THE GLOBAL STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRATIC COMMUNICATION

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May 1996
for summer issue of Monthly Review

Since the first systems of mass media and telecommunications emerged, their control and structure have been political issues. It has been well understood that the control over the means of communication is an integral aspect of political and economic power. Perhaps the most striking feature of our current age is the increase in prominence -- for economics, politics, and culture -- of technologically advanced systems of communication and information, that are often global in scope. Moreover, the global communication system is in the midst of a dramatic transformation that is reorganizing industries and revamping modes of regulation.

Yet precisely at the historic moment that the social implications of communication are at their greatest, the subject of how communication systems are controlled and organized and for what purposes is effectively being removed from the range of legitimate political debate, as communication is turned over to the market for profitable exploitation.

I argue that it is mandatory for progressives, democrats and socialists across the world to resist this trend and to organize around media and communication issues. If we fail to do so, substantive progressive social change will be vastly more difficult to achieve. In this article, when discussing national experiences, I will tend to concentrate upon the United States, because that is the nation with which I am most familiar. In addition, the United States is particularly important for all global communication scholars and activists, as it is there that the model for global commercial communication was developed. To make my argument I will first review the key trends in global communication and the nature of contemporary communication policymaking.

The Communication Revolution

Two trends mark the communication revolution. First, there has been a rapid corporate concentration within media industries, along with a strong drive toward globalization. Although film, books and recorded music have been global industries dominated by a handful of corporations for much of the century, media markets otherwise have been primarily national in scope. A global oligopolistic market that covers the spectrum of media is now crystallizing with very high barriers to entry. National markets remain and they remain

indispensable for understanding any particular national situation, but they are becoming secondary in importance. Today there are five global vertically integrated media companies: News Corp., Disney, Time Warner, Viacom and TCI. There are several other media firms with global ambitions on the periphery including General Electric (owner of NBC), Westinghouse (owner of CBS), Sony, Seagrams (owner of MCA), and a few European giants led by Philips (owners of Polygram) and Bertelsmann AG. These firms tend to make films, books, recorded music, and television programs and own newspapers, magazines, radio stations, cable companies, and television networks. They often are connected to electronics firms and have widespread holdings in sports, amusement parks, retail outlets and leisure enterprises. A firm like Time Warner now earns 25 percent of its revenues outside of the United States. By 2000 that figure is expected to reach 40 percent and it is likely that within a decade all the global media firms will earn a majority of their income outside of their home country. The eventual mature global media market should be dominated by five to eight firms with another one or two dozen quite large firms filling regional or niche markets and having working arrangements with one or more of the giants.

Considerable fuel for the growth of global commercial media will be provided by the large increase in global advertising, much of which results from transnational firms' expanding marketing plans. Global advertising is dominated by the 200 or so largest corporations and is conducted by a handful of global advertising agencies based in New York, London, Paris and Tokyo. In constant dollars annual global advertising expenditures have risen by 30 percent in the past decade, and forecasts call for it to increase at rates in excess of economic growth through the year 2000 and beyond. One industry analyst predicts global advertising will increase from the 1995 total of $335 billion to $2 trillion in 2020. The North American share of global advertising has fallen from 60 percent in 1970 to 47 percent in 1995. Although U.S. advertising will continue to increase apace U.S. GDP growth, the North American portion of global advertising is projected to continue to decline. The greatest increases will be in Europe and east Asia. Global media firms are inexorably linked to transnational consumer capitalism and often work closely with major marketers in devising programming.

