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CANADIAN PRESS COVERAGE OF ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT ISSUES

by John R. Walker

The media in Canada faces a continuing problem that few developed nations do: the sizeable influence of a foreign neighbour's news reporting and commentary on the coverage, in Canadian newspapers, radio and television, of international affairs.

The largely American influence is especially noticeable in coverage of foreign affairs issues involving peace and security. Despite a recent increase in Canadian coverage of foreign affairs, there is still much room for improvement in the quality, consistency and critical assessment of questions about the nuclear arms race and the basic survival of our planet.

The 'Uncertain Mirror' was how the Special Senate Committee on the Mass Media in Canada described the Canadian press, radio and television's reflection of life in 1970.¹ But the examples of distortion, exaggeration and trivialization that Senator Keith Davey and his commission spoke about in those days were largely confined to the subject of domestic coverage.

There was very little in their report about Canadian coverage of foreign affairs, much less peace and security issues. Although a special survey of Canadian papers for the Davey commission showed that nearly 33 per cent of the news in those papers was world news, as opposed to Canadian, there was certainly little comment in the Davey Report on how all that foreign news was covered.

The one concern in the report which did involve foreign coverage was that Canada received most of its foreign news from American, British and French news agencies, not Canadian ones. The suggestion was made in the Davey report that more Canadian reporters ought to be sent abroad to increase the "Canadian content" in foreign reports.

There was little or no response to the report. A decade later, in 1981, the Kent commission on newspapers was still able to say that "as for the coverage of foreign news, Canadian newspapers rely heavily on foreign news services, thereby failing to project a distinctly Canadian perspective on international events. In addition, the ready availability of American feature materials at low prices has clearly retarded the development of Canadian alternatives."²

Former diplomat and foreign policy expert John Holmes suggested in the 1970 Davey Report that "better, not necessarily more" Canadian foreign correspondents were needed. In the 1981 Kent report, however, Professor Denis Stairs found that "foreign policy makers had little respect for Canada's newspapers. With few foreign correspondents and only a handful of writers with expertise in foreign or defence policy, the Canadian newspapers had little to offer the informed reader. External Affairs officials did read the *Globe and Mail* and the Ottawa dailies, but turned in their official capacities to the quality British, American and French newspapers as supplements to official sources."

In 1981, two-thirds of the "foreign" file of the main Canadian news agency, the Canadian Press, was coverage of American news items, and the majority of the other third involved British and West European items. The rest of the world, where a majority of the current issues of peace and war actually develop, was given short shrift.

When faced with criticism of their foreign coverage, Canadian editors argued that it was not the public that was complaining, but rather a few academics. There has been a response, however; today more Canadian foreign correspondents are working abroad than at any time in recent years.

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At present, the *Globe and Mail* has eight correspondents stationed abroad full time, Southam News nine, the *Toronto Star* five, the Canadian Press five, the CBC has nine and CTV three. The *Globe*, the *Star*, Southam, and the Canadian Press have reporters or columnists in Canada who specialize in peace and security affairs, and Thomson Newspapers have a foreign and defence columnist.

The 1986 Caplan-Sauvageau report on communications³ made use of a special study of TV and radio coverage carried out by Peter Desbarats, a former CBC journalist who is now head of the journalism programme at the University of Western Ontario. The study showed that, in addition to sports, Canadian TV news was "constantly preferred" over the American product by a vast majority of Canadians. But Desbarats pointed out that "much of TV coverage of international events seen by the Canadian viewer, particularly on private stations, comes from American networks. Even the CBC, with the most extensive network of correspondents, relies on American sources for much of its foreign coverage." It might be added that both CBC TV's *The Journal* and CBC radio's *As it Happens* seem to rely heavily on American and British experts in their interviews on arms control and disarmament issues.

Does the press provide *enough* of a Canadian perspective on the issues of peace and security? Is the quality of coverage getting any better? To address these questions, the author performed a rather unscientific survey, combing the extensive clippings files of 26 Canadian newspapers and looking at more recent microfilm in the Parliamentary Library.

