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#02

The Gain-of-Function Free Speech Digital Fanzine

Mass Media

Souls on sale

HIT BOLT
FREE SPEECH MFKER
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MASS MEDIA IS A B!7C#

WHEN SOCIETY STOPS
FUNDING THE PRESS,
POWER FILLS THE GAP.
AND WHOEVER PAYS
ULTIMATELY GAINS
INFLUENCE OVER
WHAT GETS PUBLISHED.

THE POWER THAT SHOULD WATCH POWER

The press was never meant to protect power. It was meant to question it.

A free society needs more than elections. It needs citizens who can see what governments, institutions, lawmakers and powerful organisations are doing.

That is where journalism begins: investigating, verifying, questioning and publishing what power would rather not have to explain.

The original role

Journalism performs a role that no election campaign, government institution or communications department can replace: watching those who have the power to make decisions that affect everyone else.

Governments, political parties, corporations, banks, public institutions and even the media themselves need outside scrutiny. Not because every form of power is necessarily corrupt, but because power without scrutiny has greater room for abuse.

A free press should therefore not tell us what to think. It should give us enough information to think for ourselves. Separate fact from opinion. Compare conflicting accounts. Ask questions when the answers become uncomfortable. Give opposing positions room to be heard.

Pluralism is not simply having hundreds of channels. It means having access to genuinely different voices capable of challenging one another. When that diversity disappears, citizens lose an essential tool for understanding reality.



The press should also defend an uncomfortable but fundamental principle: the public's right to know matters more than the comfort of those in power. That makes journalism more than an industry. It makes it a counterweight to power.

Journalism is not supposed to make power comfortable.

And that is precisely why we should pay attention when the institutions meant to scrutinise governments, corporations and other powerful organisations begin to depend economically or politically on them.

This is not an attack on journalism. It is a defence of what journalism is supposed to be.

FROM WATCHDOG OF POWER TO LOUDSPEAKER OF POWER

When journalism depends on the institutions it should investigate, the balance breaks.

A GOVERNMENT DOES NOT NEED TO DICTATE A HEADLINE TO INFLUENCE A NEWSROOM. PRESSURE CAN BE FAR QUIETER: ADVERTISING, SUBSIDIES, LOANS, SHAREHOLDERS, PRIVILEGED ACCESS, CORPORATE INTERESTS – OR SIMPLY THE FEAR OF LOSING WHATEVER KEEPS THE BUSINESS ALIVE.

The most effective censorship does not always need a censor.

Submission, instead of truthfulness

Sometimes it only needs to create the conditions in which someone decides for themselves what is safer not to publish.

Media organisations need money to survive. Advertising, investors, subscribers, financing and public funding are part of their economic reality. None of these things automatically turns a newspaper or television network into propaganda. But they create relationships of dependency that deserve scrutiny.

In 2015, journalist Peter Osborne resigned from The Daily Telegraph, alleging that the newspaper had failed to adequately cover the SwissLeaks scandal involving HSBC, one of its major advertisers.

The episode exposed an uncomfortable truth: commercial interests can enter the newsroom too.

Political power can operate in similar ways. Government advertising, subsidies, licences, regulation or privileged access to sources can all create influence without anyone ever issuing a direct order.

But there is an even subtler way to shape public perception: control the agenda.

Manipulation does not necessarily require inventing facts. It can also happen through deciding which story leads the news, which receives twenty seconds of coverage, which is repeated for a week, which expert appears on screen again and again, and which events never become news at all.

The power of media is not only the power to tell us what happened. It is also the power to decide what deserves our attention.

When political, financial and corporate interests converge around information, the question is no longer simply whether a story is true or false.

The question becomes: Why am I seeing this story instead of another one?

YOU DON'T NEED TO CONTROL EVERY STORY.
YOU ONLY NEED TO CONTROL THE AGENDA.



INFORMATION IS NO LONGER A PUBLIC
SERVICE. IT IS A BUSINESS, AND
TOO OFTEN, TAILORED TO WHOEVER PAYS.

WHO OWNS WHAT YOU KNOW?

Thousands of channels,
in just few hands.

We have never had access to so much information. Television, newspapers, radio, film, platforms, search engines, social networks and thousands of channels compete for our attention every second. It feels like unlimited choice. Behind many of those brands, however, ownership is far more concentrated than it appears.

“Their systems determine what appears first, what gets recommended, what gains visibility and what disappears beneath millions of competing pieces of content.”

In the Beast's Tentacles

Open an app. Turn on the television. Watch a film. Read a newspaper. Listen to a podcast. Search for a story. They look like different worlds. They are not always different worlds.

Decades of mergers, acquisitions and corporate convergence have produced conglomerates operating simultaneously across television, film, publishing, entertainment, telecommunications and digital distribution.

When fewer organisations control more outlets, fewer decision-makers have the ability to influence what reaches a mass audience. That creates an obvious challenge for genuine media pluralism.