In addition, the present and future growth is stimulated by the widespread commercialization, deregulation, and privatization of domestic television systems. Until the 1980s most nations held these as nonprofit entities which limited the capacity for a global media market to emerge. The current explosion in satellite digital television provides the basis for inexpensive global commercial broadcasting, and it will probably become a

monopoly or duopoly in most parts of the world, based upon recent experience. This will not be a global market where everyone in the world will consume identical media products; it will be more sophisticated than that. But if the media products are differentiated by region, they nevertheless will be linked to global media concerns and determined by profitability. In short, the present course is one where much of the world's entertainment and journalism will be provided by a handful of enormous firms, each with distinct, invariably pro-profit and pro-global market, political positions on the central social issues of our times. The implications for political democracy, by any rudimentary standard, are troubling.The second key trend is the development of digital communication and related technological breakthroughs such as wireless satellite communication that make communication much less expensive and more accessible. On one hand, digitalization encourages global concentration as worldwide transmission is nearly instantaneous and cost efficient. Moreover, as all forms of communication turn to digital format, media products become easily transferable between media. This makes it even easier for vertically integrated conglomerates to maximize revenues from their properties, thereby penalizing smaller firms unable to do the same. On the other hand, digital communication can undermine the ability of communication to be controlled in a traditionally hierarchal manner, as it holds to potential of making it easy to produce and distribute high quality material. The most dramatic development along these lines has been the Internet. When one merely considers the social potential of these new technologies, and not the political economic context in which they are being developed, the prospects are breathtaking.

Digital communication also provides the basis for an eventual convergence of the media, telecommunication (meaning telephony primarily) and computer industries. As all communication and information, including data and voice communication, shift to digital format, there is no reason why telephone companies cannot eventually provide television programming over their wires and why cable companies cannot handle telephone traffic over theirs. At some point televisions can become personal computers and vice versa. Computer firms will provide the software necessary to make digital communication accessible and profitable. In particular, to the extent that the Internet is going to become a full blown global digital highway -- providing audio, video, text, and telephony -- there are the grounds for a clear battle between the top firms in each of these sectors to dominate it. There are short and medium term technological and regulatory problems that will limit the ability of these three industries to fully converge, and full convergence may never occur. But a high degree of convergence, at least in the form of joint ventures if not

in mergers and acquisitions, appears on the horizon.This has two very important consequences. First, by combining the media, telecommunications and computer industries we are confronted with the largest and possibly fastest growing sector in the global economy. Based on market capitalization, three of the four largest firms and 13 of the largest 50 firms in the world fall in this sector. In the 1970s most of the world's telecommunication systems were nonprofit and state-owned monopolies. Today they are being privatized in perhaps the largest termination of public property in the history of capitalism. Most of the new for-profit telecommunication companies will be partially owned or formally affiliated with one of the three or four emerging global telecommunication networks. Since 1984 telecom privatizations have generated over $105 billion. Wall Street broking houses Merrill Lynch and Salomon expect that 20 percent of their future investment banking revenues will come from worldwide telecom deals. In other words, communication is at the heart of global capitalism, making the job of progressive media and communication activists that much more difficult and that much more important.The second consequence of convergence is to create an air of uncertainty about the future of the media, telecommunication and computer industries. If the Internet or some computer network like it comes to eventually dominate, what happens to traditional media and telephone companies? Some technological determinists have taken the Internet to mean the end of corporate for-profit communication, because people will be able to bypass the corporate sector and communicate globally with each other directly. Although the Internet clearly has opened up important space for progressive and democratic communication, the notion that the Internet will permit humanity to leapfrog over capitalism and corporate communication seems dubious unless public policy forcefully restricts the present capitalist colonization of cyberspace. In the past year capital has shown its teeth as it has salivated over the commercial potential of the Internet. One of the Internet's earliest proponents now concedes that the Internet is shifting "from being a participatory medium that serves the interest of the public to being a broadcast medium where corporations deliver consumer-oriented information. Interactivity would be reduced to little more than sales transactions and email." IBM's executive in charge of global computing networks predicts that by the year 2000 the Internet will become "the world's largest, deepest, fastest and most secure marketplace," and account for $1 trillion in commercial transactions. "The Internet will evolve along a similar path as broadcasting," a leading Wall Street analyst stated, informing investment managers that "by the end of the decade, four private data broadcasters will emerge that will bundle and package branded content on a global basis to a broad array of personal computers."

