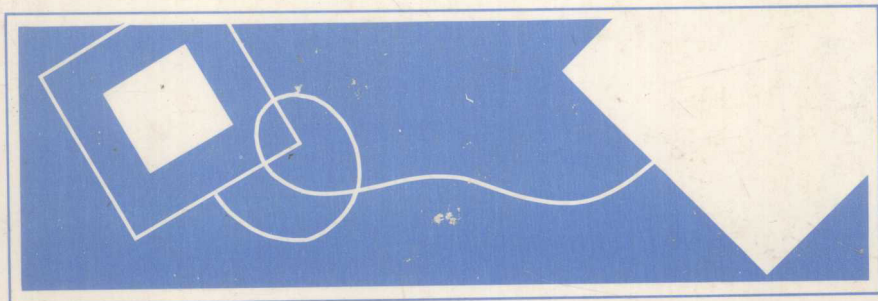


ELECTRONIC COLONIALISM

*The Future of International
Broadcasting and
Communication*

THOMAS L. McPHAIL

Foreword by Everett M. Rogers



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FOREWORD

Here is a book about the New World Information Order (NWIO), a topic that most North American professors and students of mass communication may only begin to understand. Western media generally have given scant attention to this international debate, and our public is poorly informed about the rise of power by less-developed countries in United Nations agencies like UNESCO. Needed is an objective, detailed account of this process by which the politics of international communication shifted away from the United States and Western Europe.

The basic issue here is freedom of the press versus government control of the media. Everyone agrees that following the former principle in the past has not led to a very perfect system of international communication. Our news from developing countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia concentrates on disasters and coups, hardly a balanced account. Developing nations' broadcasting systems carry a diet of "Kojak" and "I Love Lucy," content that distorts the image of the West. The magnificent potential of the mass media for fostering socioeconomic development is largely wasted. What the Third World tried to do about these problems of international communication through the NWIO debate, and how the United States and other Western governments reacted, is the story of this book.

Tom McPhail gives us an insider's account of the NWIO debate of the 1970s and early 1980s, balanced by his per-

spective as a communication scientist. He demonstrates an unusual ability to sift through the mass of materials about this topic, much of it written in what he calls "UNESCOese," and to distill a highly readable account. Much of Professor McPhail's background material and personal respondents are colored by their extreme positions on the debate. But in my opinion, the present book is both balanced and readable. In fact, this is the best account of the NWIO debate that I have seen.

Everett M. Rogers
Stanford University

PREFACE

Students and professionals are facing a rapidly changing environment in international broadcasting and telecommunications. The label of the New World Information Order (NWIO) has become synonymous with much of the concern and rhetoric between Western industrialized nations and Third World countries covering disparate pasts and conflicting philosophies about the proper role of media systems in domestic and international affairs.

This book accounts for the impetus toward an NWIO. With the rise of nationalism in emerging Third World nation-states during the late 1950s and 1960s, a parallel concern for control of their economies and culture was established. This concern presented itself in many ways, but crystallized on two major considerations. One was the flow and accuracy of media messages entering or leaving such countries (with the major wire services—Associated Press, United Press International, Agence-France Presse, and Reuter's—being central to this concern); and the other concern was with the fear of future broadcasting technologies, particularly direct broadcast satellites (DBS).

Many personalities, events, meetings, and countries are involved in the international media story. But when all is said and done about the international information environment of the 1980s, it will most likely be that UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) will have been the most prominent institution. A strong

supporting role will have been played by the MacBride International Commission for Study of Communication Problems.

The following is an overview of the major events which surprisingly have gone largely unnoticed by many Western countries and students of communication, sociology, political science, and journalism. Yet, the ability to collect and disseminate information about foreign countries, especially those in the Third World, may well rest on the outcome of this international debate.

