Property Rights and Communication

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Introduction[1]

In the current federal neo-policy and neo-regulation process in the communications sector[2], euphemistically referred to as the Information Highway, the development, rules of governance and terms of access to information and communication networks are being framed by the preferences for, and extension of, private property rules and practices. These policies and practises erode and undermine the democratic common property right of access to information and knowledge.[3] Canadians' right of access will be undermined in a market approach due to lack of sufficient financial resources and the availability of affordable, quality service featuring diversity of content. A "have and have not" bifurcation in Canada based on such factors as income, education, and geographic location will become exacerbated in communication and information.

The ramifications of this policy change extend beyond the current narrow debates emanating from government and industry leaders about the use, ownership or, ostensibly, the wealth generating or emancipatory potentials of the technologies. Interestingly, such prophetic claims are even being made by those on different sides of this issue. Some public interests attribute an empowerment of public rights through the new technologies. This tendency of limiting public discussion and analysis to the potentialities of technology obscures and dismisses the broader issues relating to social and economic justice. The two dominant views emerging from these technological determinist perspectives are that such omnipotent technology will lead us either to

some utopian economic or to social/cultural panacea.

Technologies are not drivers of change, but tools subject to political, economic and social forces and decision making. What is significant in the current changes is that the stakes involve not so much the technologies, but information. This is a resource of the mind, language and humanity. Information is the stuff of understanding, communication, creativity and change. But how do we think about information? Questions of its control raise structural issues, but the more fundamental issues of availability, diversity, quality and need, necessary for a level of 'natural' human existence, can broaden debate to the universal dimension and importance of the resource.

In a broader political economic context, information is being subjected to a process of privatization and commercialisation, particularly in those aspects of life which until now have been unquestionably considered public. This deepening and extension of private property market relations is a broad assault upon the previously non-commodified public and private (individual) activities, space, relations and lives of people and society. So what is the problem? Why should this concern us? Quite simply, with the destruction and transformation of public information and public space, the basis of democracy, of economic and social justice, is threatened (Schiller, 1986:39).

This paper considers these issues in four parts. The first section offers a way of theorizing or thinking about information as a property right in the context of the role of the state and our communication system. The next two sections consider how this is being played out as process and practice in Canadian policy making and communication industry restructuring. These sections also analyse the class dimensions of this change, and the actors and social claims being made in this struggle. This includes an analysis of the strategies being used by different class actors and agents within the core state policy making apparatus. The concluding section revisits these core themes and considers the potential for the realization of the 'market' or 'democratic' goals

in the emerging information society.

Information

Before considering the changes in Canadian information and communication policy, it is useful to define what is meant by information, its role, and the claims which have come to be made on it in a capitalist liberal democratic market society (CMS).

Much of how we think about information is defined by how we think about society, our view of society and people's place in it. The difficulty in defining information lies in attempting to separate what it is or where we find it, from what one does with it or what it should be used for. This difficulty is more clouded as one tries to abstract 'information' from the context of the political economic relations of the society in which we live. Within the structural context of our society, information is often posited in terms of spheres, for example the social sphere, the education sphere, the market sphere, and so forth. While this helps us in clarifying our views of society, it risks artificially polarizing or drawing lines between what are more aptly described as interdependent or mutually influencing processes and activities (Resnick and Wolfe, 1987).[4] We can each be economic, political, social and cultural actors in separate processes and activities and in various combinations or degrees. The point is that, at times, with some of these there is a preponderance of one type of activity or process over the others—more social than economic, or more cultural than social, let us say.

In thinking about society this way, there are a number of ways of thinking about a 'public' as opposed to a 'market' view of information—what it is, what it should be, or how it is used. Herb Schiller, who has long argued for the protection of information rights, sees information as central to the development of a democratic society. As Schiller writes,

> information serves to facilitate democratic decision making, assists in citizen participation in government,

> and contributes to the search for roughly egalitarian measures in the economy at large (1991:42).

In this view, of information as a social good, a democratic resource, benefits the lives of individuals, and through its collective use, the overall governance of society. Indirectly, or as a subsequent step through its use, information provides economic benefits by providing people with the means and ability to participate and benefit from direct economic exchange. As well, information allows people to participate in a host of other activities, which by their very nature, provide the 'economic sector' with an 'informated subject'. By 'informated subject' I mean individuals who, through their ability to access and benefit from information (literacy, education, experience, etc.), are able to contribute to the general economic, social and cultural production of society. They have a demand for the information and other products of society arising from their participation (Zuboff, 1988:9-10).[5]

Michael Apple, borrowing from Pierre Bourdieu, differentiates information as symbolic capital from information as financial capital. On the one hand, information as financial capital is useful only in the sense that it can be valuated as a physical commodity, its value is defined by its exchange (sale) value and time value (generally short term). On the other hand, Apple appeals to the more abstract and 'public' nature of information when he describes it as also symbolic capital (Apple, 1991:25). Simply put, this value is cultural in the sense that it is a lived, every day resource. It is accessible, usable, and readily exchangeable for its own sake and not based on a commodity transaction. Through this, the developmental qualities of information arise.

The underlying theme of such views, is that information is first, diverse, broad, dynamic—a product of humanity and interaction—ideas in substance. Secondly, perhaps most importantly in terms of *practise*, and the battlefront in current policy making, information is a public resource that allows for the achievement

of some 'end' goals. In a democratic view, these goals allow people to learn, express, exchange and interact in social and cultural ways for the sake of personal well being, development and understanding. It is that which contributes to being a citizen and to the maximization of one's individual utilities and abilities. This is a view of society that includes commerce rather than the inverse, a commercial market system that includes society. The corollary to this is that individuals are then able to participate in society and benefit from this. Whether a capitalist market society or some other form, in this view people can participate in activities and social relations which allow for 'production' that reproduces one's self and society. In our liberal democratic capitalist market society this should include, and give some balance to, the two sets of property rights; the 'democratic'—civil, social, political rights and activities—and 'liberal'—economic activities.

An imbalance between the 'liberal' and 'democratic', whereby the liberal (market, economic) is given too much weight erodes an economic justice perspective underlying the democratic view whereby social norms and ethical values prevail over impersonal market values (Clement, 1988:14). In the hierarchy of individual rights, civil and political rights can be satisfied on an individual basis, though there is a collective purpose to these. However, social and economic rights, which now increasingly rely on the ability of individuals to access and use modern communications and information to be fully realized, need collective property rights to fully develop and be realized (Clement, 1988:14). This is the basis of the current contradiction within capitalism such that the imbalance favours individual private property.

However, to achieve these democratic goals in a complex modern society at either an individual or collective level is near impossible without those institutions, practices or processes generally thought of as the 'public sphere'. This, in addition to the 'market sphere or sector', is the other half of the front in the battle to determine what it is and what information ought to be.

Habermas has characterized the social sphere or process as "the realm of social life where public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens .... citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion", in other words freedom of association and expression (1974:49-55). The institutions we associate with these processes can be informal or formal. These include schools, libraries, cultural organizations, or more informal means of interaction, such as local groups. However, and this takes us back to the nexus of the conflict in communication policy, the means required to do this in a collective way in a complex society are the various physical communication media, technologies and institutions. These would include traditional media—the text, the newspaper, magazine, newsletter, public meeting, radio, television, and the new media, computer-based networks and similar technologies.

