

critical stories about Fleet-Boston Financial Corporation, a major advertiser and credit source. Or, it can be as insidious as the self-censorship that both journalists and citizens take part in as we regularly consume corporate culture.

In colonizing our minds, public relations is a close cousin to advertising—largely owned by ad agencies, operating outside public view, and serving interests from giant corporations to foreign governments. According to John Stauber, founder of PR Watch, “Half of everything in the news actually originates from a PR firm . . . it’s easy to simply regurgitate the dozens of press releases and stories that come in every day for free from PR firms.”ⁱⁱ

Many tout the Internet as a leveling factor, as though human beings and corporate “persons” are playing a game as equal opponents. Useful as e-mail and websites can be for exchanges of ideas and information, consider the global “net” effect of the following:

- less than 20 percent of the world’s population has electricity, much less the wherewithal to acquire computers;
- More people are using the Internet for e-commerce than for social activism;
- In 1996, Congress gave the digital spectrum, worth up to \$70 billion, to corporations in return for a broadcasters’ pledge to “serve the public interest.”

Given the corporate media assault on our self-governance, what alternatives do we advocate? In contrast to the “marketplace of ideas” (the competitive language of “free trade”) we can demand, as the Knights of Labor did more than a century ago, that the “transportation of knowledge” be made genuinely public. Members of the Committee on Corporations, Trade & Democracy identified the following principles shaping our vision of the media in a democracy:

- universal access to accurate information and the exchange of ideas via publicly funded media, free of commercial advertising;
- decentralized media, including micro and community radio and television, with interactive participation by all members of the community;
- universal and lifelong public education in media skills and democratic decision-making; and
- equal media access for issue advocates and candidates for public office.

The following mission statement from Nell Geiser, co-publisher of the youth activist zine *Co-Motion*ⁱⁱⁱ and a member of WILPF’s Boulder branch study group, offers an alternative to the corporate media’s profit motive:

“*Co-Motion* is a political, activist newsletter developed at New Vista High School. Our goal is to create a medium that will inform youth and provide forums for collective action. The issues we address will include

global, local, and always political topics that aren’t discussed enough in mainstream media. The topics and perspectives of youth will always be integrated into our reporting. It is important to be fair in our portrayal of every issue. We must foster a large, diverse community in order to maintain a lively, vital exchange and flow of ideas.”

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Committee members from the Campaign to Challenge Corporate Power, Assert the People’s Rights collaborated on this article. Call (508) 398-1023 or people@poclad.org, for information.

ⁱ Frantz Fanon, a black French psychoanalyst and social philosopher, best known among activists for authoring *Wretched of the Earth*. He was born in 1925, died in 1961.

ⁱⁱ PR Watch: 3318 Gregory St., Madison, WI, 53711; (608) 233-3346; www.prwatch.org.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Co-Motion* may be reached through Nell Geiser: nell-geiser@aol.com, Robin Feffer: rfeffer@netscape.net, by phone at (303) 443-3391, or at 1017 Maxwell Ave., Boulder, CO 80304.

WHO DEFINES PROTESTS?

If we examine mainstream broadcast and print media reports of the actions in Seattle last fall and in Washington, D.C. this April, we who have firsthand experience or other sources of information can see many failures in reporting the facts. Instead, what we often see is pseudo news analysis, as seen on the front page of my local paper, the *Sacramento Bee*. Leo Rennert, the Washington, D.C.-based reporter for the *Bee*, characterized the protestors as uninformed about the causes of poverty in the third world, despite his failure to interview any of them.

When reporters do choose to “report” the story, they often confine themselves to the language of the sports arena: who is “winning” or “losing,” for example, in the conflict in Seattle. In this way, they carry over to peoples’ demonstrations the same mentality we find in coverage of the presidential horse race.

Protesters lost in Washington, according to much of the media coverage, because they failed to shut down the IMF meeting. But if these reporters had actually consulted the protestors themselves, they would have found that the men and women in the streets felt they’d had another resounding success in terms of bringing national attention to the twin evils of the IMF and the World Bank, and building the movement to reclaim power over corporations.

- Ben Sher