

PM: Synchronized News, Limited Views

By Polly Mann

They remind me of the little football figures lined up on the pinball machines--the individual companies that make up the corporate media--identical characters with synchronized movements. That's the way they're constructed. The lead article in the October issue of *Extra!*, the monthly magazine of Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, carried a list of the 20 corporations that dominate the media, including names of many unknown to me, plus such well-known names as Walt Disney, NBC, CBS, The New York Times, Yahoo, Time Warner, and Hearst. Back in 1983, journalism educator Ben Bagdikian listed 50 such corporations in his classic investigation of media consolidation, *The Media Monopoly*. As the number of these companies has decreased, the advertising revenues of the existing ones have increased.

In 1989 the total circulation of daily newspapers was 63 million and 14 chains distributed over half these papers. In 2009 five corporations dominated. In 1982 the radio industry was dominated by ten corporations. Fifteen years later, the radio industry is the most consolidated of all media with two companies--Clear Channel and Sirius--dominating. According to the Pew Research Center, TV is the primary news source for 66 percent of Americans. Three companies took in over half the broadcast TV advertising revenue for 2009--CBS, News Corp (Fox) and Walt Disney (ABC). With the addition of NBC, four companies receive 70 percent of all broadcast TV ad revenue. The internet is the latest news phenomenon, and most people choose from only one or two internet service providers. As early as 2003, political scientist Matthew Hindman of Arizona State University found that internet news had gained greater popularity than traditional media, with interest waning in local news providers (*New York Times*, June 6, 2003). But corporate media is also ubiquitous when the internet vehicles supply news, as does Yahoo.

When that media's first concern is to make a profit, it is questionable that the ethical, moral, or humane implications of an issue will receive adequate attention, or even any attention at all.

It is ignored or forgotten that U.S. Supreme Court Justice Black interpreted the First Amendment to the Constitution (freedom of religion, speech and the press, as well as the right to assemble and petition the government) in the case *Associated Press v. United States* in 1945, in the wake of World War II. He emphasized that "the widest possible dissemination of information from diverse and antagonistic sources is essential to the welfare of the public." However, diverse voices and opinions are being heard less and less today. Even as the country has become more accepting of diverse races, religions, and sexual preferences, the heads of all 20 news corporations are white males. This homogeneity is also prevalent in newsrooms and

viewpoints. Minorities make up less than 13 percent of newsroom employees, less than 4 percent of television station ownership, and less than 8 percent of radio station ownership in a nation revealed by the 2010 census to be 36 percent minority.



Photo credit: Julius Escordo

Eschewing corporate media that serves the agenda of the 1%, the Occupy movements are publishing their own newspapers.

Could there be a connection between the concentration of media and the public's growing dissatisfaction with it? A recent Gallup poll revealed that 57 percent of respondents "have little or no trust in the mass media to report the news fully, accurately, and fairly," and a recent Pew poll revealed that "negative opinions about the performance of news organizations now equal or surpass all-time highs on nine of twelve core measures." When Pew asked people about news organizations, 77 percent reported that they believe they "tend to favor one side." Even writer John Rash claimed, in a Star Tribune column of October 1, that "trust in the media is at a historic low."

The corporate-owned media, in general, reflects the corporate viewpoint, which, not incidentally, is the same as the White House viewpoint. Thus U.S. readers in search of any other views on foreign affairs have to work hard to seek out other sources, such as foreign news and websites and independent media. With so many lives and so much money (over half the budget) in the balance, why isn't there more outrage?

Polly Mann is a co-founder of Women Against Military Madness and a regular contributor and columnist for the WAMM newsletter. She serves on the WAMM Newsletter Committee.