Beyond mass media

by Brian Martin

Complaints about the mass media are commonplace. To begin, there is the low quality of many of the programmes and articles. There is the regular portrayal of violence, given an attention out of proportion with its frequency in everyday life. More generally, most of the mass media give much more attention to bad news—crime, deaths, disasters, wars, etc.—than to positive sides of the human condition. The mass media frequently create unrealistic fears about criminals, foreign peoples and the like.

"News" often is more like entertainment than information or education. News reports, especially on television, are typically given without much overt context. The latest events are described, but not what led up to them or caused them. The result is that consumers of the media learn a lot of facts but frequently don't understand how they fit together. "Context" is the result of the assumptions behind the facts, and this context is all the more powerful because it is neither stated nor commented upon.

Even the "facts" that are presented are often wrong or misleading. Powerful groups, especially governments and large corporations, shape the news in a range of ways, such as by providing selected information, offering access to stories in exchange for favourable coverage, spreading disinformation, and threatening reprisals.

Advertising is another powerful influence on commercial media. Advertisers influence what sort of stories are presented. But more deeply, advertisements themselves shape people's view of the world. They are a pervasive source of unreality, fostering insecurity and consumerism.

The problems with the mass media are indeed many but, judged by the criteria of accuracy, quality and independence of special interests, some media are much better than others. Most media critics seem to believe that it is possible to promote and develop enlightened, responsive, truly educative mass media. This may be the case.

In this article, though, I argue that mass media by their nature give power to a few and offer little scope for participation by the vast majority.

The problem is not with media in general, but with mass media, namely those media that are produced by relatively few people compared to the number who receive them. Most large newspapers, television and radio stations fit this description. This argument suggests that reform of the media, although useful, should not be the goal. Instead, the aim should be to replace mass media by communication systems which are much more participatory.

This argument does not assume that audiences are passive, uniform masses of people. Rather, it is founded on the insight that "power tends to corrupt" (Lord Acton) applied to the power that mass media give to owners, editors, sponsors and featured contributors.

The usual approaches

Much of the discussion about media assumes that there are two choices: a free market or state control. The problem with control by the state is obvious: centralised control. The media of military regimes and bureaucratic socialist states are notorious for their censorship. The defenders of the "free market" argue that government-owned media, or tight regulations, are similarly noxious even in liberal democracies.

Critics argue that the "free market" media promote a very limited freedom, namely freedom only for large media companies and other powerful corporate interests (Lichtenberg, 1987). Private mass media are often justified as being a vital part of the "marketplace of ideas." But, as a way of promoting truth, this so-called market is largely a myth, serving mainly the interests of elites (Ingber, 1984).

The limitations of the mass media in liberal democracies are not always easy to perceive unless one has access to alternative sources of information. Fortunately, there are some excellent books and magazines that expose the incredible biases, coverups and misleading perspectives in the mass media. The magazines *Extra!, Free Press, Lies of our Times, Propaganda Review*

and *Reportage* give eye-opening accounts of the ways in which the English-language mass media give flattering perspectives of business and government, limit coverage of issues affecting women and minorities, cover up elite corruption, promote government policy agendas, and so forth. *Unreliable Sources* by Martin A. Lee and Norman Solomon (1990) gives examples of the conservative, establishment and corporate bias of US mass media on issues such as politicians, foreign affairs, environment, racism, terrorism and human rights. Intriguingly, conservatives also believe that the media are biased, but against them (eg., Efron, 1971).

The analysis that underlies these exposés is simple and effective: corporations and governments have a large influence on the mass media, and the mass media are big businesses themselves. These factors appear to explain most of the problems.* The power of the western mass media is especially damaging to the interests of Third World people, being an integral part of contemporary cultural imperialism in a variety of ways.

Yes, the media are biased. What next? Jeff Cohen, of Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), does have a strategy. He says (Lee and Solomon, 1990, pp. 340-358):

- *be sceptical of media stories;*
- *write letters to media companies, make complaints, join talk-back radio;*
- *don't advocate censorship, but instead advocate presentation of both sides on any issue;*
- *use public access TV;*
- *write letters, hold meetings and pickets;*
- *use alternative media.*

This is a good grassroots programme of action, as far as it goes. But the goal is "fairness and accuracy," namely the balancing of news. There seems to be no larger programme to replace undemocratic media structures.

