

## A Riot of Our Own

By Charles Paul Freund

**D**idn't like the recent anti-globalist, anti-capitalist street actions in Seattle and Washington, D.C.? Then maybe you should have caught New Delhi's riots last November. India's capital was shut down even tighter than the American cities; crowds of rock throwers targeted policemen, not just fast-food restaurants. But the angry New Delhi protesters were neither Greens nor environmentalists, neither anarchists nor even wielders of giant puppets. They were industrial workers, and they were mad because stringent new pollution controls were shutting down their mostly small workplaces.

These workers of the developing world united—with nothing to lose but their jobs—under the banner of the Small Industries Action Front. The specter that was haunting Delhi was an order by India's Supreme Court immediately to shut down factories located in residential areas. An estimated 50,000 workplaces were covered by the order, suggesting two conclusions: that Delhi had been pretty lax in its zoning enforcement for a very long time, and that the court's decision to put matters right overnight was going to lead to considerable disruption for everyone involved.

"We are protecting our basic rights to earn a living," Dinesh Goel, president of the Mahipalpur Industries Association, explained to Reuters.

"They are sealing all factories whether they are polluting or not."

After the first protests disrupted New Delhi traffic on November 19, the city government appealed to the court to allow it to shut down the factories gradually. The court rejected the request. The result was several days of chaos. Industrial workers took to the streets throughout New Delhi, blocking traffic and setting fires. The city was forced to close its schools along with its factories, because students were unable to get to classes. Airline passengers had to abandon their cars and walk to the airport, carrying their luggage, because the airport road was blocked. Police were stoned, answering with tear gas and, at close range, their clubs. The worst violence occurred on the first day of demonstrations, when 75 people—half of them police—were injured, and one person was killed.

## Air Commands

By Jacob Sullum

**Y**ou may have heard that the Fairness Doctrine, which required broadcasters to provide balanced coverage of controversial topics, was abolished 14 years ago. Not quite.

In 1987 the Federal Communications Commission concluded that the requirement, first officially enunciated in the 1940s, had deterred TV and radio stations from dealing with issues of public concern: Broadcasters had steered clear of controversial discussions and provocative commentary because they were worried about

## ASSETS

## Balance Sheet

By Jeff A. Taylor

▲ **Trending Up.** By 2015, "Governments will have less and less control over flows of information, technology, diseases, migrants, arms, and financial transactions." Or so says a 70-page CIA report on the future. Globalization is to blame, and five out of six ain't bad.

▲ **Scared Simple.** Net transactions spur states to pursue tax simplification. Thirty-nine states form the Streamlined Sales Tax Project to come up with ways to nix confusing cross-jurisdictional taxes.

▲ **Merge Urge.** The Federal Trade Commission resists the doomsday lobbying of Walt Disney and others by voting unanimously to approve the AOL-Time Warner merger. But expect fighting over the "open access" mandate the FTC wrangled from America Warner On Time.



▲ **Child's Play.** Juvenile homicide arrests fall to their lowest rate in decades; overall youth crimes drop, too. Some 1,400 youths between 10 and 17 were charged with murder in 1999, a 68 percent drop from 1993. The youth violent crime rate is the lowest since 1988.

▲ **Teaching Moment.** The Equal Em-

ployment Opportunity Commission backs an Ohio teacher who wants the portion of his union dues spent on political activities sent to a charity, as labor law allows. Denis Robey wanted his money to go to Habitat for Humanity, but union officials threw up roadblocks.



possible disciplinary action. The FCC also noted that the proliferation of media outlets had made a legal mandate for diversity of viewpoints obsolete.

But the commission continued to enforce two narrower rules that posed similar threats to freedom of speech: the "political editorial rule," which required stations that criticized a candidate or endorsed his opponent to let him respond on the air, and the "personal attack rule," which gave the same right to individuals or groups whose "honesty, character, integrity, or like personal qualities" were impugned. The commission was never able to explain why these rules were not



▼ **Crippling News.** Forty-five cases of polio crop up on the Caribbean island of Hispaniola in recent months. An under-vaccinated population is to blame, suggesting the plan to wipe out polio within the next two years is in jeopardy.

