

the *cultural environment* MONITOR

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cultural
environment
movement

Volume 2, Issue 2, Fall 1998

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representing diverse
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Monitor submissions to:*

CEM Monitor
P.O. Box 31847
Philadelphia, PA 19104

cem@libertynet.org

Or call us with questions at

215-204-6434

Media Without Democracy and What To Do About It

An excerpt from the book of the same title by Donna Allen

Continued on page 2

THE CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT MOVEMENT IS PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE TWO UPCOMING CONVENTIONS

**The 1999 Cultural
Environment Movement
Convention**

March 25 - 28, 1999
Ohio University
Athens, Ohio

**"Vive La Diference:
National Identities in the
International
Communications Market"**

June 18 - 19, 1999
Paris, France
In cooperation with CEM,
COMPA and UNESCO

Look for details and calls for papers on page 2!

Media Without Democracy

continued from page 1

port to several First Amendment goals basic to the restructured equal-opportunity communications system we are seeking.

For example, mass media owners' frequent and firm expression of the First Amendment right to freedom of the press affirms the right of all people to speak for themselves in whatever media form they choose. However much the mass media themselves may stray from its observance, just voicing that idea so strongly and repeatedly encourages people to continue their efforts to be heard.

Mass media owners have also strongly affirmed the concept that media should reflect society, even though they themselves are not able to do so. Nonetheless, mass media's voicing this ideal brings us closer to that goal. Many recent efforts to remedy the harmful and limiting stereotypes that inhibit communication have been based on this argument that media should mirror the public.

A second major strength of the present system that helps immensely toward the building of a new communications system based on equality of outreach is mass media's consistent devotion to the development of new communications technologies. Smaller media who lack the money to develop sophisticated technology have benefited from the spillover effects of the new technologies financed by mass media.

For example, offset printing

after World War II made it possible for people of modest means to publish, and the public to hear, information it previously had not been able to take into account in political decision-making. Porta-Pak cameras and videotapes have enabled people in the U.S. and in countries of low literacy to communicate with each other and better influence the decisions of their governments. Many more people can now be heard.

'Restoring equality of outreach can be achieved by adding the missing information of others, not by reducing anyone's First Amendment rights.'

Discourage Practices that Reduce Communication

A second action toward democratically restructuring the communications system is to discourage practices in the present system that reduce overall communication and that contradict both the First Amendment and mass media's own affirmations of First Amendment principles.

One of the most harmful of these is the practice of attacking people through name-calling and stereotyping. Being called names, even such commonly-accepted ones as "extremist" or "dissenter," is harmful to those so characterized who then lose the ear of many of the public.

There are several ways these practices can be discouraged with-

out abridging any First Amendment rights. One way is by offering alternatives. This could be, for example, (a) by adding to opinion the facts upon which the opinion is based, which would then enable people to judge the merit of the information for themselves; (b) by including more first-hand sources, thus encouraging people to speak for themselves; or (c) if the media owners don't want to disseminate a viewpoint with which they disagree, at least by telling that there are other views or where to obtain these other viewpoints. Thomas Paine said, "Whatever is my right as man is also the right of another; and it becomes my duty to guarantee as well as to possess."

Still other ways to avoid these harmful practices without hurting one's own press freedom are: (d) accepting and even encouraging the monitoring of mass media by those who have special knowledge of a field or area of life, or community of people, and also encouraging dialogue with such groups and individuals on a regular basis in order to learn of shortcomings in the accuracy of coverage, (e) looking at examples of those media which, without surrendering any First Amendment rights, do not inhibit other viewpoints but who instead work to encourage them and increase their number.

Expand People-Based Media, Networks, and Coalitions

The third and by far the most fundamental of the four actions moving the communications system toward democratic equality is

to base the restructuring of the communications system on people's own media, that is, media that evolve out of people's needs to communicate their own information to each other.

The two-way (or multi-way) communication of people-built media is very different from the predominantly one-way communication of most mass media that are dreamed up and market-researched on Madison Avenue, financed on Wall Street, and sold to millions of the public as a commodity.

A restructured communications system must rest on media created by people speaking for themselves to participate in political decision-making through communicating their own information.

Networks and coalitions that grow from people-based media enable them to reach a wider audience of the public and in turn also to receive more coverage in mass media - without losing their closeness to people.

Explore Constitutional Ways to Extend the System to All People

The First Amendment does not protect a right to dominate the marketplace of ideas. Constitutional ways can be found to prevent and to end dominance, in keeping with the intent of the First Amendment and suitable for a democracy of political equals.