Democratic Rights, Information as Property

In a liberal democratic capitalist market society some amount of information will invariably be a commodity—a liberal market valued resource. Information will also be a democratically valued resource, a common public good.

How should we argue for and defend the democratic aspect of information? This could be done in many ways, such as using political or social rights arguments. In a market society, an appropriate case can be made through an argument based on property. Our society values property over all else, and defines the right of property as an individual right. In the current policy debate over information; the rights to it, its use and access, can usefully be grounded in a theory of property that underpins our liberal democratic market society. Using property rights as an entry point for analysis permits a discussion of democratic objectives as well as providing the means to reveal and explore the inherent contradictions in the current market centred debate over information, and the possible resolutions of this debate. These possible resolutions can have democratic or anti-demo-

cratic consequences.

The work of C.B. Macpherson (1973,1978,1985) is useful for this analysis because it helps us position information as a fundamental human right and a property right. This work also sets out the role of the state and the tensions and contradictions arising in a capitalist market society (CMS) in the articulation and achievement of such property rights. The challenge is to achieve some mitigation between an individual right to private property (market valuation) and an individual right to common (public) property (democratic valuation) as it relates to information. In the first, the right exists to exclude others from access unless certain economic terms are met. In the second, the right is to not be excluded from the use or benefit of something, though some limits over collective access may exist. These limits generally ensure measures of equality.

The stakes are high in current policy making as radical neo-liberal ideology drives its agenda across a broad sweep of state responsibilities and initiatives (Clark, 1991).[6] The contemporary debate about communication and information policy has become limited to a religious-like mantra from the proponents of the liberal market place. This mantra of competition, privatization, and deregulation argues for a rigid ideological adherence to social relations exclusively based on individual private property relations. Entrenchment of such a view in policy would reduce society to that which is only peopled by economic producers and consumers. This agenda is a crude narrowing from a view of society, of 'mankind' and social practise, though not in any way in equilibria, that included that of the *citizen in democracy.* Instead, an economic vision is propagated that takes the form of a religion because it claims to be the inevitable result of higher, more powerful forces than individuals or society; a god or gods—the market, technology, globalization. This view imposes closure on other views and alternative ways of seeing and doing. It advocates conformity and impotence.

This tension between market freedom and the need to set

limits to achieve democratic, common freedom and opportunity is summarized by Macpherson in the following statement:

> When the individual property right is written into law as an individual right to the exclusive use and disposal of parcels of the resources provided by nature and parcels of the capital created by past work on them, and when it is combined with the liberal system of market incentives and rights of free contract, it leads to and supports a concentration of ownership and a system of power relations between individuals and classes which negates the ethical goal of free and independent, individual development (1978:199-200).

In communication, this liberal market narrowing occurs with the unequal relations involving exclusive control over, the creation of, the terms of access to, and use of, information. This includes the shaping and valuating of information and knowledge and how its worth (economic or other) is determined. The current policy and market trends are an intensification of the process Raymond Williams identified as a 'selective tradition' whereby someone's vision of legitimate knowledge, information and culture "enfranchises one group's cultural capital at the expense of another" (Williams, in Apple and Christian-Smith, 1991:1).

Currently, the trend is to the privatization of information, the materialization of information into a thing that can be commodified, and the institutionalization of these inherently unequal class-based relations (legal, economic, political). People, in this liberal market view, are seen as 'market man', a maximum utilizer of resources and capacities. This model of society features competing individuals—consumers and appropriators (extractors)—where the accumulation of property, in this case information, is an end in itself. Developmental possibilities for other objectives (e.g., social, cultural, political, common capital) are excluded in this view. Interestingly, in the liberal market view this accumulation for self gain is equated to at its most fundamental level with

the end goal of freedom. This goal is shared with the democratic purpose of property, which the individual property right presupposes. However, by privileging private individual over collective individual rights, it negates the achievement of a broader sense of freedom (Macpherson, 1973:82-86; 1978:46-47).

Applying Macpherson's ideas to information, and the political relations of this property, one way of viewing the current contestation over communication policy making is over the morality of different property claims. In other words, contestation over what information and the terms of its creation and access are, and ought to be. The underlying right is not contested by liberal or democratic proponents in this debate. But the contradiction arises when the set of *economic claims* (private ownership) are posed against *democratic claims* (not to be excluded, common property). Historically in Canadian communication policy making, there has been agency or mutual determination in this debate over goals and practises. Over time, this has resulted in a mix of economic and social policies designed to mitigate or balance such claims, e.g., the development of public broadcasting, or provincially and privately owned telecommunication networks, Canadian content, obligation to serve. Still, these remain inherently contradictory claims in a capitalist market system (Macpherson, 1978:3,5; 1985:84).

This battle over democratic and liberal ideals is being played out in many sectors of which communication and information is only one. Others include welfare state institutions and practises, education, health, transportation and finance. The state's role is central in these changes. Only the state can make policy and manage national economic, political and social relations. Moreover, while individuals may have the rights of property, it is the state that creates or changes these rights and establishes the institutions (e.g., law) that protects these rights, sets limits on them, and authorizes or enables their articulation in social relations. The state is the terrain of contestation over claims and the resulting output is policy in the broadest sense. Although this

contestation has always been unequally weighted or tilted in favour of the economic or capitalist class, the policy goals of neo-liberals will further erode the democratic potential and practices in communications by limiting the state's role and ability to seek some balance or mitigation between these claims.

The view of these neo-liberal proponents is that the state's role must be minimal—for the protection and stabilization of markets and individual economic liberty. This liberty takes the form of both producer rights and consumer rights (whereby those with the most ability to pay have access, as opposed to participatory democracy whereby all *citizens* rather than *consumers* have the right of access in order to realize personal benefits in some measure of equality). This static liberal view of 'mankind' and society sees social purpose and social relations as extractive (self-interest and gain). In the discourse of the day, the 'market' and 'competition', normally thought of as 'means' to an end, become 'ends' in themselves. Any social, cultural, political or other collective democratic purpose is discounted or marginalized. In the final analysis, this view reduces information to a commodity to be accumulated or exchanged for capital. As a consequence, social relations involving information are not to be developmental and shared whereby individuals could equally have access to personally benefit, grow and develop (Macpherson, 1985:57-58).

Information, Opportunity and Crisis

If not technological or other determinisms, then what are the key factors behind the marketization of public information? Information has always been important as part of the economic and social capital of society. What is different in the current era of competition is the strategic purpose ascribed to information by decision makers in society, and in particular members of the dominant capital class, including the state. At the heart of the matter is the potential and the increasing ability to extend the control, production and use of information as an industrial sector in its own right.

Two decades ago, the 'information economy' was seen by liberal theorists as a logical extension of industrialism (Bell, 1973). More recently, it has come to be defined as the necessary strategy to escape a crisis of our capitalist market society.

