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Changes

The only changes made here were to format the source for HTML, and to add an Icon or two. - Peter Feltham.

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FINS SPECIAL REPORT February 21, 1995
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G-7 MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON THE GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY Making Way for the New by Destroying the Old Civilization

Washington, DC--The European Union, chaired by President Jacques Santer will host the G-7 Information Society Conference Feb 25-26, 1995, at Brussels, Belgium. The U.S. Delegation will be led by Secretary of Commerce Ronald H.Brown. Vice President Gore will deliver the keynote address at a luncheon Feb 25th.

The Clinton Administration has stated that it wants to achieve support from the G-7 on five basic principles for building the GII:

1. encouraging private investment;
2. promoting competition;
3. creating a flexible regulatory environment;
4. providing open access to networks and services for providers and users;
5. and ensuring universal service.

The Administration gave a detailed description of these principles in a paper released Feb 16, "The Global Information Infrastructure: Agenda for Cooperation" [Fins-II2-03].

However, on Feb 17, 1995, a coalition of leading human rights and civil liberties groups petitioned Vice President Al Gore "to carry the banner of free speech to Brussels" where the G-7 will meet next week to discuss the future of the global information infrastructure (GII).

The coalition alleges in a news release issued by Ann Beeson , a fellow at **Human Rights Watch**, and Marc Rotenberg , Executive Director of the **Electronic Privacy Information Center** (EPIC), that the U.S. agenda for the GII is incomplete because ***"it fails to include core free expression principles"*** [Fins-II2-04].

They recommend that the Clinton Administration:

1. protect against censorship and promote diverse ideas and viewpoints on the GII.
2. support broad access to the GII by people of all nations.
3. promote strong information privacy rights on the GII.

In addition to **Human Rights Watch** and **EPIC**, the petition was signed by **American Civil Liberties Union**, **American Library Association**, **Article 19**, **Center for Democracy and Technology**, **Electronic Frontier Foundation**, **People for the American Way**, and **Privacy International**.

The Europeans have organized the G-7 conference around 3 themes:

- **Theme 1**: Regulatory Framework and Competition Policy;
- **Theme 2**: Development of the Information Infrastructure and the Provision of Access to IT and Applications; and
- **Theme 3**: Social, Societal and Cultural Aspects

On Saturday Morning, Feb 25th - some 40 to 50 private sector representatives from the G-7 and EU will discuss issues regarding the Information Society. Ministers will be present, and business leaders will discuss the same themes and issues, which will be addressed by the ministers beginning in the afternoon session.

No comparable session of the conference will include representatives of the social, cultural, or environmental sectors that have a direct interest in the radically new global civilization --called the Information Society--being planned without public participation.

Moreover, in the United States, members of the **National Information Infrastructure Advisory Council**, have a lopsided membership of top CEOs from American industry. The NIIAC, together with private groups such as the **Computer Systems Policy Project**, an affiliation of chief executive officers of the 13 largest American computer companies, are advocating a strictly business perspective on development of the Global Information Infrastructure, together with a tough negotiating posture.

For example, recommendations of the NIIAC provided to Secretary Brown Dec 6, 1994, concerning the issues to be addressed at the G-7 Conference, staked out this position:

> While agreement on fundamental objectives and approaches to developing the GII will depend on multilateral initiatives, such as the G-7 Conference, there will remain a need to utilize bilateral and, in appropriate circumstances, unilateral measures to achieve specific objectives.

The "Perspectives on the Global Information Infrastructure," offered Feb 13, 1995, by business leaders of the CSPP, utterly disregards the primary leadership role actually played by the research and education community in development of the information infrastructure.

Moreover, they now call for "Putting the Private Sector in the Driver's Seat." CSPPs perspective says

> "The role of governments around the world is to nurture the GII by establishing policies that support and encourage private sector initiatives. Governments must also ensure that private sector views are fully represented in any international dialogue about the GII."

The views of the not-for-profit or "third sector" organizations that represent the interests of society and environmentalist concerns have been basically locked out of the perspective on the GII by both the NIIAC and the CSPP.

