

RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENT

*Walking on
Two Legs*

"Intermediate Energy Technology in China" by Vaclav Smil, in *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (Feb. 1977), 1020 E. 58th St., Chicago, Ill. 60637.

Specialists have increasingly questioned the usefulness of capital-intensive Western technology for developing nations. In China, an intermediate approach ("walking on two legs") has characterized the austere Chinese economy since the 1950s. While large mines, refineries, and power stations support the nation's heavy urban industry, the countryside now depends heavily on the production of fuel and electricity by small communal enterprises.

Haphazard experiments began during Mao's Great Leap Forward (1957-59), but only since the end of the turbulent Cultural Revolution (1969), says Smil, a geographer at the University of Manitoba, has systematic planning begun.

Three forms of energy have been adapted to decentralized production: coal, hydroelectricity, and "biogas." Official statistics show that almost one-third of China's coal now comes from small community mines, mostly south of the Yangtze River where the cost of northern coal is prohibitive. Almost all of China's 60,000 small dams and hydroelectric stations are in the same region.

Biogas is produced by fermentation of animal dung, night soil, vegetation, garbage, and waste water. Organic materials are broken down by acid-producing bacteria; the acids in turn yield methane, carbon dioxide, and traces of other gases. A typical 10-cubic-foot insulated "digester" can supply a farm family of five with enough fuel for cooking and lighting, as well as fertilizer for crops. Almost 3 million peasant families are producing biogas in Szechwan alone.

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*The Big
Get Bigger*

"Newspaper Mergers: The Final Phase" by Ben H. Bagdikian, in *Columbia Journalism Review* (Mar.-Apr. 1977), 601 Journalism Building, Columbia University, New York, N.Y. 10027.

In 1930, newspaper chains controlled 43 percent of America's daily newspaper circulation; in 1960, 46 percent. But today, notes Bagdikian, a veteran newspaper analyst, the chains control 71 percent of daily circulation. Most of the remaining independent dailies have circulations under 10,000—not very tempting to the potential investor.

In 1976, the top 25 newspaper chains alone accounted for more than half of all daily circulation, up from 38 percent in 1960. The largest

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chain, Gannett, began the year with 50 dailies and ended with 73; Thomson grew from 51 to 57. Now that most of the independent dailies have been acquired, the bigger chains have begun to buy up the smaller chains. Last year, the 30-paper Newhouse organization purchased the eight Booth papers for an estimated \$305 million, the largest newspaper deal in history.

Why this furious acquisition pace? Because virtually all (more than 97 percent) of the nation's 1,500 daily newspapers have no local competition. Investors are attracted by the stable, high annual profits (up to 25 percent of sales). But, particularly when controlled by large conglomerates, Bagdikian warns, the newspaper may become little more than just another manufactured product. Worse, objective reporting may become the casualty of conflicts of interest. The New York Times Company, for instance, recently was threatened with the loss of 260 pages of trade advertising in one of its properties, the journal *Modern Medicine*, after the appearance of articles on medical incompetence in another property, the daily *Times*. (The company sold *Modern Medicine* shortly thereafter.)

Bagdikian proposes two steps to insulate news operations from "business side" intervention. First, disclosure of newspapers' owners and their holdings should be required by the Postal Service. Second, as is the practice on several European newspapers, notably Paris's *Le Monde*, editorial staffs should be given the right to choose the editor in chief, to send a delegate to board meetings, and to participate in the budget process. Such staff autonomy runs counter to U.S. traditions, Bagdikian concludes, but it is preferable to control by "empire builders concerned with business in other places."

Making Reality Seem Worse

"TV Violence Profile No. 8: The Highlights" by George Gerbner, Larry Gross, Michael F. Eeley, Marilyn Jackson-Beeck, Suzanne Jeffries-Fox, and Nancy Signorelli, in *Journal of Communication* (Spring 1977), P.O. Box 13358, Philadelphia, Pa. 19101.

The Violence Index, measuring the prevalence, rate, and character of violent behavior on television, registered an unprecedented jump in 1976. All three networks increased their scores, with NBC still the highest, followed by ABC and CBS. The most dramatic increases occurred in the "family hour" (8-9 P.M. EST) and children's daytime programming, thereby boosting the cumulative index to the highest level since Gerbner and the Communications Research Team at Pennsylvania's Annenberg School of Communications first began keeping records in 1967.

The researchers' analysis, based on a broad sample of fall 1976 TV programming, shows that 9 out of 10 TV shows contained violence, up from 78 percent in 1975. "Frequency" also rose, from 8 to 9.5 violent