But today, owning the content is only part of the equation. The new power is also in distribution. Google, YouTube, Meta and other major platforms do not need to write a news story to influence the information ecosystem.

Their systems determine what appears first, what gets recommended, what gains visibility and what disappears beneath millions of competing pieces of content.

Algorithms filter, categorise, select, rank and promote information.

That turns the algorithm into a new kind of editor. One that is not necessarily designed to give you a balanced picture of the world, but to hold your attention, increase engagement and feed an economic model built around advertising and data.

There is no need to imagine a secret room where politicians, executives and journalists meet to decide what you should think. The problem can be much simpler.

Concentrated ownership. Economic dependency. Political access. Lobbying. Algorithms. Shared incentives. You do not need a conspiracy when the incentives point in the same direction.

So the important question is no longer only: Is this information true?

We should also ask: Who produced it?, Who paid for it?, Who distributed it?, Who decided that I should see it?

WHEN AN OPINION CHALLENGES THE DOMINANT NARRATIVE,
THERE IS NOT ALWAYS A NEED TO REFUTE IT: REDUCING
ITS REACH, HIDING IT, OR REMOVING THE PERSON WHO
PUBLISHED IT CAN BE ENOUGH. SHADOW BANNING HAS
TURNED CENSORSHIP INTO SOMETHING ALMOST INVISIBLE.
MARK ZUCKERBERG ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE BIDEN
ADMINISTRATION PRESSURED META TO RESTRICT CERTAIN
COVID-19-RELATED CONTENT.



FREEDOM WAS NEVER FREE

Sweden, 1766. One of the first constitutional protections of press freedom was not a gift from power. It was a limit imposed on power.

THE FREEDOMS WE TAKE FOR GRANTED TODAY DID NOT SIMPLY APPEAR. THEY WERE ARGUED FOR, CHALLENGED, DEFENDED AND, IN MANY CASES, WON AGAINST THOSE WHO HAD AN INTEREST IN KEEPING CONTROL. IN 1766, SWEDEN TOOK A REMARKABLE STEP: IT ADOPTED ONE OF THE WORLD'S FIRST CONSTITUTIONAL PROTECTIONS FOR FREEDOM OF THE PRESS.



For centuries, controlling information had been one of the privileges of power. Governments could decide what could be printed, which ideas could circulate and which voices were allowed to reach the public.

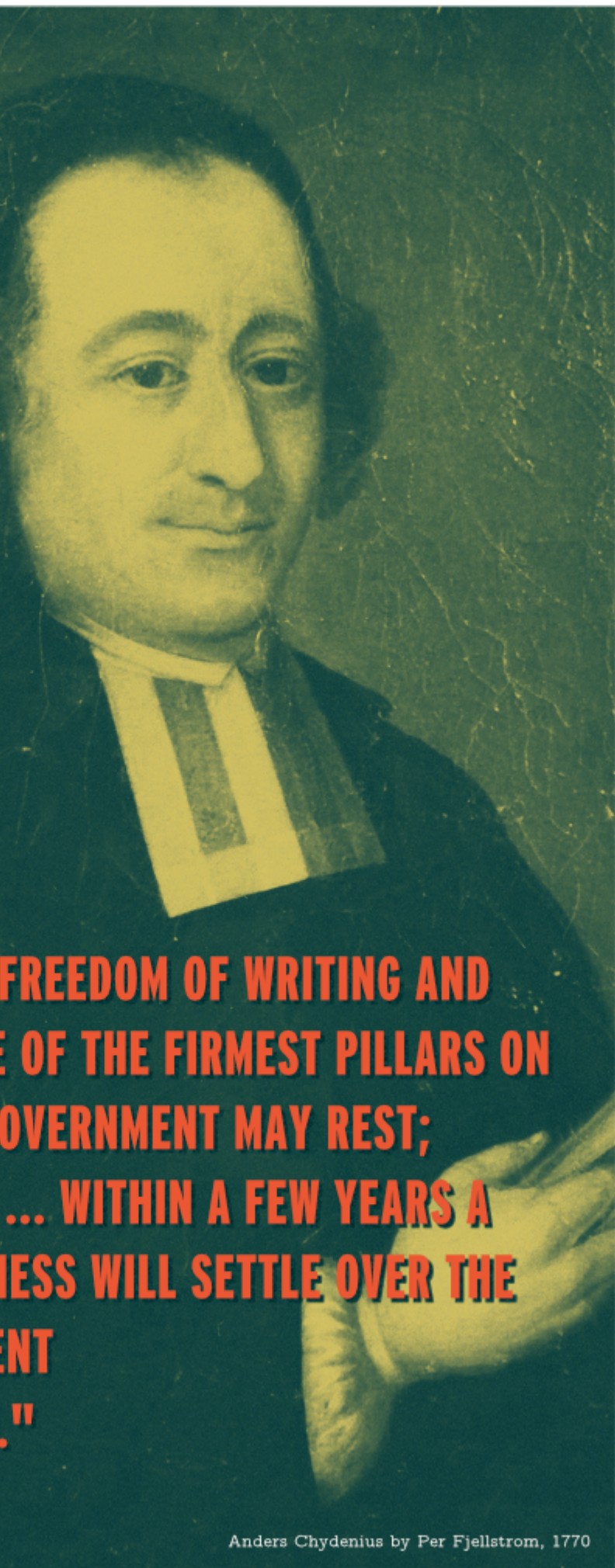
The Swedish Freedom of the Press Act of 1766 challenged that principle.