The best remedy for monopoly in the economic world, of course, is competition. The best remedy for the dominance of a few ideas is more ideas. Democracy requires this remedy to achieve viability of its political decisions.

A first step in exploring consti-

tutional routes toward that goal of equal outreach for the information of all people is to re-evaluate the role of media corporations in performing an intrinsically individual right. The First Amendment, after all, is part of the Bill of Rights for individuals.

However modest, steps must be taken to return to individual responsibility the exercise of the First Amendment press freedom right.

A beginning can be made by

'It is up to the public to initiate corrective communication that will remedy the problem and get democracy working again.'

locating in an individual the responsibility of each media corporation for its First Amendment actions. For example, every media corporation or organization seeking First Amendment protection privileges could be required to state its First Amendment goal just as it states a corporate purpose when seeking a charter of incorporation. This statement should be signed by a live person who would be the one most responsible for actions to be taken under the First Amendment protection.

Making Media and Democracy the Issue for the Nation

However much government may be able to help protect and expand individuals' First Amendment rights to freedom of the press, the problem of a poorly

functioning democracy is basically a citizens' problem, specifically a citizens' communication problem - because communication is the way people participate in political decision-making, including deciding what kind of communication system the nation should have.

The very essence of democracy is "do it yourself." It is up to the public to initiate corrective communication that will remedy the problem and get democracy working again, just as it was the public who created democracy in the first place. In short, people must themselves make media the issue.

The fact that there is now no political possibility of making any large changes in the present communications structure gives us time for the major job of raising the issue of the role of media in a democracy. We

have time to begin the necessary thinking about what kind of communications system we need, to explore possible actions, to monitor media ownership, news selections, and handling of issues - and to form networks and coalitions that include full representation and expression in our debate and explorations of the great variety of our ethnic, cultural, and many other rich and insightful orientations. We are beginning to do that now.

"Media Without Democracy and What To Do About It," a booklet by Donna Allen, is published by Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press. It is available from the Cultural Environment Movement for \$7 with an individual membership.

Antitrust Law and The Media Monopoly

How useful are the current United States Antitrust Laws when applied to ownership, production and distribution of mass media corporations?

CEM called on a charged group to investigate.

On January 23 and 24, 1997, CEM brought together 22 people at Temple University's Sugarloaf Conference Center in Philadelphia, PA to examine whether antitrust legislation against the media monopoly is feasible at this time, and what other legal challenges, if any, exist.

The idea for the conference originated at the CEM Founding Convention, and was approved as a priority by the CEM Board of Directors in May of 1997.

Conference participants included antitrust and first amendment attorneys; academics, students and researchers; economists; labor representatives; and democratic-media advocates. The proceedings were moderated by Mark Crispin Miller, Director of the Project on Media Ownership.

Laying the groundwork

Two introductory speakers opened the conference, laying the groundwork for discussing antitrust law and tradition as it relates to media deconcentration.

Antitrust attorney Carl E. Person gave examples of the profound length and cost of an antitrust lawsuit, in the event that such a case would be heard by the court.

He offered that government involvement in antitrust laws is in

fact a deterrent to their enforcement, as it leads people to believe that antitrust law is in effect, when in fact it has fallen by the wayside in recent years. This is partially due to antitrust regulations being under the jurisdiction of the Federal Trade Commission, Person said.

Robert McChesney of the University of Wisconsin painted an equally dismal picture of current media concentration trends, using Ben Bagdikian's *The Media Monopoly* as a standard. In the book's 1984 edition, Bagdikian counted 50 dominating companies in the industry; by 1997 the number was 15. This makes the industry uncompetitive by even oligopolistic standards, said McChesney. But it is good business. Owning multiple media outlets and other businesses allows for product branding and increased loyalty; for example, ESPN now prints "ESPN Magazine" and serves food and cable at "ESPN Grill."

Since the 1996 Telecommunications Act, 4,000 of 11,000 existing radio stations have changed hands. Since the mid-1980's, there has been a 50 percent increase in television advertising, and a sharp decline in public service in broadcast media. McChesney disagreed with those who thought the Internet is the solution, saying that we need to think of it as part of the corporate media.

Potential Solutions

Subsequent conversation among the group concluded that when discussing antitrust law in relation to media, we must think of it not only as the restraint of trade, but restraint of content and ideas. Even monopolies (or perhaps especially monopolies) have public service obligations to diversify programming.