The value, strategically or economically, of information has always existed in human relations. Harold Innis (1951) in his various writings, has emphasized the importance of a balance between monopolization or control of information and its decentralization and accessibility. For Innis, the bias of communication meant that at certain historic junctures the strategic choice, design and use of certain technologies biased power and social relations in society. The inequalities of such monopolization in modern society, in this view, are intertwined with the way western society has made a religion of science and the machine. Innis states, "industrialism implies technology and the cutting of time into precise fragments suited to the needs of the engineer and the accountant" (Innis, 1951:140). In this statement, Innis characterizes the essence of the information age, the commodification of time and its disjuncture from long term thinking, continuity and broader social purpose. In an industrialized or post-industrial society, one that is linked by mass communication, whether text, electronic or other form, the measurement and commodification of time also includes the destruction and repackaging of time's content, and this content is information. Modern communication, on this basis, emphasizes individualism over collectivism, instability and change over stability and permanence, and competition over participation (Innis, 1951:80-81).

In the 1960s, proponents of an 'information society' or economy touted this as a goal that was a natural extension and growth of a market society. Theorists such as Daniel Bell (1973), an early apostle of the post-industrial society, saw information as the valued industry of the future. In keeping with a liberal market view, this extension of the market would result in efficiency, productivity and growth benefitting all.

The information society, first seen as an evolutionary expec-

tation, has since become an ideological imperative considered by decision makers as necessary for systemic survival in the face of economic crisis. The crisis has variably been described as one of production or overproduction, too much low cost foreign competition, under consumption, falling rate of profit, and so forth. Responses have resulted in the restructuring of policy, economic and social relations and institutions, leading to mass unemployment, a reduction in support for human services, and unqualified faith in an idealized notion of competition. State policy has favoured redistribution benefitting the market at the expense of the citizenry, with a rather specific effort of narrowing and redefining traditionally de- or uncommodified aspects of life. For the market, this has meant less government control and oversight of corporate behaviour, a declining quality of work, and the removal of the traditional policy barriers which make market practises publicly accountable. Essential to the policy of escape from crisis (also euphemistically referred to as restructuring) is the pursuit for more competition, the creation of an idealized market utopia, and a focus on the development of an information industry (Webster and Robins, 1986:319; Schiller, 1986:30).

This is done while social and cultural activities which meet individual needs but have no direct relation to commerce are ignored. They have not, nor can they have by their very definition, commodity value in and of themselves in order to accomplish their intended purpose. Any attempt to privilege the economic or commodity criteria as more important, or better able to deliver the service, means that only the most profitable rather than the most necessary or useful service is available.

But these changes are not some instrumentally foreordained set of practises and conclusions. Change involves social struggle and competing claims. This holds true with information and technology and for the broader social and economic policies and practises of society. Competing claims by social actors, though often made within a set of unequal power relations, none-the-less shape final policy outcomes and social practises. Agency, which

is the effectiveness of resistance or initiative by social actors, whether from within the dominant class against others in this class, or arising from those in the subordinate classes, mutually influence results (Foucault, 1972:162-163).

The current changes in Canadian capitalism are being led as much from within by fractions of the capitalist class as from external outside forces. Such change approximates Gramsci's notion of reform from within or a passive revolution (1971: 106-107). As argued by Michel Foucault, the success of this 're-formed' hegemony, its permanence, requires its pervasion into the conscious and subconscious levels of society and the citizenry. Hegemony is society's social *glue* of understanding and world view. The complexity of modern society relies on the use of technology and, increasingly, the control of information "to pervade the whole of the social body" (Foucault, 1972:156). The existing class-based ownership and power relations of media/ information ownership backed by state complicity puts democratic claims at a particular disadvantage in the current period of change. The claims made by dominant class actors to support or validate these inequalities are expressed in a way which ostensibly appeals to shared democratic ideals, but in reality cannot deliver because they are based on economic criteria alone. This ideology has power through its social dominance. It attempts to frame discourse and seeks to control opinion and ideas, to define the acceptable parameters of discussion, and the possible. Its goal is to define how we are to see and value society and, as part of this, information and knowledge. Information is, therefore, not inherently just, equal or democratic. It must be constructed and shaped by social relations. For it to be democratic (in access, diversity, and use value) it must be defined as such, and the claims seeking this must be broadly recognized (social consciousness), accepted (political) and institutionalized (law and practise) (Foucault, 1972:162). The prospect for achieving this broader democratic view in the current struggle over our changing hegemony as it relates to information seems thin.

Policy, Discourse and Social Reality

This section considers the shifts in federal policy in Canada necessary to accommodate the process of information commodification and marketization, and the strategies employed by the market, as well as the responses of social actors. In so doing, it highlights the class dimension of the dominant actors within and outside the state, and the social relations which are emerging in our 'information society'.

Neither the state, dominant or subordinate social classes are homogenous in their ideologies, values or practises in the relations involving the competing claims of rights, strategies or objectives in the changes relating to information and the communication sector. There is no homogeneity in the views of actors within each of the government, market or public sectors. Agents with differing views of society, characterized by opposing liberal and democratic objectives, exist within groups in each sector. Competition for dominance (policy and practise) of ideas is ongoing between agents within each sector and between sectors. But these are not simple 'pluralistic' relations. Domination by elites based on different types of power (e.g., economic, political) is also inherent in each of these groups and sectors, though particularly so with industry and the state.

This domination is based on both the class and power positions of members. This is clearer and more established in state and capitalist class components than social groups. While social groups (e.g., low-income, seniors, cultural organizations, etc.) are class-based, they tend to see themselves more in terms of special or group interests (Jenson, 1989:83). In policy making, the world view is more conducive of, and an acquiescence to, a pluralistic view of social interaction and representation. As a result this masks the underlying structural inequalities and limits the public's ability to achieve substantive change. This difference allows discursive and ideological appeals by the state, in an attempt to justify and achieve public consensus on policy and

values, to be phrased as being in the interest of the citizenry. This occurs in particular where these pronouncements tend to appeal to democratic objectives while masking structural changes benefitting individual private property practises. The discourse of the dominant class also conceals the inherent economic (power) inequalities of this agenda. While appealing to the values of participatory democracy or a broad notion of community and shared values/benefits, in practise what is being promoted is a system of consumer or *dollar democracy*. Dollar democracy, based on one's ability to pay, becomes the ticket to individual participation and equity. The antithesis, participatory democracy, in its broadest sense, is the ability to have equal access to, and equally share in, the cumulative social and capital production of society. In the market place, this democratic 'end' and purpose for social and economic restructuring, exists in name only. It becomes a justification for change but with no real prospect of delivery due to the underlying inequalities and structural limitations of class-based economic relations.

The main armaments used by government and industry to date to create acceptance by the public of these changes are propaganda and policy/regulatory changes. Using government jargon, the 'optics' of the message for change focus on claims of the socially and economically liberating benefits of an information society. This justificatory strategy is shared by market players. Government alone, but in close consultation/negotiation with the dominant market actors, has also, and continues to, rewrite policy and regulation necessary to reconstruct and lay the foundations for structural changes to permit the privatization and commodification of information.