Driven in part by the work of politician and thinker *Anders Chydenius*, the law radically expanded the right to publish information and reduced state censorship. It also established an extraordinarily modern principle: citizens should have access to official documents and be able to examine the actions of government.

The idea behind it was simple but powerful. Those who exercise power should not be the only ones allowed to control information about how that power is exercised.

Freedom of the press therefore became more than the freedom of journalists or publishers. It became a tool for citizens to scrutinise authority. But the story did not end in 1766.

"AN EQUITABLE
PRINTING IS ONE
WHICH A FREE G
FOR OTHERWISE
HORRIFIC DARK
ENTIRE FIRMAME
OF OUR LIBERTY.



**FREEDOM OF WRITING AND
OF THE FIRMEST PILLARS ON
GOVERNMENT MAY REST;
... WITHIN A FEW YEARS A
DRESS WILL SETTLE OVER THE
MENT
."**

Anders Chydenius by Per Fjellström, 1770

Political change soon brought restrictions back. Under King Gustav III, many of the freedoms introduced by the act were weakened after 1772. What had been won could also be taken away.

That is perhaps the most important lesson of the story. The freedoms we inherit can feel permanent simply because they existed before we were born.

History suggests otherwise. Freedom of expression, freedom of publication and access to information survived because generations before us considered them worth defending.

Rights do not maintain themselves.

Someone has to defend them.

**YOU CAN KNOW MORE OF ANDERS CHYDENIUS IN:
WWW.CHYDENIUS.NET**



Watch it, read it, think it... and pass it on



@DavidJimenezEIDirector

How to Buy a Journalist in Spain: Favors, Punishments, and Lies in the Media

"Journalism is more corrupt than politics."
The other day, I used that headline in an interview I gave to El País. Many colleagues were upset. Others encouraged me to keep going...."



@The Atlantic

Social-Media Companies Threaten Democracy

"Today, social-media companies like Facebook and Google are the gatekeepers of meaningful freedom of speech. This is problematic, argues the New York Law School Professor Nadine Strossen, because..."



@jaketran

Why does mainstream media always sound the same?

The video examines how concentrated media ownership can turn seemingly independent outlets into amplifiers of the same message.



Matt Taibbi

Hate Inc.: Why Today's Media Makes Us Despise One Another

Part tirade, part confessional from the celebrated Rolling Stone journalist, Hate Inc. reveals that what most people think of as "the news" is, in fact, a twisted wing of the entertainment business



@tblindspot

How Six Major Companies Control All US Media

"In 1983, 50 companies controlled 90% of American media. Today, it's just 6. Ever wonder who really decides what you see, hear, and read? This documentary breaks down the shocking truth about..."



@uvacomsciencemicrolectures6326

The All-powerful Media Paradigm (Examples and Fallouts)

"UvA ComScience Microlectures explores the Fourth Estate ideal, examining how the promise of a completely free media model faced significant challenges. This lecture investigates the history..."



NOT EVERYONE LOOKS THE OTHER WAY

CRITICISING THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA DOES NOT MEAN REJECTING JOURNALISM.

QUITE THE OPPOSITE: IT MEANS DEFENDING IT.

The braves

There are still journalists, small newsrooms and independent outlets that understand their work as a public service. People willing to investigate when it would be easier to repeat a press release, to ask questions when others prefer silence, and to publish information that may upset governments, corporations, advertisers or even their own audience.

Their work rarely has the resources of major media conglomerates. Many survive through subscriptions, small donations or communities of readers who value their independence. That is precisely why their existence matters.

A free society needs journalists who can look power in the eye without asking permission, and media organisations independent enough to publish what they uncover. The goal is not to replace an official narrative with an alternative one, but to keep open the space where facts can be investigated, verified and debated.

Good journalism does not ask you to trust it blindly. It does the opposite: it gives you information so you can think for yourself.

Because holding power to account remains one of the most important ways journalism can serve society.

HIT BOLT DESIGNS



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FREE SPEECH MFKER
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**"FREEDOM OF
THE PRESS IS
GUARANTEED
ONLY TO THOSE
WHO OWN ONE."**

A. J. LIEBLING
American journalist

