

THE GEOPOLITICS OF INFORMATION: HOW WESTERN CULTURE DOMINATES THE WORLD

Anthony Smith / Oxford University Press / \$13.95

Richard E. Bissell

"I have seen the imperialist enemy, and it is us," the liberal Western journalists have cried for some years—not meaning to include the media in their Pogo-esque indictment of the West. The investigative tradition of the Western, particularly American, press has revelled in the "seditious activities" of various Western institutions (the CIA, ITT, et al.) in recent decades. The alleged neo-imperialism of the West has been laid bare by intrepid Western media explorers in the Third World. Now the tiger they let out of the cage has decided to bite the media as well, and they are very unhappy. But most of all, they are confused.

In the last few years, the West has been faced with growing demands at various international meetings for a "New International Information Order" (hereafter cited as the NIIO without well-deserved quotation marks), and with the presentation of the MacBride Report on the NIIO to the UNESCO Conference in Belgrade in October 1980, the issue has come to a head. Amadou M'Bow, the Secretary-General of UNESCO, could not restrain his modesty in presenting the report (sufficiently contradictory internally not to be worth summarizing), and asserted that with this report UNESCO has now become "the moral conscience of the world."

Specifically, advocates of the NIIO have advanced the following claims: The United States, France, and Britain control the world's print media; the people of the Third World are too dependent on the short-wave broadcasts of the BBC, Radio Moscow, and the Voice of America; each developing country should have its own news service and control over the flow of information into and out of that country, and it should be the responsibility of the developed countries to provide the necessary resources and personnel; the Third World will have to meet a threat posed by American construction of big computers and space stations

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with the potential to control global information in the twenty-first century; and the predictable conclusion: It has become necessary to break the control of the "neocolonialist, monopolistic, and undemocratic powerful media multinationals."

Now, if all that sounds like a combination of Cecil Rhodes and Buck Rogers, it just shows how fraudulent perceptions in developing countries have become. After the Third World experience in pushing the "New International Economic Order," the NIIO is as logical a sequel as *Jaws II* was to *Jaws*. The recent Belgrade conference at least managed to delay consideration of the MacBride Report recommendations. (Perhaps because of the upcoming election, the American delegation for once held firm against Third World demands). But the danger is that the report remains on the UNESCO agenda. To assure passage in 1982, delegates will spend two years mobilizing the guilt complexes of America while circus-master M'Bow provides additional funding for the NIIO.

Anthony Smith has a major problem with the NIIO, and he is not alone. His dilemma is the same as that faced by the Ayatollah's apologists who welcomed Khomeini as a liberator only to become puzzled when he started to throw reporters in jail or expel them from the country. Smith doesn't like "old orders." He regards the structure that provides what we understand as a free exchange of news and information as antiquated and maintains that it should be scrapped, particularly on the basis of the NIIO complaints. He wants to find a meeting-ground with the NIIO, and so he accepts its premises as valid.

But since the solutions suggested by NIIO proponents would in effect eliminate freedom of the press, Smith subjects them to skeptical scrutiny. Thus, though he accepts that the West is "imperialist" in an abstract sense, he is clear-sighted enough to realize that the remedies posed by the Third World will leave him

marginal opportunity at best to cover his favorite Third World topics. The NIIO clearly knows what it is doing. At a UNESCO conference in Yaounde, Cameroon, last July, the delegates called not only for the establishment of a new pan-African news agency, but also for a "special conference about non-African radio stations whose presence in the continent embarrasses national radios."

Of course Western media embarrass developing countries, whose national media are sometimes directed to print outright lies—the kinds of deceptions that could not occur in an environment where communications are seen as a competition for truth. A more elegant formulation of the NIIO solution (included in the just-released MacBride Report) calls for international news agencies to "conform to national laws and development policies." Smith has a hard time dealing with the NIIO solution, yet can offer no alternative given his acceptance of the NIIO assumptions.

One doesn't have to be a friend of the NIIO to recognize that information flows affect political power. What sympathizers of the NIIO are unwilling to admit is that the dissemination of information has been far freer under the "old" order than

under any other "order" known to man—including the NIIO. Those arguing for the NIIO simply don't like *bad* news—their behavior is akin to Haile Selassie's when he maintained vociferously during 1973-74 that there was no starvation in Ethiopia, or to Idi Amin's, when he fed reporters to the crocodiles for exposing his brutality.

Smith at least performs one service for readers: He conveys the state of mind of Third World governments, particularly as it is represented at UNESCO conferences. But he ignores this fundamental point: Truth is important to Third World (and Second World) citizenries if not to their governments, and it is under the present order that truth is best protected. Africans have good reason to listen to the BBC, and it is well understood why Soviet citizens listen to Radio Liberty and the Voice of America, or why one of the first steps taken by the Soviet Union during the Polish strikes of August 1980 was to resume the jamming of Western radio broadcasts.