The concordance of ideological views between decision makers in government and dominant information industry actors is reflected in formal policies, public and private sectors documents, and studies which serve as justificatory devices to affect public opinion in support of such change. As well, special initiatives are undertaken, such as public hearings, e.g., Informa-

tion Highway Advisory Council (IHAC), Canadian Radio-television Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). These formal and informal hearings are used by government to create the appearance of inclusion and to dispel opposition. With few exceptions, the resulting policy outputs are only partially shaped but not changed in any substantive way by public claims. The shared government and industry ideology proscribes the reliance on market forces to achieve economic, social and cultural goals or betterment. Perhaps one of the most damaging examples of this ideological shift, given its broad impact on structuring the framework of the information society, was the writing of the 1993 Telecommunications Act. The Act contains the contradictory objectives: "to safeguard, enrich and strengthen the social and economic fabric of Canada" (Sect. 7.a.); "be affordable and accessible to all Canadians" (Sect.7.b.); respond to the "economic and social requirements of users" (Sect. 7.h.); and, in a shift to a *method* instead of an end, "to foster increased reliance on market forces for the provision of telecommunications services" (Sect. 7.f.). In practise, this 'method' section has become the overriding context and raison d'etre used by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunication Commission (CRTC) and policy branches in Industry Canada for setting the framework for policy decisions, while other sections are considered subordinate or irrelevant.

This approach is not unique to Canada. In the U.S., the government has ordained that "the Information Highway is to be built, owned and operated by the private sector" (McChesney, 1995:7). In reflecting on these changes in the U.S., McChesney observes that their communication policy "was written by and for business in the U.S. and is one of the most corrupt pieces of legislation in U.S. history" (1995:8). McChesney argues this is corrupt not only due to the back room dealing making between government decision makers and corporate lobbyists, but also because, as has become the model in Canada, social issues are relegated to a caretaking item to be dealt with after a commercial

system is in place.

In Canada, a plethora of government decisions, documents and studies similarly promote this way of seeing technology, information and the presumed benefits for society. In its decision on restructuring the telephone and cable industries in Canada (the main players in our information society) the CRTC saw telecommunications as "a tool for information management and a productivity enhancer for business" (CRTC, 1994a:1). Two of the core objectives for the CRTC in their decision were universal access and to "encourage development and widespread availability of new technology and innovative services to respond to the needs of business and residence consumers" (1994a:2). In this narrow view of a society populated by producers and buyers, lost are the notions of affordability and access to other forms of not-commercial content by *citizens* and the use of this for other *not-for-profit purposes*.

Similarly, the introduction of the final report of the federal government's Information Highway Advisory Council (IHAC) clearly sets the benchmarks for the new social reality in stating,

> In the new information economy, success will be determined by the market place, not by government..... The private sector should build and operate the Information Highway" (IHAC, 1995:x).

The governments' role is relegated to that of referee and the setting of ground rules.

Private property as the heart of current social change is also exemplified by proposed changes to copyright law with respect to information. Copyright determines the ownership of a commodity as well as its terms of access. At its core, the creation of an information market relies on this form of property creation and legal protection. The federal government's IHAC report on copyright determines that "copyright and the development of appropriate mechanisms are fundamental to the creation of a content market place to give the Information Highway its raison

d'etre" (NGL Nordicity Group Ltd., 1995, :71).

Even the terms of reference and the fifteen issues identified for analysis by the IHAC were cast using a market framework valuation. The issues were:

1. Timing and Financing
2. Competition and Regulation
3. Canadian Ownership and Control
4. Standards
5. Government Co-ordination
6. Copyright and Intellectual Property
7. Culture and Content
8. Information Controls
9. Government Programs and Services
10. Privacy and Security
11. Research and Development
12. Growth and Competitiveness
13. Universal Access
14. Consumer Awareness and Learning
15. Government Operations (IHAC, 1995:v,vi).

Of these, Issues 7—Culture and Content and 13—Universal Access would suggest some reprieve for social and cultural concerns. However, a closer reading shows that culture and content issues were largely approached from the perspective of copyright (getting paid for products) and the international marketing of Canadian cultural products. This trade view undermines the non-economic valuation of culture in Canada, as exemplified, for example, by the cultural exemption secured under the North American Free Trade Agreement. Universal access is defined as an objective where government should only intervene if market failure occurs (IHAC, 1995:121,169). The common property right of access particularly in terms of social and cultural infrastructure is thereby dismissed.

It is also government confirming industry's ability to develop, own, and control access to information within the broad policies of neo-regulation, privatization and commercialization that is essential to a commitment by industry to invest in, and

expand, this market. That government is compliant in this, often with little or no empirical economic or social research and justificatory evidence to support claims for the need of such change, is not always enough for industry. Industry players have produced reams of studies, reports and analyses which promote these same objectives. However, they package these with threats of capital withdrawal, hold-back or under investment in an attempt to keep government decision makers on course. Government is warned that if it doesn't tow the line the Information Highway will not be built, jobs will be not created, and Canada will not be competitive and grow economically (CCTA, 1994).[7]

Key industry actors also propose a managerial or corporatist approach to policy making and market development, which excludes other stakeholders and leaves only industry and government as partners. The industry role is seen as planning, designing, owning, developing and operating networks and services. Evaluation of investment and development is to be based on economic variables alone. 'Success' is to meet the test of the market place, where only that which is profitable is available. In this view, the role of government policy is to pursue initiatives which favour a market driven agenda and competitive market place. However, the removal of government oversight from the market structure means that concentration of ownership and market power increases. As such, competition becomes a euphemism for increased dominance and a redividing of the existing, and new, market pie by a few large players. Those who currently dominate will continue to do so only with fewer barriers and restrictions, particularly with their expansion of market activities to previously uncommodified areas. Public regulation is diminished as market regulation replaces it. In future, this means that with our public networks there will be much less public involvement in oversight and decision making. In turn, this may reduce their ability to meet the full range of the public's economic and non-economic needs and to even address the failures of the provision of such services.

To address the concerns of the public at large, and in part to counter public interest group detractors, the agenda of self interest is subsumed by appeals to 'increased choice', consumer 'needs' response, the 'empowerment' of consumers to communicate, and the protection and enhancement of 'culture'. That all this is increasingly defined in narrow market terms, a choice between commodities, means that social and cultural content valuated only by the profitability of its production is obfuscated.

This rhetoric suggests that only an inherently efficient market is able to achieve economic, social and cultural objectives. However, the inability of market forces to address or provide for not-for-profit national or local political, social, cultural communication and information or even for that matter, economic management, is ignored by both government decision makers and industry. Tipping the balance from a predominance of public regulation to that of market regulation, begs the question, is industry really prepared for this role? Does it have the ability to undertake these social and cultural duties and responsibilities? Given the imperative of economic goals and methods, one would think not (See, for example, Stentor:1993).[8]

Industry actors also raise the spectre that outside forces create an inevitable need for this particular type of change. Technological advancement, globalization, convergence, ostensibly all beyond the control of human kind or their governments, have lead to a crisis in the traditional way that society operates. The only solution in this market view of human kind and society is to redefine traditional social relations and decommodified activities and resources, which were built and perpetuated by social, cultural and political policy goals, to an economically defined approach. Stentor Telecom Policy's report, "Culture and the Information Highway" elucidates about this view,

> The policy measures that have bolstered the broadcasting and cable industries; enabling them to carry out their social and cultural objectives, may not be sustain-

able in a free-trade environment. In response, these measures may have to give way to a more competitive model for the domestic market (Ellis, 1994:2).

