CHAPTER 2

Censored Déjà Vu: What Happened to Last Year’s Most Censored Stories

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Chapter 2 is designed to give readers an update on the top stories from previous years that have been covered in the news in 1999. This year’s reviews focus on coverage of stories from 1998. For follow-ups on previously under-covered news stories in the United States, an excellent reference is 20 Years of Censored News by Carl Jensen & Project Censored (Seven Stories Press, 1997). 20 Years provides updates on the most Censored stories for the years 1976 to 1995 and is available direct from the publisher (Tel: (800) 596-7437), from the Quality Paperback Book Club, and in bookstores nationwide.

1998 #1 CENSORED STORY

SECRET INTERNATIONAL TRADE AGREEMENT UNDERMINES THE SOVEREIGNTY OF NATIONS

The proffered intent of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) was to safeguard the investments of multinational corporations. However, the corporate protections that the international trade treaty was meant to put into place challenged the sovereignty of member nations by granting corporations rights that equalled or superseded the regulatory authority of nation-states and local governments. Additionally, MAI would have overreached the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) by allowing corporations to directly sue any level of government—state, municipal, or federal—for
perceived financial losses (including future profits) due to legislative action, strikes, or boycotts.

The MAI would have thrust the world economy much closer to a transnational laissez-faire system where international corporate capital would hold free rein over the democratic wishes and socioeconomic needs of its people.

The investments to be protected by the MAI were broadly defined as any assets such as factories, products, services, currency, and stocks that may be located in one country, but owned by a company, corporation, or individual in another country. Pushed by the International Chamber of Commerce and U.S. Council on International Business, the MAI agreement would have required “national treatment” for all foreign investors. Consequently, local governments would no longer have been able to treat domestic firms more favorably than foreign firms, and it would have become illegal to implement restrictions on what foreign firms could own. Subsidy programs which focused on assisting and developing domestic industries would have been eliminated as host nations became legally liable for lost competitiveness and profits. Lawsuits would have been heard before secret tribunals consisting of unelected trade officials of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The agreement made no provisions for local citizens and communities to have legal recourse.

The MAI would also have had devastating effects on a nation’s legal, environmental, and cultural sovereignty, forcing countries to relax or nullify human, environmental, and labor protection in order to attract investment and trade. Necessary measures such as food subsidies, control of land speculation, agrarian reform, and the implementation of health and environmental standards could have been challenged as “illegal” under the MAI. Compromise of national sovereignty would have been extended to community control of forests, local bans on the use of pesticides and hormone-induced foods, clean air standards, limits on mineral, gas, and oil extraction, and bans on toxic dumping. The MAI would have exacerbated the pressure on undeveloped nations to deplete their own agricultural, mining, fishing, and forestry assets, seriously undermining the capacity of local communities and municipalities to govern sustainably and democratically.
COVERAGE 1999: In April 1998, unable to resolve several issues including exemptions for cultural industries and a proposal to allow European Union members to give each other preferential treatment, negotiators for the MAI took a six-month break. Reconvening in October, France announced it was withdrawing from the talks as they were unwilling to relinquish the amount of control over its own economy that the MAI would require. In November, Australia and Canada followed suit. On December 4, 1998, the 29-member OECD, which hosted the negotiations in Paris, announced the formal suspension of talks.

During the three-year negotiations, which started in 1995 after the passage of GATT, the proceedings received virtually no mainstream press coverage in the United States. The foreign press, on the other hand, dedicated significant attention to MAI proposals and reported on anti-MAI demonstrations which took place throughout Europe.

Critics of the agreement both here and abroad included labor unions, environmentalists, political activists, and non-governmental organizations such as the Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch. These were pivotal influences in the treaty’s demise.

When the OECD decision to indefinitely suspend talks was announced, officials from the member countries agreed that it was imperative to continue discussing the need to protect overseas investment. “There is a general recognition of the importance of some agreement. I don’t think you are going to see something emerge called MAI. I do think it’s in everyone’s interest, including France’s, that there be some investment framework,” said Donald Johnston, OECD Secretary-General. France and Canada asserted that the World Trade Organization (WTO), not the OECD, was the proper venue for such talks. The United States and OECD officials disagreed, pointing out that if a treaty agreement could not be reached with the 29-member OECD, it would not be reached with the 135-member WTO.
Anticipating the revival of MAI international trade rules within the framework of the WTO, critics and protestors from around the world converged on Seattle, Washington, from November 30–December 3, 1999, for the third ministerial WTO talks. What scanty press coverage the MAI received in the domestic press in 1999 came late in the year and in articles about the WTO ministerial meeting amidst critics’ fears that MAI investment principles would be included in the negotiations.

