

Phil Lind with Robert Brehl, *Right Hand Man: How Phil Lind Guided the Genius of Ted Rogers, Canada's Foremost Entrepreneur*. Toronto: [Barlow Books](#), 2018. xii + 357pp., photographs, index. Cloth; ISBN 978-1-988-02533-9, Cdn \$29.99.

The late Ted Rogers, arguably one of Canada's most flamboyant, swashbuckling, aggressive and innovative businessmen, was a key figure in Canada's burgeoning tele-communications industry. Rogers parlayed a stake in Canada's first private television station (CFRB) in 1960 to create what has become one of Canada's largest telecom companies, Rogers Communications, and at his death (2008), one of Canada's richest men. He was one of the first to realize the potential of wireless telephone and was an early pioneer of media "convergence" in which he owned media producers and outlets –print and broadcasting –networks, cable channels, high speed internet, wireless telephone operators (Fido) and entertainment and sports entities such as the Blue Jays and Maple Leaf Sports. His career was marked by spectacular business acquisitions (Cantel, Hunter-Maclean) but also at times dangerously careening towards bankruptcy threatened by mountainous debts.

Along for what at times was a wild roller-coaster ride conducted by the mercurial Rogers was his self-described "right hand man" Phil Lind. In this entertaining and informative autobiography (helped by Robert Bruehl a former journalist who also assisted in Ted Rogers autobiography), Lind describes his role as strategic adviser to Rogers. An accomplished raconteur, Lind characterizes his 40 year career as being the "cable guy" assisting Rogers in building Canada's largest cable provider. He recounts his work frenetically establishing local franchises first in Canada then spearheading Rogers' foray into the American market. He takes credit for introducing "simultaneous substitution," that is, inserting Canadian advertising in American TV programmes transmitted on Canadian airwaves.

When the interview was introduced to Canada in the 19th century, newspaper editors criticized James Gordon Bennett's *New York Tribune's* journalistic innovation by criticizing it as "self-advertisement." Lind's work, a pastiche of personal and professional reminiscences, could be similarly criticized. Indeed, by its very nature, autobiography is self-serving, one-sided and not objective.

Moreover, Lind's depiction of Rogers is neither systematic nor complete. For a more thorough account of Rogers' financial and deal-making legerdemain, Ted Rogers (with Robert Brehl), *The True Story and the Man Behind Rogers Communication* (2008) and Caroline Van Hasselt, *High Wire Act: Ted Rogers and the Empire Debt Built* (2007) are more relevant. Notwithstanding that, Lind's intimate, insider snapshots of Rogers are still of value.

According to Lind, his skills – programming, regulatory knowledge and an understanding of the public mood – complemented Rogers' lack of them. Rogers' strengths lay in finance and cable operations. Lind's love of sports also helped Rogers –as Rogers was not a sports fan but an expert on the business of sports – acquire the Toronto Blue Jays baseball club, providing their cable stations with enormous amounts of lucrative programming.

Unlike most business executives with either an MBA or Engineering backgrounds, Lind claimed that his political experience and an MA in Sociology gave him a special perspective. The author maintains that this education made him effective in leading the negotiations with such regulatory agencies as the Canadian Radio-Television Commission. It also helped when negotiating with municipal governments to obtain Rogers cable franchise licenses.

Apart from the name-dropping and mentions of dozens of excellent friends – reflective of Lind's gregarious personality – Lind offers some insightful glimpses into how Rogers powered his way to the top. Especially illuminating are those illustrating Rogers' management style which like many domineering bosses was that of a bully. Amongst his executives, Rogers sowed 'seeds of distrust' and encouraged "back-biting." However, even though in meetings he was often rude and out of control, his magnetic personality led people to forgive his outbursts. However, he did listen to opposing opinions and he was not afraid to change course. Another one of Rogers' strengths was that he did not "gas" executives from companies he'd taken over, but generally incorporated them into his operations.

Lind presents a detailed background to the "David and Goliath" near simultaneous takeover of the much larger Canadian Cablesystems Ltd. (CCL) and Premier Cablevision which catapulted Rogers into the cable big leagues in the mid-1970s. This experience enabled Rogers to invade the US market and avoid what usually led to the graveyard for Canadian companies by "out-Americaning" the Americans.

On the whole, Lind admired Rogers' business acumen and supported his decisions except for two major ones. Lind criticized Rogers for selling the British Columbia franchises to Shaw Communications in 1993 and opposed Rogers selling his American holdings as short-sighted. Indeed, when the latter decision was announced Lind briefly entertained the idea of purchasing them with a partner. However, the self-realization that he would always be a "right hand man" rather than an entrepreneur ended that.

Lind is not afraid to discuss the failures such as the vehement reaction of subscribers to "negative options" in the 1990s which forced them to take and pay for unwanted channels in order to receive wanted ones. He recounted how irate subscribers even stoned Rogers vans in British Columbia. He also described the "fiasco" of presenting Buffalo Bills football games in Toronto in 2006 as a failed backdoor maneuver to bringing the National Football League franchise to the city.

Lind met and befriended so many people in his career that the work reads like a Who's Who of Canadian politicians, the business community and entertainment personalities. Some like Paul Godfrey and Stephen Harper do not get favourable mentions.

Finally, Lind's account inadvertently reveals how the intensely competitive life style of the alpha business executive was for many destructive and ultimately deadly. A number of fellow executives died relatively young in their 40s and 50s. Rogers himself suffered a mild heart attack in 1985 and underwent quadruple bypass surgery in 1989. Indeed, Lind himself recounts how a stroke in 1995 almost killed him and how he endured subsequent years long rehabilitation.

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