Class

There is a class dimension associated with the congruence between government and industry decision makers. Non-class issues are also involved in policy making, with this representation largely taking the form of new issue-based interest groups. This class matrix can be distinguished using criteria of political and economic power; a private property (market approach) as opposed to social values and a common property (mixed approach) predisposition; and position and importance in relation to others in the policy and regulatory processes.

Dominant class fractions include members of the information industry and inner circle decision makers in government. These interests favour the pro-market agenda (private property). Another part of the matrix is an information petit bourgeoisie, professionals working within the various information industry sectors, which tend to have split loyalties between self interested private property (labour relations and as producers) and the broader social and cultural (non-commodity) processes and relations. There is also a set of subordinate class actors. Traditional players in the policy process, consisting of unions and public interest groups, are generally driven by issues relating to economic and social justice (inequalities). Issue or ostensibly non-class interest groups are also involved in the policy process. One form, usually single issue oriented, has historically pursued social or cultural rights, for example information content. A new type of group, exhibiting post-modern values relating to individual differences and pluralistic notions of communities, tends to focus on alternative socio-political processes.

Within the structure of government, and in particular the departments charged with policy making on these issues (Indus-

try, Heritage, Finance, Treasury Board, Justice) there are competing visions between individuals, managers and sector branches on policy. These competing views are often underpinned with implicitly conflicting values about individual and collective property rights. However, in terms of final policy decision making, these power relations are unequal. Certain managers and sectors within the departments, an inner circle, (usually policy and regulatory branches) have the greatest influence and power over policy outcomes. This is usually in concert, but at times can be in conflict, with their political masters. With the current pro-market agenda there is a particular concordance of views between industry, these inner circle bureaucrats and the dominant politicians (e.g., Cabinet Ministers).

Interestingly, the schism between the views of these elites in government and many of their employees or colleagues closely resembles the schism in society at large between the expectations and values of the public and the elite decision makers of both government and the market. The public tends to seek a much more balanced set of social relations in general and information policy specifically than these elites. Recent studies have shown a growing class-based polarization over economic and social objectives between elites and the public at large. A recent report by Ekos Research Associates argues that there is "relative discontent with the narrow and unsuccessful pursuit of prosperity and competitiveness", a market agenda, and that this "neo-conservative agenda still seems to be a powerful force in the elite world of government and business" (1995a:20). In a comparison of twenty two values of elites/decision makers and the public, elites were most concerned with economic issues such as competitiveness, prosperity, minimal government and the like. The public's concerns were largely the inverse, focusing on collective and social values, including freedom, environment, health and equality (1995a:12). With regard to information, recent surveys by Ekos (1995b) and Compas (1995) on Canadian culture and information content (television, films, books, music, etc.) showed a

strong preference by the public for a diversity of content to meet social and cultural needs in addition to economic 'choice' options and, a desire for government intervention through policy and program support to meet these needs.[9] However, these views receive little play in current policy making.

The potential for a more equitable balance in policy making is further aggravated by the revolving door of employment between the senior levels of government and industry. The little lag time between assuming responsibilities from one employer to the next, and the fact that many of these elites move from a senior policy position in one sector, to a comparable position in the other, reinforces the shared ideology of these interests. For example, since the federal government shifted to a pro-market, neo-regulatory regime, seven senior individuals responsible for defining and implementing this government policy have since taken up the following private sector positions:[10]

Vice President - Regulation, Canadian Cable Television Association
President - Alliance Communications
Vice President - Regulatory Affairs, Stentor Telecom Policy Inc.
Vice President - MultiMedia, Bell Canada
Vice President - Bell Mobility
Vice President - Unitel Communications
President - Canadian Cable Television Association

Individuals from a number of government departments have moved to an industry player that is directly affected by (and often benefits from) the changes in regulation and policies. Similarly, those in senior levels of industry also move into senior policy or management positions in key communication policy setting departments. Those representing the public view are often excluded from this type of access to this inner circle. However, to counter the public 'flak' that tends to arise about insider decision making, both the CRTC and the federal government have undertaken public consultative initiatives—ostensibly pluralistic proceed-

ings which give equal time and opportunity for all players, including the public, to affect policy. The unequal resources the dominant corporations bring to these venues, and the weight attached by government to their representations as compared to public efforts, maintains rather than mediates the unequal power relations in policy making. The recent IHAC is instructive on the class dimension of this issue.

As shown in Chart One, of the thirty one IHAC council members, twenty represented the market whereas six represented the public interest. Twenty one of these participants (Information Industry, Cable, Telephone, Commercial Content, and Finance) represented dominant companies in the information field. With the recent industry restructuring, take-overs and the like, these companies also exhibit an increasing level of economic interdependency and cross-ownership relations. Three public institutional representatives on the IHAC straddled the public interest and market agendas. These three (education, health, library) increasingly rely on the market for the provision and delivery of their services. Of the six representing the public, one of these, the Consumers Association of Canada (1995), tended to represent the views of business by presuming that open competition would provide maximum consumer choice and that this would eventually result in social and cultural goals being achieved after a new market regime had been established.[11] Also disturbing about the IHAC process was that many of the council members had little formal training or broad experience in the areas of communication, policy and information. Much of the first half of their tenure was spent being briefed on the basics of policy and practises in these areas. Moreover, no small amount of time was spent by members representing specific industry's and companies fighting to protect their own interests.[12]

Chart One: IHAC COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

Information Technology Industry	9
Cable Television Industry	3

Telephone Industry	6
Commercial Content Industry	2
Finance Industry	1
Public Interest Organizations	6
Public Institutions	3
Labour	1
Chair	1

The inner circle of companies which consistently lobby policy makers behind the scenes and are represented in major policy fora including CRTC hearings is relatively small. They include the following:

Chart Two: Regulatory Intervenors

Alberta Government Telephone
Allarcom (Pay-TV) *
Canadian Association of Broadcasters
Canadian Business Telecommunication Alliance *
Canadian Cable Television Association *
Canadian Daily Newspapers Association
Canadian Federation of Ind. Business
Canadian Independent Telephone Association
Canadian Satellite Communication Inc.
Canadian Satellite Users Association
Competitive Telecommunication Assoc.
Director of Competition, Competition Bureau
Northwestel Inc. *
Quebec-Tel
Government of Saskatchewan
Sprint Canada
Stentor Telecom Policy Inc. *
Unitel Communications *
Rogers Cable *
Shaw Cable *
Western International Communications *
Information Technology Association of Canada

Those who were also represented on the IHAC directly or indirectly are asterisked.[13]

In comparison, the public interest groups who most consistently participate include the Federation Nationale du

Consommateurs du Quebec, the National Anti-Poverty Organization, the Public Interest Advocacy Centre, the Consumers' Association of Canada (national and provincial), the Telecommunications Workers Union and the Communication, Energy and Paper Workers Union of Canada.