But even if the Western media were to fail to convey the truth, a "new" order would not be necessary: The marketplace will ensure that the media communicating the most truth will prevail. To abandon our traditional instruments in the search for truth would be suicidal. □

A TIME FOR ACTION

William Simon / McGraw-Hill / \$10.00

Michael C. Brown

When last Mr. Simon was heard from, in 1977 when times were tough and readers of this journal were perhaps just discovering the delights of our departed Wonderboy president, the title of his book then was *A Time For Truth*. There were many hard truths in that well-written book, mostly rising out of Simon's years in Treasury under Presidents Nixon and Ford. The current issue of William Simon's meditations is entitled *A Time For Action*. With the Reagan ascendancy both the title and the brief filed under it assume major importance. What might have been a very interesting back-burner discussion during another Carter-slog

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through four years suddenly has become a preeminent document in a critical debate.

For this reason I wish Mr. Simon's book had been written a little less colloquially and a little more for the ages. There is an avuncular, conversational tone throughout that often has an unfortunate lulling effect on even the most attentive reader. Nevertheless, Mr. Simon is a most compelling pamphleteer and *A Time For Action* stands up as a stirring set of marching orders.

Certainly most of us are ready to form ranks after the last four years of liberal jungle-ball economics. From President Carter's laughable voluntary wage and price controls and his

howler of a balanced budget, to theoretician and guru J.K. Galbraith's plot for government to inaugurate a system of income and price restraints over those who have "gained control of prices and of income independent of market restraints," the past few years have seemed like a conspiracy to separate the average American from an average prosperity. William Simon mercilessly catalogues the economic horror stories of recent years in his opening chapter, "The American Crisis": \$180 billion in federal deficits in four years; continued declines in capital investment; 100,000 steelworker jobs lost in a single decade; 18 percent annualized inflation rate; lowest housing starts since World War II; total U.S. public and private debt, \$4.25 trillion; and on and on. Depressives and those on maintenance doses should absorb this book carefully.

Mr. Simon wisely breaks into this appalling litany periodically with illustrations of the quiet truths of American capitalism: Capital investment = productivity = jobs for a growing labor force = increased standard of living. But there is no doubt what Mr. Simon sees as the overwhelming equation of our current state: Declining standard of living = continued loss of jobs = more government intervention = higher inflation = financial panic and collapse.

The complex, regulatory nature of federal government emerges as the arch-villain of *A Time For Action*. Mr. Simon sees the Nader-Commoner-Galbraith axis linking the issues of energy and environment to economic growth and whipping what is fundamentally a disorganized, not dishonest, federal bureaucracy into a frenzied control of the economy by government. The creation of the now discredited Carter Department of Energy, only three years old and already so bureaucratically involuted that its founder refused to mention the agency during his campaign for re-election, was a typical liberal paregoric used to soothe what Simon calls the no-growth counterculture.

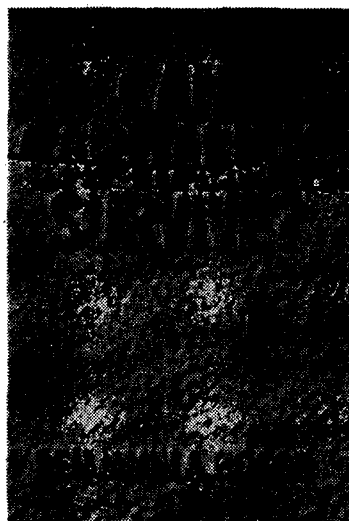
But the subtleties of the methods needed to reverse the regulatory nature of government are missing from this book. How is it possible to step into the halls and corridors of the EPA and OSHA and throw down the barriers against wild government paternalism? Given the American epidemic regard for one's own mental and environmental "space," and the constant gauging of how one "feels" in what amounts to almost an

obsession with mortality, is it possible to turn back the American ethos to a spirit of freely competitive survival and individual effort? I sense Mr. Simon is not wholly optimistic on this point. He does suggest obligatory "economic impact" or cost-benefit findings before a regulation goes into effect, with benefits exceeding costs. But how is a national frame of mind altered? Advertising?

Public relations? Benefit concerts? Mr. Simon's book takes the long view in opposition to the short view and maintains the spirit of realism versus the spirit of utopianism. Your reviewer, particularly chuckle-headed in the fields of finance and economics, was mentally and spiritually galvanized by *A Time For Action*. Aha, say the liberals and progressives in the audience, more evidence

that conservative, Republican economics are simple-minded solutions for the intellectually feeble. Nonsense. From Tom Paine's *Common Sense* to Barry Goldwater's *Conscience of a Conservative* to William Simon's *A Time For Action*, clarity and clarion-calls have combined to stimulate both men of action and the clerisy to rise up and shake sense into society. Deo volente. □

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