**Sources:** *Washington Times*, December 5, 1998; [www.citizen.org](http://www.citizen.org); [www.preamble.org](http://www.preamble.org)

1998 #2 CENSORED STORY

**CHEMICAL CORPORATIONS PROFIT OFF BREAST CANCER**

The leaders in cancer treatment and information are the same chemical companies that also produce carcinogenic products.

Breast Cancer Awareness Month (BCAM), initiated in 1985 by the chemical conglomerate Imperial Chemical Industries and now known as Zeneca Pharmaceuticals, reveals an uncomfortably close connection between the chemical industry and the cancer research establishment. As the controlling sponsor of BCAM, Zeneca is able to approve—or veto—any promotional or informational materials, posters, advertisements, etc. that BCAM uses. The focus is strictly limited to information regarding early detection and treatment, avoiding the topic of prevention. Critics have begun to question why.

While 49 percent of Zeneca Group’s 1997 profits came from pesticides and other industrial chemicals, another 49 percent were from pharmaceutical sales, one-third of which were cancer treatment drugs (about $1.4 billion). The remaining 2 percent of Zeneca’s profits derived from health care services, which include the 11 cancer treatment centers Zeneca operates across the United States. The herbicide acetochlor, considered a probable human carcinogen by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), accounted for close to $300 million of Zeneca’s 1997 sales; tamoxifen citrate (Nolvadex), the most prevalent breast cancer treatment drug...
drug, accounted for $500 million. Zeneca strongly promotes the tamoxifen option for breast cancer as part of their “risk reduction” plan, implementing its use in each of its treatment centers. Actual cancer prevention would clearly conflict with Zeneca’s business plan.

Hormones have been at the center of breast cancer research for the past two decades. Five years ago, however, researchers began to consider the possibility that chlorinated chemicals might be a contributing factor in the rising occurrences of breast cancer. In response to what it perceived as a threat, the Chemical Manufacturers Association and the Chlorine Chemistry Council banded together to develop a strategy to discount the research, which included hiring a public relations firm to discredit the scientific investigation and its resulting data.


coverage 1999: The merging of massive chemical corporations with large pharmaceutical companies has led to a conflict of interest in the cancer treatment and chemical production sectors. Zeneca pharmaceuticals merged with Astra chemical corporation on April 6, 1998, effectively forming the world’s third largest pharmaceutical and third largest agrochemical company.

In regard to the use of drugs to treat breast cancer, most of the 1999 mainstream press coverage appears to be corporate press releases thinly veiled as news stories. Riding this wave of positive press coverage, AstraZeneca kicked off an ad campaign encouraging healthy women to assess their breast cancer risk, and urging them to then contact the company for further information.

Formerly available only for breast cancer treatment, tamoxifen was approved by the FDA in October 1998 to reduce the incidence of breast cancer in healthy women at high risk. This decision was reached after a four-year trial by the National Cancer Institute of 13,388 “high risk” women, which found that tamoxifen decreased breast cancer incidence by almost one-half. Unfortunately, women in the tamoxifen group also had twice the incidence of uterine cancer, three times the rate of blood clots in
the lungs, and 50 percent more cases of blood clots in major veins. Five women in each group died: in the placebo group all five died from breast cancer, while in the tamoxifen group three died from breast cancer and two from drug side effects. Ironically, tamoxifen itself is considered a probable human carcinogen by the World Health Organization.

Tamoxifen has been aggressively marketed to women with no mention of these potentially life-threatening side effects. Television ads for tamoxifen in 1999 first discredited ideas women may have had about why they would not get breast cancer, then urged them to call Zeneca to find out what they could do to reduce their risk. The blatant promotion of this carcinogenic drug is not exclusive to its manufacturer, but is supported by the American Cancer Society of Clinical Oncology which recommends “offering” the drug to healthy women who have an increased risk of breast cancer. Rowan Chelbowski of UCLA said “[they] are not recommending that women take tamoxifen, but rather [they] are recommending it be offered.”