The two antitrust laws that might apply to media (Section 2 of the Sherman Act and Section 7 of the Clayton Act) have not been enforced.

Three possibilities for solutions were discussed: (1) Observing the regulations of other countries, where in some cases the concentration is even worse; (2) designing new and creative legislation in lieu of attempting to fit into old antitrust laws; and (3) fostering a popular movement to support the democratization of media.

Proposed Actions

On the second day of the conference, people split into three groups to consider the question: What might adequate legislation look like? The groups reported as follows:

• Group A agreed on two main goals of legislation or regulation: To reduce the amount of corporate power and to reduce the amount of non-corporate special-interest

power in mass media.

The group decided not to rule out antitrust legislation as a means, and said it should still be considered with three questions: (1) Can something viable be drafted? (2) Could it be passed? and (3) Would the benefits be worth the cost carrying out the first two questions? The group concluded such legislation should stress not economic efficiency, but information efficiency, and that diversity and democracy should be the principles of media antitrust judgment. They also said the legislation should be written to prohibit media entities to merge with or be sold to non-media entities.

The group also suggested organizing to maintain pressure on broadcast media and government regulators to improve the public interest standards of commercial broadcast media.

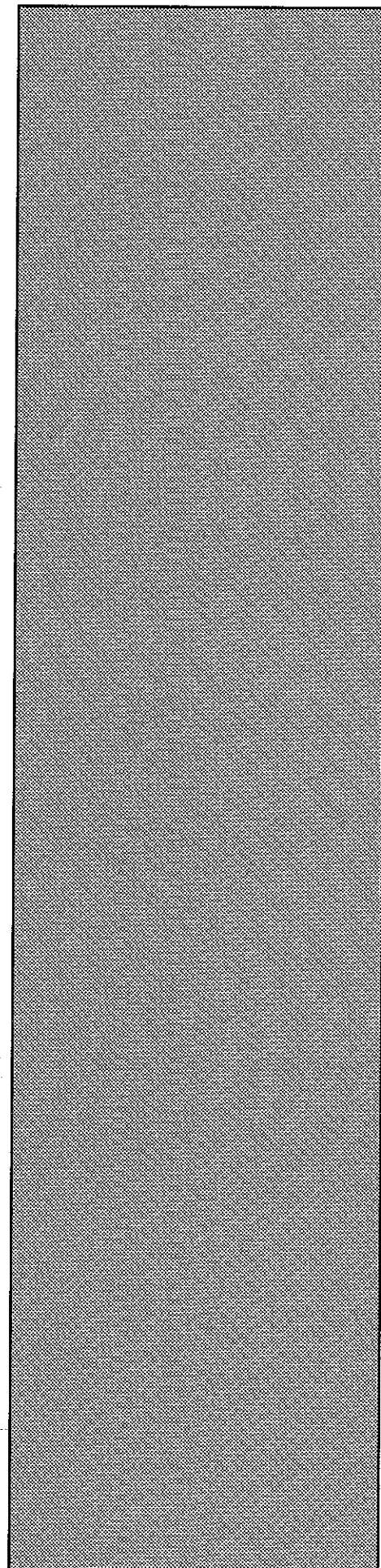
◆ Group B likewise proposed a law requiring simplification of media ownership, suggesting that the Robinson-Patman Act, which addresses price-fixing in book selling, might apply to the specific problem of media antitrust.

In addition, Group B discussed digital technology and the broadcast spectrum giveaway. They said that leasing the spectrum would net funding for diverse local programming, and suggested using the argument that the broadcast spectrum is no longer a scarce resource with the advent of high-density television, or HDTV, which has the capability of splitting one frequency into six. However, they pointed out that the same argument was used about cable, but diversity of ownership or channels does not ensure diversity of content.

Group B thus recommends using rule making to promote diversity in content. Group B also suggested the use of the Freedom of Information Act to get information on the results of past policy decisions, such as media deregulation in 1991, and the cancellation of the Fairness Doctrine in 1996.

◆ Group C decided that the immediate goal of legislation should be maximum feasible limitation of further concentration, with the ideal goal being deconcentration. They stressed an emphasis on radio, since it has recently been the area of most prominent concentration.