A sophisticated treatment of these issues is given by John Keane (1991) in *The Media and Democracy.* He provides an elegant critique of "market liberalism," the approach by which governments reduce their intervention in communications markets. He notes that unregulated communications markets actually restrict communication freedom by creating monopolies, setting up barriers to entry and by turning

knowledge into a commodity. He also points out several trends in liberal democracies which seem to be of no concern to supporters of a free market in communications: the use of government emergency powers, secret operations by the military and police, lying by politicians, advertising by governments, and increasing collaboration between elites in government, business and trade unions. The increasingly global reach of communications corporations is also a significant problem.

The traditional alternative to corporate media is "public service media," namely government-financed media (such as the ABC in Australia, BBC in Britain and CBC in Canada) combined with government regulation of commercial media. Keane favours revived public service media, with guaranteed autonomy of government-funded media, government regulation of commercial media, and support for non-state, non-market media. This latter category includes small presses and magazines, community radio stations, and open-access television stations.

Keane's model sounds very good in theory. He gives an imposing list of things that should be done, but he doesn't say who is going to make it happen—the government, presumably. More deeply, Keane doesn't say how the state will be controlled. He wants a new constitutional settlement with enlightened and progressive government media, suitable government controls on commercial media, and promotion of the "non-state, non-market media." But why should "the state" do all this? Why won't it keep doing what it is already doing, as he describes so well?

Limits to participation

Many of the critics of the mass media state or imply that these media could be democratic, if only they were run differently. Independence of the media outlets would be guaranteed, minimising the influence of government, owners or other special interest groups. A range of viewpoints would be presented. The power of advertisers would be reduced or eliminated. Opportunities for citizen input into content would be opened up. Much of this could indeed happen. But, I would argue, it would not make mass media truly democratic.

Consider, for example, an alternative newspaper with a substantial circulation and reputation. However responsive the editors may be to readers, some editorial decisions must be made. Choices must be made about what stories to run, about which advertisements (if any) to accept, about which events to publicise, about which submissions to accept, about what policies to make about language, and so forth. There are innumerable "policy" decisions to be made. Even spelling can be controversial. Should the paper be open to the debate about spelling reform? What about letters to the editor? Should everything be published, or should some selection be made on the basis of issues or quality of writing?

If there are only a few active contributors, then everyone can be involved who wants to be, and all submissions published. But this is extremely unlikely when the circulation becomes large and the publication is seen to be important. Then lots of people see an opportunity to raise their own favourite issues.

These problems are far from hypothetical. They are quite apparent to anyone dealing with alternative magazines with circulations in the tens of thousands, or even just thousands. Not everyone who wants to can have an article published in *Mother Jones, New Statesman and Society* or *The Progressive.* Such magazines are "high quality" because they are able to select from many potential offerings. But being able to select also means that the editors have a great deal of power. Being able to select "quality" also means being able to make decisions about content.

Of course, from the point of view of the owners and editors of such magazines, they are hard pressed just to survive. Make some wrong decisions and readership may drop off or financial benefactors may be less generous. (Most "alternative" magazines depend heavily on contributions to supplement subscription fees.) Practising "democracy" within such a magazine, if this means publishing letters from all and sundry or letting readers vote on policy matters, would be a prescription for financial disaster.

These comments are a bit unfair to the alternative media. By definition, even the largest of them is still a small player in the media game. Further-

more, one can argue that a diversity of perspectives is available through the different alternative media. There are more small magazines available than anyone can read, after all. My point is not to criticise the alternative media, but to point out that participatory democracy is virtually impossible in a medium where there is a small number of owners and editors producing a product for a much larger audience.

The futility of seeking media democracy becomes most apparent when the scale is increased: audiences of hundreds of thousands or millions. This is the domain of major newspapers and television stations. It requires only a little analysis to find that the larger the audience, the more powerful are the key decision-makers in the media organisations and the less effective are any mechanisms for participation. The very scale of the media limits opportunities for participation and increases the power of key figures. The way in which this power is used depends on the relation of the media to the most powerful groups in society. In liberal democracies, governments and corporations, and media corporations in particular, exercise the greatest power over the media. The large scale of the mass media is what makes it possible for this power to be exercised so effectively.

Other arguments for mass media

Perhaps there are some overlooked arguments for maintaining mass media even in a fully participatory society. It is worth canvassing a few of them.

(1) Emergencies. The mass media, especially radio and television, can come in handy in emergencies: messages can be broadcast, reaching a large fraction of the population.

But the mass media are not really necessary for emergency purposes. Fire alarms, for example, do not rely on conventional media. Furthermore, network media, including telephone and computer networks, can be set up to allow emergency communications.

