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The New Information and Communication Order: Deja Vu All Over Again?

IBPP Editor
bloomr@erau.edu

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Title: The New Information and Communication Order: Deja Vu All Over Again?

Author: Editor

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Abstract. This article endorses qualified support for a world seminar on international information activities proposed by a number of Third World countries. It also does not support a political psychology that equates a somewhat similar proposal made in 1976 with the present one.

In 1976, many so-called non-aligned countries attempted to effect a "New World Information Order" through the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Proposals included international and internationally authorized domestic controls over journalists and would significantly constrain the collection, analysis, production, and transmission of news. Supporters of these proposals railed at Western political and cultural hegemony, Western violations of Third World sovereignties, and baldly sought to impede the reporting of information potentially damaging to their own governmental, national, and autocratic images--there often being no de facto difference between the last three. However, the quest for a New Information Order was not successful and actually resulted in the United States and the United Kingdom leaving UNESCO.

Now in 1997 there has arisen what seems to be a similar information initiative. This time it's a "New World Information and Communication Order." Some Third World countries are advocating for a world seminar on international information Issues in 1998 or 1999 with the support of UNESCO. Is this old wine in a new bottle?

Certainly there are government leaders and ideological avatars who have exactly the same intent as in 1976--the leaders of Nigeria and Algeria especially. But there are significant differences in the agendas of other supporters and in the world as well. Huge gaps in information technologies--mitigating against a world in which everyone who wishes has access to information of interest. Also, the arguments from some supporters of press freedom seem suspect that it is not up to governments to decide what to do these gaps. After all, governments seek and support international and internationally authorized domestic policies for all sorts of activities--from the rules of war to quotas for catching fish. And no country allows total press freedom. Moreover, some of the main complaints from 1976 seem to have even more significant validity in 1997. Western countries' technological and other material resources do ensure domination of international news and ineluctably affect what is considered news. This domination sets an agenda with profound cultural, political, and--ultimately--security implications. There is biased reporting of Third World events--sometimes based on ideological blinders, venal instincts, and the seeking of political and economic power, more often based on misperceptions and misinterpretations of the contexts in which these events occur. As well, UNESCO and its current director general, Federico Mayor of Spain, seem to be more supportive of press freedoms. For example, Gao Yu, a journalist and political prisoner of the People's Republic of China (PRC), has been awarded the first UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom prize in the face of intensive pressure from the PRC.

A world seminar on a New Information and Communication Order also could consider the brave new worlds of information warfare and international commercial activities on the world wide web. As well the seminar could address other international implications of the ancient dictum that "knowledge is power"--a dictum that is becoming ever more characteristic of an era of globalization. One topic might

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even be the psychological factors affecting social perception--so important in political judgment and behavior. The correct stance for countries sincerely espousing significant press freedoms is not to stonewall an international meeting or defuse the energy for it. It is to ensure that legitimate grievances are resolved. (See Crossette, B. (May 4, 1997.) A media panel that the media shy from. The New York Times, p. 10Y; Crossette, B. (May 5, 1997.) UNESCO award to imprisoned Chinese journalist angers Beijing. The New York Times. <http://www.nytimes.com>; Hirt, E.R., McDonald, H.E., & Erickson, G.A. (1995.) How do I remember thee? The role of encoding set and delay in reconstructive memory processes. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 31, 379-409; van den Bos, K., Vermunt, R., & Wilke, H. A. M. (1997.) Procedural and distributive justice: What is fair depends more on what comes first than on what comes next. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 72, 95-104.) (Keywords: Information Warfare, Perception Management, Propaganda.)