A Zeneca spokeswoman told the New York Times that 29 million women are at increased risk for breast cancer. If only 10 percent take tamoxifen at its average annual cost of $1,000 for the recommended five years, tamoxifen sales would come to $14.5 billion.

This attitude prompted Ann Pappert of Ms. to suggest “this may be just another chapter in the sad history of ‘medical miracles’ for women, like DES and the Dalkon Shield, that turned into nightmares.” Her opinion is supported by a letter sent from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to Zeneca, which warns the company that their advertising brochure for physicians was inaccurate. The original brochures stated that endometrial cancer associated with tamoxifen was “uncommon” and had inadequate information on the side effects of tamoxifen for all women over 60 even if their risk factor is less than 1.67 percent.

In 1999, the Justice Department launched an antitrust investigation into Zeneca and the company’s deal with the generic-drug maker Barr Laboratories, which competitors say may have cost consumers millions of dollars. Government officials are concerned that Zeneca’s settlement, which gave Barr Laboratories $21 million dollars and a nonexclusive deal to distribute a generic form of tamoxifen manufactured by Zeneca, is more than just competitive, and has in effect prevented other generic-drug makers
from entering the market and kept the drug’s price high. Barr now realizes approximately $30 million a year from the deal.

AstraZeneca and Swiss drug giant Novartis have unveiled plans for a merger and spinoff of their agricultural-chemical businesses. The new company will spin off into a new company called Syngenta, becoming the biggest agrochemical business in the world, with sales of $7.9 billion.

Other corporate-cancer profiteers include: Rhone Poulenc Rorer’s pharmaceutical division, which churns out the breast cancer treatment drug docetaxel (Taxotere). Similar in nature to Zeneca’s situation, this company also manufactures 56 crop protection products that contain ingredients that are probable or suspected carcinogens.” Also, Novartis, which at $4.15 billion is the 1998 world leader in agrochemical sales, makes the pamidronate compounds used to treat bone metastases in breast cancer patients. On one web page, this multinational company states that “Novartis intends to lead the fight against cancer by introducing therapies that battle the disease and alleviate the patients’ suffering.” On another page it declares that “Novartis Crop Protection is the leader in fungicides.”

Eli Lilly and Co. sells millions of dollars of raloxifene (Evista) to treat breast cancer. But a huge cash cow for Elanco, Lilly’s animal health division, is the cattle hormone Rumentin. It has been suggested that eating hormone-treated meat alters estrogen levels, which in turn may contribute to increased cancer risk.

Other breast cancer profiteers include General Electric and DuPont, who manufacture mammography machines and x-ray film. The two companies are tied for managing the highest number of SuperFund toxic waste sites in the country.


MONSANTO’S GENETICALLY MODIFIED SEEDS
THREATEN WORLD PRODUCTION

Monsanto Corporation has been working to consolidate the world seed market and is now poised to introduce new genetically engineered seeds that will produce only infertile seeds at the end of the farming cycle. Farmers will no longer be able to save seeds from year to year and will be forced to purchase new seeds from Monsanto each year.

On March 3, 1998, Delta and Pine Land Company, a large American cotton seed company, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced that they had been awarded a patent on a technique that genetically disables a seed’s ability to germinate when planted a second season. This patent covers not only the cotton and tobacco varieties, but, potentially, all cultivated crops. Scarcely two months after the patent was awarded, Monsanto, the world’s largest seed corporation and second largest agrochemical corporation, began the process of acquiring Delta and Pine Land with its rights to this new technology.

If commercialized, the USDA stands to earn 5 percent of the royalties from the net sales of this technology. Historically, the USDA has received government money for research aimed at benefiting farmers, but recently the USDA has been turning more and more often to private companies for funding. As a result, for the first time in history, research is being done for the benefit of corporations, sometimes in direct opposition to farmers’ interests.

Dubbed “Terminator Technology” by Hope Shand of the Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI), Monsanto’s new seeds
have diverse implications including the disruption of traditional farming practices around the world, the altering of the Earth’s biodiversity, and possible impacts on human health.

