

Democracy v. the Government of Canada: the muzzling of government scientists, librarians & archivists and the growing movement for communication rights in Canada

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Society not only continues to exist *by* transmission, *by* communication, but it may fairly be said to exist *in* transmission, *in* communication. There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication. Men live in community in virtue of the things they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common.” (Dewey 1915, p. 4)

Dewey is just one of the theorists who saw the potential of advanced media technologies to advance social progress, a more inclusive and democratic society made possible in part by education. Enzensberger (1974) said that it would be naïve to think that the hardware or software on its own can accomplish emancipation. Older communication technologies, including radio and television, could have been developed for two-way communication; that they were not reflects a social choice, based on the capitalist system. Enzensberger claims that effective use of the medium requires organization, and fully effective use requires a socialist system.

Dupuis (2013) chronicles a very disturbing trend by the Harper government in Canada in recent years in the aptly name bibliography *The Canadian war on science: a long, unexaggerated, devastating chronological indictment*. For example, since 2008, Canadian government scientists have not been able to talk to media without managerial approval, and some have been accompanied by government “minders” at scientific conferences. A recently leaked Code of Conduct at Library and Archives Canada states that such activities as attending at or speaking at conferences or classes, even on the employee’s own time, are to be viewed as high risk activities.

I argue that this trend illustrates why we cannot assume that the potential of new media technologies will simply unfold on their own in a capitalist society.

Activists in Canada are fighting for communication rights – for federal scientists, librarians and archivists to share their knowledge, and for all of us to benefit from this knowledge. For example, the British Columbia Library Association¹ recently passed a resolution that states that:

BCLA affirms the rights and responsibilities of federal scientists and information workers to conduct their work in the manner established through long standing tradition and practice including the right to present government research to the media and members of the public, and to publish, teach and participate in professional practice; and BCLA undertakes to support these rights and

¹ I am a member of the BCLA’s Information Policy Committee and participated in drafting this resolution.

responsibilities through such means as working with other organizations to advance advocacy, inform members and continue to push for positive change.

Round table participants are invited to share their perspectives about government muzzling, as well as current or potential strategies for activism to support communication rights to support a vision of an inclusive society, one reflecting the values of community, that can work for all of us, both now and for the long term.

References

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Dupuis, J. (2013). *The Canadian war on science: a long, unexaggerated, devastating chronological indictment*. Retrieved June 1, 2013 from <http://scienceblogs.com/confessions/2013/05/20/the-canadian-war-on-science-a-long-unexaggerated-devastating-chronological-indictment/>

Enzensberger, H. M. (1974). Constituents of a theory of the media. *The consciousness industry on literature, politics and the media* (pp. 95-118). New York: Seabury Press.