

I suspect that most of us, whether troubled or sanguine about foreign ownership and control, reject both extremes and occupy ground somewhere in between. There are many variations in the inbetween views. Let me try a few.

One line of analysis which has both plausibility and merit runs like this. No country is completely sovereign. All our links with other countries, whether political, economic or cultural, limit our freedom of action in some degree. This, they say, is particularly true of a country like Canada with close financial, trade, cultural and many other intimate links with its large imposing neighbour. That country by virtue of its size, weight and power is bound to have a very strong influence on all countries, but particularly on Canada. Control by its citizens of Canadian industry is only one channel of influence; important, yes, but no more important than trade, finance, culture, education. Canadian views are influenced by all these and governments in Canada cannot be oblivious to the basic truth that these links and influences exist. Why then get all excited by one particular form of influence? What worries me about this line of reasoning is that it is rather too easy to slide from it to a related and rather defeatist view. We have so little real sovereignty - and can have so little real sovereignty alongside the United States - that there is no point in worrying about foreign control of our industry.

Clearly there are many restraints on Canada's freedom of action. Clearly, too, there are many instruments and links through which foreign influence is transmitted and restraint exercised. But they are additive in their total impact - and they are by no means equal in their weight and influence. Many people believe that foreign ownership of a country's industries is a rather direct and powerful instrument of foreign influence and as such deserves rather special attention.

Still another line of reasoning holds that large corporations with international operations are themselves becoming internationalized in personnel, attitudes and policies; they know no national loyalties and act on behalf of their international shareholders. As such, if they have any limiting effects on national sovereignties, they do not discriminate and do not project the views, attitudes and policies of any particular nation. There is some truth in this. We are familiar with large corporations that fall into this category. But the fact is that such large international corporations are not typical. Most corporations we are talking about, and which we know have ultimate control over Canadian enterprises, are United States corporations, with head offices in the United States, subject to United States laws and under the direction of United States nationals. While this is an interesting idea, it just isn't true - at least not yet.

There is one further theory which I would like to mention. It accepts the proposition that foreign control does, in fact, provide a powerful instrument for political control, but argues that, in the context of U.S.-world relations in general and U.S.-Canada relations in particular, the United States would never wish to exercise this power. They have to get along with Canada. It is essential for their world position that they do. This proposition intrigues me. But it's a kind of brinkmanship that, to say the least, makes me nervous.