Monsanto has euphemistically called the process by which seeds are disabled the “technology protection system.” A primary objective of Terminator Technology is to grant and protect corporate rights to charge fees for patents and products that are genetically modified. Terminator Technology offers no advantage by itself, but when coupled with the production of the strongest, highest yielding seeds, farmers may be compelled to buy single-season plants.


COVERAGE 1999: The debate about the ethics of genetically modified foods finally arrived in America during 1999 after having been a major issue globally for the last several years. Like the coverage of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (1999 #6 Censored story), the debate about Terminator Technology and genetically modified organisms (GMO) in food was widely featured throughout the year. The centerstage visibility in mainstream U.S. media accomplished Project Censored’s goal—exposure of the pros and cons of genetic engineering and its implications for the world food supply.

In early October 1999, hundreds of media sources reported on Monsanto’s formal announcement that it would not “market seeds that produce crop plants that are themselves infertile.” Although Monsanto is the world leader in seed sterility technology, another company which Monsanto hoped to purchase developed the specific Terminator Technology. Final approval of this purchase was blocked by antitrust investigators.
While the media coverage about the ethics of genetic modification remained strong, the concern over the domination of transgenic crop and livestock development by a handful of multinational corporations was largely absent. In countless polls, editorials, and letters to the editor in publications worldwide, the public overwhelmingly stated that there was not enough information available about how genetic engineering might affect the food they ate and the world in which they lived. Equally troubling was the notion that the science behind the technology has been largely profit-driven, and funded by a handful of some of the largest global corporations. Mergers and consolidations continue at the highest levels in the biotech and pharmaceutical industries, putting more independent genetic technology into the hands of those whose ulterior goals may not represent the best interests of the consumer.

On December 20, 1999, there was wide press coverage about Monsanto’s merger with Pharmacia and Upjohn Inc., which formed one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in the world worth an estimated $52 billion. Monsanto is the producer of the chemical herbicides Roundup, Harness, and Lasso, the artificial sweetener NutraSweet, the arthritis drug Celebrex, the numerous variety of Ortho lawn and garden products, and POSILAC, the brand of rBGH milk-producing hormone given to cows. Citing intense criticism and pressure, the merging companies announced plans to “spin off” the agricultural division of Monsanto, which would conduct its own stock offering separate from the rest of the company.

The action and protest by opponents of GMOs culminated with the December 15, 1999 announcement of a major class-action lawsuit filed by several prominent antitrust lawyers on behalf of six farmers. The farmers accused Monsanto of rushing genetically engineered seeds to the agricultural marketplace before properly testing them for safety, and of forming an international cartel which conspired to control the world’s production of corn and soybean seeds. In addition to discussing how U.S. exports had been severely impacted, especially to Europe and Japan, the farmers noted that Monsanto had spent over $8 billion in acquiring seed companies over the last decade. The actions of the farmers are widely supported and assisted by environmental groups from around the world.

Despite the fact that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) opposes the labeling of any genetically engineered food, and has since
1995, FDA officials are having to rethink their position in the face of foreign market demands. Europeans are forcing American food exporters to segregate and label all genetically engineered food. This firm statement by the Europeans is seriously undermining the FDA’s argument that labeling would be an unnecessary and wasteful proposition. Many farmers have benefited from the increased yields of genetically engineered seeds from Monsanto and other biotech firms, but they have been unable to sell their yields abroad since the international community put its foot down in the summer of 1999. In response the U.S. food and biotech industries have shifted into full crisis mode, mounting a massive public relations blitz in an attempt to prevent the backlash from washing up on American shores.

The Nation reported several attempts at such publicity including the Alliance for Better Foods run by the public relations firm BSMG. This same firm also represents Philip Morris and Monsanto. In December 1999, Monsanto’s main public relations company, Burson-Marsteller, bused 100 members of a Washington, D.C., Baptist church to conduct a pro-GMO rally outside an FDA hearing. Some protesters reported being paid.