Actually, the mass media are a great vulnerability in certain emergencies: military coups. Because they allow a few people to communicate to a large population with little possibility of dialogue, television and radio stations are commonly the first targets in military takeovers. Censorship of newspapers

is a next step. This connection between coups and mass media also highlights the role of mass media in authoritarian regimes.

Military strength is no defence against a military coup, and indeed may be the cause of one. To resist a coup, network communications are far superior to mass media (Schweik Action, 1992). So, from the point of view of preparing for emergencies, mass media are bad investments.

(2) Media talent. The mass media allow many people to enjoy and learn from the efforts of some very talented people: actors, musicians, athletes, journalists and commentators. True. But just as many people can enjoy and learn from these talented people without the mass media, for example through audio and video recordings.

Furthermore, the mass media suppress access to all but a few performers and contributors. Those who are left out

have a much better chance of reaching a sympathetic audience via network media.

Richard Schickel (1985) points out that the celebrity is a twentieth-century phenomenon, created especially by movies and television. He describes a culture of celebrity, in which people strive to be well known, even if this is only because they have appeared on the screen. The culture of celebrity, he argues, is undermining many traditional practices. For example, politicians are sold on the media in terms of image rather than policies.

For talented people, it is difficult to resist the attractions of fame. It is difficult for any writer or actor to refuse the opportunity to reach a mass audience and obtain a high media profile, not to mention a high salary. Perhaps this is one reason why many of the talented media critics want only to reform, rather than abolish, the mass media.

(3) A force for good. The mass media are undoubtedly powerful. In the right hands, they can be a powerful force for good purposes. Therefore, it might be argued, the aim should be to promote a mass media that is overseen by responsible, accountable people.

This sounds like a good argument. What it overlooks is how easily power corrupts. Lord Acton's insight has been verified in a series of eye-opening psychological experiments led by David Kipnis (1976, 1990). These experiments show that by exercising power over others, a person tends to believe that those subject to the power lack autonomy and hence are less worthy. Whoever is in positions of power in the mass media is susceptible to this process, as well as the normal corruptions of power, including power sought for its own sake and for self-enrichment.

(4) Large resources. The mass media command enormous resources, both financial and symbolic. This makes it possible for them to pursue large or expensive projects: large-budget films, special investigative teams, in-depth coverage of key events.

Actually, large-scale projects are also possible with network systems. They simply require cooperation and collaboration. For example, some public domain software (free computer programmes) is quite sophisticated and has been produced with the help of many people. In centralised systems, far-reaching decisions can be made by just a few people. In decentralised systems, greater participation is required.

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These four possible arguments for retaining mass media, in some reformed and improved form, actually turn out to be arguments against mass media. The mass media are not necessary for emergencies and are actually a key vulnerability to those who would take over a society. The mass media are not necessary to enjoy and benefit from the talent of others, and they foster an unhealthy emphasis on image. Power exercised through the mass media is unlikely to be a force for good since it tends to corrupt those who exercise it. Finally, although the mass media can undertake large projects, such projects can also develop through network media, but in a way involving participation rather than central direction.

Participatory media

In order to better understand the inherent undemocracy of mass media, it is useful to imagine a communications system that allows and fosters participation by everyone. David Andrews (1984) did this with his concept of "information routeing groups" or IRGs. His discussion predated the vast expansion of computer networks and is worth outlining in its original form. He imagined a computer network in which everyone is linked to several interest groups, with each group having anywhere from perhaps half a dozen up to several hundred people. An interest group might deal with anything from growing apples to racism. Each time a person makes a contribution on a topic, whether a short comment, a picture or a substantial piece of writing, they send it to everyone in the group. A person receiving a message could, if they wished, post it to other groups to which they belonged. Andrews called each of the groups an IRG.

In a network of IRGs, everyone can be a writer and publisher at the same time. But there are no guaranteed mass audiences. If a contribution is really important or exciting to those who receive it, they are more likely to post it to other groups. In this way, a piece of writing could end up being read by thousands or even millions of people. But note that this requires numerous individual decisions about circulating it to further groups. In the case of the mass media, a single editor may make the decision to run or stop an item. In the case of IRGs, lots of people are involved. By deciding whether or not to forward an item to another group, each person acts somewhat like an editor.