According to the three above-mentioned commission reports, most Canadians get their news from television and radio, and call them "the most credible sources." Yet broadcasters generally follow newspaper and agency coverage. For instance, the Canadian Press news agency, which gets 85 per cent of its foreign news from the Associated Press in the US, serves about 110 Canadian newspapers. It rehashes this file for Broadcast News, its affiliate, which feeds 383 Canadian radio and 66 TV stations. But print journalism regularly provides more detailed, extensive and informative coverage of foreign affairs, especially peace and security issues, than the electronic media. It might also be argued that Canadian decision-makers rely upon the medium of print for serious news coverage. (Although, in today's electronic world, politicians are probably more sensitive to the immediacy of the TV "clip.")

The topic 'peace and security' covers too wide a swath for this paper, including as it does such matters as arms control and disarmament negotiations; defence issues, involving NATO and NORAD; East-West relations; and regional conflicts like those in

Central America, the Middle East, Afghanistan and Iran-Iraq. This paper will confine its study to arms control and disarmament issues.

PUBLIC INTEREST

The 1980 election of US President Ronald Reagan did more to stimulate interest and coverage of arms control and disarmament questions than anything in recent years. The rhetoric and actions of his administration resurrected concerns that had been lying dormant for some time.

Public concern about nuclear weapons and their control or elimination seems to surface in cycles, and the media follows suit. There was public anxiety and wide coverage during the first couple of years after Hiroshima, culminating with the Baruch Plan, put forward in the United Nations and designed to eliminate nuclear weapons. From the late forties to the mid-fifties, there was a diminution of interest. In the early sixties, coverage increased again because a public outcry over fall-out from nuclear testing coincided with the comprehensive disarmament plans being put forward by the Soviet Union and the West. There was another smaller flurry of media attention in the early seventies when SALT I and the ABM treaty were signed.

In these cases the Canadian media were merely reacting to fluctuations in government actions and public attentiveness. This was especially noticeable in Canada in the seventies, when Canadian leadership was more inward-looking than in the days of Lester Pearson and Louis St. Laurent. The public was more concerned with the Quebec crisis and economic problems at home, and the media was consumed with separatism and constitutional reform. Organizations like the CBC and Canadian Press, which had had correspondents in Moscow and at the United Nations in the fifties and sixties, withdrew to home base during the seventies. They took little interest in nuclear issues at the very time when the nuclear arms buildup was at its height.

In 1978, the United Nations sponsored its first Special Session on Disarmament in order to stimulate world attention and action on this neglected subject. While the two superpowers had little of substance to offer, Canada's Prime Minister Trudeau proposed a "strategy of suffocation" which won considerable attention among the aficionados of disarmament as a pragmatic way to get beyond mere arms control. But while the Canadian media covered his speech prominently because of the uniqueness of his attendance at the UN, there was hardly any serious analysis of his proposal in the Canadian press. What little coverage there was suggested that disarmament was a 'motherhood' issue

and asked whether anybody was listening. Obviously no one in the United States was listening to Canada: the *New York Times* gave Trudeau's speech two paragraphs at the end of a long column of tired rhetoric by Andrei Gromyko. When the UN special session finally wound up on July 8 it was generally dismissed as being scuttled by national grievances, although Southam newspapers and one agency report noted that revamping of the UN Disarmament Commission and the entry of France and China into these negotiations.

In the early seventies the diplomatic talks on SALT II had been buried under news about the Vietnam war. The SALT talks dragged on throughout the decade so that the signing of the treaty in June 1979 received only cursory coverage in Canada. Commentaries in the *Chronicle-Herald* (Halifax) and *La Presse* (Montreal), for instance, expressed skepticism about whether peace and security had been advanced by the treaty considering that both sides retained thousands of nuclear weapons. Other reviews of the treaty commented on the difficulty of coping with the baffling acronyms involved. A few pieces discussed the negative reaction in the US Congress, but interest in the subject was soon overtaken by the Iranian hostage crisis that began in November.