The FDA held three public forums in cities around the nation during 1999 to allow private industry, government, and the public to discuss genetic engineering and food. These gatherings drew considerable regional and national coverage. South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, some European nations, and Japan have all passed laws requiring the labeling of genetically modified foods. The two leading manufacturers of baby food in the United States, Gerber and Heinz, announced in July that they will not allow any genetically modified corn or soybeans into their products. The American Corn Growers Association told its members to strongly consider only planting traditional corn for fear that growers may not be able to export GMO corn.

In February 1999, representatives from 170 countries met at the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity in Cartagena, Colombia. At this meeting, the U.S. interests led an attack that destroyed the world’s first international biosafety protocol on genetically engineered organisms and products. Third World Resurgence and the New York Times were just two sources that reported on these negotiations leading up to the World Trade Organization (WTO) meetings in Seattle. As a means of protecting themselves from developed nations dumping unlabeled GMOs, developing
nations wanted the protocol to extend to all genetically modified products. The United States was adamant about excluding agricultural products and worked closely to defeat the agreement with other nations where American multinational corporations have significant vested interests—Canada, Australia, Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay.


1998 #4 CENSORED STORY

**RECYCLED RADIOACTIVE METALS MAY BE IN YOUR HOME**

Special government permits currently allow some U.S. companies to sell “decontaminated” radioactive metal for the manufacture of everything from knives, forks, and belt buckles to zippers, eyeglasses, dental fillings, and IUDs. The Department of Energy (DOE), the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), and the radioactive metal processing industry want to eliminate the need for these special permits and are advocating for new, more relaxed radiation standards. Present standards oblige metal companies to scrub contaminated metal until the radiation level is nearly unmeasurable. The new standards will allow a level of radiation whose concentration could result in nearly 100,000 additional cancer fatalities in the United States alone.

The current standards still allow some radiation to remain on recycled metal, exposing consumers to low-dose radiation from some common consumer products. Certain scientists argue that continual exposure to low-level radiation is potentially more harmful than a onetime high-level dose. The greatest threat to consumers may be from seemingly harmless everyday household products such as pots, pans, bed frames, and metal desks. In 1980, a survey of the domestic jewelry market revealed that out of more
than 160,000 pieces of jewelry studied, over 170 pieces were found to be radioactive. Although these represented a very small percent of the total jewelry studied, at least 14 people developed finger cancer and several others were forced to endure the amputation of fingers and/or parts of their hands.

While the DOE, NRC, and radioactive metal processing industry endorse lowering the recycled metal standards for U.S. production, they engage in selling high-level contaminated metal to foreign markets. In fact, three major U.S. oil companies shipped 5.5 million pounds of radioactive scrap metal to China in 1993. In June 1996, Chinese officials stopped a U.S. shipment of 78 tons of radioactive scrap which exceeded China’s safety limit as much as 30-fold. As of January 1998, 178 Taiwan buildings containing 1,573 residential apartments had been identified as radioactive due to the use of recycled radioactive building materials. Residents suffered from congenital disorders, various cancers, and unusual chromosomal and cytogenetic damage. Tom Gilman, U.S. Ecology accounts manager, centers the issue as an economic debate and dismisses public health concerns by stating that recycling radioactive metal is “turning wastes into assets” and that “there is always going to be some level of radioactivity.”


COVERAGE 1999: In mid-1999, the issue of radioactive metal recycling received some mainstream news coverage when two lawsuits were filed, one against the DOE and the other against a high-profile contract between the DOE and British Nuclear Fuel Limited (BNFL). Prior to the lawsuits, coverage of the potential dangers of recycled scrap metal was virtually nonexistent. In fact, in early 1999 the only issues about scrap metal recycling being explored by the mainstream press were those regarding the acquisition of metal recycling plants by large corporations and the potential financial gains being made in the ‘waste-to-energy’ industry.

A ruling by U.S. District Court Judge Gladys Kessler on June 29, 1999, concerning a 1997 quarter-billion-dollar contract awarded by the DOE to BNFL received substantial news coverage in select papers. The contract in question permitted a subsidiary of the BNFL to decommission and
The BNFL can cleanse and then sell to the scrap metal market for the manufacture of such intimate everyday items as forks, frying pans, teeth braces, and baby carriages.