If this scenario is accurate, then the battle is between the 5-8 media giants and the handful of enormous telecommunication and computer firms to see that they are connected to one of the winners of the battle for the Internet. These firms and industries do not know how important the Internet will be for reconfiguring the media and telecommunication industries or just how radically different the communication landscape will appear in 10 or 20 years. But they do know we are in the midst of a technological sea change and they are doing everything in their immense powers to capitalize upon it and reduce the risk that they may be cut out of the action. In all likelihood each of the major media firms eventually will link up with one or more of the global telecommunication networks. Therefore, the global media oligopoly will transform into a global communication and information oligopoly. In view of all the joint ventures it sometimes has the appearance of a cartel.Lack of Public DebateGiven the magnitude of the communication revolution and all the hype about its importance as the marker of our new age, it is remarkable how little it figures in public debate. Fundamental decisions are being made, but even when they involve governments they tend to be made in semi-secrecy by private interests.

Historically the rise of crucial new communication technologies like broadcasting has generated national public debates over now best to deploy these resources. It was as a result of these debates that public systems of broadcasting were established to serve publicly determined goals, not to generate profit. These debates often took place among society's elites, but there has been periodic popular intervention. As a rule of thumb, if certain forces thoroughly dominate a society's political economy they will thoroughly dominate its communication system, and the fundamental questions of how the communication system should be organized and for what purposes are not even subject to debate. So it is and so it has been with the Communist Party in various "people's republics," and, for the most part, with big business interests in the United States. By this yardstick, the decline of debate and of public broadcasting and telecommunication systems across the world reflects the increase in the power of capital and a withering of the political culture. Labor and left forces that have traditionally led or at least supported the struggles for public service broadcasting and publicly owned telecommunication systems are far weaker today. There are still national policy debates, and in some nations considerable concern over protecting domestic cultural products from imports, but the balance of power has shifted to the global market.

Moreover, with the rise of global media systems and a global media and communication market, one might logically

expect that communication policymaking might enter global policymaking deliberations. In fact, the trend has been in the opposite situation. In the 1970s Third World nations used UNESCO as a forum to champion a drive for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), that would attempt to address the global commercialization of communication as well as the extraordinary and growing imbalance in communication resources between the rich and poor nations. The United States, urged on by powerful media interests, attacked UNESCO for even broaching the NWICO and withdrew from the organization. Since then UNESCO has formally backed down and made clear its desire not to tamper with the global media market in any substantive manner. Most poor countries have been pressured by the IMF and global capital markets to reject state or public involvement with media and communication, and to privatize their media and telecommunication systems. This is seen as indispensable to the integration of nations into the global market political economy. The public broadcasting systems in the rich countries have been advised to alter their mandates to conform to the global market and to become commercially viable. With the increasing significance of the global communication market for capital accumulation, the main global arena for the consideration of communication issues is now the World Trade Organization. The WTO battles to protect corporate intellectual property copyright in emerging economies and it has established the complete privatization and liberalization of global telecommunication as among its foremost goals for the 1990s.

The impetus for the global commercial media and communication market comes primarily, though by no means exclusively, from the United States. A majority of the global media giants are U.S. based firms, and the remainder all do significant business in the U.S. market. U.S communication laws and regulations go a long way toward setting standards for the global market. In the current era the United States provides the historical model of market-driven media and communication that all other nations are advised to emulate. The market is presented as the truly democratic regulatory mechanism because it "gives the people what they want," whereas any other approach requires bureaucrats to interfere with people's genuine market expressed desires. It is in the United States, too, that the decline of public debate over communication is the most developed. Media and communication activists worldwide must come to terms with the U.S. experience and the claims of market perfection in order to comprehend the global situation.

The U.S. ExperienceIt might surprise most people to know that a love for commercial media is not genetically encoded into persons born in the United States. It is an acquired taste. When radio broadcasting emerged in the 1920s few

thought it had any commercial potential. Many of broadcasting's pioneers were non-profit organizations interested in public service. It was only in the late 1920s that capitalists began to sense that through network operation and commercial advertising, radio broadcasting could generate substantial profits. Through their immense power in Washington D.C., these commercial broadcasters were able to dominate the Federal Radio Commission such that the scarce number of air channels were effectively turned over to them with no public and little congressional deliberation on the matter.

