

Memorandum

To : Steering Committee, CEM
 From : George Gerbner
 Date : February 19, 1991

The challenge of today's global cultural environment requires the building of a new coalition and a broad constituency to support media education, to work for democratic media reform, to place cultural issues on the socio-political agenda, and to develop ways of participation in local, national, and international cultural policy-making.

We believe that there is a body of shared concerns among many diverse organizations, professionals, and other citizens that provides a strong basis and compelling need for coordinated action. The Cultural Environmental Movement hopes to set up a steering mechanism that is gender balanced and strives for significant minority representation.

The group that assembled in Washington, D.C. for the initial meeting in December, 1990, agreed that the main task should be coalition-forming and constituency-building to support informational, educational and policy initiatives on the local, national and, when appropriate, international levels. A strong investigative and research component is also needed to provide the reliable factual basis necessary for valid activity. The group also agreed on the need to develop a strategic plan, an organizational structure, an approach to fundraising, and a timetable.

DEVELOPING A STRATEGIC PLAN

We would like to suggest that the Steering Committee explore four key questions as we begin to develop a strategic plan:

- * What are the CEM's potential constituencies and why?
- * What are going to be the initial themes and issues?
 How can these themes and issues best be delivered to CEM's potential constituencies, and in the process mobilize large numbers of people to take positive action?
- * What types of positive action would we like to see take place?

There are of course other questions that will be raised, such as the form and procedures of our own organization. We invite the Steering Committee to develop additional plans and proposals.

I. What are CEM's potential constituencies and why?

The Cultural Environmental Movement has the potential of reaching out to a wide range of public-interest constituencies concerned about a variety of media stereotypes, formulas, and policies. Acting alone, such groups are often considered self-serving or "veto" groups. Acting in concert they can gain collective strength and can reach a broader conception of the common stake in cultural diversity and freedom while pursuing specific issues and interests.

The suggestions regarding potential constituencies are preliminary and in need of further development and refinement.

1. Educational, scientific, academic and other professional groups. Teachers, students, parent-teacher associations, organizations of educational administrators, school boards, communications scholars, journalism, film, broadcasting and other audiovisual teachers, associations of scientists and others concerned with science information and the spread of pseudo-science, New Age and other superstitions; story-tellers.

2. Media-oriented legal and citizens groups. Better broadcasting councils. Media action, media access, and media watch groups. Groups advocating alternative media structures and systems.

3. Health and human services. Medical, pediatric, nursing, psychiatric and psychological associations. Agencies, associations, and other groups concerned with alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs; mental illness and other disabilities; youth and aging; adoption; drunk and reckless driving, etc.

4. The physical environment. Groups concerned with conservation, energy policy, pollution. Environmental defense groups.

5. Women's groups. Organizations of and for women concerned with cultural representations, violence against women, equity issues.

6. Minority groups. African-Americans, Hispanics and other "ethnic" Americans, Native Americans, youth groups, senior citizen groups, gay and lesbian organizations, and other groups concerned with stereotyping, marginalization, stigmatization, "symbolic annihilation."

7. Religious organizations. Councils of churches, religious communicators concerned with the role of religion in culture, the communication of values, and freedom and diversity in media.

8. Child and family-oriented agencies and groups. Organizations committed to the welfare of children and families and concerned about possible damaging effects of media. Groups concerned with reporting and portrayals of sex education, abortion, adoption.

9. Consumer-oriented agencies, public interest advocacy groups. Federal, state, and local consumer protection agencies. Advertising monitoring councils. Organizations opposed to imposing commercial ideology on news and cultural activity. Consumer defense groups. Groups advocating economic alternatives.

10. Labor organizations and creative groups in media. Screen actors, writers, directors, newspaper guilds. Other media and entertainment groups. Lawyers guilds, communications workers, other labor groups.

11. Community crime-fighting and criminal justice organizations. Urban groups, law-enforcement and criminal justice agencies. Gun-control groups and others concerned about the impact of media on crime, including the danger of repressive "law enforcement." Jurists and other concerned with the media mythology of the courtroom, cameras in the courtroom, media and the due process, and violation of civil rights in crime drama and reporting, etc.

12. Conflict resolution. Groups concerned with media representations of violence, war, genocide.

13. International concerns. Groups concerned with international relations and consistently prejudicial representation of different countries and people.

14. Leaders and celebrities. It would be important to reach and enlist the support of highly visible authors and leaders such as Neil Postman, Alvin Toffler, Louis Sullivan, Ralph Nader, and celebrities such as Ed Asner, Phil Donahue, Norman Lear, Paul Newman, Robert Redford, Martin Sheen, Meryl Streep, Joanne Woodward.

15. The general public. Many polls show that the American public is both greatly dependent on and anxious about the media. A solid majority, however, say that banning or censoring is not the answer. Clearly, large numbers of Americans are sympathetic to the basic aims of CEM. The challenge will be in developing a sense of greater diversity and of alternatives, a mechanism for democratic participation in cultural policy-making, and in identifying

and reaching out to those most willing and able to give active political and financial support.