Judge Kessler ruled in favor of the DOE because of a loophole in federal law which prevented her from halting the project. However, she stated that it was “quite troubling” that the DOE and BNFL provided no explanation why an amendment in the EPA’s Environmental Agreement was finessed to evade “public notice and comment opportunities.” Kessler stated that the absence of opportunity for “public scrutiny or input on a matter of such grave importance” was both “startling and worrisome,” and that the “potential for environmental harm is great, especially given the unprecedented amount of hazardous materials which the defendants seek to recycle.”

In August 1999, Congressional leaders, steel industry officials, and scores of environmental groups called on the Clinton Administration to reconsider the Oak Ridge program. Public Citizen, a watchdog group, was one of more than 185 organizations that signed a letter to Vice President Gore on August 11, demanding a halt to the controversial program. A 1996 plan promoted by the Vice President had endorsed restricting the use of recycled metal for use in batteries only. However, the final contract does not provide for this restriction, leaving the public with no way of knowing if the metal objects in their homes or offices are made from recycled radioactive metal. As of November, 1999, Gore has still declined to comment on the matter.

In October, the Tennessean reported that despite the June ruling, federal lawmakers appeared “close to putting the brakes” on the controversial plan to “clean and recycle atomic bomb-making machinery from the Oak Ridge” site. U.S. Representative Bart Gordon is reviewing the plan, but feels confident that “Congress will reach a compromise agreement that would have the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, not individual states, rule on the matter.” Legislators fear that the Tennessee state ruling may “become the de-facto national standard.” Currently, U.S. Energy Secretary Bill Richardson is reviewing the case and a “hush-hush” attitude about the issue remains.
The second high-profile lawsuit was filed against the DOE by three former operators of the U.S.-owned Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant in western Kentucky. It was first reported by the *Washington Post* on August 8, 1999, and picked up by the *Los Angeles Times* on August 14. The ex-employees contend that the plant failed for years to properly screen gold and other metals for radioactive content. They state that some metals bound for private markets may have been highly radioactive when they left Paducah. This unscreened metal could have been recycled into a number of consumer products.

The Paducah case is extremely disturbing because it charges that thousands of “unsuspecting workers inhaled plutonium-laced dust brought into the plant for 23 years as part of the flawed government experiment.” The *Washington Post* stated that “the government and its contractors did not inform workers about the hazards for decades, even as employees in the 1980s began to notice a string of cancers.” Paducah plant workers further allege that radioactive waste was deliberately dumped into nearby fields, abandoned buildings, and a landfill not licensed for hazardous waste. The implications of such charges are far-reaching, considering the fact that this activity may have gone unmonitored for several decades.

To date, mainstream coverage about the recycling of radioactive metals has been seen in the *Washington Post, San Francisco Examiner, and Los Angeles Times* as well as on television stations ABC, MSNBC, Fox, UPN, and KQED. Multiple alternative sources have been diligent in covering the issue. The recycling of radioactive metal into the domestic market has been occurring for decades, posing a serious threat to public health. Only now, after lawsuits have been filed, has the mainstream press turned its attention to the problem.

**SOURCES:** *Washington Post, August 8 & 14, 1999; The Tennessean, August 11 & 15, & October 1, 1999; The Associated Press State & Local News Wire, February 4, June 30, July 19, & August 12, 1999; San Francisco Examiner, September 19, 1999.*

1998 #5 CENSORED STORY
U.S. WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION LINKED TO THE DEATH OF A HALFMILLION CHILDREN

U.N. sanctions advanced by the United States against Iraq have taken the lives of more Iraqi citizens than did the military actions of the Gulf War itself. The Iraqi people are being punished for their leader’s refusal to comply fully with the U.S.-supported U.N. demands “to search every structure in Iraq for weapons of mass destruction.”

The sanctions imposed on Iraq are causing shortages of food, medical supplies, and medicine. In May 1996, then-U.N. ambassador Madeleine Albright acknowledged on 60 Minutes that more than half a million children under the age of five had died since the war ended. UNICEF reported in 1998 that child mortality continued at 150 per day. The United States holds the position that sanctions against Iraq must continue until it can be proven that the country is unable to build biological and chemical weapons. Of these deaths, many are attributed to depleted uranium (DU) weapons or have been linked to birth defects known to be caused by radiation exposure. The rate of cancer in Iraqi children has increased dramatically.

