton Spectator's coverage of the Sunday shopping issue.)

Total items found, 115.

Story Position

- Page One 23
- Metro Section Front 21
- Other 9
- Editorials 20
- Columns 4
- Letters 38

Story sources

- For 114
- Against 111
- Neutral 68

APPENDIX EIGHT

Five most quoted individuals by *The Hamilton Spectator* on the Sunday shopping issue. (Number) indicates number of mentions. (F) or (N) indicates in favour or not in favour of Sunday openings.

1) Dominic, Agostino, Hamilton alderman (14)(F)

2) Helen Bell, Glanbrook mayor (11)(F)

3) Zel Goldstein, president of Hy & Zel's drug store (6)(F)

4) Reg Whynott, Hamilton-Wentworth regional chairman (6)(N)

5) Eric Adams, businessman and Sunday shopping activist (6)(F)

APPENDIX NINE

(Analysis of The Standard's coverage of the farmland issue.)

Total items found, 112.

Story Position

- Page One 39
- Page Nine (local page) 34
- Other 16
- Editorials 5
- Letters 17

Story sources

- For 90
- Against 31
- Neutral 19

APPENDIX TEN

Five most quoted individuals by The Standard on the farmland issue. (Number) indicates number of times quoted directly. (F) or (N) indicates in favour or not in favour of the project.

1) Gracia Janes, president of Preservation of Agricultural Lands Society, (22) (N)

2) Arnold Lepp, president of Niagara North Federation of Agriculture, (19) (F)

3) Wilbert Dick, Niagara regional chairman, (18) (F)

4) Alan Veale, Niagara regional planner, (18) (N)

5) Jill Hildreth, Lincoln regional councillor, (10) (F)

APPENDIX ELEVEN

(Analysis of The Standard's coverage of the Sunday shopping issue.)

Total items found, 117.

Story Position

- Page One 28
- Page Nine (local page) 38
- Other 18
- Editorials 5
- Letters 8

Story sources

- For 141
- Against 84
- Neutral 51

APPENDIX TWELVE

Five most quoted individuals by The Standard on the Sunday shopping issue. (Number) indicates number of times directly quoted. (F) or (N) indicates in favour or not in favour of the project.

1) Michael Collins, St. Catharines regional councillor (17)(N)

2) Wilbert Dick, Niagara regional chairman (17)(F)

3) Sharon Gall, United Food and Commercial Workers Union (10)(N)

4)Doug Mann, Niagara Falls regional councillor and Sunday shopping committee chairman, (9)(F)

5) Rob Dobrucki, St. Catharines regional chairman, (9)(F)

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