

The Media Monster and the Freedom of Speech

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Abstract

This article concerns the anti-media monopoly campaign currently ongoing in Taiwan. Want Want China Times group, the “Media Monster,” is a media conglomeration which consists in major newspapers, magazines, a free-to-air television channel, and a nationwide cable TV network. Its development consists in the acquisition of the China Times Group by the Want Want Corporation in 2009, the plea to merge with China Network Systems Co. in 2010, and the bid to buy Next Media Taiwan in 2012. In addition to the historical survey of the development of the media group, I will also enumerate some of the public reactions and major protests against the WWCT.

I will then argue that the power this group possesses has already become a violation to the freedom of speech. In order to show this, I will first explain the notion of the freedom of speech, and then invoke two main arguments defending the value of this freedom. The two main arguments are, accordingly, the instrumental argument given by John Stuart Mill in his *On Liberty*, and the argument for intrinsic value given by C. Edwin Baker developed in his “Scope of the First Amendment Freedom of Speech.” The aim is not to settle the debate concerning which justification is more fundamental. I invoke these arguments just to show the weight of the freedom of speech.

Once the importance of the freedom of speech is shown, I will then advance to the issue of “what counts as a freedom being protected.” It shall be argued that the traditional account of negative freedom, that which requires merely non-interference, is inadequate. In order for an individual to be deemed free, a republican interpretation is needed: non-domination. One can only be deemed free if one is not only not interfered with, but also enjoys robust or resilient non-interference. In this sense, the freedom of speech can only be realized when no party possesses the capacity to interfere with other’s speeches.

Understood as the republican interpretation, it is quite straightforward that the media monster does violate the freedom of speech. It has more than once occurred that those holding opposite opinions were persecuted. If the merging were complete, any

chance of those persecuted being defended would be eliminated. Therefore, it can only be concluded that the ongoing media monopoly in Taiwan requires regulation, and legislation prevention any future merging or purchases that may violate the freedom of speech is needed.