

Times-Colonist, Sun Shrink Protests, Ignore Crisis
by Rafe Mair



We all know what a word or punctuation mark can do to a sentence. For example, to write "John, says Mary, is a lousy bed companion" is very different than "John says Mary is a lousy bed companion." Sea lice protest, May 8, at BC Legislature in Victoria.

Farmed salmon fighting rally, historic in size, rendered puny by BC's big Canwest papers.

(In fact, perhaps both are, but that's not the point).

Today I'm going to deal with a single word in a sentence; the word is "nearly."

Some background. On Saturday, May 8, well known and much loved Alexandra Morton ended her walk from her home in Sointula to Victoria in opposition to farmed salmon in the ocean, with a rally at the steps of the Legislature.

The Victoria Times-Colonist and Vancouver Sun, both owned by Canwest, gave appalling coverage, starting with the absurd statement that "nearly" 1,000 people were there. Please look at the picture accompanying this story and see how preposterous that statement was. It mattered a great deal because that statement trivialized the event and I say that was deliberate by the use of "nearly." [For complete article reference links, [please see source at The Tye here.](#)]

The use of "nearly" can only mean that they actually counted but couldn't quite make 1,000. There is no other construction one can put on that sentence. For if they hadn't counted, how could they say that there were fewer than 1,000 people at the rally? This cannot be a guess or speculation because on its plain construction it's clearly a statement of fact.

The truth is that they didn't count at all, so their statement is a plain falsehood making one wonder if they were even there. It's fascinating that when later challenged on their estimate, the Times-Colonist said that they evidently had asked the police who said it was 1,000-2,000, which doesn't quite explain the "nearly 1,000." Their nose, in fact, got longer.

'Thank goodness for people filming'

Let's look at some other estimates from people used to assessing the size of crowds.

Holly Adams, who was shooting for Global News, said, "I spoke with police outside the Legislature and they estimated just over 4,000 people, and that was just before 5:00 p.m." That was the estimate used by Global on their newscast.

Wendy Bales, who is a director of the Fraser Valley Regional District, said, "I was there and figured at least over 4,000, with some people coming and going for parts, so there were many more. Global TV reported over 4,000. I was also surprised (but then not) at the lack of coverage. As with so many things, the important stories have to be told by the people, and you can't believe the story on the surface. So what else is new? Thank goodness for the 'net'! I can't wait for the real story to be told. Thank goodness for all the people filming."

Vicky Husband, who has an Order of Canada, is probably the best known environmentalist in the province. She has seen many rallies and said, "Our estimate is between 4,000 to 5,000" -- the largest crowd she had ever seen on the Legislature lawn.

Erling Olsen, owner/skipper of the Pacific Viking, the fish boat which escorted the canoe that started in Hope and crossed the Georgia Strait, talked to a Victoria Police Officer who told him he had never before seen a crowd of demonstrators at the Legislature as large.

A conservative estimate

Environmental activist Ivan Doumenc did a bit of measuring and I thought it was the last word.

"I took a very conservative guess: I assumed -- which is very unrealistic, based on what the photo shows -- that each person used two square meters on an exclusive basis. That's a rectangle of one meter by two meters with no one else but its sole occupier on it. Measure that at home, and you will realize that it's a very, very conservative assumption indeed. I also assumed that not a single person was standing to the left or the right of the frame of the photo, and I further assumed that the columns of people still moving toward the lawn in the photo's far background were actually not going to the rally." "In spite of that, I still found that approximately 3,000 people were occupying my polygon. Once you add more realistic estimations that other people must have been standing outside of the picture, that some people in the far background are actually going to the rally, et cetera, you easily find yourself in that 4,000 plus range which was given to Global News on that day at by several on-site police officers."

Willfully ignored?

One little word -- "nearly" -- graphically shows us Canwest's bias against environmentalists and its obeisance to the Campbell government.

Now with one little word we can understand why Canwest has assiduously avoided covering Alexandra Morton's eight-year struggle to get the word out about sea lice from fish farms killing migrating wild salmon smolts with the exception of the occasional article, usually buried in the

business section.

This explains why Canwest has neglected to interview experts like Dr. John Volpe, Dr. Neil Frazer, Dr. Martin Krkosek, Irish lice specialist Dr. Patrick Gargan and Dr. Daniel Pauly of the University of British Columbia, said by the prestigious Science Magazine to be one of the top 50 scientists in the world.

That's why Canwest has never appointed a member of their staff to thoroughly investigate the entire issue.

This explains why Canwest has not gone to Norway to ask Marine Harvest, the biggest fish farmer on our coast, all the questions that have been raised. (Several environmentalists including Alex and my partner, Damien Gillis have been several times).

This explains why the fish farmers' spokesperson gets an op-ed piece, it would seem, when she wants.

It also explains that because the Vancouver Sun's editorial page, run as it is by a Fraser Institute alumnus, has never to my knowledge published an editorial critical of fish farming; this, no doubt, explains why columnists Vaughn Palmer or Mike Smyth have avoided like a plague dealing with the horrendous impact of fish farms on migrating wild salmon.

What you didn't read

What was it that Canwest did not cover on May 8th?

There were First Nations' speakers including Grand Chief Stewart Philip, Grand Chief of the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, probably the most powerful native leader in the province. His speech was sometimes humorous but always carried the firm conviction that his people not only opposed fish farms in the ocean but were prepared to take the matter as far into the court system as needed.

The reason this was so important, and should have been reported, is that the two senior governments have clearly vowed to do nothing, leaving the courts the only way to go. Given the record of First Nations in court since the Calder case in 1973, this speech of Grand Chief Phillips and his colleagues had huge meaning, and I would have thought that even Canwest would understand its importance.

One might have thought that Canwest would have at least taken a clip of Alexandra Morton's speech.

These three papers did a great disservice to readers by not reporting what happened -- indeed they practiced censorship by remaining silent (except when they pretended to count the crowd).

It's trite to say that you can deceive by what you say and by what you don't say. Canwest, its dailies as well as its community papers, and the Black community papers have, by saying so

little, kept their readers in the dark on hugely important environmental issues including not only fish farms, but the Campbell government's unbelievable destruction of our rivers and giveaway of energy to other jurisdictions.

Embrace new media

The use of the word "nearly" tells us where Canwest apparently is -- a staunch supporter of Gordon Campbell's destruction of the environment so dear to real British Columbians.

Canwest is bankrupt and has now been purchased. Because of the new ownership's association with Canwest past, this change doesn't give us any optimism about their coverage to come of environmental concerns.

There is this hope, however. President Obama taught us how to use the Internet and that where we must go if we want to save our precious heritage.

Readers can start their trek to truthfulness by going to www.thecanadian.org. (Sorry for the shameless plug ... no, to hell with, it I'm not a bit sorry!)

Where Parisians past cried "aux barricades" we sing out "to the Internet."
[Tyee]

Rafe Mair's column runs every second Monday on The Tyee. Find his previous Tyee columns [here](#) and more of his writings on [The Common Sense Canadian](#).

You will see here graphic proof of what we all know - we have to be our own media so ... please pass this on