The group also urged the divestment of news divisions by media companies, to allow news and information to be not-for-profit. To fund such endeavors, the group recommended a five percent tax on advertising; decreasing the amount of tax-deduction for advertising; and fining media companies for failing to satisfy the public interest. The fund would support local, independent, non-profit, non-commercial media production, especially news and children's programs. It would also subsidize community monitoring of local broadcast media to ascertain if media are serving their public's interest. Community monitoring groups would report to the FCC. Shortening the term for which licenses are issued would empower the communities to have more weight in licensing decisions.



Update: What five of CEM's organizational members are doing to promote gender equity and general diversity in mass media ownership, employment and representation

Update: A World Congress on Media and Communication

Submitted by Sean Ó Siochru

At a meeting on the People's Communication Charter in Madison, Wisconsin in September 1997, an international group of media activists and academics discussed the need for an event to pull together, and deepen, the various strands of progressive media and communication movements around the world. The idea of a staging a World Congress on Media and Communication (still a working title) was suggested, and agreed, as a way forward. Its key characteristics are:

- It should reach out beyond those concerned with media to make common cause with others struggling for a better world, in gender, environmental, poverty, indigenous peoples, and other issues;
- It should thus contribute to building a sustainable world wide social movement on these issues, with genuine roots among people and communities, and an impact on the general public domain;
- It should be organized in such a way as to complement and strengthen, not detract from or displace, existing progressive media and communication initiatives;
- It should take place in the year 2000 or later, to allow sufficient time for planning and organization.

A wide consultation process and feasibility study has been initiated, until March 1999, to test the idea

in different regions and among different groups, and to refine and adapt it to real circumstances and needs. A short document (available at: <http://commposite.uqam.ca/videaz>) was given its first outing at the Videazimut Virtual Conference on the Right to Communicate, and generated significant interest.

Feedback to date has highlighted the following:

(1) Clarifying the purpose. The strength of a democratizing movement is its capacity to mobilize people, and people's resources (including media). The Congress must contribute directly to such a grass-roots process, and very early on clarify the means proposed to do this: A precise strategic aim for the Congress must emerge quickly: e.g., a strategy and action plan to weld together various progressive movements around media issues, with clear commitment, resourcing, tasks and timetable; a limited set of clear priority actions around which a broad coalition could organize.

(2) The focus need not be a single event. Indeed, a true congress would bring together delegates from various regions or interest groups, possibility after a series of interlinked regional meetings to explore regional priorities and agendas, build coherence and a common understanding of key issues, and elect representatives for the global congress.

(3) The process is a part of the output. From this consultative phase through to planning and execution, the process must be open, democratic and reflect diverse

interests, especially those marginalized by current power structures.

The Interim Organizing Committee (comprised of Alain Ambrosi, Michael Eisenmenger, George Gerbner, Cees Hamelink, Bob McChesney, Kaarle Nordenstreng, Seán Ó Siochrú, Marc Raboy, Pradip Thomas) has prioritized building a better regional and gender balance!

Anyone interested in being kept in touch with developments, or in contributing more significantly, should contact Seán Ó Siochrú at sean@nexus.ie

Update: Canadians Concerned About Violence in Entertainment (C-CAVE)

Submitted by Rose Dyson

C-CAVE activities include The Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education, The Canadian Communications Association (CCA), Science for Peace-Canada, Ontario Institute for Studies In Education, University of Toronto (OISE/UT) Alumni Association, MediaWatch, The Coalition for Responsible Television, Bnai Brith Antidefamation League, Catholic Civil Rights League, The Family Council, Greater Toronto Area (GTA) Chapter of the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, Metro Network for Social Justice, Canadian Voice of Women for Peace and Social Justice, Canadians Against Sexual Exploitation, and the Kids Network Prism Awards

Competition.

The Founding Convention working group on "the cult of violence" chaired by Rose Dyson has continued to meet on a periodic basis.

Until Peter O'Neill was, along with many other employees, "downsized" as a result of a merger between Baton Broadcasting and CTV in the fall of 1997 he hosted a number of these meetings in his capacity as Societal Issues chair of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) and a Vice President of CTV.

In retrospect, not much was accomplished during these industry dominated "updates" on self-regulatory progress. For the most part they were public relations exercises in which industry officials representing both the CAB and the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council could be "seen" to be addressing the problem of violence in the media.

Papers on CEM documents, such as the People's Communications Charter, the Viewers Declaration of Independence and the Agenda for Action, along with relevant Canadian initiatives were given at the last two Learned Societies Congresses by Rose Dyson. These were held, respectively, at Brock University in St. Catherines, Newfoundland in 1997.