A system of IRGs can be self-limiting. If a group has too many active members, then each one might be bombarded with hundreds of messages every day. Some might opt out, as long as there was someone who would select pertinent messages for them. This person then acts as a type of editor. But note that this "editor" has little of the formal power of editors in the mass media. In an IRG system, anyone can set themselves up as an editor of this sort. Members of this "editor's" IRG can easily look at the larger body of contributions, should they so wish. One of the main reasons why the IRG editor has

relatively little formal power is that there is no substantial investment in terms of subscriptions, advertisers, printing equipment or salaries. Participating in an IRG is something that can easily be done in a few hours per week. Investments are lower and positions are less entrenched. An IRG editor will maintain an audience only as long as the editing is perceived to be effective. Similarly, quitting is relatively painless.

To anyone familiar with computer networks, especially the Internet, it may seem that to talk about IRGs is simply an awkward way of describing what is actually taking place on existing networks. Indeed, Andrews' account of IRGs can be interpreted as a description of what was to take place on Internet. But IRGs do not have to be based on computers. They can operate just as well—though more slowly—using the postal system. Again, this already happens with a number of discussions that operate by post, where each member adds perhaps a page of comment on the current topic, sends it to the group coordinator, who then makes copies of all contributions for all members. For those who have the technology and know how to use it, computer networks make this process far easier and faster.

Another medium that is inherently participatory is the telephone. Phones are very easy to use—only speaking, not writing, is required—and are widely available. Certainly it is possible for a person to dominate a telephone conversation, but only one person is at the other end of the line. In the mass media, one person speaks and thousands or millions listen.

Ivan Illich (1973) proposed the concept of "convivial tools." This includes technologies that foster creative and autonomous interactions between people. Convivial technologies in the case of the media are the ones that foster participation. The postal system, the telephone system, computer networks and short-wave radio are examples of convivial communications media.

The implication of this analysis is straightforward. To promote a more participatory society, it is important to promote participatory media and to challenge, replace and eventually abandon mass media. Jerry Mander (1978), in his case against television, gave as one of his four main arguments corporate domination of television used to

mould humans for a commercial environment. But all mass media involve centralised power. Mander's argument should be extended: all mass media should be abandoned.

Saying "mass media should be superseded" is easy. Working out practical implications is the hard part. In my view, although a world without mass media may be a long-term goal, the mass media will be around for quite some time. Therefore, it is necessary to have a strategy to challenge them, from inside and outside, as well as to promote alternatives.

There are already plenty of challenges to the mass media, of course. But these challenges are not to the existence of the mass media, but only to the way they are run. In a way, media criticism is a form of loyal opposition.

Strategies

Here I will outline a number of possible strategies, focusing on what can be done by individuals and small groups to challenge mass media and replace them by participatory network media. It would be easy to make some sweeping recommendations about what should be done, especially by government. But to be compatible with the goal of a participatory communications system, the methods should be participatory too. The following ideas are meant to encourage discussion.

(1) **Change one's own media consumption patterns**. Many people are such regular and insistent consumers of the mass media—television, radio and newspapers—that it's possible to speak of an addiction. This also includes many of those who are strongly critical of the mass media. Cutting down on consumption can be part of a process of imagining and fostering a participatory communications system.

I'm sure that some people will find this recommendation objectionable. Surely, they will say, it's quite possible to be an avid mass media consumer— or to work for the media—while still maintaining critical perspective and also using and promoting alternative media. Of course that's true. Analogously, a factory worker can certainly remain critical of capitalism and promote alternatives.   ·

My view is not that cutting back media consumption is necessary, but that it can be a useful way to change

people's consciousness. It is similar to animal liberationists reducing their consumption of animal products and environmentalists riding bicycles and composting their organic wastes. Such individual acts cannot by themselves transform the underlying structures of factory farming, industrial society or centralised media: collective action for structural change is needed. Nevertheless, changes in individual behaviour serve several important purposes: they change the perspectives of individuals, they reinforce concern about the issue and they provide an example (of consistency) for others.

Changing media habits can be incredibly difficult. Watching the news on television is, for many people, a ritual. For others, reading the daily paper is an essential part of each day. Although Jerry Mander's *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* has become a classic in alternative circles, no social movement has developed to abolish TV. There are only some small groups, such as the Society for the Elimination of Television, producing a few newsletters.

One reason may be that—according to one argument—watching television changes one's brain waves, reducing the number of fast waves characteristic of thinking and increasing the number of slow waves characteristic of relaxed states. This explains why watching television seems so relaxing: it allows the brain to switch off. It also explains why television is so effective at communicating commercial messages. Images go into the brain without processing; the images cannot be recalled, but they can be recognised, for example in a supermarket (Emery and Emery, 1976).