In the same fall of 1979, Canada and its NATO allies were faced with one of the most important decisions in the alliance's recent history: the proposal to deploy cruise and Pershing II missiles in Europe, unless an agreement reducing Euromissiles could be reached with the Soviet Union. This was the so-called "two-track" decision.

This writer's earlier survey of Canadian newspaper coverage of that issue⁴ revealed the paucity of straight news coverage of this important decision, and the total absence of any serious analysis of its political implications. Most of the newspapers across Canada treated this decision as no more than a military modernization programme, as it was portrayed by NATO authorities, a counter-deployment in response to the Soviet deployment of SS-20 missiles in Europe. None examined why the Soviet Union had installed its SS-20 missiles in the first place. Only a couple of articles mentioned the dangers that the new NATO weapons posed for the future of arms control: the 'concealability' of the cruise and the provocatively short flight-time of the Pershing II to military targets near Moscow. Very few reports discussed the reasons that these missile deployments were causing such discord in the NATO alliance, and none discussed what Canada should do since the Clark government was determined to keep out of the debate.

Yet this decision continues to haunt us. It did not encourage the Soviet Union to reach an immediate

agreement on intermediate-range nuclear force (INF) reductions in Europe; rather the Soviets walked out of both strategic and Euromissile talks in 1983. It spurred the revival of the peace movement in Europe and tested the unity of the alliance. And eventually it was used by the Canadian government as a rationale for testing the cruise missile in Canada, even though the question of testing was technically a bilateral issue with the United States.

Coverage of the NATO decision was soon replaced by news of Trudeau's re-election in 1980, and by such foreign news as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the continuing Iranian hostage story, the American elections and the Solidarity crisis in Poland. During a seminar on nuclear issues at the Canadian Learned Societies' summer conference, Geoffrey Pearson, then Chief Advisor on Disarmament and Arms Control Affairs, concluded that "survival in the nuclear age is something most of us don't want to discuss." Only one reporter covered the proceedings.

In 1981, with Reagan inaugurated and his anti-Communist rhetoric being turned into action in Central America and into inaction on arms control, the Canadian media began to take more interest in peace and security issues. The *Globe and Mail*, which had given minimal coverage to the "two-track" decision, ran an excellent and lengthy series of articles by an editorial writer, Stan McDowell, that delved seriously into arms control issues and the latest spiral in the nuclear arms race. Much of the rest of Canadian press commentary, with some notable exceptions, was written by Americans or derived from Washington sources, although the French language press relied on *Agence France Presse* with analysis by experts in France and West Germany. The growing protests and demonstrations of the peace activists in Europe were drawing more coverage in Canadian papers by the end of that year.

On 10 February 1982, Southam News broke the story that the Trudeau government was negotiating an agreement with the United States to test the air-launched cruise missile and its guidance equipment over the Canadian north. The rationale given for these tests was that the Canadian terrain was similar to the Soviet northland. At the time the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence (SCEAND) was meeting to outline a Canadian position for the upcoming UN Second Special Session on Disarmament, but neither the Minister of Defence nor the Minister of External Affairs bothered to inform committee members of the on-going bilateral negotiations with the United States. Since an agreement would allow tests of unarmed cruise missiles and other types of weapons in Canada, the committee wanted to know the implications of those tests for arms control and disarmament.

While many Canadian editorialists initially applauded the government's willingness to proceed with the tests, the uproar in Parliament and the public outcry forced the Ministers to return to the committee to explain the government's position. A majority of the committee supported the government. But four members — two NDP, one Liberal and one Tory — issued a 'minority report', deploring the decision to allow US tests. Organizing around the issue of cruise testing, Canadian peace groups became more active and got greater coverage in the press. In response to the public debate, Trudeau went to the unusual length of sending a long and detailed 'open letter' to Canadian newspapers in which he defended the Liberal government's position on cruise testing.

The cruise missile issue seemed to bring the nuclear arms race 'home' for Canadians. In his survey of Canadian coverage, this journalist found that the *volume* of newspaper clippings in each file was revealing. Filed under the label "missiles" were stories of every kind of nuclear weapon. Due to the heavy coverage of the cruise question in 1982, there was more than twice as much in this one year's file as there was in all of the files under that label for the past twelve years. The number of clippings for 1983, when the umbrella testing agreement with the United States was finally signed, was nearly three times as great as that for 1982.

