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does CORPORATIONS' of media give us free pressurE?

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"CBS News ... Keeping America on top of the world."

If one of your country's leading military contractors owned one of three major television networks, you would probably be concerned over the public's access to accurate information.

If only a handful of corporate élites controlled most of the business for the mass media on your continent, your disdain for the state propaganda of Eastern-bloc countries might turn against the distorted information millions of citizens are exposed to in your country.

Given this, the North American should be fighting for the right to a free flow of information.

Both in the U.S. and Canada, the mainstream media appear to offer diversity and competition in their presentation of "news" to the public. But mass media is big business, and in the last 10 years, the concentration of ownership and power has fallen into fewer and fewer corporate hands.

Three television stations dominate the market in the U.S. and Canada: ABC, CBS, and NBC. In 1986, the General Electric corporation bought out RCA, the parent company of NBC. General Electric is the tenth largest corporation in the U.S. and a major military contractor, with sales from its electronic components, electrical and nuclear systems, air and spacecraft components, and insurance and banking interests exceeding \$28 billion a year. Independent Canadian newspapers are

all but extinct. In 1970, for instance, there were 108 daily newspapers in Canada. Of these, 43 were independently owned, while 65 were owned by corporations running newspaper chains. By 1980, the number of dailies increased to 117, but only 28 were independently owned, while 89 were owned by chains. Of those 89 chain-owned papers, 65 were owned by just three firms, according to the 1970 Davey Royal Commission and the 1981 Kent Commission.

Two newspaper chains across the country, Thomson and Southam, own and run the print media. Besides their newspaper monopoly, Thomson and Southam have diverse corporate interests. Thomson, for example, has holdings in Hudson's Bay Company, Zellers, and Simpsons, and interests in North Sea Oil. Southam controls several publishing companies and the largest book retailer in Canada, Coles — both heavily invested in some of their largest advertisers.

For Canada, the Free Trade deal may mean Canadian news broadcasts will become entirely alternative programming.

When Ben Bagdikian wrote the first edition of his book *The Media Monopoly* in 1983, there were 46 corporations that

controlled most of the business in daily papers, magazines, television, books, and motion pictures in the U.S. The number now stands at 29.

Bagdikian, dean of the University of California School of Journalism, has spent almost 10 years tracking the quickening pace of monopoly control of the major media. He released the latest edition last November.

According to Bagdikian, at the end of World War II, more than 80 per cent of daily U.S. newspapers were independently owned, but by 1987, the number had almost reversed: 72 per cent were owned by outside corporations, 15 of which controlled most of the business. In 1981, 20 corporations controlled most of the business in the U.S.' 11,000 magazines. Five years later, the number had shrunk to six.

"It is quite possible," says Bagdikian, "and serious corporate leaders predict, that by the 1990s a half dozen corporations will own all the most powerful media outlets in the U.S."

The concentration of corporate control in the media raises serious questions about the information the public is receiving. Fears about GE's influence on NBC coverage has already been confirmed. The network recently aired a documentary on the French nuclear industry, a country that openly supports the expansion of nuclear power and which just moved to expand its medium-range missile arsenal.

Who can ensure a parent corporation's interest in the arms race, or the banking

business, won't affect the presentation of issues like nuclear weapons in the major media outlets they control?

ABC's involvement in the 1973 coup d'état that deposed democratically-elected socialist president Salvador Allende for the current dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet is one historical answer.

ABC's negative coverage of Allende's government reflected the interests of its parent, ITT, which along with Anaconda Copper Inc. stood to lose hundreds of millions in profits if Allende nationalized the country's communications systems and natural resources.

U.S. corporate power dwarfs that of Canada, and since the U.S. dominates the world market in many other industries, the media are no different. Before the public debate on free trade was underway, for example, U.S.-owned Gulf and Western, one of the largest companies in the world, bought out one of Canada's leading publishers, Prentice-Hall.

This brings to light what Bagdikian refers to as "interlocking dictatorships" of corporations, where directors of megacorporations sit on several boards at one time, extending their stake in the media coverage of the companies they represent.

"Time Inc. has so many interlocks," he writes, "they almost represent a plenary board of directors of U.S. business and finance, including Mobil Oil, AT&T, American Express, Firestone Tire and Rubber Co., Mellon National Corporation, Atlantic Richfield, Xerox, General

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