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I have a concern

By Houstoun Waring

Americans like to talk about the weather or football or the stock market. You have to pin them down to discover what their major concerns are.

I keep asking some of the brighter men and women around the community this question: "What do you think about in the quiet hours of the night when you don't sleep? In other words, Whither Mankind?"

When asked point-blank, everyone reveals that he has something on his heart.

A woman gives me one word, "drugs." A professional man is seeking ways for teens to develop into well-rounded adults. Another man worries about the life-style that modern man has fallen into with its pressures, its worship of time, and the dehumanization of the individual.

AN EDUCATOR SHIES from the proposal to teach by tapes, by television, and through large classes. He would like to see more one-to-one relationships such as Mark Hopkins on one end of a log and the student on the other.

A mother, who is an ex-teacher, urges the return of discipline in the home and school, and a public official worries about the inability of society to assimilate racial groups.

One of my own five concerns is the conglomerates' control of American thought. I hope to see some private agency formed that will sound the alarm on mass media trends at the end of each year. It would publish a 900-word document called "The State of Mass Communications." Until such an agency appears, I plan to continue my annual report, as follows:

State of Mass Communications

CHAIN OWNERSHIP — New York used to have twenty newspapers under home ownership. It now has three newspapers, two of which are parts of chains. Even so, New York is the only city left in America with three dailies owned by three different corporations. Washington had three newspaper voices until 1972 when the Washington Star bought up its Scripps-Howard competition.

Denver, Washington, Chicago, and some other cities still have two competing daily newspapers, but 96 pct. of our cities don't. The percentage has dropped from 60 pct. in 1910 to 4 pct. today.

It is not healthy for a self-governing people to rely on one publisher for its daily news. The man may be conscientious and the wisest citizen of the community, but all men have limited vision. It is important to feed another viewpoint into the area.

PSYCHOLOGISTS HAVE found that the masses generally follow the leaders of the state or nation, or the bread-winners parrot the opinions of their bosses. And where do the civic leaders and the bosses get their information? From the daily press to a large extent. Such individual opinion-shapers should have access to diverse publications. Only 4 pct. of the cities supply rival newspapers.

Michigan, for example, is a state with 9 million people, but it has only one morning newspaper. In the past two years, chains have gobbled up the last big papers — leaving Michigan with only two independent newspapers with more than 20,000 circulation.

FOREIGNERS CAN'T own U.S. radio stations but they can control newspapers, although such ownership could be legally banned. Lord Thomson, the Canadian and British press magnate, owns dozens of papers in our country — ten in Ohio alone. What is to prevent a Hitler or a Thieu from doing the same? Chiang Kai-shek influenced the American press (with U.S. dollars supplied by Congress) during the 1950s and 1960s.

Prof. Robert L. Bishop of the University of Michigan School of Journalism reveals that newspaper combines are encouraged by our tax laws. Giant publishers use low capital gains taxes in these deals. A person who earns his big money may face a 70 pct. bracket. If he gets it through investment, he will pay much less. Hence, we see dailies owned by General Electric, General Tire and Rubber, and other conglomerates. They are bought and sold like a shoe factory with little regard for public service or



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the community where the newspapers are located. Tax loopholes, Bishop adds, work in favor of the large corporations.

The working American suffers in two ways by capital gains. He pays a higher income tax on his salary, and he is kept from reading competing newspapers because tax laws favor monopoly ownership by conglomerates.

Prof. Bishop advocates a Monopoly Commission to prevent New York industrialists from using what they call "freedom of the press" to kill the very thing the First Amendment seeks to shield.

BROADCASTING. If newspapers are directed by a conglomerate, can't Americans use broadcasting to learn about basic issues facing the world? No! For one thing, broadcasting must be regulated by the FCC because of the limited number of channels. As a result, broadcasters are fearful of editorializing on controversial questions of major concern. Secondly, broadcasting stations are often controlled by conglomerates. Denver, for instance, does not have a single commercial TV station owned by someone in Colorado. "Thought control," as Japan termed the situation before World War II, is on its way to becoming nearly complete.

The FCC can do more than it has done. Presidents should take as much care in appointing a man to the FCC as to the Supreme Court. For as the FCC commissioners think, so does America think. Clifford Durr, Newton Minow, and Nicholas Johnson demonstrated what can be done by courageous FCC commissioners.

WORKING JOURNALISTS. The ethics of American journalists are improving. More owners are avoiding conflicts of interest by disposing of stocks in corporations which they might need to criticize, and many are living modestly so as not to become the slave of the home-town corporate giants. Sports and financial editors have in the past taken money from outsiders, but this practice is waning. Radio disc jockeys still seem to be receiving payola for playing certain records to increase sales.

Venial journalists are not the problem today. The complexity of society is. No man can hope to learn all that the task of communicating requires. But all journalists can improve their performances. One way is to attend college again. Four universities — Harvard, Columbia, Northwestern, and Stanford — offer refresher courses to journalists who can leave their desks for a few weeks or months. By delving into biology, economics, political science, and international affairs, a journalist can help his readers or listeners better when he gets back on the job.

CABLE TELEVISION is a new member of the communications family. It is also falling to the conglomerates. Half of all cable subscribers are served by just 11 CATV companies. Six companies may soon dominate this new means of communication.

MAGAZINES of general circulation have failed because they lost advertising revenue to TV, and the new postage bills have put them in the red. Congress should quickly decide whether our countrymen can still secure information that cannot be obtained through most newspapers and broadcasting stations. It is important that the republic have an intelligent electorate, and this is not possible without some courageous mass magazines that cannot be intimidated by a local political party, industry, or religious group.

FOR 25 YEARS, leading Americans have sought funds to support a staff for a National Press Council which might attract the attention of literate citizens. Such a council must have a staff; it must have \$200,000 a year for investigations; and it must be directed by twelve of the best unpaid minds outside the journalism field.

Robert M. Hutchins outlined a plan in 1943-47; the American Association for Education in Journalism and the Twentieth Century Fund are inching toward some such press council; and noteworthy critics like Douglass Cater, Ben Bagdikian, and William Rivers have put their shoulders to the wheel.

But the American people still can't turn to a single source for annual guidance on their mass media.

Meanwhile, conglomerates are producing everything from books to bombers as part of the Military-Industrial Complex.