From 1982 on, in contrast to past reporting, much more of the analysis was provided by Canadian writers, both journalists and academics. Furthermore, coverage was devoted not merely to the question of cruise testing, but included the effect of cruise missiles on the nuclear arms race and on arms control negotiations, specifically the failing START and INF talks in Europe.

An entirely new focus for the nuclear arms debate was introduced on 23 March 1983 when President Reagan proclaimed his desire for a new strategic defence initiative (SDI) that would make nuclear weapons "impotent and obsolete." This unexpected and grandiose scheme, immediately labelled 'Star Wars' by the media, drew widespread skeptical comment and in-depth political analysis in the Canadian press.

A *Victoria Times-Colonist* editorial, labelled "Star Gazing," concluded that the President's hint about "a modified zero option policy for missile deployment in Europe holds more promise than his Star Wars dream." The *Toronto Star* called "Reagan's Wrong Path to Peace" a dream that might become "our waking nightmare." *Le Soleil's* René Beaudin had one of the few analytical backgrounders that linked SDI to the 1982 confidential US Defence Guidance doctrine of fighting in space and surviving a nuclear war. An editorial in the *Winnipeg Free*

Press entitled "An Old Outer Space Story" explained how the US Anti-Ballistic Missile initiative of the sixties had been wisely tempered by the ABM treaty, and predicted that financial and technological considerations might strangle SDI, even if it was not first discarded for the obvious strategic and political reasons. But the *Toronto Sun* editorial writers urged Reagan to abandon "vague talk about laser beams preventing nuclear war," to tell the people how badly off US defence was, and to "get a first strike missile that will knock out Soviet hardened silos."

In the wake of Reagan's 'Star Wars' speech and the collapse of the START and INF talks in December 1983, confrontational rhetoric between Washington and Moscow intensified, and an alarmed Prime Minister Trudeau began to organize his own peace initiative in 1983. His purpose was to stimulate the will to negotiate and to generate a more conciliatory atmosphere. Despite the lack of interest in Washington and in some Western capitals, Trudeau's travels were covered extensively by the Canadian media; journalists travelled with him to Asia and Europe, to Washington and Moscow.

In 1985 Canada had a new Conservative government under Brian Mulroney, and media interest in arms control and disarmament continued, spurred by the House Defence Committee's review of the NORAD agreement, due for renewal in 1986. The name had been changed to the North American *Aerospace* Defence command and it soon became evident that the focus of media attention would be the potential effects of Reagan's 'Star Wars' initiative on the role of Canada in NORAD. These concerns elicited a stream of hard news stories, feature commentaries and editorials on the subject; again, much of it now from Canadian journalists and academics. This flurry of coverage continued into 1986 when the NORAD extension was signed at the Mulroney-Reagan "Shamrock Summit" on 1 April.

During the same period, there had been a great deal of media coverage on the public dialogue going on between Washington and Moscow, in preparation for the Geneva summit in the fall of 1985 and the subsequent meeting in Reykjavik in the fall of 1986.

BETTER SOURCES

The newspaper files on NATO issues, on Geneva arms control talks, on East-West disarmament proposals and summits have shown a visible growth over the past decade, and an encouraging increase of analysis by Canadians. One reason for that, aside from Canadian public concerns about cruise missile testing, the 'Star Wars' programme and NORAD developments, is that the government has become

more sensitive to public opinion, and somewhat more open about such subjects. Another reason is that, in addition to official sources of information — External Affairs and National Defence — there are now more outside agencies providing background information and analysis on these matters: the Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, started in Toronto in 1976; the Canadian Centre for Arms Control and Disarmament, opened in Ottawa in 1983; and the Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security, a Crown Corporation, established in 1984. In addition to the old established sources of useful background information, such as the Canadian Institute of International Affairs, there are also a growing number of academic schools at universities like York, Laval, UBC, Queen's and Guelph that specialize in issues of peace and security. The peace movement has itself spawned a number of organizations whose expertise increases yearly, and the number of public conferences and seminars sponsored by these groups has blossomed. As a result, in sharp contrast to the situation ten years ago, a diligent and concerned Canadian journalist has a number of sources to go to in the course of his or her research.