Few Americans are aware of the enormous human toll caused by the continuing war with Iraq. In updates to the original Project Censored stories, the authors explain that the mainstream press has characterized the deaths, disease, and hardships of Iraq as “claims” while misunderstanding and grossly understating the damage and potential health hazards caused by the sanctions and the use of depleted uranium.

In another surprising insight into the Iraqi “situation,” a 1994 Senate panel reports that between 1985 and 1989, U.S. firms supplied microorganisms needed for the production of Iraq’s chemical and biological warfare. U.N. inspectors found and removed chemical and biological components identical to those previously furnished by the United States to Iraq. The Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles reported in 1990 that more than 207 companies from 21 western countries, including at least 18 from the United States, were contributing to the buildup of Saddam Hussein’s biological and chemical arsenal.
COVERAGE 1999: There has been little U.S. mainstream news coverage about the almost one million Iraqi children who have either starved to death from U.N.-imposed sanctions, or become the victims of cancer and other maladies from chemical and biological weapons exposure. News about Iraq is more typically about the ongoing debate to pressure the country’s leadership into complying with U.N. demands (the policy of “containment plus” to keep Saddam Hussein within the confines of the two “no-fly” zones). Some publications, though, have made a point of covering the more controversial elements in Iraq’s current history. The poignant page-two feature article in the November 1999 National Geographic, and a series of investigative articles in the Christian Science Monitor are the most noteworthy examples.

A UNICEF report released in August caused a small flurry of coverage, especially in the foreign press. According to London’s The Independent, “[UNICEF] argues that about 500,000 Iraqi children who have died in that time would have lived but for the sanctions.” They report infant and child death rates doubling since 1989, and one in five children having stunted growth from malnourishment. According to a Chicago Sun-Times report on UNICEF’s findings, the toll is especially heavy in central and southern Iraq, home to 85 percent of the country’s population. Although officials insist that this proves Iraq’s government is responsible for the woes of the country, a UNICEF representative argues that “the differences could be explained partly by the heavy presence since 1991 of humanitarian agencies helping the [northern] Kurdish population.”

In the San Francisco Chronicle, UNICEF was reported to have claimed that 4,500 Iraqi children under the age of five die each month, and the number of Iraqi children with cancer has increased sevenfold. When asked about the effects of the sanctions on the plight of Iraq’s children, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said, “It’s a hard decision, but we
think the price … is worth it.” The Houston Chronicle expounded on Albright’s position, stating that Washington refuses to take responsibility for the human toll from economic sanctions.

A January 1999 New York Times story quotes one White House official as saying, “Containment doesn’t bring about a decisive resolution quickly. It’s unsatisfying and ungratifying by its nature. But 40 years of containing the Soviets in the Cold War paid off. You’ve got to be patient.” Denis Halliday, a former U.N. assistant secretary general and coordinator of its Humanitarian Program in Iraq, resigned his post in protest as did American U.N. weapons inspector Scott Ritter, both disgusted with the failure of the sanctions. Ritter lost patience with Saddam Hussein’s cat-and-mouse game, but Halliday stated he no longer wanted to be a part of the devastating effects of the sanctions on the children: “Sanctions are starving to death 6,000 Iraqi infants every month, ignoring the human rights of ordinary Iraqis and turning a whole generation against the West.”

Halliday has gone on to write in various newspapers about the U.S. violation of the goals of U.N. Resolution 687 (the cease-fire-sanctions resolution), and the almost-daily air strikes in the “no-fly zones” created without U.N. approval by the United States, Great Britain, and France (France has since withdrawn from the triumvirate). According to a Houston Chronicle article on U.N. Resolution 687, Iraq’s disarmament must be in the context of regional disarmament: there must be a nuclear weapons–free zone as well as a “weapons of mass destruction–free zone” created throughout the Middle East including Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey.
Although the question of radiation fallout from the Gulf War use of depleted uranium has been ongoing in foreign news reports, the discussion was finally picked up in the U.S. press with a series of investigative articles in the Christian Science Monitor. Monitor reporter Scott Peterson not only personally investigated the presence of radiation in the war fields of Iraq, but explored Pentagon, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and other government and military reports to trace the history and controversy about the use of depleted uranium. Seventeen countries have arsenals of DU bullets, many procured from the United States, England, France, and Russia. A 1990 U.S. Army study “links DU with cancer and states that ‘no dose is so low that the probability of effect is zero.’” The Pentagon has now backpedaled on that position. Still, U.S. handlers of DU are ordered to treat the substance as “low-level radioactive waste.” Peterson states, “If there is a connection between human suffering and DU, then its use in the future will mean that lands of conflict will remain contaminated for the 4.5 billion years—a figure comparable to the age of the solar system—that DU remains radioactive.”