Other activities involve collaboration with groups on opposition to globalization and corporate rule, particularly within the context of media concentration. Those have included Rose Dyson's participation on the Steering Committee of the Ad Hoc Committee, People Against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (PAMAI). It was created by Science for Peace, Canada and the

Council of Canadians following a Global Teach-In on the subject of challenging corporate rule at the University of Toronto.

For more information, contact Rose Dyson, Chair, C-CAVE
167 Glen Road
Toronto, Ontario M4W 2W8
Canada
416-961-0853, 416-929-2720(fax,
rdyson@oise.utoronto.ca

Update: Minneapolis Public Schools

Submitted by Lyn Lacy

The Progress Report ("report card") for Minneapolis Public Schools has media literacy on it. One of the aspects that media specialists mark for K-6 students is "Uses critical viewing skills for television and other media".

Minneapolis Public Schools also has media literacy in its Information Media and Technology Content Standards (which is 15 pages long and describes 5 specific standards). The following are excerpts from that document:

From the Preface: The goal of the information media and technology standards is to develop a media literate person who has the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and produce communication in a variety of forms.

Content Standard 3.2: Students identify, analyze, interpret and evaluate the content of information media, including the mass media, from diverse perspectives. Includes such specific standards as:

- Compare the same topic from a variety of cultural perspectives.
- Recognize differences between

fact and opinions in content.

- Recognize propaganda and other persuasive approaches in content.
- Analyze and evaluate how the amount and type of information can distort perceptions of an event.

Content Standard 3.3: Students analyze unique properties of design of various information media, including the mass media. Includes such specific standards as:

- Analyze influence of editing in print and nonprint information media.
- Relate script, soundtrack and visuals to the purpose of nonprint information media (e.g., determine whether purpose is to inform, narrate, entertain, persuade and/or stimulate emotion).

- Analyze commercial influences on the creation of information media (e.g., determine what sells, what is popular or trendy, which cultures are appealed to).

Content Standard 3.4: Students analyze ways in which information media, including mass media, reflect/influence diverse cultures. Includes such specific standards as:

- Establish criteria to distinguish best information media to suit purposes.
- Evaluate impact of time spent daily on mass media and entertainment technologies
- Recognize motive and appeal of persuasive mass media messages.
- Analyze advantages and limitation of the mass media.
- Interpret inferences of words, visuals and sounds in mass media and evaluate their impact on various cultures (e.g., stereotyping, propaganda, sexual innuendo).
- Evaluate power of mass media to create opinion about various cultures.
- Analyze long-range effects of

mass media messages on diverse cultures.

Update: NewsWatch Canada submitted by Jacqueline Mosdell

NewsWatch Canada is a public-interest media-monitoring project based in the School of Communication at Simon Fraser University. It is co-directed by Donald Gutstein and Robert Hackett. Our purpose is to assess how well the news media cover issues of significance to Canadians. Our goal is to evaluate, in methodological rigorous ways, the comprehensiveness, independence and diversity of Canada's press, at a time of growing media concentration and declining resources for investigative journalism.

For our first three years we operated as Project Censored Canada. Like Project Censored in the US, PCC publicized an annual list of the top ten under-reported stories in the major news media. In 1996 we broadened our scope to study patterns of under- and over-reporting, and changed our name to NewsWatch Canada.

Each spring, upper-level students in the School of Communication at Simon Fraser University undertake content analyses of major Canadian daily newspapers and (occasionally) television news broadcasts. They are attempting to assess how well our news media report on issues and events of significance to Canadians. Our work focuses on blind spots -- issues and events overlooked by the dominant media -- as well as double standards, where different groups

or perspectives are afforded unequal coverage. After vetting, the studies are published in report or pamphlet form, and posted on our Web site. Since 1996, we have produced several such research reports.

NewsWatch Canada plans to release a commercial book in late 1998, which details our research to date. Our research can also be viewed on our Web site at <http://newswatch.cprost.sfu.ca/newswatch>.

For more information, contact Jacqueline Mosdell, Research Assistant, NewsWatch Canada, NewsWatch Canada, School of Communication, Simon Fraser University, 8888 University Drive, Burnaby, BC V5B 4K1, 604-291-4905, 604-291-4024 (fax), newswatch@sfu.ca, <http://newswatch.cprost.sfu.ca/newswatch>

Update: Columbus Center for Media Education submitted by Linda Anderson

The Columbus Center for Media Education (CCME) produced two videos for broadcast for Franklin County, OH educators over the EduCable network. The Columbus Schools Educational Network provided camera work, editing, and graphics. A number of quality video cuts were provided by Dr. Gerbner, Mary McGee, and the Discovery Channel. The first video was an introduction to the concept of Media Literacy, and the second was a panel discussion between educators, parents, and two high school students regarding the content of a selection of videos.

