

Collage by Jim Harter



# FREEDOM IMPLIES MATURITY

by Michael Paul McCusker

"Journalists, as the man said, do not have responsibility. The trouble is they do not have power, either: what they do have is influence, which is a very different thing. They also have a fascinating time, fiendish hours and conditions of work, and fairly small rewards." — The Economist

G. B. Shaw to a journalist:

"Sir, your profession has, as usual, destroyed your brain."

July is a month in which we celebrate freedom. The larger voices proclaim America as the freest, most wonderful country on Earth and unfurl the flags of wordly preeminence and Godly jingoism. There are smaller voices of disagreement, which is not to say that the ideals of freedom are not present within the nation or that their intent is less than political freedom and equality for everyone who presently and in the future dwell within its borders. It is that the actuality is far less than what is advertised; that political freedom is not the daily reality of millions of American citizens; that the old evils of worth measured by wealth, race and sex continually and persistently erode the foundations we claim to stand upon and believe in.

A paradox that might be worth considering is that nationalism, which is a packaged product that disguises inequities and rot within a nation while simultaneously promoting the ambitions of a powerful and avaricious few, is a prerequisite for expansion; and that ideologies, which are fictions, are justifications for conquest. We disguise our intent to rule the world — in a neo- fashion, which is the current and most probable fashion in a nuclear age —

by accusing our major competitor of the same design while portraying ourselves as simply in defense against its ambitions; and in the meanwhile our cultural rulers preach our destiny to spread our way of life to a world which only awaits to embrace our superior and enlightened rule.

The use of information is vital to either promote or reject this view of our universal superiority as a people, a culture and an ideology. It is also vital to how we conduct ourselves within our own boundaries and to how we ultimately view ourselves.

Which leads to a definition of information. Is it a free exchange of ideas or should it be controlled to reflect only certain ideas? A corollary question is if information is only a business like other businesses and is to be in the hands of the relatively few who are able to afford and profit from its dissemination and ultimate control. A. J. Leibling, who was dissatisfied with the subordination of information, said that a free press existed only for those who were wealthy enough to own one.

The trend has been that corporations are increasingly in control of the information we receive and that they influence legal and court and decisions about its use and flow, such as the ruling by the Oregon State Supreme Court that corporations, which are individuals under the law, cannot be investigated and reported about without great risks of libel suit. That ruling, which was against Willamette Week and favored a bank in the state, says essentially that while celebrities of the moment can be exhaustively exhumed in the press, institutions which affect millions are virtually untouchable.

Technology, especially satellites and computers, have enabled the huge growth of information networks that are instantaneous and worldwide. Multinational corporations, which are private governments in control of public governments, are able to transmit and receive operational information to and from subsidiaries all over the globe. They are also able to control and manipulate the information pertaining to their activities which gives them powers unanticipated

by the very intelligent and far-looking framers of the U.S. Constitution whose main concerns were the powers of government.

Information presented to the American public is in the form of news, of events. Ideas and opinions are subdivided into editorial sections of newspapers or as commentary segments of radio and television broadcasts. Most men and women in the news business do not think of themselves as propagandists: on the contrary, most of them earnestly attempt the impossibility of objective recounting of incidents and facts — in the words of Gene Fowler that news is history shot on the wing. But of course they reflect the biases of their society, and ultimately of the business they serve.

What is known as the advocacy press has no such pretensions toward objectivity, or illusions. Grinding political and ideological axes is its purpose, and like Third Parties in this country, the small critical publications are the kitchens for ideas. Whatever their flavor, they owe unequivocal allegiance to the First Amendment, which guarantees freedoms of press and speech, even if their goal is to abolish it.

The First Amendment is unequivocal. Nothing shall abridge freedom of speech, therefore, freedom of thought. It is the ideal which distinguishes this country from most others, though in theory more than actuality. Not our wealth or system of acquisition or consumption is as important to history as the wonderful, desperate attempt to reverse history and make it possible for people to be equal and independent under the law.

The natural tendency of government is to rule in its own interest, usually to the detriment of the people who live under its control. Our government is like every other in that it is opposed to the freedom of its subjects and wishes for them to serve and obey. The men who founded this nation recognized this aspiration of government and more remarkably restrained their own ambitions by setting up a form of government that had as its primary

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