



[Newsroom Staff Cut at Vancouver's Big Papers](#)

Ahead: Fewer news jobs, more news 'platforms.'

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Standing beside the city editor's desk in the Vancouver Sun newsroom late in the afternoon of Nov. 7, editor-in-chief Patricia Graham wanted the 110 newsroom staff assembled in an attentive semi-circle around her to know she took the news she was announcing very seriously.

"This is the most important discussion I've ever had with you in my time as editor," Graham said, according to a source who was at the meeting.

Like her counterpart Wayne Moriarty at The Province, who was presiding at a simultaneous meeting in his paper's newsroom in the same building, Graham was announcing editorial staff reductions in newsrooms that have already been cut 50 per cent in the last decade and a half.

Enthusiating about the future of the Sun on various cyber "platforms," Graham told her staff, "This is no longer a newspaper. It's a newsroom."

She also indicated that she planned on eventually sending up to 50 per cent of the Sun's page layout work via e-mail to a non-union CanWest operation in Hamilton, Ontario. This practice, [already in play](#) for a small number of Sun pages, is currently the subject of a grievance filed by the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers of Canada (CEP), which represents workers at the paper.

CanWest's cuts nationwide

Newsroom staff at Vancouver's two CanWest daily papers learned in the late afternoon meetings that the wave of staff reductions across the country at

newsrooms and broadcast facilities owned by the media giant will now result in the loss of up to 15 editorial staff at each paper. If all of these reductions are achieved, management will have cut newsroom staff by more than 10 per cent this year. Currently, at the Sun and Province the combined newsroom staff numbers 275.

CanWest recently announced cuts of up to 200 employees at its TV stations across the country.

Constrained by a union contract that would require opening the corporate books if they wanted to simply lay off staff, Sun and Province management have turned to offering voluntary buyout packages as a way of achieving desired cuts.

Hugh Ferguson, an editor at The Province and newsroom steward for the CEP, says that the two papers are approaching the cuts in different ways.

"Moriarty said that no Province Live It, sports or entertainment pages will be shipped to Hamilton for pagination. To that extent, I am quite proud of The Province management team." Ferguson told The Tyee. "It seems the reverse is true at the Sun, where management seems more willing to embrace CanWest's business objectives."

Worries of layoffs in Alberta

Ferguson said the Sun is already sending World and National pages to Hamilton for layout. Calls during the late afternoon of Nov. 7 to Graham, Moriarty and Sun managing editor Kirk LaPointe for comment on this story were not returned.

At the non-union Edmonton Journal and Calgary Herald, union sources in Vancouver told the Tyee, staff cuts similar in size to those at the Sun and Province could conceivably be achieved in the old fashioned way, by direct layoffs. An anonymous source in the Herald newsroom said on Nov. 7 that Calgary management was talking about simply laying off 10 staff in the newsroom there.

However, a source in the Edmonton Journal newsroom told The Tyee that the paper's top management was in a meeting with employees on Wednesday evening (at 5 p.m. Vancouver time) about staff reduction targets at the Journal. The source, who declined to be quoted by name, said that his understanding was that Journal management was offering voluntary severance packages in its first attempt to hit reduction targets of up to 20 newsroom staff.

'Bad day for democracy'

Meanwhile, at CanWest papers in Montreal and Ottawa, where workers are represented by the Newspaper Guild/Communications Workers of America, newsroom staff reductions of similar size are to be achieved via voluntary buyout packages, The Tyee has learned. Both eastern papers, like the Sun and Province, operate under union agreements that would make it next to impossible to simply layoff staff.

Mike Bocking, president of the CEP local that represents Vancouver CanWest journalists, says the size of cuts being announced across the company's media holdings comes as no surprise.

"The numbers we're hearing tonight are close to what was being predicted by our sources," he said. "This is just more of the same. What we're seeing here is the degradation of journalism in Vancouver and across the country. This is bad for democracy in Canada."

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Tom Sandborn is a regular contributor to The Tyee with a special focus on labour and health policy issues.

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