This corporate representation in these policy/regulatory activities also correlates with their respective positions of dominance in the information industries in Canada. Through takeovers, mergers and alliances this industry is extremely concentrated and largely controlled by these interests. For example, in television, five companies reached 62 per cent of all Canadian viewers in 1993 (including Allarcom, Eaton's, Asper). Ten companies in this sector received 90 per cent of all revenues. In cable, three companies (Roger's, Videotron, Shaw) controlled 56 per cent of the market in 1994. In radio, ten companies controlled 55 per cent of all revenues (including Allarcom, Roger's, Shaw). In magazine publishing, 12 companies control 52 per cent of circulation. In book publishing in 1992 twenty one of 370 firms (6 per cent) controlled 51 per cent of total sales. With barriers between these traditional sectors removed by policy, the race now for these players is entry and dominance of the electronic market place for existing products and the extension of the market into private (home) and other traditionally non-market social and cultural activities and institutions (Winter and Hassanpour, 1994:10-17).

The Canadian Cable Television Association has defined these new market opportunities as the 'unclaimed territory' (CCTA, 1994:3,6). These types of services include electronically based information services, distance education, health, libraries, home shopping, E-mail, government information, games and entertainment, among others. This territory has been described as 'unclaimed' for two reasons. First, none of the existing companies have finished developing the networks and applications necessary to produce and distribute these products and the consumer market is still being developed. Secondly, none of the

existing companies have achieved market dominance in these services. Most of these commodities are intended to be accessed by individuals from the home.

Public Claims, Class and Interest Groups

In addition to this agency in the dominant class fraction, subordinate class agency occurs both in more traditionally class-based group and new interest group forms. This agency is both reactive and oppositional (progressive) in relation to the unequal economic and political power of the domination information class. With both these segments of the subordinate class, the goal is shared; a struggle against these inequalities. However, the traditional groups, who tend to have developed some degree of class consciousness, react to economic inequalities (e.g., pricing, affordability). Those in the newer segment in contrast, have formed as interest groups and are less class aware, but argue for a more democratic structure and practise for an information society, a community or communities view, than do the traditional groups.

While the traditional groups recognize the class nature of social relations, they have tended not to attempt to change them or offer a different vision for social relations, so much as argue for welfarist forms of redistribution to ensure access. Many in the new interest groups, in fact, argue implicitly for greater social control over decision making in the development and access to information networks and resources. It also is not coincidental that the new interest groups formed largely over concern about broad 'information content' issues, whereas the traditional groups formed over narrower economic issues relating to access to basic public communication infrastructure, or around narrower cultural content (e.g., broadcast policy). Both segments are elite led and have only recently started working together in coalitions around common policy goals. In the current policy changes, which are driven by a more entrenched bilateral government-industry corporatism, both types of groups are required to adopt

new approaches in influencing policy making than have been used in the past. This means they must pursue more aggressive behind the scenes lobbying in addition to formal, public interventions.

The traditional groups have generally taken one of two forms. One group, class-based, have represented low income or disadvantaged Canadians. Other interest-based groups have represented Canadians in general on the basis of shared cultural need, and regional disparities and claims. The first group includes the:

National Anti-Poverty Organization;
Telecommunications Workers Union;
Federation Nationales des Consommateurs du Quebec (FNACQ);
Public Interest Advocacy Centre;
Ontario Federation of Labour;
British Columbia Public Interest Advocacy Centre;
Communication, Energy and Paper Workers Union of Canada.

The claims made by these groups concern issues of affordability, availability and access to basic media (e.g., networks, books, etc.). The second grouping tends to focus on a specific need or issue important to a constituency, such as Canadian content or technical requirement. Members of this grouping include the:

Canadian Association of the Deaf;
The Friends of Canadian Broadcasting;
Television Northern Canada;
The Canadian Conference of the Arts;
Consumers Association of Canada;
Canadian National Institute for the Blind;

A common thread linking both types of groups is that their claims on policy are centred around the public nature of communication and the need for Canadians to have access to be able to participate in society.

The dominant class sees information and communication as a strategic investment to develop innovative and widespread uses (widely distributed, and sold and resold) of new information based commodity products. The traditional public interest groups

see a duality to these services however. On the one hand, there exists a commercial component, as argued by the information companies. But at the same time, these groups argue that there is a public utility or public goods function. As such, access and use are "necessary for economic, social and cultural development, participation and integration for society at large" (Reddick, 1995:32). These groups argue that the current policy trend will create a society of information "have and have nots" based on the ability to pay, particularly given the need for companies to recover massive proposed investments. For example, the phone and telephone companies alone are planning investments of up to $15 billion just for network upgrading.

The new interest groups have been formed by academic and professional elites who are generally associated with institutions involved with information and knowledge. These groups and their members (usually other elites or similar professional organizations rather than the general public) tend to be either early adopters of new technologies, or have been pushed into information society practises by their employers, or those financing them; often provincial governments. For example, most provincial governments have developed strategies of electronic information production, distribution and exchange of government services, education, library and health services. The new interest groups would include:

The Coalition for Public Information;
The Ontario Library Association;
The Canadian Library Association;
The Canadian Teachers Federation;
Provincial Privacy and Information Commissioners;
Telecommunities Canada (Freenets);
Information Highway Working Group;
Public Information Highway Advisory Council.

Some of these groups have been in existence for some time, such as the library associations. They and the others are considered 'new' because of their recent interest and activities involving

broad communication policy because that their previous or other activities or mandates were much less or not at all concerned with communications.

The claims of these groups focus less on economic issues of access or ownership in the industry, and instead, involve the need for *public space*, in addition to commercial space, in an information society and a diversity of information (social, cultural, political), in addition to commercial commodities. Interestingly, some also promote the development of a highly connected, high capacity 'information system' to all individuals, often embracing similar emancipatory utopian expectations to that of the market proponents of the Information Highway (Coalition for Public Information, 1995:1,2,4,5).

Some of these claims seem to be made without a clear understanding by some of these actors of the economic costs associated with such objectives or the proclivity of the market to actually invest or provide service to market segments (low income) or areas (rural) which offer little return on investment. Nonetheless, the claims these groups do make are a recognition that economic imperatives are an assault on 'public' information and the traditional public sphere. They also recognize that the market can not or will not meet these social, cultural and political needs.

Some groups, by uncritically embracing and promoting the mythical and utopian possibilities of the information society risk undermining the potential that they will achieve their end goals. As a result there is a shared discourse with economic actors that new technology can 'decentralize' society, link everybody, 'empower' citizens and groups, create electronic communities and so forth. But they lose sight of the fact that these occur within a wider, centralized and integrated privately financed and owned structure. Economic criteria still define what is a justified investment, what can be 'economically' provided. The increasing private control over information also sets the limits and terms of this decentralization which are not equal or designed for social

ends. The risk of a market driven approach is that electronic grids and information products and services will not be emancipatory. Moreover, public space and information resources will not be broadened and reflect social diversity, instead these become narrowed, eroded and filtered as they are commodified. Gorz calls this emerging network infrastructure, one that extends to the private and leisure activities of the home, "the glue of serial impotence" (Gorz, in Webster and Robins, 1986:322). In this view, people become a mass of linked, impotent consumers. These groups need to better define, articulate, develop strategies for, and adhere to their goals and ideas to avoid becoming complicit by default with the market agenda (Webster and Robins, 1986:321-23).

