Solidarity Federation
ONE Owner; ONE Vision; ONE Voice
Winter 1998

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It is common knowledge that the majority of the world's media is owned by a very few corporations and individuals. These control our access to the wider world to a large extent, and their agenda is a capitalist one — for the benefit of the corporation. Voices of independence are tolerated, and possibly encouraged, to give a veneer of freedom of expression, but one that is only allowed if it is not too influential.

The media covers a multitude of sins — all forms of communication or artistic expression could be said to add up to media. The popular image is of the newspapers and magazines, possibly including TV and radio, but it clearly includes films, books, plays and the 'arts' in general. Apart from direct experience and through second hand information from acquaintances' direct experience, our knowledge of the world and beyond invariably comes to us through media of one form or another.

Modern western mass-media is crowded, dense and fast moving. However, for people who live(d) in smallish villages without such mass-media technology, most news would be

brought to them by participants or observers of those events. Certainly, in the past, with low literacy, there was not much call for written media, and wider news was brought to people orally.

Now, in the west at least, there is literally masses of information and news all around, some of which is delivered to our homes in a variety of diverse media. Our lives are generally dominated by it — the information age may be a cliché but it holds a bit of truth. Conversations often revolve around events not in our own lives, but those as portrayed by newspapers, TV, magazines, films or radio.

Our reality is not in danger of being defined by the media, it is in danger of being only the media. The big problem of this, given that a medium is but a channel of communication, is that we are being defined by external events which are brought to us by others, by people who have their own agenda and who have their own priorities — the priorities of the media corporations.

The fact that we are privileged to have a mass of information readily available should be something to celebrate; the fact that we can know what is happening around the world almost instantaneously should be seen as a cause for acclaim, but it is not. Why? Because the role the media plays in western society is not one of empowerment, not one of enhancement, but one of capital returns. If it sells, sell it; if it attracts lots of advertisers, then sell it a bit cheaper.

Capitalism will sell anything, it will 'turn rebellion into money' quite happily (but only as a small niche market).

The mass media is like populist politics, it seeks to attract and influence the largest number of people in the shortest possible time. It therefore appeals to that well-worn phrase 'the lowest common denominator'. In reality, 'the lowest common denominator' really means the editors' idea of the least challenging rubbish they think people will swallow, wrapped up in lots of easy to digest pieces of general interest that keep people entertained but not informed. Large amounts of sport, pages of

TV gossip, celebrity trivia; it's all fairly harmless in itself, but it seeks to hide the fact that the media generally has nothing to say except that of its master's voice.

As our lives become increasingly orientated around the corporate media, rather than it being a tool of communication, it is becoming a tool of incorporation. We are being incorporated into a world made by those who control the media.