

tional Security Decision Memorandum 14 which discussed the possibility of "prevailing" in a "protracted" nuclear war. This and the controversy over Star Wars stirred coverage of such items as the Single Integrated Operational Plan for nuclear war, the Pentagon's command and control system and its weaknesses, and the US plans for dispersal of nuclear weapons into Canada in times of crisis.

On the Soviet side, information from the source has until recently been very hard to come by. Questions about Soviet nuclear strategy usually have to be answered by American military sources, which can be biased, or by US strategic institutes and academics who specialize in Russian military affairs. Canadian coverage of such matters reflects a lack of domestic expertise.

The medium through which most Canadians obtain their news of war and peace issues is television. Despite its brilliant images, its speed of delivery, its immediacy and apparent reality, TV's 'show business' news features tend to trivialize and distort. This is particularly so with subjects that are difficult to film, such as arms control negotiations, East-West talks or stories about the nuclear arms race in general. Interviews with experts, as on CBC's *The Journal*, are useful if the questioning is good.

There is a tendency, however, as British TV critic Neil Postman has said, "to suppress the content of ideas in order to accommodate the requirements of visual interest." Recently some interesting and provocative television programmes have provided enlightened commentary on these issues, such as the NFB's *War* series and the BBC's *Comrades* about the Soviet Union, but they are few and far between. And they probably can't compete with *Dynasty* on most Canadian TV sets.

The Canadian media should not be reporting simply the hard news in this field: the results of a

summit, the deadlocks in arms talks, the fantastic weapons produced by the military-industrial complex, or the latest test of a super new missile. They should be putting these items in the larger context, assessing their effect on our national interests, explaining their implications for our defence and disarmament policies, digging out the real motives and strategies behind the superpower's declaratory policies, and helping the general public understand where these events are leading. There are too many myths and false stereotypes cluttering up the media coverage of the issues of nuclear arms control and disarmament. These life and death problems are far too important and global in scope to be reduced to the "them versus us" level of journalism.

Canada is not a superpower and is not even a nuclear weapons state, yet it is a member of the NATO alliance and a partner in the NORAD agreement with the United States. In the event of nuclear war, Canada will be the "ham in the atomic sandwich." We cannot escape involvement in the nuclear debate any more than we can escape destruction in the event of a nuclear war. We have a responsibility to keep fully abreast of what is going on in arms control and disarmament negotiations, as well as in the field of weapons developments and Star Wars research. Canadians must participate. If our politicians don't want to take a leadership role in this debate, at least the Canadian media has a responsibility to bring these issues to public attention, and to make people's concerns known to political leaders. Canada's unique position should allow our media to be more "objective" in assessing these issues than the press of the superpowers. To stay silent or to parrot the line of one or the other superpower when their policies warrant criticism is to abandon the responsibility of a free press. The Canadian media still has a considerable way to go in taking on that responsibility.