CCME received a 3 year, \$32000 grant from the Columbus Medical Association Foundation to fund Media Literacy for all Franklin Country Schools.

In cooperation with the Minnesota Medical Association, CCME developed a brochure entitled "10 tips for parents to stop the media violence" which was printed in 35,000 copies by Nationwide Insurance for distribution to local media literacy groups and physicians.

CCME also created a partnership with FIRSTLINK of Columbus to provide parent critical viewing workshops entitled "Take Charge of your TV".

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Jacqueline Mosdell, NewsWatch*

*Canada, School of Communication
Simon Fraser University, 8888
University Drive, Burnaby, BC
V5B 4K1 Canada, 604-291-4905
newswatch@sfu.ca
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CEM Clipping Service = CEM Members

A radio interview about CEM by FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting) was syndicated to approximately 100 radio stations. Op-ed pieces on CEM appeared in over 400 Scripps-Howard media outlets, the Philadelphia Inquirer and the Syracuse Herald American.

We would like to keep track of these mentions, but CEM cannot afford the luxury of a clipping service. You can play an important role by clipping any article you see on our work, whether it be in a newspaper, magazine or newsletter. Date the article and mention where it came from.

If you hear us on radio or see us on TV, send the name of the station and a brief description to CEM, P.O. Box 31847, Philadelphia, PA 19104. A postcard is fine. Be sure to include your name and phone number in case we need more information.

But What Can I Do?

A quick guide to getting published on the editorial page

By Peter Wirth, CEM Publicist

CEM, as its name implies, is a movement. As such, we all have a role to play.

The mass media are more accessible than most people realize.

Let's take a look at newspapers. There are approximately 1600 daily newspapers in the U.S. Each newspaper should have an editorial page. This is an important section. In addition to the letters to the editor section, you will find editorials and op-ed articles. Editorials represent the opinion of the editor; op-eds are longer issue-oriented articles and are generally written by guest columnists. Each section has an editor that acts as the gatekeeper.

You can play a very important role by identifying these people and sending them material on the subject of violence in media and its effects on children and the culture as a whole, diversity of media ownership, information about pending legislation, or any other area in which CEM is active.

Who are they and how do you find them?

Call up your local daily newspaper. You will probably get a switchboard operator. Ask the operator for the name of the person who is in charge of the editorial page and ask them to put you through. When you reach the person in question, introduce yourself and ask if they have a few minutes. These people are often quite busy and under deadline pressure, and will appreciate the fact that you understand this.

If they have the time to talk, tell them you are concerned about the

issue of violence in the media (for instance) and that you would like to send in some material for consideration for publication as an op-ed.

At the same time, you could also ask them to pass your material on to the editorial staff and request that the paper consider an editorial supporting your position.

What will you achieve?

First, you have provided the newspaper editor with information on the issue from the CEM perspective. You shouldn't make the assumption that people in the news world are aware of all the facts surrounding every issue, because they aren't. Information can be very powerful.

Second, you have now started the beginning of a relationship with a reporter or editor by providing them with information. They now have a source (CEM or yourself, if you feel comfortable) where they can go for interviews when certain issues appear in the news.

Third, you have helped raise the issue to the surface. Reporters tend to do stories that they feel the community is interested in.

Fourth, you have helped get the CEM's name out to the news community. The more CEM is used as a source, the more likely we will be called upon for interviews and information. In the process, we will help shape national debate on issues of concern to CEM.

Peter Wirth, CEM Publicist
702 South Beech
Syracuse, NY 13210
315-476-3396
pwirth@ican.net

SEND US YOUR SUCCESS STORIES

Progressive activists tend to focus on the limitations of corporate media.

We want to hear what success you had in getting word out in your local radio, TV or newspaper. Were you on a local talk show? Was your op-ed accepted? Did you hit a home run and get an article picked up by a wire service?

Tell us the good news so we can motivate other activists to do the hard work of affecting public opinion.

Send your article to:
CEM Monitor
P.O. Box 31847,
Philadelphia, PA 19104

or e-mail
cem@libertynet.org

We'll print your success story in a future edition of the Monitor.

JOIN CEM TODAY!

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