Another reason why switching off the television is so difficult is that it becomes part of the household. It seems voluntary, and it is to some extent. Action must begin at home (Lappé, 1985; Large, 1980). It is easier to oppose "alien" technologies such as nuclear power, which are not part of people's everyday lives. Challenging technologies that are personal possessions, used routinely—such as television and cars—is far more difficult.

Except for some people who must monitor the media as part of their work, mass media consumption is, from a time management view, quite inefficient. Think back on all the television

you watched during the 1980s, or some previous decade. How much of it was genuinely necessary to be fully informed, or was even genuinely informative? A similar calculation can be made for reading newspapers. One time-management expert (Lakein, 1973) recommends glancing at headlines at newsstands to keep up with events.

But, many will ask, what if the aim is not efficiency but simply enjoying life and occasionally learning something along the way? This brings the discussion back to lack of participation. Most people have been turned into passive consumers of the media. This will not change until some people take the initiative to break the pattern.

(2) **Participate in a group to change media consumption patterns.** In a group of two or more people, it can be easier to make some of the individual changes. Individuals can be assigned the task of monitoring particular media and reporting on issues that are important to the group. Others can read alternative media. In this way, individuals don't need to worry so much that they have missed some important item. More important, though, is the process of interaction in the group: discussing the issues. This is what is missing in the individual consumption of the mass media.

Of course, quite a bit of discussion occurs already among friends and colleagues. By working in a more directed fashion in a group, a greater commitment to participation and participatory media can be fostered. Teachers can contribute to this process by giving guidance on how to analyse the mass media and how to use and develop alternatives.

(3) **Use the mass media for one's own purposes.** This is the usual approach: writing letters to the editor, putting out press releases, being interviewed, inviting media to meetings, holding rallies to attract media coverage, etc. Numerous action groups, from feminists to farmers, promote their cause this way.

Such efforts can shift the emphasis in media coverage, for example from coverage of politicians and business to some attention to social issues and movements. But this does little or nothing to challenge the fundamental lack of democracy in the mass media. Furthermore, it can distort social movement agendas. Seeking media atten-

tion can take precedence over building grassroots support. Some movement leaders are turned into stars by the media, causing internal stresses and resentments (Gitlin, 1980). All in all, this approach, as a means of promoting participatory media, has little to recommend it. Social movements need a strategy on communications, including how to deal with both establishment and alternative media (Raboy, 1984).

Of course, promoting participatory media is not the only goal of social movements. In a great number of cases, using the existing mass media is a sensible and quite justifiable approach. Furthermore, campaigns such as those by FAIR to challenge biases in the media are extremely important. But it is important to be aware of the limitations of such campaigns. Even "fair and accurate" mass media are far from participatory.

Participating in the mass media is inevitably limited to only a few people or only to minor contributions. Only a few people have the skills or opportunity to write an article—that will be published—for a large newspaper, or to be interviewed for more than a few seconds on television. Even an occasional article or television appearance is trivial compared to the impact of those who host a television programme or write a regular column in a major paper. Furthermore, those who are successful in "breaking in" may actually legitimise the media in which they appear. This is analogous to the way that worker representatives on company boards can legitimise both the decisions made and the hierarchical structure of the company.

Many progressives want to use the media, or go into it as journalists or producers, to help the causes in which they believe. The intention is good, and the work many of them do is superb. But it should be remembered that this approach perpetuates unequal participation. It needs to be asked whether the aim is mainly to promote a favoured viewpoint or to foster a discussion involving ever more people. These two aims are not always compatible.

(4) Participate in alternative media. This is an obvious strategy. Possibilities include:
- *subscribing to alternative magazines and supporting small presses;*
- *writing material for newsletters and small magazines;*

- *publishing one's own newsletter, magazine or books;*
- *organising meetings of friends to discuss issues of significance;*
- *doing community organising with techniques such as public meetings and door-to-door canvassing;*
- *listening to and producing programmes for community radio and television;*
- *using computer networks;*
- *producing, collecting and using micrographics (microfiche, microfilm), especially to distribute and save non-standard works;*
- *using short-wave radio;*
- *running workshops on developing skills for network media;*
- *developing campaigns that help build skills in using alternative media and don't rely on mass media;*
- *participating in self-managing media enterprises (Downing, 1984; Herman, 1992; for further references see Bennett, 1992).*

These and other initiatives are going on all the time. They need more support and development. This strategy is fully compatible with the goal of participatory media, so there are fewer internal contradictions and traps.