It was in the aftermath of this commercialization of the airwaves that elements of U.S. society coalesced into a broadcast reform movement that attempted to establish a dominant role for the nonprofit and noncommercial sector in U.S. broadcasting. These opponents of commercialism came from education, religion, labor, civic organizations, women's groups, journalism, farmer's groups, civil libertarians, and intellectuals. The reformers attempted to tap into the intense public dislike for radio commercialism in the years before 1934 when Congress annually considered legislation for the permanent regulation of radio broadcasting. These reformers were explicitly and nonnegotiably radical; they argued that if private interests controlled the medium and their goal was profit, no amount of regulation or self-regulation could overcome the bias built into the system. Commercial broadcasting, the reformers argued, would downplay controversial, pro-working class and provocative public affairs programming and emphasize whatever fare would sell the most products for advertisers.

The reform movement disintegrated after the passage of the Communications Act of 1934, which established the FCC. The 1930s reformers did not lose to the commercial interests, however, in any fair debate on a level playing field. The radio lobby dominated because it was able to keep most Americans ignorant or confused about the communication policy matters then under discussion in Congress through their control of key elements of the news media and their sophisticated public relations aimed at the remainder of the press and the public. In addition, the commercial broadcasters became a force that few politicians wished to antagonize; almost all of the congressional leaders of broadcast reform in 1931-32 were defeated in their re-election attempts, a fate not lost on those who entered the next Congress. With the defeat of the reformers, the industry claims that commercial broadcasting was inherently democratic and American went without challenge and became internalized in the political culture.

Thereafter the only legitimate manner to criticize U.S. broadcasting was to assert that it was uncompetitive or

"excessively" commercial, and therefore needed moderate regulation to protect the public interest while not damaging the commercial viability of the industry. The basis for the "liberal" claim for regulation was that the scarce number of channels necessitated regulation, not that the capitalist basis of the industry was fundamentally flawed. This was a far cry from the criticism of the 1930s broadcast reformers, who argued that the problem was not simply one of lack of competition in the marketplace, as much as it was the rule of the marketplace per se. It also means that with the vast expansion in the number of channels in the current communication revolution, the scarcity argument has lost its power and liberals are at a loss to withstand the deregulatory juggernaut.

This constricted range of policy debate was the context for the development of subsequent communication technologies including facsimile, FM radio, and television in the 1940s. That the communication corporations had first claim to these technologies was unchallenged, even to public service minded New Dealers. In comparison to the public debate over radio in the 1930s, there was almost no public debate concerning alternative ways to develop these technologies. By the 1940s and thereafter liberals knew the commercial basis of the system was inviolate, and merely tried to carve out a nonprofit sector on the margins. This was problematic, since whenever these nonprofit niches were seen as blocking profitable expansion, their future was on thin ice. Thus the primary function of the nonprofit sector in U.S. communications has been to pioneer the new technologies when they were not yet seen as profitable -- e.g. AM radio in the 1920s, FM radio and UHF television in the 1950s -- and then to be pushed aside once they had shown the commercial interests the potential of the new media. This looks to be the fate of the Internet as well. In many cases, such as the Internet, satellites and digital communication, these technologies were developed through research funds provided by the federal government. Once the technologies proved profitable, however, they were turned over to private interests with negligible compensation.

The U.S. Telecommunications Act of 1996With the digital revolution, the boundaries established in the 1934 Communications Act between broadcasting and telephony have broken down. Indeed the barriers between all forms of communication are breaking down. The U.S. Congress passed, and President Clinton signed into law, the Telecommunications Act of 1996 to replace the 1934 law. The overarching purpose of the 1996 Telecommunications Act is to deregulate all communication industries and to permit the market, not public policy, to determine the course of the information highway and the communications system. It is roundly considered one of the three or four most important federal laws of this generation, and it will go a long way

toward shaping the main players in the global communication marketplace.

