

# A new world information order?

by Thomas L. McPhail

In recent years, the role of UNESCO and the concept of the New World Information Order (NWIO) have received increasing attention in the Western press. Much of that attention has been negative. The MacBride International Commission Report is the major document to date on the NWIO, but the Commission's successor, the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) is already attracting more heat than light. Even the press-sponsored National News Council, which is based in New York, has lamented the biased and myopic coverage of the NWIO by U.S. newspapers and the wire service.

An interesting aspect of both NWIO and the IPDC is that their aims of promoting greater domestic control over broadcasting and telecommunications systems reflect a concern well-known to Canadians. Our experience with Royal Commissions on broadcasting, Canadian content rules, income tax rulings, and calls for greater social responsibility of newspapers, demonstrated by the Davey and, more recently, by the Kent Royal Commission on newspapers, make aspects of the international media and press debate familiar to Canadians. Yet the Canadian media, particularly the print media, are for the most part parroting the antagonistic U.S. stand against the NWIO, MacBride and the IPDC.

## U.S. hostility

Historically, the U.S. situation concerning communication has been complicated. Americans are not familiar with much government in their broadcasting, telecommunication or press undertakings. Yet they and their multinational communications industries have a far greater interest in the outcome of the NWIO debate than most other nations in the world. Any expansion of communications in the Third World will bring business to those companies. This is what makes the rigid and antagonistic U.S. stand difficult to comprehend. In the U.S. there is only private ownership of radio, T.V. and even satellite corporations. Their nationally funded network, the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) came about only in the mid-60s and we may see its demise under the current U.S. Administration in the

1980s. The end result of this long tradition is that Americans, particularly press owners, are extremely upset, if not paranoid, when it comes to the NWIO. U.S. controlled organizations like the Inter-American Press Association and the World Press Freedom Committee, which also have prominent Canadian members, spread alarms about NWIO and the IPDC.

Consider the IPDC, which is the new international program governed by a 35-member administrative council of which Canada is a member. It is designed to provide financial and technical assistance for regional communication projects in the Third World. In fact the IPDC was created as a result of U.S. initiatives and resolutions in UNESCO, but now the IPDC is confronted with a hostile U.S. attitude. Of its current \$6 million budget, the U.S. has contributed only \$100,000 and even that was in the form of "tied aid." For example, some of the U.S. contribution will be spent to bring Third World journalists to American universities or press seminars for the major purpose of warning them about the dangers of NWIO. Other parts of the U.S. fund will be used to pay U.S. media owners for obsolete equipment that will be dumped in the Third World. Not exactly a pleasant picture. In fact, this type of activity further alienates Third World leaders and increases their commitment and resolve to restructure world information for the benefit of Third World nations.

## Worthy projects

By contrast, Canada donated \$250,000, two-and-a-half times the U.S. sum, and placed it in a special account for use by IPDC as their governing council sees fit. Most of it will probably go to providing Africa with a continental news service. Even today approximately 20 of the 50 African nations have no domestic news services at all. This practical aid — of setting up national wire services — is indicative of the projects that the IPDC is pursuing. Despite the vehement attacks carried out about UNESCO and its NWIO activities by many North American newspapers, the IPDC deserves a chance to demonstrate its assistance to Third World communication projects.

To date, the IPDC has received several proposals from Third World nations for aid in the development of communications systems. For example, from Latin America there are requests for training programs and the development of a news feature service. From the Arab states there are requests for feasibility studies dealing with satellite systems as well as for a centre for training of broadcasters. From Africa there are requests for both national and re-

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*Thomas McPhail is Director of the Master of Communications Studies Programme at The University of Calgary, Alberta. He was formerly in the Department of Journalism at Carleton University in Ottawa, and is the author of the recent book **Electronic Colonialism: The Future of International Broadcasting and Communication.***