II. What are going to be the initial themes and issues?

The Cultural Environmental Movement should not allow itself to be classified as narrow, marginal, special interest. Its name should reflect the dynamic interrelatedness of cultural concerns. The emphasis should be on system and policy, with the understanding that working on specific mainstream issues affects the entire system of controls and impositions and thus the full complexion of the cultural environment.

We need to anticipate and overcome inevitable attempts to classify us as far-out, off-the-wall or, at best, idealistic but impractical eccentrics or radicals. We also need to avoid the embrace of unduly strange bedfellows and the danger of being associated with fundamentalist and other dogmatic or single-issue censorship or veto-groups.

Therefore, we need to develop and consistently promote a set of well-considered themes and a priority list of issues. Many of these themes and issues are implicit in the interests and concerns of the constituencies we reach out to and work with. These should be worked out in consultation with the groups involved and then discussed, harmonized and integrated into a program by the Steering Committee.

In addition, we must give Americans (and eventually others who also depend on news and other cultural products "made in the USA") a sense that there are democratic cultural alternatives, that there can be a greater diversity of creative freedoms and perspectives, and that it is possible to have some effective participation in the policies that shape our culture. Citizens create choices! Consumers only respond to them. We must mobilize Americans to act as citizens as effectively as commercials mobilize us to act as consumers.

Too few Americans know that advertising as a tax-deductible business expense, added to the price of products we must buy, is, in fact, a form of taxation without representation; that such a heavy subsidizes (and limits) the mainstream of our culture; that a license to use the airways (or a franchise to wire a city) is a public trust and not just a permit to make money.

The abdication of responsibility in pursuit of concentrating power and maximizing profits by many media owners and managers is second only to the government's virtual abandonment of its responsibility to defend the public interest. A beginning was made when the California

Democratic Party included in its 1990 platform a plank calling for "a media education program of instruction emphasizing skills of critical awareness ... to prepare young people to participate in our increasingly media dominated world." Unesco (just as we pulled out of it) issued a declaration on the rights of children and all citizens to live in a rich, free, and diverse cultural environment. We must begin to reclaim use of these precious rights, conferred on us by law, the constitution, and the basic principles of liberal education and self-government in a democracy.

To summarize: There is a wide array of initial themes and priorities we should elucidate, ranging from rule-making, legislation, and media codes of a liberating nature to systemic alternatives and specific issues and concerns of specific potential constituencies.

We should help stimulate a national debate on cultural policies, policy-making, and the debilitating effects of existing constraints and practices. We should act to create alternatives for the most damaging cultural stereotypes, brutalities, and inequities.

At the same time, our positions should be carefully researched and balanced. We should counter media scapegoating. We should support creative and journalistic efforts against private as well as public censorship. We should avoid overstatement and resist attempts to present our program as a panacea for all ills of society. The cultural environment sustains social practice but does not replace it. Action on the media front may expose and even help alleviate social inequalities and dysfunctions and thus facilitate -- but not substitute for -- political and social action.

There is a fair amount of existing research on media policy, content and effects, and on attitudes and opinions toward the media. We have very little information, however, on the attitude of local and national organizations toward cultural policies, on their experiences with the mass media, or on their willingness to join a consortium of organizations to affect cultural change. The idea of a survey of local and national organizations to test their interest in the overall CEM idea, and on particular issues and themes, proposed at the first meeting of the steering committee, is a good one; but it is probably two or three months away. First, more work needs to be done with regard to identifying lists of potential constituency organizations and their leaders--which brings us to the next question.

III. How can the Cultural Environmental Movement best deliver its themes to its potential constituencies, and in the process mobilize large numbers for action?

CEM begins with zero financial resources. Thus the Strategic Plan for communicating with potential constituencies must, by necessity, focus on the use of direct mail and telephoning. Indeed, the primary strategic objective of the Cultural Environmental Movement should be to develop a low cost constituency Leadership Communications Program (CLCP) that can reach out to the Movement's potential constituencies.

The essence of such a constituency Leadership Communications Program lies in systematically communicating with, and ultimately mobilizing for action, the leadership of various groups such as we list under "Potential Constituencies." If properly implemented, a constituency Leadership Communications Program has the potential to recruit hundreds of constituency leaders to join CEM and to promote ongoing cultural environmental educational and other activities within their individual constituencies.

There are three elements to the proposed constituency Leadership Communications effort:

1. Organization, compilation, cleaning, and processing of lists--the creation of CEM constituency Leadership Communications File--The constituency Leadership Communications Program (CLCP) is based upon the lists of constituency leaders who potentially may be interested in CEM. The people who are carefully identified to be placed in this file should be the individuals most likely to support CEM and/or to have an impact upon the formation of cultural public opinion generally. In addition, persons who have made financial contributions to related environmental causes, or who have otherwise identified themselves as environmental activists, should also be placed in this file. The organization and compilation of lists should ultimately result in a file of more than 5,000 constituency leaders. If properly assembled, this file would represent one of the most potent data bases of potential cultural environmental activists ever put together.

The CLCP data-base should be entered into a direct mail/list maintenance computer system, preferably one at a local service bureau. Lack of funds, however, may in the early stages necessitate the use of a privately owned PC. In any case--if a major effort is undertaken--a direct mail operation that is able to

reach out to a minimum of 2,500 constituency leaders could be operational by July 1, 1991.