The stakes are high for Western nations with democratically elected governments. When one realizes that currently 1 out of every 20 jobs in North America is connected with exports to the developing world, then understanding these nations becomes critical. In addition, Western foreign policy initiatives are based largely upon their acceptance by the general public. Yet, in turn, the public's image of societies beyond their immediate surroundings is based upon what the mass media present. If less developed countries (LDC's) begin to exclude, censor, or limit the media agencies of the West, then it will be increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to build public opinion to support substantial foreign policy initiatives by the West.

With a world population growth rate of one million people every five days, adequate and accurate coverage of LDC's is more imperative now than ever. Some say that the NWIO will result in less rather than more coverage of LDC's in the 1980s—the exact opposite of what is needed.

For example, the Camp David accord could not have occurred without the media. Nor would the American public have accepted the considerable financial and political burden involved if it were not for the realization, through extensive press coverage, of the need for strong and direct foreign policy initiatives affecting nations thousands of miles away from U.S. shores.

Will a "Camp David" type summit be a policy option for Western leaders to solve foreign problems in Asia, Africa, or

Latin America in the future? Clearly it may be possible if their constituencies are aware of the underlying problems, disparities, or even bloodshed in countries far removed from their day-to-day concerns. Today the impact of foreign affairs is as close as the corner gas station.

Finally, a Canadian perspective is unique and most applicable to the NWIO. With the introduction of radio at the beginning of the 20th century to current concerns over transnational data flows affecting its sovereignty in the Information Age, Canada has tried to protect and support its domestic cultural industries. The protection is from U.S. cultural domination for the most part. Yet, at the same time, as Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau asserts, Canada is like a mouse sleeping beside an elephant. The United States' proximity brings competition, a high standard of living, and a continental culture that is now being exported far beyond North America. That is why Canadian students of communication and culture understand the Third World's concerns; they have been there. The history of Canadian broadcasting has been a story of countering U.S. radio, television, film, and magazine influence; the writings of Canadians like Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan are based on the crucial relationship of culture and communication.

"Information is the oil of the 1980's" was an expression that I heard frequently while at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris during 1978. Attending the 20th General Assembly of UNESCO during October and November of 1978 in Paris enabled me to acquire insights and materials concerning the various positions being taken about foreign media coverage and the NWIO. I was able to interview many reporters, delegates to the UNESCO General Assembly, and senior staff members of the large UNESCO bureaucracy.

Particularly useful, related books are Rosemary Righter's *Whose News?*, Anthony Smith's *The Geopolitics Of Information*, and Mort Rosenblum's *Coups and Earthquakes*.

Thanks go to the many people both here and abroad who assisted with the gathering and criticisms of the material.

Finally, special thanks go to Wilfred Kesterton for his excellent comments on earlier drafts and to Jeffrey Mahoney who provided research materials.

Financial assistance from Carleton University permitted the author to both travel in Europe and collect materials that would have otherwise been impossible to obtain. The Canadian Commission for UNESCO and Ms. Betty Zimmerman of The MacBride Commission were most cooperative. Of course, all materials, interpretations, and limitations are the sole responsibility of the author.

Chapter 1

THE NEW WORLD INFORMATION ORDER

Lord Cooper, publisher, to William Boot, foreign correspondent:

With regard to policy, I expect you already have your own views. I never hamper my correspondents in any way. What the British Public wants first, last, and all the time is News. Remember that the Patriots are in the right and are going to win quickly. *The Beast* stands by them four-square. But they must win quickly. The British public has no interest in a war which drags on indecisively. A few sharp victories, some conspicuous acts of personal bravery on the Patriot side and a colourful entry into the capital. That is *The Beast* policy for the war.

Scoop by Evelyn Waugh

Introduction

International communication is undergoing a major reexamination and analysis. The outcome of this wide-ranging

investigation may substantially alter the nature and flow of all types of international information in the future.

This book outlines the major institutions, individuals, conferences, and issues that are altering the international information, telecommunication, and broadcasting order. This includes all types of mass media activities—wire services, daily newspapers, satellites, journalists, film, radio, television, and advertising. Traditional assumptions about media flows are being challenged and altered. What follows is a descriptive and analytical portrayal of how certain events, some very recent, are affecting the information environment of the future.

