

Is it worse than acid rain? U.S.

by David Marples

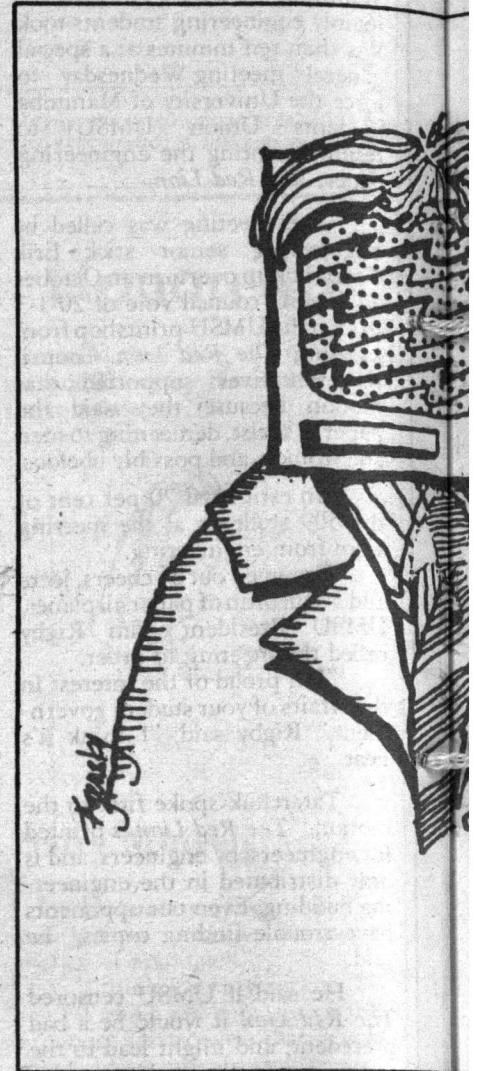
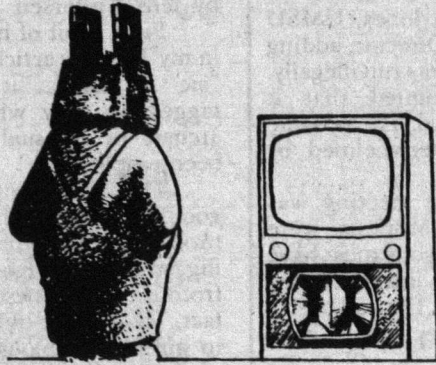
In the corner of the room there stands a square box. All the members of the family are sitting around this box. Occasionally the boy will put a candy into his mouth, but he does this in a sort of hypnotic trance, without taking his eyes off the moving colours in the corner of the room. Eventually, the woman moves away from the box to replace the coffee pot on the stove. At this same time, the other four members of the family (since it is the average family we are talking about) go through what seems to be a ritual of motions. The father glances through the evening paper, the boy concentrates more attention on the candy, and the two girls talk about something that happened at school. This lull in the proceedings is called a commercial break. The box is a propaganda mechanism not unlike that

described by George Orwell in 1984, and the propaganda comes direct from New York City to Canadian homes. Of course, the dominance of television in modern society is an old canard. But it can be argued, with some justice, that its influence has never been more malevolent, its quality never lower than at present. Before looking at the programmes in

more detail, the question deserves to be asked: what is the function of television? The answer is probably that it is to inform, educate and entertain the viewer, so that in some way he is better off for having pressed the button that brought his thought processes to an abrupt halt. In fact, the first two functions are already something of the past and the third is being slowly undermined

by a phenomenon known as the ratings war, whereby the three major TV stations in the U.S. have thrown quality to the winds in a ruthless bid to be "popular." Competition has eroded responsibility to the public.

Further, commercials, which are necessary since there is no nationalized network in the United States, now dominate the screen as never before. During the Muhammad Ali-Larry Holmes fight, there were commercials as soon as each round ended, so that the viewer never saw the condition of the boxers in between rounds. And more than once the next round had begun before the commercials were over. The credits of all programmes are followed immediately by commercial breaks. Major movies are interrupted with increasing frequency toward the end, a manoeuvre that blatantly exploits the viewer who, having sat through 1 1/2 hours of the film, is





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