▼ **Cola Nuts.** Coca-Cola buys its way into the Library of Congress with a "donation" of 20,000 TV commercials and \$100,000 to fund the study of culture. Up next, "Tastes Great" and "Less Filling" wings for the library.

▼ **On Principals.** Public school administrators go rule crazy. In separate incidents, a 14-year-old boy is charged with criminal sexual contact after slapping another 8th-grader on the butt and a 10-year-old boy is strip-searched by school employees looking for cigarettes. In both cases, higher-ups defend the actions.

▼ **Syndrome Syndrome.** Belgian and Italian soldiers complain of "Balkans syndrome," allegedly brought on by depleted uranium shells used by NATO in the region. Chronic exhaustion, depression, and lethargy must be caused by something other than a soul-sapping mission.

▼ **Money Run.** Since 1996, about 25,000 fugitives from felony charges got Supplemental Security Income checks from the Social Security system. Between \$76 million and \$283 million meant for the poor and disabled helped fund getaways, an internal audit finds.

▼ **Hatch Hash.** The chief of the Health Care Financing Administration, which sets government prices for health care, is forced to resign for violating the federal law that prohibits political fundraising by federal employees. Michael M. Hash held an event for a Democratic House candidate, something even postal workers know runs afoul of the Hatch Act.

just as unnecessary, counterproductive, and unconstitutional as the Fairness Doctrine itself.

In October, noting the continued inadequacy of the FCC's defense after many years of litigation, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit ordered it to rescind both regulations. The commission had announced a 60-day suspension of the rules a week earlier, but the court saw that move as too little, too late. "The petition to vacate the rules has been pending since 1980," the judges noted. "If these circum-

stances do not constitute agency action unreasonably delayed, it is difficult to imagine circumstances that would."

## Ring of Power

By Jeff A. Taylor

Suppose there was a device that, when used during a dangerous procedure, significantly reduced the risk of a fatality. Suppose that same device

also made a difficult procedure much easier. What would you think of it?

If you're a member of the Consumer Product Safety Commission, you might decide to outlaw it. Such is the case with baby bath seats, some 2 million of which are now in use.

The Consumer Federation of America is campaigning to ban the devices, saying they give parents a false sense of security. But the numbers don't back up that claim. Each year 50 or so kids drown in bathtubs. Usually less than 10 of those accidents involve the use of a bath seat. Significantly, in almost all of the reported deaths, the child was left unattended. Blaming the bath seats for this lapse in parental judgment seems more than a little misplaced.

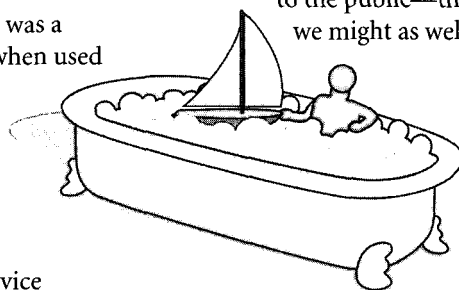
But not for CPSC Chairman Ann Brown, who seems to think that making life difficult for parents will keep kids safe. "Imagine a parent holding a soapy, squiggling baby," Brown said. "A parent would never leave that baby alone for a second. But even the best parent can be seduced into bad behavior if they see a child sitting upright in a little seat."

That is one powerful piece of plastic, able to "seduce" even "the best parents" into a "bad" choice. If that is the operating standard for safety—that no labor-saving device that might be misused by morons should be available

to the public—then we might as well ►



LIABILITIES



## SOURCE

"Growth in computer adoption in lower income households is nearly double that of the higher income bracket, showing that the 'digital divide' is closing rapidly as technology becomes more affordable."

So concludes a new study by the nonprofit Employment Policy Foundation, which predicts that by 2009 the gap between high- and low-income households in computer ownership will have completely disappeared. The study, available online at [www.epf.org/forecasts/2001/tf20010112.pdf](http://www.epf.org/forecasts/2001/tf20010112.pdf), also predicts that telecommuting will be ubiquitous by the end of the decade.

## QUOTE

"If that little powder was worth only 10 cents, there would be no organizations dedicated to raising a billion dollars to finance armies in Colombia."

—Jorge Batlle, president of Uruguay, urging fellow Latin American leaders to consider the decriminalization of drugs, at the Iberoamerican Summit of Chiefs of State and Government, November 20, 2000