Other actors involved in these policy debates, which have had a fairly consistent level of representation are self employed professionals—an information petit bourgeoisie. These actors tend to have two major economic interests influencing their objectives in addition to cultural and social concerns. On the one hand, they have a stake or claim on information content or products as labourers on behalf of corporate producers. This set of relations they share in common with an increasing number of members of the subordinate class who are becoming information workers or where traditional work is being affected by the increased use of information technology in the production process. As well, many also have a claim as owners (producers) of information products. These are producers of information and information based works for both social/cultural (use) value, but also as much, if not more so, for their commodity/exchange value. This means that at times, there can be concordance or discordance with other public interest groups depending upon the particular policy issue at hand. Groups representing these actors at policy fora include:

The Society of Composers, Authors and Music Publishers in Canada;
Association of Canadian Television and Radio Artists

(ACTRA);
The Independent Film and Video Alliance;
The Writers Union of Canada.

The general public interest is represented in varying degrees by this constellation of unions and public interest groups, but often the public is not fully aware of the substantive policy and structural changes being implemented until these have already occurred. One can speculate on the reasons for this, but they probably include: failure of communication by their group representatives; low levels of interest; complexity of the issues; lack of availability of useful/informative information; under reporting or biased press coverage; and inattention by politicians, among others. In addition to these barriers, much of the decision making occurs behind the scenes, through lobbying, private studies, consultations with experts and dominant actors (capitalist class and subordinate class interest groups) both in private and in controlled access fora.

Recently, a number of the traditional and new public interest groups have started working in broader alliances. For example, the coalition People for Affordable Telephone Service (PATS) was formed by over 60 organizations representing 10 million Canadians (PIAC, 1995:1). This is not a formal organization but a number of groups who share a common interest around one issue—telephone service. Being a single issue coalition, it has been relatively easy for the group to achieve consensus over common objectives on policy. The objectives deal with the availability and affordability of basic telephone service.

Another public coalition, the Alliance for a Connected Canada (ACC), was formed to deal with both basic technical access, information content and employment issues (Brehl, 1995:B3). This coalition links traditional and new public interest groups on a cross-sectoral basis as a tactic to strategically give these interests more *political* clout on policy decision makers. Strategically, the ACC is also a means to create a democratic process for forming consensus and action around core issues. In

particular, they are focusing on inequalities relating to access (affordability), content development and diversity (non-commercial social, political and cultural needs) and quality and abundant levels of employment. The strategists of this alliance are largely academics or experts in the field of communications mirroring Gramsci's conception of counter-organic intellectuals. They are attempting to create an oppositional (ideological) praxis to counter the attempted hegemonic shift desired by the dominant 'information' class. This is very much a response to the class-based, market inequalities of the information society which are emerging out of pre-existing class-based structural inequalities.

Members of this alliance by the summer of 1996 included the Public Interest Advocacy Centre, the Telecommunications Workers Union, the Communication, Electrical and Paperworkers Union, the Council of Canadians, Telecommunities Canada, the Coalition for Public Information, the Fédération nationales des associations des consommateurs du Québec (FNACQ), the National Library of Canada, the Information Highway Working Group, the McLuhan Program in Culture and Technology, the Canadian Library Association, the Canadian Teachers Federation, the Assembly of First Nations, and the Association pour l'avancement des sciences et des techniques de la documentation (ASTED).

Groups such as PIAC and the TWU also represent traditional class-based groups such as low income Canadians and telecommunication workers. The cross-sectoral nature of this coalition was a strategic choice on the part of these groups, in part to counter government's current strategy of categorizing particular consumer groups in the pejorative as 'special interests'. Forming a broader constituency has generated some concern and attention by policy makers because as a coalition these groups have much more political clout and media impact. This concern has arisen because the group is politicizing policy awareness and extending debate to include a broader set of 'ordinary' Canadians through their representative organizations who have not been

centrally involved in information or communication policy (Brehl, 1995:B3).

Government Managerialism and Policy

The federal government's strategy in policy making and approach and response to public interest groups and the information class is based on the managerial or corporatist model. The corporatist strategy with respect to the 'public' generally takes two forms. On the one hand, as discussed above, many groups or interests are included in the traditional 'pluralist' policy fora. While this affords some influence on policy by the public, such processes have little real impact on policy. Instead, these processes tend to neutralize public opposition by permitting this form of expression and interaction. For those groups who exhibit more political effectivity on issues—more of a challenge to the ideology and agenda of government and its corporate allies—these groups are either marginalized or brought into the corporatist arrangement under terms set by government. This is not to say that they are equal partners in some tripartite managerial set of relations. Even if this were so, the relations themselves would still be undemocratic by the wider exclusion of individual participation by the public and the other representative groups. Instead, these 'included' groups are more like 'junior partners' with no real ability to change the overall policy agenda. If it were a baseball game, these groups have moved from the bleachers to the dug-out, but they still aren't on the field or calling the shots to the real players. Occasionally, minor policy or regulatory concessions are made to continue their participation or appease substantive opposition which generates around specific policy issues. For example, the federal government recently ordered massive telephone rate increases. In an attempt to dispel opposition from public interest groups, the government promised to establish through regulation a Lifeline program and similar affordability options for low income Canadians (Brehl and McCarthy, 1995:B1).

There is however, a price to be paid by groups to be included

closer to the centre of this form of back room decision making. These groups must devise a strategy to achieve some of their goals within the rules and discourse set by government. Current policy frames issues in the context of an 'information market place'. For example, Industry Canada told one of the groups mentioned above that with respect to 'consumer policy':

> Globalization and technological change have changed the dynamic of the market place. This market place is increasingly consumer driven. Consumer power and judgement, consumer acceptance of products and feedback dictate to companies now. Consumers have a stake and role in the economy. In this new economy we want nimble producers and, as well, we need nimble consumers. The focus of Industry Canada is on the market place now. The challenge is to get this framework right. We need an efficient, competitive market and as a result we will end up with quality products and consumer choice. The premise for this policy is to make sure that the market works. The new consumer policy paradigm is that the government will intervene as an exception not as the rule where there is market failure. The goal is to get the market and competition working right.[14]

The inclusion of public interests, organizations or academics is based on their limiting their criticism of government policy to the details of its implementation, instead of the overall policy direction at large. Groups are also required to adopt some of the discourse of this policy agenda—essentially agreeing to a narrowing of debate to conform to the economic imperatives underlying policy. For example, Industry Canada has dictated that the new discourse with respect to the public or consumer is that citizens are now only consumers operating in an information market place. Interest groups are expected to adopt this stipulated discourse and policy agenda. To be critical or oppositional

risks marginalization or exclusion. The words 'class', 'have and have nots', 'vulnerable consumer', 'poor' and the like are to be replaced by the generic catch all term, *market failure*. In this view, the devil is not the overall policy or ideology, but in the details of its implementation and practise. 'Dysfunction' becomes an aberration in the ideal market, where there are no losers.[15]

The potential for co-opting and neutralizing the most effective public interests through such a process is great, particularly where any substantial part of a group's funding comes from government. Dominelli and Hoogvelt, writing on how the U.K. government has refined a similar strategy, remind us of Foucault's warnings of the dangers of conforming to the duality of discourse and practise. Foucault says that through both,

> the individual and the group gradually become drawn into a new world of lived experience that gradually detaches them from their own critical consciousness, ideology or value commitments (M. Foucault, in Dominelli and Hoogvelt, 1995:20).