UNESCO, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), the New International Economic Order (NIEO), the concept of development journalism, the origins of a “free press” in Western societies, the International Program for the Development of Communication, and emerging new communication technologies are but some of the interrelated issues that are evolving in such a way as to cause concern to some and hope to others. Much depends on the perspective one takes. In the final analysis, the New World Information Order (NWIO) may produce significant problems in the collection and dissemination of international news since the underlying philosophical stances of the major parties are totally incompatible.

The NWIO is an evolutionary process seeking a more just and equitable balance in the flow and content of information, a right to national self-determination of domestic communication policies, and, finally, at the international level, a two-way information flow reflecting more accurately the aspirations and activities of the less developed countries (LDC's).¹

The NWIO seeks a restructured system of media and telecommunication priorities in order for them to obtain greater influence over their information, economic, and political systems. To the LDC's the current world communication system is an outgrowth of prior colonial patterns reflecting

commercial imperatives of former times. Now the LDC's want to remove the last vestige of colonial control by promoting the NWIO. But

Western governments and news organizations vigorously oppose the plan, fearing it will bring increased interference with freedom of the press. But in October [1980], officials of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, where the third world enjoys large voting majorities, were authorized to draw up concrete proposals. Outvoted Western delegates, while remaining critical, agreed that further study should proceed on the form a new order would take [New York Times, 1981: E3].

In seeking to attain movement toward an NWIO, critics from LDC's have postulated potential mechanisms that clash with strongly held journalistic traditions in the West. The call for government responsibility and control of the media—limiting reporters' access to foreign events, journalistic codes, licensing of reporters, and taxation of the radio spectrum—are moves which the West adhors. (More details on Western press traditions are presented in Chapter 2.) Even the call for a balanced flow, which was approved by UNESCO in 1978, is disliked by many who claim that it interferes with the free market mechanisms and that only an open and free flow of information is consistent with the goals of a truly free press.

Many LDC critics attack the Western press as if it were a monolithic, rational system. They fail to realize that what eventually winds up in Western newspapers or on radio or television is determined by a complex, and not entirely consistent, process of decision making. Rosenblum puts it this way:

Correspondents play an important part in selection by determining what to cover in the first place. But most of the process is in the hands of editors at different stages. These are the gatekeepers. Each medium and each type of correspondent operates in a different fashion, but the principle is the same. A correspondent's dispatch first goes to one gatekeeper and then what emerges—if

anything—goes on to others. All along the way, the original dispatch may be shortened, lengthened, rewritten or thrown away entirely. This series of editors determines what is to be eventually shared with the public; and they decide what the American people may never know [1979: 7-8].

This is an important point. What people in Western societies currently learn about LDC's is meager and the result of several gatekeepers. With the NWIO, the Western press fears that this situation will become even worse. Licensing of foreign correspondents, as discussed by UNESCO in February 1981, or by any agency is seen as the first of many steps which will collectively result in both fewer reporters being acceptable to LDC's and only favorable, pro government news stories being permitted out of many LDC's. The NWIO, which is just evolving as a significant aspect of world communication, has the potential for substantially altering the front pages or national newscasts for American and European citizens alike. The problem is, and this is what the book details, that the coverage of LDC's in the future is going to change but no one knows whether it is going to improve in accuracy, quantity, and quality or whether it will be restricted, biased, or heavily censored. That is why awareness of the NWIO is central to understanding world communication.

What makes this successive diminution of information ironic is that both technically and theoretically there is more international information available today than ever before. Satellites, portable teletype terminals, videotext, video-discs, minicomputers, high frequency radio, and direct long-distance dialing have collectively replaced slow and cumbersome dispatches of the past.

But practically the story is quite different. The average mass circulation newspaper in the West now carries less and less international news. There are several contributing factors. The major ones are simply high costs, roughly \$100,000 to place and equip a single foreign correspondent abroad for a year. This has led to a net reduction of reporters that wire services, networks, or individual papers are willing to place