

NORTH COAST



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In a dark time the eye begins to see
~Theodore Roethke

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ROGER HAYES

MICROMEDIA AT THE MILLENNIUM

G.B. Shaw to a journalist:

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

The year 2001 is the North Coast Times Eagle's 30th birthday. It has changed considerably over the past three decades in format and style but its essential obsession with independence and concomitant consequence of poverty remain unchanged.

Its life is bicameral like the human brain and the modern calendar, divided into the early era of the Old Bird and the Born Again Bird raised from a three-year crypt with various smaller deaths and resurrections.

The essential purpose of both incarnations of the NCTE is to exercise the 1st Amendment like a muscle, to push at it and goad it, to not allow it to atrophy or slip into ethical Alzheimer's through neglect or apathy, and to slap away the hands that wish to strangle it.

The scatological father of the original NCTE was Robert Stanley Need, a flamboyant, richly articulate, socially pretentious, editorially fearless and once legendary figure now barely remembered on the Oregon coast his newspaper heated white hot for five remarkable years.

The 'Old Bird' lasted only five years as a consequence of its unconditionally controversial approach to press freedom. For most of that time it starved slowly (though noisily) for lack of financial substance. Robert Stanley Need acted as a Horatius holding off creditors and philosophical enemies who strained to silence his brand of rabblerous populist journalism. He was a hard, demanding editor and wrote inflammably about whatever he considered unjust or unfair. But he finally bowed out, exhausted and spiritually trampled, and less than a year after he surrendered his newspaper to a *poseur* who stole bequeathed money that might have kept the paper alive awhile longer, the 'Old Bird' went to its crypt like a precocious child killed too early.

The NCTE was born again after three years because, as it proclaimed in its first editorial, "1st Amendment newspapers have become as rare as the nation's symbol, the bald eagle. The independent press has virtually disappeared, homogenized into huge corporations that control the country and probably the world Like everything else the role of the press is in question. There should be no doubt. The press should have no other special interest than the 1st Amendment (which is) patently impossible when the press is controlled by corporations whose interests are often in conflict with the Constitution."

The media wields oblique influence rather than power --- although its manipulation for propaganda is immensely powerful. The major difference between corporately owned mainstream media and its raffish alternative that is usually on the edge of society and almost always on the brink of bankruptcy, is that megamedia uses the 1st amendment and the popular concept that news must be reported objectively as a cloak for blatantly partisan propaganda.

Two major institutions acted questionably this past national election: the always questioned mass media that did not question enough; and the U.S. Supreme Court which sold its credibility for a longshot chance of elevating the judicial branch of government into a blackrobed autocracy.

Virtually all of the mainstream media have comfortably moved into the White House with George Bush Jr. with little or no critique of the Supreme Court decision that 'appointed' him President. Yet it is a dark and spreading stain on the rights and powers of ordinary citizens. Only micromedia --- primarily the leftward periodicals --- are providing any analysis of the effects and consequences of a baldly stolen Presidential election by an entrenched minority determined to preserve its power against rapidly changing demographics.

Columnist Linda Ellerby wrote that the late Frank Zappa "questioned journalists with the same fervor he

questioned politicians, and he couldn't understand why most journalists didn't seem as passionate about the 1st Amendment as he was, or why every American didn't realize that all censorship, especially well-intentioned censorship, was a form of tyranny." (Zappa ridiculed Tipper Gore's attempt to censor rock lyrics which she said promoted deviant behavior. "I wrote a song about dental floss," he said to a Congressional panel, "but did anyone's teeth get cleaner?")

"Censorship is more obscene than obscenity," says the Rev. Billy Hults, editor and publisher of the Upper Left Edge.

Newspapers like the *Times Eagle* reflect the dismal and deadening. Yet through dark funnels history is really understood. Each era is a funhouse mirror of every other. Wealth and power are two essential points of humanity's triangle, creating the vastly accumulated weight of an unstoppable lunge toward catastrophe.

These next few years promise to be vivid and intense for unrepentantly irreverent independent media: --- 'In a dark time the eye begins to see', Theodore Roethke wrote, which flies in the flag of every issue of the NCTE

"The day the first press is confiscated or the first publisher of an alternative publication is branded a terrorist and jailed for national security reasons, the mainstream media will have to wake up," Peter B. Smith, indefatigable editor of the wryly eccentric and stalwart *Bay City Slug* ('The Newspaper That Hates Progress') has written.

"Though corporate owners of the print media might try and ignore the event, I'm certain reporters and journalists who work for these monstrosities of misinformation will sound the alarm. Should they fail in their sacred duty the alternative press will become the underground press, and we will have returned to the black days before the American Revolution....As long as the mainstream press doesn't do its job, the alternative press will, come what may."

~MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER