

# CENSORSHIP

## A WORLD ENCYCLOPEDIA

Volume 2

E-K

*Editor*

DEREK JONES



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FITZROY DEARBORN PUBLISHERS  
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*or*

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editorship, and upon the book trade in general, came from none other than France's chief censor, Chrétien-Guillaume de Lamoignon de Malesherbes, director of the *bureau de la librairie* between 1750 and 1763.

In 1758–59 Malesherbes composed five memoirs, intending them for the education of the dauphin, son of Louis XV. In them the director hoped to humanize censorship and bring the Enlightenment's conception of reason to bear upon it. Malesherbes argued that censorship ought to be a pre-publication administrative action, never a post-publication repressive one. He would have his censors tolerate licentious books, political commentary that remained theoretical, and even religious debate. If the limits of toleration were both extended and carefully defined, in Malesherbes's opinion the book police might avoid being arbitrary and could focus attention upon what was genuinely condemnable. Malesherbes also believed that a broadened range of condoned books would give clandestine printshops less need to exist, and they then would be driven out of business.

Apart from accelerating the award of "tacit permissions", Malesherbes never had the opportunity to put his reforms into practice. In 1763, four years after composing his memoirs, he was eased from office. However, in retirement 25 years later, he approached the problem again, composing a *Mémoire sur la liberté de la presse* (1788). On this occasion, he tried to compromise between French and British practice. According to the one-time administrator, should an author submit to pre-publication censorship, he might be exempt from legal pursuit. If, however, he insisted upon avoiding examination, he opened himself to attacks of libel. In such an instance he would be obliged to mount a courtroom defence. Because he mistrusted French justice, Malesherbes hoped that authors would submit to administrative censorship rather than plead in court. Yet this Enlightenment-style compromise proved to be in vain. By 1788 the movement's reasoned concessions to examination of the printed word were out of date. Even as Malesherbes composed his memoir, an avalanche of uncensored pamphlets crying for political regeneration swept across France; and less than a year later Article 11 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen rejected out of hand traditional forms of administrative censorship: "... [E]very citizen, therefore, may freely

speak, write, and print, subject to accountability for abuse of this freedom in the cases determined by law."

As far away as South America, Enlightenment principles – introduced mainly, paradoxically enough, by Spanish officials and clergy – were, despite censorship, preparing the ground for revolutionary change. Progenitors of the independence struggle, such as Francisco de Miranda (Venezuela), Manuel Belgrano (Argentina), and Manuel Hidalgo (Mexico), were first roused by their clandestine reading of what had been declared illicit writings by Rousseau and Voltaire. Twenty years after the French revolution, one by one the territories of the new world claimed their independence, even if, as in France, radicals and conservatives engaged in long battles for control, and censorship itself was far from dead.

RAYMOND BIRN

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## ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Over the past 100 years, censorship in the areas of environment and public health has become increasingly important, for several reasons. First is the rise of powerful groups – notably governments, corporations, and professions – with a vested interest in policies, practices, or beliefs that are, or are thought to be, damaging to the environment or to people's health. These groups have both a reason and a capacity to censor. Second is the increased prominence of experts, such as scientists and doctors, with credibility due to their credentials and positions. When some of these experts try to speak out in a way that threatens vested interests, there is something to censor. Third is the rise of citizen movements, notably the modern environmental movement dating from about the 1960s, and the more

diffuse movements and initiatives concerning public health. These movements provide an audience for environmental and public health messages and a force that can sometimes challenge vested interests.

States, including the militaries, are responsible for significant censorship in these areas. War, military repression, and other military activities have major impacts on public health and often on the environment. Some of these are quite obvious and treated as either inevitable or secondary in debates framed around "defence" and "national security". In wartime there is pervasive censorship that includes the effect of conflict on the environment and health. Military secrecy also applies in "peacetime". It becomes especially salient when information, if avail-

able to the public, can become a basis for opposition to military operations.

