

Records, Banquet Foods, Coronet Industries, Cushman and Wakefield (one of the largest realtors in the United States), Random House (includes, in addition to its own imprint, Pantheon, Vintage, Alfred A. Knopf, Singer, and Modern Library), Hertz Rent-A-Car, and, not to be overlooked, the National Broadcasting Company.

The trend toward the centralized control of media, and consequently, the elimination of diverse sources of information, is considered by its benefactors to be the result of natural economic forces. When applied to the conglomerate control of domestic satellites, this development is supported by its owners in terms of improved communications and reduced consumer costs. But in the field which regulates the flow of information within society, economic standards alone are hardly adequate for determining public policy. The communications process extends well beyond economic boundaries; the information this process conveys shapes consumer tastes, molds the social and cultural environment, and directs political awareness.

More importantly, the institutions which operate the interrelated elements of the communications process (i.e., electronics manufacturers, program production companies, and interconnection firms) control what is essential to the citizen in a democracy, the right to be informed and alerted to any potential threat to his liberties. Where the control of this entire communications system is consolidated into those few but exclusive hands that are left unchecked to pursue their specialized interests, the public becomes the vulnerable party. Such is indicated by the failure of the media,\* particularly television, to inform the American people with respect to the social and political significance of the introduction of a domestic satellite system; nor has the citizenry been alerted to the varied misuses this technology might be put, including its use for such policing activities described earlier. The networks' direct involvement in the research and development of surveillance technologies, however, makes it unlikely that they would critically examine this important matter: RCA, which sold the United States Government more than \$250 million worth of military supplies in 1971, has perfected such surveillance equipment as the Three-Dimensional Surveillance Laser Technique for the United States Army; CBS has also engaged in similar efforts, including its development of the Laser Image Processing Scanners for the Air Force, as well as its Compass Link System of reconnaissance photography which has been adopted for domestic policing in numerous communities. Television's failure to report these major issues not only leaves in doubt the integrity and independence of this country's most revered medium of information, but more importantly, provides a clue to the limited interests which it serves.

## THE FCC?

No less disconcerting than the media's failure to alert the American people to the problems posed by the private control of domestic satellites is the way that the FCC has chosen to disregard its public responsibility. Throughout its satellite proceedings the Commission showed no concern for the effect its decisions would have upon the flow of information in this country, and chose to ignore entirely the question of how sat-

ellites might be used to erode essential public freedoms. The Commission's failure to deal with these issues is only compounded by the fact that more than \$20 billion of American taxpayers' money subsidized the development of this space technology, an investment now to be turned over to the aerospace and communications industries.

All along, the FCC has been the public's only means of representation. Its failure to represent the public in its satellite deliberations, which have been limited almost exclusively to arguments from applicants concerned about their share of a billion dollar enterprise, is reflective of the way powerful communications firms influence the Commission to accommodate private, at the expense of public, interests. One might consider the FCC's failure to regulate AT&T (which the Commission last year conceded that it has not regulated for decades) as symptomatic of its irresponsibility to the public; but its decision not to provide for some form of public control in the area of satellite communications represents a dereliction of duty, perhaps the grandest betrayal of the public interest in the history of American telecommunications.

**The Network Project does research in areas of telecommunication. This research is currently being made available through the project's publication of a series of six (bimonthly) *Notebooks*. The *Notebooks* are available by annual subscription (all past issues sent to late subscribers): \$10/individuals, \$25/institutions.**

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- No. 1: Domestic Communications Satellites**
- No. 2: Directory of the Networks**
- No. 3: Control of Information**
- No. 4: Office of Telecommunications Policy**
- No. 5: Cable Television**

***The Fourth Network*, a study of public television published in December 1971, is available for \$3.**

**Please make checks payable to: The Network Project Notebooks: The Network Project, 104 Earl Hall, Columbia University, New York, N.Y. 10027**

*\*An exception was made by Mr. John O'Connor of the New York Times who in his May 21, 1972 column noted the problems posed by the corporate ownership of domestic satellites.*