(5) Use non-violent action to challenge the mass media. Activists have more often used than challenged the mass media. Yet there are a host of methods of non-violent action that can be used to confront and change mass media, as well as to promote network media (Sharp, 1973). For example, boycotts can be organised of particularly offensive publications or shows. Small shareholders can use direct action to present their concerns at shareholders' meetings. Activists can occupy media offices. However, it is usually extremely difficult for consumers of the media to organise challenges. The best prospects are for media workers. They can challenge and subvert management by publishing or showing items without permission, allowing humorous mistakes to slip through, resigning as a group, working in against orders, and even taking over media operations and running them participatively. Such initiatives can only succeed if there is considerable support from the users of the media. Hence, links between workers and users are essential.

(6) Undermine institutional supports for mass media. This is a big one. It roughly translates into "undermine monopoly capitalism and the state."

The mass media would not be able to maintain their dominant position without special protection. Television is the best example. In most countries, governments own and run all channels. In liberal democracies there are some commercial channels, but these must be licensed by the government. Without government regulation, anyone could set up a studio and broadcast at whatever frequency they wanted. For cable systems, government regulations control who gains access.

The power of commercial television comes, of course, from corporate sponsorship, typically via advertisements. Without sponsorship from wealthy corporations, a few channels would be unlikely to be able to maintain their dominant positions. If a society of small enterprises is imagined—whether run by owners or worker collectives—there would be no basis or reason for large-scale sponsorship of mass media.

Corporations and governments also are crucial in maintaining the position of large-circulation newspapers. In many countries the dominant newspapers are government owned and produced. In capitalist societies, advertisements are essential to keep the purchase price down. Without advertisements, the size of the papers would shrink and the price would jump, leading to a decline in circulation. This would make the newspapers more similar to current-day alternative newspapers and magazines, which typically require contributions above and beyond subscription fees in order to stay afloat. Governments also help maintain large-circulation commercial newspapers in various indirect ways, including high postal rates for alternative media, defamation law (which can bankrupt small publishers), and copyright (which enables monopoly profits).

Governments and large corporations support the mass media, and vice versa. Of course, there are many conflicts between these powerful groups, such as when the media criticise particular government decisions or corporate actions, and when government or corporations try to muzzle or manipulate the media. But at a more fundamental level, these institutions reinforce

each other. Without government and corporate support, the mass media would disintegrate. With participatory media instead of mass media, governments and corporations would be far less able to control information and maintain their legitimacy.

In terms of strategy, the implication of this analysis is that challenges to the mass media, and the strengthening of network media, should be linked to challenges to monopoly capitalism and the state. To bring about participatory media, it is also necessary to bring about participatory alternatives to present economic and political structures.

The question is, how? The topic of abolishing corporate capitalism and the state is a big one! This is not the place to delve into strategies. The important point here is that strategies to challenge and replace mass media should be added to the agenda.

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In order for any significant shift away from the mass media to occur, there must be a dramatic shift in attitudes and behaviours. People who neither watch television nor read newspapers are now commonly seen as eccentrics. A shift needs to occur so that they are supported and it is the heavy consumers of the mass media who are given little reinforcement. Such shifts are possible: witness the change in attitudes in some countries about smoking in public, due largely to anti-smoking activism.

In order for withdrawal from using the mass media to become more popular, participatory media must become more attractive: cheaper, more accessible, more fun, more relevant. In such an atmosphere, non-violent action campaigns against the mass media and in support of participatory media become more feasible. Such campaigns, especially if supported by social movements, in turn make changes in personal media habits more likely and acceptable.

This, in outline, is one way that the mass media might be undermined. But it will not be an easy or quick operation. In so far as modern society is ever more based on information and knowledge, the mass media are increasingly central to the maintenance of unequal power and wealth. This is all the more reason to give special attention to the task of achieving a society without mass media.

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* See especially the now classic treatment by Bagdikian (1990). Schiller (1989) is a hard-hitting attack on corporate domination of information and culture in the US. In terms of how the dominant influences on the media operate, one can choose between a propaganda model as given by Herman and Chomsky (1988)—based on the five filters of ownership, advertising, sourcing from powerful organisations, attacks on unwelcome programmes, and anticommunism—or a model involving organisational imperatives and journalistic practices as given by Bennett (1988) and Tiffen (1989), among others. For the present discussion, the differences between these analyses are not important. For many other sources, see Bennett (1992).