A number of Canadian newspapers now have writers who cover foreign affairs and defence subjects on a regular basis, some of them travelling abroad for their columns. Among these are Patrick Martin of the *Globe and Mail*, Ron Lowman of the *Toronto Star*, John Harbron of Thomson Newspapers, Jack Best of Canada-World News, who files to several Canadian papers, and the author of this essay, who writes a freelance column for Southam News. In the French language press there are Jocelyn Coulon of *Le Devoir*, Marcel Adam of *La Presse* and René Beaudin of *Le Soleil*.

This does not mean that Canadian reporters are, or should be, ignoring American sources. In this field particularly, there are a large number of institutions and universities with highly informed arms control and strategic experts on their rosters, many with previous experience in military, technical and negotiating fields. These people can be as well-informed as government officials and are often less inclined to prevaricate. As anyone who has covered Washington knows, the American style of government encourages its public servants to be a lot more forthcoming on what is going on, even in the arms control field, than officials in Ottawa can be. (That is how the cruise missile testing story got out: information obtained by a Canadian journalist from an American official.) For those who have the time for deep digging, the American Freedom of Information Act is light years ahead of Canada's Access to Information Law in providing access to useful information on foreign policy and defence affairs.

What is still of some concern is the amount of American-oriented news copy that comes across the border, via the Associated Press or United Press International news agencies; via the NBC, CBS or ABC television networks; or via some of the American newspapers or chains like the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times* or the Gannett or Knight-Ridder groups — not to mention *Time* and *Newsweek*, with their large batteries of foreign and defence correspondents.

This is not a criticism of the competence of US correspondents, some of whom are among the best in the world. But it is worthy of interest because of the cultural and ideological bias often displayed by the American media in their coverage of East-West relations and issues of peace and security. Anyone who has worked abroad with American reporters, as this writer has, will have noticed that most of them assess the host country in terms of how its policies relate to those of Washington, or how it shapes up in the Soviet-American confrontation. This perspective will often produce an approach to the news which is quite different from that of a Canadian correspondent.

Since the major nuclear arms control and disarmament negotiations are held between the United States and the Soviet Union, the coverage we get from American sources about those talks is very important. However, US reports about the Soviet system of government, its economic development, its social problems, its political ideology, its international aims and its strategy in arms control negotiations can be rather one-sided, negative and even distorted. (It is ironic that during World War II, when the USSR was an ally, the Americans bent over backwards to present a euphoric view of the Soviet Union.)

Stereotyped reports can affect public opinion. In 1982, Professor William Dorman of the Journalism School at California State University, Sacramento, made an intensive study of American hard news coverage of the Soviet Union, reviewing a variety of outlets: five prestigious American dailies; the news agencies of United Press International and Associated Press; the weekly magazine *Time* and *Newsweek*; and the evening news programmes of NBC, CBS and ABC. He found that "unfortunately, at least for those hoping for a vigorous and enlarged debate over US defence policy and the country's relations with the Soviet Union, the survey turned up ample evidence that the mainstream media have not changed substantially in how they present the USSR to the American people." Apparently, the stereotypes have not changed since the Cold War began.

Accusing the American media of using "loaded frames and labels" to describe the Soviet Union, Dorman claimed that "Russian intentions and be-

havior continue to be painted in the darkest possible shades, journalistic themes persist in echoing those of official Washington, American's worst fears go unchallenged in the press, and labels continue to be substituted for analysis." His 1982 study referred to such stories of questionable veracity as the possible KGB role in the attempt on Pope John Paul's life; the alleged Soviet manipulation of the nuclear freeze movement in the US; the suspected Soviet use of chemical weapons in Southeast Asia; and the claimed use of slave labour to build the Soviet natural gas pipeline. When Reagan replaced Carter, Dorman argued, there was a shift in emphasis and interpretation revealed in the American media, with a new stress on the failures in the Soviet Union. This detectable shift supported the views of those "who believe mainstream journalists are often little more than spear carriers for official Washington."