A prime case is nuclear weapons which, because of their enormous destructive power and symbolic significance, became a prime focus for peace movements from the 1950s onwards. States have tested their bombs as part of the process of developing their nuclear arsenals. They also involved troops in training exercises around nuclear explosions. All this was blanketed in secrecy. In countries with pervasive censorship, such as the Soviet Union and China, there were no alternative sources of information. The massive nuclear disaster at Chelyabinsk in 1957 was covered up by the Soviet government for many years. In the West, by contrast, public concern together with independent sources of expertise, such as university scientists, made possible a challenge to government censorship. Radioactive fallout from atmospheric nuclear explosions can be measured around the world. Governments could censor their own scientists but could not stop scientists elsewhere from making measurements and pronouncements.

Military research is normally subject to strict censorship. In a few cases, especially in the United States, health and environmental implications have been revealed, though often only years afterwards. Examples are research in biological and chemical weapons and research into "mind control", some of which involved exposing unsuspecting subjects or populations to chemicals and drugs.

Nuclear power, with roots in nuclear weapons programmes, has long been subject to state censorship. Many nuclear bureaucracies have sought to cover up any adverse consequences. In India, for example, the Atomic Energy Act 1962 prohibited releasing or attempting to obtain information about nuclear power. Similar acts applied in other countries. Government cover-ups were attempted of the Windscale reactor accident of 1957 in Britain and the Fermi fast breeder accident of 1966 in the United States. As anti-nuclear movements have gained strength and sympathy, it has become harder for governments to maintain secrecy.

In the Soviet Union, nuclear power was promoted as totally safe and all criticisms and negative information were suppressed. Full information about the Three Mile Island accident in the US in 1979 was provided only to top Soviet managers. Soviet nuclear accidents were concealed from the public and from other nuclear plants, so that nothing could be learned from the experience of problems. However, the Chernobyl nuclear power plant disaster of 1986 could not be concealed, although the Soviet media did not report it until two days after reports from foreign broadcasters. Members of the Politburo received extensive information about the enormous impact of radiation releases from Chernobyl on the health of nearby populations, but this was kept secret and bland reassurances were issued to the media. For years afterwards, articles describing the situation of local inhabitants, especially their health problems, were denied publication, while whitewashes were published.

Disinformation, the intentional dissemination of false information, is commonly used by militaries, especially in wartime. Sometimes it concerns health issues, such as the US government's allegation that "yellow rain" in southeast Asia was a Communist biological weapon. It was later revealed to be bees' faeces. The success of any disinformation campaign depends on the censorship of valid information. The involve-

ment of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in the heroin trade in different parts of the world, primarily as a means to finance undercover operations, has been hidden by censorship and disguised by disinformation.

Famine, a public health problem of the first order, is made possible or aggravated by government secrecy. The massive famine in China in the late 1950s, in the wake of the Great Leap Forward, killed perhaps 20 million people but was covered up by the Chinese government at the time and for decades afterwards. Publicity provides an effective antidote to the development of famine.

Corporations, such as those that produce chemicals, pharmaceuticals, cars, or forest products have been responsible for considerable censorship. When corporations fund their own research, they may try to cover up unwelcome findings by their own scientists. There are several ways in which this sort of censorship can be challenged. One is for government regulatory bodies to examine the research. Another is for independent scientists – usually at universities – to carry out their own studies. A third is for industry scientists to leak information or speak out publicly. For this to be effective, there needs to be a receptive audience, including government regulators, politicians, or public interest groups. Corporations try to stifle each of these challenges. They can attempt to turn government regulatory bodies into allies of the industry, to fund university researchers, to discredit hostile researchers, to harass and dismiss internal whistleblowers, and to block the dissemination of unwelcome research findings.

These processes are a recurring pattern in many health and environmental issues. In the 1920s scientists in the United States raised concerns about lead in petrol and some US states banned it. General Motors sponsored a study by the Bureau of Mines and put pressure on it to prevent the release of negative results. General Motors promulgated its own view but the media also reported critical scientists. Later, a study team investigated, found no short-term effect, and recommended long-term studies – but these were to be done by the industry. Corporate interests thus censored their own scientists, were able to nobble government studies through funding and pressure, fought a publicity battle with some independent scientists and media, and eventually succeeded, in that generation, in preventing an independent study of long-term health effects.