By even the minimal standards of the 1934 Act, the debate surrounding the 1996 Telecommunications Act was a farce. Some of the law was actually written by the lobbyists for the communication firms it affects. The only "debate" was concerning whether the broadcasters, long-distance companies, local telephone providers, or cable companies would get the inside track in the deregulatory race. Consistent with the pattern set in the middle 1930s, the primacy of corporate control and the profit motive was a given. The range of legitimate debate extended from those who argue profits are synonymous with public service, like Newt Gingrich, to those who argue there are public interest concerns the marketplace cannot resolve, but they can only be addressed once the profitability of the dominant corporate sector has been assured, like Vice-President Al Gore. The historical record with communication regulation indicates that although the Gore position can be gussied up, once the needs of corporations are given primacy, the public interest will invariably be pushed to the margins.

This situation exists for many of the same reasons the broadcast reformers were demolished in the 1930s. Politicians may favor one sector over another in the battle to cash in on the highway, but they cannot oppose the cashing in process, except at the risk of placing their political careers in jeopardy. Both the Democratic and Republican parties have strong ties to the large communication firms and industries, and the communication lobbies are perhaps the most feared, respected and well endowed of all that seek favors on Capitol Hill. The only grounds for political courage in this case would be if there were an informed and mobilized citizenry ready to do battle for alternative policies. But where would citizens get informed, except through the news media, where news coverage is minimal and restricted to the range of legitimate debate, which, in this case, means no debate at all. That is why the Telecommunications Act was covered (rather extensively) as a business story, not a public policy story. "I have never seen anything like the Telecommunications Bill," one career lobbyist noted. "The silence of public debate is deafening. A bill with such astonishing impact on all of us is not even being discussed."

In sum, the debate over communications policy is restricted to elites and those with serious financial stakes in the outcome. It does not reflect well on the caliber of U.S. participatory democracy, but it is capitalist democracy at its best. The politicians of both parties promised the public that the Telecommunications Act would provide a spurt in big-paying jobs and intense market competition in communications, a "digital free-for-all" as one liberal

Democrat put it. An even cursory reading of the business press at the same time would reveal that those who benefited from the law knew these claims to be half-truths or outright lies. These are oligopolistic industries that strongly discourage all but the most judiciously planned competition. It is more likely that deregulation will lead to merger activity and increased concentration.

Markets as Civic ReligionIn the end, the case for "liberalized" communication relies upon the ideology of the infallible marketplace, a virtual civic religion in the United States and globally in the 1990s. Unless communication and media activists deal with it directly and debunk it, they have little chance of success. This pro-market argument remains infallible only to the extent that it is a religion based on faith and not a political theory subject to inquiry and examination.

Under careful examination, the market is a highly flawed regulatory mechanism. In markets, one's income and wealth determine one's power. Viewed in this manner, the market is more a plutocratic mechanism than a democratic one. In communication this means that the emerging system is tailored to the needs of business and the affluent. The majority of the world's people are irrelevant to the market. Nor do markets "give the people what they want" as much as they "give the people what they want within the range of what is most profitable to produce and/or in the political interests of the producers." This is often a far narrower range than what people might enjoy choosing from. Thus, in the case of 1930s broadcasting, many Americans may well have been willing to pay for an advertising-free system, but this was a choice that was not profitable for the dominant commercial interests, so it was not offered in the marketplace. Moreover, markets, driven as they are by the need to generate profit, are utterly incapable of factoring in any values that cannot be readily translated into bottom line success. Even in the wealthiest capitalist economies, issues of clear importance to the bulk of the population such as universal education, health care, and employment as well as environmental caution cannot be expressed through the market. In fact, these values must be enforced by the state and they are generally opposed by market interests as unwarranted intrusions into their control over the political economy. Finally, markets encourage a selfishness that undermines the spirit of community necessary to make democracy a viable proposition.Much of the ideological strength of markets as a regulatory mechanism for media comes from the metaphor of the "marketplace of ideas." The image to be conjured from this term is one where as long as there is no government interference, all varieties of ideas will blossom under democracy's sun with the truth growing tallest. The market is assumed to be a neutral and value-free regulatory mechanism. In fact, for the reasons

mentioned above, a commercial "marketplace" of ideas has a strong bias toward rewarding ideas supportive of the status quo and marginalizing socially dissident views. Markets tend to reproduce social inequality economically, politically 19and19 ideologically. The metaphor serves to mystify the actual corporate domination of our communication system and therefore provides the commercial interests with a valuable shield from rightful public criticism and participation in the policymaking process. As David Kairys has noted, in the 19th century the image of the market was used to expand the range of freedom of speech. In the 20th century, the image of free speech has been used to expand the range and power of the market. So it has been that much of the "expansion" of the U.S. First Amendment in the past generation has been to protect corporate speech (e.g. advertising) and commercial activities from government regulation, effectively making such "speech" part of the constitution and off-limits to political consideration. This myopic interpretation of the First Amendment, where markets can do no wrong and governments can only do evil, has had the ironic effect of expanding formal free speech while helping to shrink the effective range and quality of political debate.

If not the market, what then would be a truly democratic manner to generate communication policymaking, especially in an era of technological upheaval like ours? The historical record points to two basic principles. First, citizens must determine the nature of their communication system through full and open political debate, precisely the opposite of what led up to the passage of the U.S. Telecommunications Act. Is such public participation an absurd idea? Hardly. In the late 1920s, Canada, noting the rapid commercialization of the U.S. and Canadian airwaves, convened precisely such a public debate over broadcasting that included public hearings in 25 cities in all nine provinces. The final decision to develop a nonprofit system was adopted three years later after a period of active debate. Putting politics before profits in communication policymaking also means that the pace of technological innovation can be brought under rational control, with longterm social and political consequences taken into consideration.

Second, if such a public debate determines that the communication system needs a significant nonprofit and noncommercial component, the dominant sector of the system must be nonprofit, noncommercial, and accountable to the public. The historical record in the United States and globally is emphatic in this regard. In addition, commercial interests, too, must almost always be held to carefully administered public service standards. There are justified reservations about government involvement with communication. The purpose of policymaking, in this case,

should be to determine how to deploy these technologies to create a decentralized, accountable nonprofit and noncommercial sector, that can provide a viable service to the entire population. One suspects that if a society like the United States devoted to this problem only a fraction of the time that it has devoted to commercializing communication, we could find some workable public service models.

Left StrategiesProgressives therefore need to put communication on the political agenda and then work for nonprofit and noncommercial alternatives to the status quo. Potential support will come from all those who do not benefit from the existing system. The heart of the movement must come those portions of the population already organized for political activism. Regardless of what a progressive group's first issue of importance is, their second issue should be media and communication. This applies to all social movements. Alliances should be struck with progressive teachers unions and librarians who are battling the privatization and commercialization of their fields, often by the same forces. And any political party that claims to act on behalf of the bulk of the population, and against capital, must incorporate progressive media and communications into the core of its platform.

Subject: MR (11 of 12)Organized labor has a crucial role to play. It is uniquely situated with the resources and the perspective to battle the media and communication status quo. After a long hibernation, it is now understood in U.S. labor circles that labor's demise has been partially due to the rightwing ideological assault against unionism and progressive government policies, with which the commercial media has been effectively complicitous. In the 1940s there were over 1,000 full time labor beat reporters and editors on U.S. daily newspapers. Today there are seven. Labor needs to devote significant resources to the policy battles against profit-driven communication and for public broadcasting. It needs to subsidize a healthy independent noncommercial journalism and media. It needs to learn the conventions of mainstream journalism well enough to improve the amount and quality of its coverage. In sum, the labor movement needs to learn from its enemies and take ideological warfare as seriously as economic warfare.Communication workers have an especially important role to play. In Canada, parts of Europe, and throughout the world they are the ones who are leading the fight against privatization and deregulation of telecommunications. This fight is being waged not only to protect jobs but also to project an alternative vision of media and communication where the workers and not the investors are the representatives of the public interest. Labor is going beyond traditional bread and butter issues to form alliances

with consumer, environmental and community groups to advocate a socially responsive vision of a non-market telecommunication system. Labor does this because it sees that if communication is entirely privatized and deregulated, the workers along with the public will eventually get shafted. This model of progressive social unionism may be worthy of emulation by all of the labor movement, not just those unions connected to the communication industries.