An earlier study, by the Columbia Journalism Review, was completed in 1980. It concluded that "for most of the US media, the meaning of the Iranian and Afghan crises seemed plain enough: the United States had become ominously weak, and its Soviet enemy defiantly, perhaps decisively, stronger . . . The mass of articles on national security since last summer (1979) was premised on an assumption journalists seemed to take for granted: the huge size and menacing nature of the Soviet Threat." These two reviews may have been overly critical of US news coverage, but they provide a warning about the kind of American interpretation that shows up constantly in Canadian newspapers and TV shows.

In 1983, Barrie Zwicker, a Toronto journalist, did a study called "War, Peace and the Media" for *Sources*, a Canadian media directory. Zwicker assessed the coverage of the Soviet Union in the *Toronto Star*, the *Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Sun* for a six-month period in 1982-1983. He stated that the Canadian public is being treated to "a hodgepodge of distorting trivia, boring stereotypes, and transparent bias parading as news." Espionage stories were by far the leading category of Soviet news, followed by items on Brezhnev and Andropov, on Soviet armaments, the Soviet war in Afghanistan, Soviet arms proposals, its space programme and the "Soviet threat." Soviet sports, arts and culture only just made it into the top ten categories.

Zwicker judged that of 147 opinion columns published in that period, only four could be considered friendly or favourable. Of 43 editorials or cartoons, 25 were hostile or negative and the rest were neutral; none could find anything positive to say about the Soviet Union. A biased view of the USSR presented in the media can colour Canadian views of arms control and disarmament issues. Perhaps a more balanced coverage will develop in 1987 because this year, not only the CBC and the *Globe*, but

also Southam and the *Toronto Star* will have correspondents based in Moscow.

The Zwicker survey suggests that Canadian journalists can be just as ethnocentric as their American colleagues. Since the source of the stories categorized in the Zwicker study are not given, it is possible that the blame might fall on the 'gatekeepers' in these Canadian newspapers. A well-known fact among working journalists, especially those in the field of foreign affairs, is that far too many editors and deskmen have a limited knowledge of, or interest in, international affairs, especially in arms control and disarmament issues.

For every good and experienced foreign editor, there are a dozen for whom the task is a bore, and they would prefer to use hyped, dramatic coverage rather than informative, consistent stories that provide their readers with real background on Soviet life and Soviet positions on complex issues. It is people like this who would trivialize Reykjavik or the Stockholm conference with headlines, as the Americans did, about who "won" and who "lost."

The foreign correspondent covering arms control negotiations does not face the problems of the reporter dealing with civil wars, Communist insurrections or military coups. There are no struggles getting the visa, avoiding the censors, or coping with physical dangers and bureaucratic harassments. Rather, he or she must anticipate a wall of silence at the negotiating site, and a plethora of leaks and attempts at news manipulation in the superpower capitals. It means taking a skeptical view of the official word from NATO headquarters, or from the Warsaw Pact when it provides any. It means digging behind the public rhetoric, while trying to avoid being buffaloes by diplomatic verbiage or scared off by baffling acronyms. Most importantly, it means writing these complex stories in a fashion that is intelligible to the ordinary reader, because that is the only way these esoteric subjects will be rescued from the military backrooms and strategic think-tanks and debated in public.

The Canadian government long ago opted out of developing nuclear weapons for the Canadian military arsenal, and therefore issues of nuclear strategy have not been a priority with the Canadian public or its press. The result has been, until very recently, that Canadian newspapers have tended to ignore serious analysis of the implications for Canada of changes in nuclear strategy. For example, the doctrine of flexible response, unveiled in the early seventies, drew little comment in Canada. Nor did Carter's 1980 Presidential Directive 59 which planned the targeting of the Soviet leadership in a limited nuclear war.

There was a little more coverage and concern expressed in the Canadian media over Reagan's Na-

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.

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2. *Royal Commission on Newspapers*, Canadian Government Publishing Centre, 1981.
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