The drug thalidomide was manufactured by the German firm Chemie Grünenthal and licensed in other countries. It was marketed as a completely safe sedative. Although Grünenthal received reports of adverse health effects, such as peripheral neuritis, it did not withdraw the drug. It lied to doctors who wrote asking if specific side effects had been seen before, attempted to conceal the number of cases reported to the company, tried to suppress publication of reports about peripheral neuritis, and sought to counter critical reports with favourable ones by using money, influence, and distortion. Grünenthal waged a smear campaign against Lenz, a German doctor who was trying to expose a link between thalidomide taken by pregnant women and birth defects in their children. The issue escaped company control when reports of the birth defects were published in medical journals and publicized in the media.

In the case of the effects of smoking on health, tobacco companies covered up their own research findings, which showed

adverse effects, for decades. Research money was channelled through company lawyers so that the findings were covered by lawyer-client privilege; thus, unwelcome results could be denied publication and scientists prevented from testifying in court.

Pesticide manufacturers have for decades used various methods to stifle critical viewpoints. In 1962 the Velsicol Chemical Corporation put pressure on Houghton Mifflin in an attempt to stop publication of Rachel Carson's famous book *Silent Spring*. In 1971, Clyde Manwell, professor of zoology at the University of Adelaide, Australia, wrote a letter to a newspaper critical of government spraying for fruit fly. This triggered a lengthy attempt to dismiss him; thereafter his research grant applications were unsuccessful. A US scientist, Melvin Reuber, who studied the cancer-causing effects of pesticides and provided results to citizen groups, received a severe reprimand that was published in a chemical industry trade journal, leading to the destruction of his career. The chemical company Velsicol, manufacturer of the pesticides chlordane and heptachlor, has failed to publish adverse findings from its own in-house research; failed to undertake many relevant studies; misrepresented its unpublished test data; omitted mention of hazards from labels and advertisements; and illegally withheld results from the US Environmental Protection Agency.

Corporations have an obvious incentive to prevent the release of information about any activities that damage health or the environment, but sometimes government bodies develop just as strong an interest. For example, many government agriculture departments have become enthusiastic advocates of pesticides and have tried to cover up or discredit contrary information.

Unethical public relations can be considered the civilian equivalent of military disinformation. Corporations have used various techniques to undermine and discredit critics pointing to environmental and health problems, including spying, buying support from experts, cover-ups, lies, and payments to journalists. To limit the impact of unwelcome books, there are cases of covert disruption of speaking tours and dissemination of damaging material to media outlets. David Steinman's book *Diet for a Poisoned Planet* (1990) was subject to this sort of treatment.

Another technique used by corporations is the silencing "agreement". When workers or citizens sue manufacturers over the health effects of their work processes or products, the corporation may settle out of court - on condition that details of the case remain secret, including claims of harm, the size of the payout, and company documents provided as part of the case.

The professions, especially the medical profession, are also responsible for much censorship. The classic example is the response of doctors to Ignác Semmelweis, who beginning in the 1840s advocated antiseptic handwashing by obstetricians to reduce the high rate of maternal death during childbirth due to puerperal fever. Semmelweis was ignored, dismissed, and misrepresented.

Standard cancer treatments are surgery, radiation, and chemicals. Those who criticize these approaches or promote alternative therapies or theories, such as vitamin C or bacterial theories, have been marginalized by techniques including the denial of research funds, cutting off grants, blocking publications, and dismissing researchers. The American Cancer Society compiled a list of "unproven methods" of cancer management in order to discredit alternatives, although some of them had

shown positive results whereas, in comparison, many standard therapies had not been shown to be effective.

The dental profession's promotion of fluoridation used similar techniques. Referees tried to block certain articles because they might help the antifluoridationists. Dentists who spoke out against fluoridation were threatened with reprisals and sometimes deregistered; scientists had research funds removed. In the 1960s the *Journal of the American Dental Association* published a dossier on antifluoridationists, including much dubious material, and used it to discredit scientists and doctors opposed to fluoridation.