The immediate goal should be to stop the wave of telecommunication privatizations or, if that is not possible, to at least gain strict publicservice regulations over private telecommunication activities. Likewise the selling off of the electromagnetic spectrum must be opposed on principle. State-run telecommunication systems 19have19 had severe flaws, as have public broadcasting systems. In both cases it is imperative to protect the public nature of the enterprises and then to organize to improve the service and make the systems more accountable to the public. It is the national telecommunication providers around the world that have the ability to provide universal service and fulfill other public service principles that would be unthinkable in a profit-driven system. This is an especially acute issue in the era of the Internet, when access to phone lines may be the dividing line between information haves and have-nots. It is the telecommunication workers who must be at the forefront of movements to prevent the privatization and commercialization of the Internet. Moreover, in many nations these telecom privatizations reek of corruption. It is an issue than can be organized around.

Subject: MR (12 of 12)Progressives must also organize around the need to maintain or create a healthy and vibrant journalism. The corporate concentration of ownership, profit-motive, and the reliance upon advertising have converted much of U.S. journalism into a travesty of entertainment, crime, and natural disaster stories. Journalism that gets the owners in trouble with powerful people is not appreciated. The professional autonomy of journalists -- always an ambiguous notion, especially in a commercial environment -- has suffered severe body blows. Journalism, real journalism, is not profitable, and the amount of resources dedicated to it has been cut back. In short, the market has little apparent interest in serious journalism -- unless it is aimed at the investor/management class and directed to their needs and prejudices -- nor is any in the offing. The global journalism of the media giants tends to be a tepid product deeply embedded into the consumer capitalism it promotes and from which it profits. It is an affront to the communication requirements of a democracy. At its worst, the commissars of global journalism -- people like Rupert Murdoch and TCI's John Malone -- use

their power to support rabidly pro-market rightwing political journalism.

The battle for democratic journalism takes place on many fronts. It means opposing media mergers. It means fighting legislation like the U.S. Telecommunications Act that entails the sacrifice of the public interest to the market. It means supporting a viable public broadcasting service. It means working to see that any possible number of new non-profit, community, and public access media are developed, in broadcasting or online. It means fighting to tax advertising (to subsidize nonprofit media) and slow down the commercial charge into every nook and cranny of human existence. It means encouraging journalist and media unions so they will have more leverage to battle their bosses. It means working with activist groups like the U.S. FAIR that monitor the mainstream press and provide an invaluable corrective to its flaws. Whatever hope there is for dissident views entering mainstream journalism must be pursued. Nor should the fight concern only journalism. Efforts to subsidize artistic work -- such as film boards -- outside of the global media market should be encouraged. Once the principle is understood there are any number of methods to accomplish the goal.The struggle takes place at the local, national and global levels. The primary fight remains to steer national policies toward the public interest and away from service to the private sector and global capital. Progressives also must organize to strengthen those international bodies such as the UN, UNESCO, and UNCTAD that have the potential for advocating global public service communication and addressing the market-magnified inequality across classes and nations. Progressives must battle to reconstruct or eliminate those global bodies that represent the interests of capital, like the WTO and the IMF. This then reveals the nature of the fight for democratic communication: it is inevitably a fight against capital, with all that that entails. The battle for democratic media is a necessary aspect of the battle for democratic society, or socialism.This special issue of Monthly Review is intended to provide left perspectives on the information age and the communication revolution. Our goals are to locate the information age in historical and political economic context, to assess the probable course of the Internet and the communication revolution in light of their relationships to really existing capitalism, and to lay the foundation for a critique that leads to political activity.1A1A