

UNESCO and the press

by William Heine

*In the May/June issue of **International Perspectives**, Thomas L. McPhail strongly endorsed the financial support of the Canadian government for UNESCO's New World Information and Communication Order, to be administered through a third world news agency, also a UNESCO organization, the International Program for the Development of Communication. The Editor-in-Chief of **The London Free Press**, William Heine, has strong contrary views. He is on the executive boards of both International Press Institute, an organization of free world journalists based in London, England, and World Press Freedom Committee, a comparable organization of free world journalism organizations, based in Washington. This article is based on an article which appeared in **The London Free Press**.*

There is only one effective way left to prevent the world's dictatorships from putting a United Nations stamp of approval on controlling the free flow of information around the globe. That's to cut off free world funding. The UN is involved through the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). UNESCO is determined to introduce a New World Information and Communications Order (NWICO). To complete the mishmash of initials, NWICO is now trying to establish the International Program for the Development of Communication.

The need to prevent knowing

UNESCO, NWICO and IPDC. Those initials have been bandied about for a decade, as Communist and Third World nations made determined, even desperate, efforts to control, directly if possible, indirectly if not, the most precious commodity in our complex world, information.

The pattern is clear and evident at every turn. Argentina tries to prevent the rest of the world knowing about the thousands of its people who have disappeared under right-wing military dictatorships. Russia doesn't want news of its psychiatric prisons circulating in the Third World or anywhere else. South Africa tries to prevent knowledge of the plight of its black majority from reaching anyone else. Iraq is desperately anxious that no one knows an entire village was wiped out because an assassination attempt was made there on President Saddam Hassan. Libya carries on a war in Chad about which little is known anywhere.

Attempts to control information and its sources aren't

restricted to dictatorships. Elected governments try to do it all the time; in Ottawa it is epidemic. The difference is that in the free world newspapers, radio, television, magazines, books, letters and word-of-mouth pass information around rather quickly. Citizens who talk or write letters, and media which print and broadcast what they learn, don't end up in jail or dead.

In only about 30 of the 158 nations which occupy chairs at UNESCO sessions are people free to say and write what they think about their governments. Journalists from those 30-odd free nations have an undoubted tilt toward free expression. That is inherent in the Western news agencies (Associated Press, Reuters and the like) which dominate almost totally the information networks of the world.

Communist and Third World nations, understandably, resent that domination, particularly as their concept of information and of freedom is so far removed from free world concepts. Basically, the rulers of the majority of nations in UNESCO believe that journalists should be licensed, that they should write only what best serves society as that is defined by their governments, that plural views cannot be tolerated — basically that governments, not people, know best.

At the fourth extraordinary session of UNESCO in Paris last fall, the tone of preliminary agenda for the organization's five-year plan were relatively muted on media control compared to previous drafts. There's a reason. UNESCO's bureaucrats are fully aware of a US congressional move called the Beard amendment, which warns that US funding would end if UNESCO took steps to control news media. As the US pays about a quarter of all UNESCO costs, and the jobs of a vast array of international civil servants would be at risk, UNESCO wisely decided to mute its language.

The press as policy tool

The basic intent is still there, however. Leonard Sussman, of the International Communication Center for Strategic and International Studies at Washington's Georgetown University, sees no change in the "decade-old commitment of UNESCO to 'use' news and information media as wheelhorses of governmental and intergovernmental policy making." *The Economist* reported a typical example; during the UNESCO conference Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, UNESCO Director-General, protested to the French news agency over coverage of a row between M'Bow and the chief Swiss delegate on human rights. M'Bow didn't say the agency was inaccurate. He objected