The theory that AIDS arose from contaminated polio vaccines used in Africa in the 1950s is very threatening to the medical research establishment. Articles and letters outlining the theory were refused publication in several medical and scientific journals. The developer of the vaccine, Hilary Koprowski, sued authors and media outlets for defamation, thereby stopping discussion of the theory.

The legal system has often been used to stop discussion of environmental and health issues. In the so-called McLibel case, Helen Steel and Dave Morris were sued by McDonald's, the worldwide fast food chain, over a critical leaflet. Numerous US citizens have been sued by corporations for writing letters, signing petitions, or making media statements about environmental and health issues (among others); these sorts of legal actions are now commonly called Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs). They are a form of harassment that inhibits people from speaking out, and are also used in some other countries. In a number of US states, there are "food disparagement laws" that prohibit criticisms of certain foods.

Although most censorship in health and environmental areas stems, directly or indirectly, from powerful interest groups, censorship is also possible in and by opposition groups. Within the environmental movement, for example, open criticism of distortions or power plays is frowned upon and anyone who engages in such criticism may be subject to various sanctions, perhaps even losing a job. Such social movement censorship is the counterpart of censorship by the more powerful interests that the movements oppose.

BRIAN MARTIN

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## EQUATORIAL GUINEA

(formerly Spanish Guinea)

**Population:** 457,000

**Main religions:** Roman Catholic; Animist

**Official languages:** Spanish; French

**Other languages spoken:** Pidgin English; Fang; Bubi; Ibo

**Illiteracy rate (%):** 7.5 (m); 25.6 (f)

**Number of daily newspapers:** 1

**Number of radio receivers per 1000 inhabitants:** 428

**Number of TV receivers per 1000 inhabitants:** 9.8

**Number of PCs per 1000 inhabitants:** 2

The mainland of Equatorial Guinea, Rio Muni (now known as Mbini), is situated in Africa's "armpit". Offshore are the islands of Fernando Po (Bioko) and Annoben (Pagadu). The Portuguese were present here from the 15th century, but the area was claimed at various times subsequently by the Spanish, the British, and then in the mid-19th century by the Spanish again, by whom it was formally acquired in the last years of the 19th century. In 1904 the three regions were declared the joint territory of Spanish Guinea, to be administered by the Patronato de Indigenas.

Religion has played an unusually prominent part in the history of censorship in this territory, both before and after its independence. When the first Spanish governor-general arrived in Fernando Po in 1858, he expelled the existing Baptist missionaries to make way for Catholicism, the national religion of Spain. The degree of Catholic proselytization was such that by 1909 the indigenous monotheistic religion had all but been extinguished. Christian mission activity also made an impact on the Fang culture of the mainland; but here the syncretistic Bwiti cult - incorporating elements of Christianity - enabled traditional culture to hold its own to some extent. The Catholics (in the persons of the Poor Clares order) had the monopoly on education. Meanwhile, as late as 1951 Presbyterian missionaries

were barred from operating in the territory, on the orders of the Spanish dictator general Franco.

Despite the dominance of the Catholic church in the territory it was Methodist missionaries who established the first newspaper, *Eco de Fernando Po*, in 1900. A daily newspaper followed, but, as all seven printing presses were controlled by Spanish missionaries or the government publications were firmly censored, particularly after Franco's ascent to power in 1938. As in Spain itself during the Franco period, coercive measures were employed to ensure that writers practised self-censorship.

By the 1950s opposition to Spanish rule had begun to emerge in Equatorial Guinea, although Spain stubbornly rejected calls for independence. In 1955 the Cruzada Nacional de Liberacion de Guinea Ecuatorial (CNLGE) took advantage of Spain's accession to the United Nations, writing a letter to the international body that drew attention to this relatively unknown part of Africa and pressing for decolonization. The Spanish reaction was swift. All organizations defending African rights, however obliquely, were proscribed, public meetings were banned, and the authorities maintained a web of informants to keep a check on subversive voices. Acacio Mare, a CNLGE leader, was arrested on 20 November 1958, killed while in