Where public interest groups or experts produce information/research for government as part of these relations, Dominelli and Hoogvelt have labelled this structural relationship and power over, by government, to public agency as 'contract government'. This is the corporatist state's response to the "differing goals of agents from the policy goals of government" (Dominelli and Hoogvelt, 1995:10). The authors describe this as a key component in the process of commodification and marketization of information and knowledge. In this process, "the tool for controlling manual workers is being used as an instrument for reorganizing mental labour" (Dominelli and Hoogvelt, 1995:11). With commodification, the product of this labour, information, is commodified. This strategy is based on making "the agents interests the same as government, structuring, monitoring, and controlling each stage of the information/research process" (Dominelli and Hoogvelt, 1995:11). I would also add, it controls

the degree of access the groups have to decision makers and the weight given to their views on policy.

Conclusion

Recent surveys suggest that for the majority of Canadians there may not be strong demand for new information commodities. Statistics Canada analysis on the income of Canadians has found that there has been a consistent decline in income levels and disposable income over the past several years. With persistent public and private sector employment cuts, the scarcity of new 'good' jobs, and the tendency for new jobs to be in the lower wage service industries, this trend is not expected to change for some time (Statistics Canada, 1993). This means that it is unlikely that there will be strong mass demand for the very commodities that industry is relying on to build the information society.

Affordability and class challenges to participation in an information society are also supported by a recent study conducted by Ekos Research Associates. In constructing a model or typology of the socio-economic grouping of Canadians, this study, *Rethinking Government*, found that 41 per cent of Canadians were "economically distressed" and another 16 per cent forming part of the middle class were "economically insecure" (1995a: 90-95). Of the remainder, 24 per cent of Canadians formed the "secure" middle class and 19 per cent belonged to the "insiders". The insider or high social class represents upwardly mobile, high income Canadians. This group correlates with the initial target market identified by information companies for their new information products—the communication intensive household. There is less certainty about the economic ability of the 40 per cent of Canadians in the middle class and, in particular, the 41 per cent in the lower social class to fully participate in this society beyond a minimal level.

What this means is that in the emerging class-based information society, many Canadians who lack sufficient economic resources or live in areas of Canada where it is not economically

viable or profitable enough to provide service, will be largely excluded from participating in economic, social and cultural information resources. The 'have and have not' bifurcation in Canada based on such factors as income, education, geographic location and so forth, will also exist in communication and information.

This outcome is not inevitable, however. Participation by the public in policy making can have some affect on the development of our communication/information society. As well, the above trends also mean that a fundamental contradiction is emerging whereby a required mass of individuals with sufficient disposable income necessary for the successful development of an information society as envisioned by its proponents may not be realized. If so, what will develop in its place? Will this meet the varied needs of society or be a limited service only available to an information caste?

Current government policy making and market decision making over the development and availability of information resources amounts to little more than ideology on the part of government that an information market place will exorcise us from economic stagnation, and on the part of dominant companies that they will realize private gain. The current economically-based 'Inquisition' of our long developed social and cultural policies and practises are an assault on our moral, ethical and democratic goals. This is all done in the name of a new market doctrine. This market-like religion conveys a powerlessness about ourselves as individuals, as a broader citizenry, and our democratic national institutions and polity. The God of the market is not new. In Greek mythology he was called Hermes or Mercury. The Greeks mainly knew him as the 'God of Commerce and the Market', but he was also called the 'Master Thief' (Hamilton, 1942:34).[16]

If the information society is to be democratic, that of 'for the people', then limits must exist on the processes of commodification and marketization. As Macpherson argues above, property rights

must balance social interests and permit full individual development and participation in social, cultural and economic processes and activities in society. These must be valuated based on their own criteria (morality, ethics, economic justice) not by economic essentialism alone. The fundamental democratic individual property right to freedom of which Macpherson speaks must include the right not be excluded from participation and access to communication and diverse information resources. Information and knowledge in the broadest sense must be recognized as fundamental to being human, for existence as social beings, and to being democratic as a society. These goals also require that the public be more included in the decision making process about the development and availability of these resources and services.. Those alone vested through enfranchisement with the right and responsibility of governing should guide debate and decision making. At issue is whether we are to be a society within 'commerce' or whether 'commerce' should be subsumed *within society.*

Notes

1. For helpful commentaries on an earlier version of this paper, I wish to thank Wallace Clement, John Harp, Vanda Rideout and Michael Janigan.

2. The federal communication sector includes broadcasting, telecommunications, intellectual property and copyright, national libraries, data protection, privacy, access to information, trade and competition policy.

3. In this paper the term information includes knowledge.

4. See Resnick, S. and Wolfe, R. 1987 *Class and Knowledge*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 2,3,5,24,52 for a discussion on the process of over determination or social interdependency.

5. Zuboff has written about using information technology to informate individuals. In other words, the use of technology to create new information and, at the same time, increase the skill and knowledge levels of individuals as workers and citizens. See Zuboff, S. 1988 *In the Age of the Smart Machine*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., pp. 9-10.

6. Neo-liberal is defined as a current mix of contemporary liberal and

conservative ideologies which together advocate reduced state power and a lesser role for government in society, and an increased reliance on market forces, competition and individualism. See for example, B. Clark, 1991 *Political Economy: A Comparative Approach*. New York: Praeger, pp.83,97,119.

7. See for instance the submission by the Canadian Cable Television Association to Order-In-Council P.C. 1994-1689.

8. See for example, "The Information Highway: Canada's Road to Economic and Social Renewal, A Vision Statement", Stentor Telecom Policy Inc., Oct. 1993.

9. "Canadians' Attitudes Toward Broadcast Issues", Compas Survey, Sept. 1995; "Staging the Future", Ekos Research Associates Inc. for Human Resources Development Canada, January, 1995b.

10. Most of these came from the CRTC.

11. See for example, the Consumer Association of Canada submission to Public Notice CRTC 1994-130 for comments on Order-In-Council P.C. 1994-1689.

12. The author was a policy advisor in Industry Canada during this period and interacted with the Council on a number of occasions on policy matters.

13. See for example the list of Parties for such hearings as CRTC 1994-130 (1994b); Telecom Decision CRTC 92-12 (1992); Telecom Decision CRTC 94-19 (1994a); Telecom Decision CRTC 95-21 (1995).

14. The author was a participant at this meeting representing a public interest group in December, 1995.

15. The author was a participant at this meeting representing a public interest group, November, 1995.

16. It is interesting to note that the dominant telephone companies in Canada call their national lobbying group Stentor Telecom Policy Inc.. In Greek mythology, Stentor was a herald with a powerful voice who died after losing a shouting contest with Hermes (Collins, 1994:1133).

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