Theme 3 of the G-7 conference will focus on "Social, Societal and Cultural Aspects" but only within the perspective of those narrow business interests. This is the traditional rigged and lopsided perspective of the marketplace mentality that disregards public goods [Lindblom, 1977; Fins-SR3-09].

As Andrew Schmookler has observed: *"the entire network of connections that are the flesh of the social system are regarded as "external" to the market. The market listens to the wants of people as individuals but is deaf to their needs as an interdependent community."*1

> 1. Andrew Schmookler, The Parable of the Tribes: The Problem of Power in Social Evolution (Houghton Mifflin, 1986): pp. 308-319.

The "marketplace" does not protect the environment, or safeguard the public's life and well being; no "marketplace" sets a price for an extra year of life or a month's supply of breathable air. The "marketplace" does not protect Americans against the sociopolitical context of chronic disease such as unhealthy lifestyles, unsafe automobiles, toxic chemical substances, or the chronic conditions of unemployment, underclass and urban disintegration.

Yet, these are the very risk factors responsible for a large majority of all preventable deaths in the United States.

Nor can the "marketplace" correct distortions in the structure of political power, or sustain mature moral relations between the weak and powerful, among those separated by race, religion, ethnic origin, gender and generation.

It cannot reach above the narrow focus of individual transactions to define the needs of the community, or those of society and civilization as a whole, nor does it serve the common good and secure fulfillment of the social contract among all Americans, which is our inalienable birthright.

In short, the "marketplace" certainly will not function to encourage and facilitate those essential social relations and valued cultural patterns that go the core of communications values and goals, which should govern building a new civilization in cyberspace.

> The crucial issue derived from these conditions concerns the need for an information and telecommunications infrastructure that will support "sustainable development" embracing the social needs of the society and our environment in forms that are not subject to profit pressures, which undermine the desired outcomes.

Nevertheless, one networker, [Dale R. Worley worley@ariadne.com](mailto:worley@ariadne.com), who operates the Ariadne Internet Services, "Helping businesses profit from using the Internet," has observed that instead of responding to these needs, when a new civilization is created *"the creative process necessarily leaves most of the existing civilization behind."*

In a message transmitted over the Net, Feb 14 on the subject *"Stakeholders in the telecom wars,"* Worley writes:

> Commonly, and especially in the American tradition, new civilizations are created by having a non-representative segment of the population remove itself to a new and "unoccupied" area (physical, social, or economic), and there build the new civilization.... After the new system is created, it takes over and destroys the old civilization, by one means or another.
>
> The "colonization" of North America and the resulting effects on the Native Americans is about the only well-recorded episode of interaction between the two civilizations, but it is probably typical: Agricultural peoples can field more warriors than non- agricultural peoples. Similarly, low-skilled manufacturing workers have little to gain by a transition to an information-intensive economy, and are in serious danger of losing their union wages.
>
> The destructive impact of the existing sitiuation is not speculation.

At the Appropriation Subcommittee hearing Jan 19, Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-MA), former chairman of the House Telecommunications Subcomm told members that the debate unfolding is *"about the culture of the United States."* He stated that the decision was made by legislation approving NAFTA and GATT, to forego low paying industrial jobs in favor of developing a high skilled work force, and thus, the nation "must give children the skills to get high end jobs."

However, the economy is now being subjected to cannibalization by multinational corporations because the training needed for that purpose is not being carried out. Moreover, Speaker Newt Gingrich has vowed to abolish high-quality public information system such as the public broadcasting system and the Government Printing Office.

This is part of a "conservative" war now being waged against other key American cultural institutions [Fins-PaN-20].

It is a shocking spectacle to witness the world's powerful Ministers creating a new global civilization, to maximize the narrow self-interests of private industry, by taking a free ride on the social and environmental interests within which the new civilization must be established.

This will doom the vision of a life sustaining Earth.

Stakeholders in the telecom wars who accept their social responsibility, have their work cut out for them.

To avoid destruction, those public interests and a viable strategy to sustain them must be explicitly articulated with meaningful public participation.

Political support can then be organized throughout the global community.

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