2. Conducting the Constituency Leadership

Communication Effort--Between July 1, 1991 and September 30, 1991 every person in the CLCP data-base would receive two to three pieces of written communication from the Cultural Environmental Movement. These direct mail communications would be supplemented with follow-up phone calls from steering committee members and/or a volunteer phone bank. The overriding goal of these activities would be to inform and activate constituency leaders to openly endorse and participate in CEM. The method of participation would vary, of course, depending upon the type of constituency leader (i.e., some leaders might simply engage in media awareness activities within their individual constituencies, while others might contribute financially). The specifics of exactly how constituency leaders can participate should be worked out in future meetings of the steering committee.

3. The Non-Paid Media--The Constituency Leadership

Mobilization Program should be augmented through a well-coordinated educational campaign in the non-paid media (friendly print journalists, TV and radio talk shows, etc.). The central themes of this educational campaign should, in general, give Americans a sense that there are cultural alternatives, that it is possible for the public to participate and affect policy-making, that it is possible to strongly support first amendment rights and yet speak out strongly against mindless violence and prejudicial media imagery. The specifics of the themes and messages the constituency leadership Mobilization Program could put forth through the non-paid media is a prime topic for further discussion. Clearly, however, the non-paid media campaign should be structured so as to complement the CLCP direct mail effort. One of its premier goals should thus be to cultivate an overall environment in which large numbers of constituency leaders are encouraged to join the Cultural Environmental Movement.

IV. What types of actions would the Cultural Environmental Movement like to see take place?

The first and foremost objective of CEM should be to recruit hundreds of the most influential constituency leaders in its CLCP data-base. Within this context, a high percentage of the people we seek to recruit should have the resources and influence to give CEM the necessary resources to achieve success. Without establishing a funding base, the Movement will not be able to accomplish its objectives.

These two components (constituency leaders, money) are thus inextricably intertwined.

While an overall fundraising program for CEM has not been the focus of this memo, a fundraising component can be thought of as a logical extension of the CLCP effort described earlier and can be developed, after discussion with the steering committee, in a follow-up next memorandum.

Outside of the internal organization membership/fundraising imperatives of CEM, what types of external cultural educational actions can we hope to see take place over, say, the next two years? In other words, how shall CEM go about the task of cultural liberation?

A general goal of CEM's educational program should be to apply the teachings of the humanities and the social sciences to the everyday cultural environment from which students learn. We should hope to stimulate media studies an critical viewing curricula which can help develop an analytical and critical sense toward mass-produced culture. We need to reach out to the citizenry with a fresh approach to liberal education that is aimed at "liberation from the mass produced dreams that hurt." Questions which we should hope to interject into the national debate include: How did we get into this predicament? What is it really like? and, what can we do about it?

Specific efforts should focus on the themes and issues to be developed in conjunction with specific constituencies, and on current and emergent media regulatory and policy issues.

CEM should not want to come up with pre packaged alternatives at this point. We do not want to dictate our own views, but to stimulate a national discussion on cultural/media issues; a discussion that leads to a search for alternatives. With this having been said, a brief listing of some examples of possible external actions that could be promoted by CEM follows. It is hoped that these examples can be of use in promoting further discussion.

1. CEM could promote a national debate on the need for employing more women and minorities in films and television. Currently men outnumber women by 3 to 1 on the screen, and by much more in executive jobs. This one fact helps determine the content of many of the stories we receive. Using more women would tend to lower the violence content and heighten the relationship-exploring content of TV and film fare, along with providing more jobs to underrepresented segments of the population.

2. CEM could develop television program monitoring kits to be used by grass roots groups to gather a factual

basis in which to ground local and national representation and action. "Put your television viewing to a good cause," and "Get something good out of bad programming," could become basic CEM rallying messages for a program that develops useful data and promotes a more active and critical media analytical perspective at the same time.

3. CEM could mobilize political opposition to unfair media-industry/government collusionary practices--such as what occurred during the development of the bill President Bush recently signed that supposedly set limits on children's advertising. Certain aspects of the bill simply shield some of the most exploitive practices of the industry. If CEM had been active in the months leading up to the signing, we might have been able to assist front-line organizations such as Action for Children's Television to put real teeth in the bill.

4. CEM could act as an umbrella organization for media and other social action groups that are pressing for change. While CEM and a majority of American oppose program censorship, a growing number of social action groups are lobbying television, movie, and record producers on specific issues that can be formulated in a way as to press for alternatives and greater diversity.

5. CEM could support the expansion of existing media awareness programs in the United States. Current media awareness programs generally emphasize better education to help young people cope with the whole range of materials. The assumption is that greater awareness of the media's potential negative effects can help bring about healthier viewing patterns and greater viewer restraint.

NOTE: THIS MEMO COMES TO YOU IN ROUGH DRAFT FORM. IT IS FAR FROM FINISHED. IT IS SENT FOR REVIEW, CORRECTION, AND DISCUSSION AT THE NEXT MEETING.