Reports further implicating DU in the incidence of Gulf War Syndrome surfaced in the back pages of several newspapers after a September convention in Las Vegas of Persian Gulf War veterans. Physicians and researchers revealed their suspicions that exposure to a “toxic soup” of various chemicals and biological entities as well as DU radiation is responsible for the rearrangement of RNA (which helps decode genetic instructions) found in chronically ill Gulf War veterans. The Pentagon
continues to dispute the contribution of depleted uranium to Gulf War Syndrome which affects an estimated 110,000 veterans.

DU continues to plague troops and victims alike in other war-torn countries. In December, 60 Minutes reported on a military coverup of the use of DU in not only the Gulf War but also in Kosovo. As in the Gulf War, troops in the Kosovo conflict were not informed of the hazards of DU. The military reports it “lost track” of the number of DU shells used in the 78-day NATO campaign in the Balkans, and continues to insist that there is no evidence that depleted uranium shells cause cancer.

Project Censored was unable to uncover any further reports regarding the United States’ role in supplying materials for Iraq’s production of biological and chemical weapons.


1998 #6 CENSORED STORY

U.S. NUCLEAR PROGRAM SUBVERTS U.N.’s COMPREHENSIVE TEST BAN TREATY (CTBT)

When scientists in India conducted a deep underground test on May 11, 1998, the world saw it as a violation of the United Nations’ Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). However, two months before, the United States carried out a similar test that went largely unnoticed by the American media. Code-named “Stagecoach,” the U.S. experiment called for the detonation of a 227-pound nuclear bomb at the Department of Energy’s (DOE) Nevada Test Site, co-managed by Bechtel Corporation, Lockheed Martin, and Johnson Controls. While perceived as a hostile act by many nations of the world, U.S. officials claim that since it was a “subcritical” test, meaning no nuclear chain reaction was maintained, it was “fully consistent with the spirit and letter of the CTBT.” Furthermore, they
claimed that the test was necessary to insure the “safety and reliability” of America’s aging nuclear arsenal.

Disputing this “safety and reliability” promise, foreign leaders believe that “Stagecoach” was, in fact, designed to test the effectiveness of America’s weapons if, and when, they are ever used again. Though India refused to sign the treaty because it wasn’t comprehensive enough, the countries that did sign felt that the CTBT would halt new weapons development and promote the move toward disarmament. The European Parliament officially warned the United States that further experiments might open the door for other nations to progress to full-scale testing. Leaders from China and Japan also harshly criticized the United States, calling for America to stop “skirting its responsibility for arms reduction.”

According to the original Nation article, underground experiments aren’t the U.S. government’s only method of subverting the treaty. In July 1993, Clinton introduced the Stockpile Stewardship Program (SSP) which allots $45 billion over the next 10 years to finance new research facilities. Even when adjusted for inflation, this amount is larger than the per-year budget during the Cold War when much of the cost went to actually producing the nuclear arsenal. One of the most controversial elements of the SSP is the Accelerated Strategic Computing Initiative (ASCI) which is intended to develop a virtual nuclear testing program. The supercomputers comprising ASCI will allow scientists to continue testing and developing new weapons while bypassing actual experimentation. These supercomputers will conduct and monitor virtual explosions creating a new frontier of nuclear technology and the potential for massive weapons defense spending.


coverage 1999: The debate about the U.S.’s failure to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) was a major 1999 media event. Thousands of articles graced the front pages of every major publication in the world. When all was said and done, the U.S. Senate rejected a major international treaty for the first time in 80 years. Hopes rose that the United States could take a strong role in nonproliferation leadership by ratifying the treaty,
especially in the context of the India-Pakistan arms race. When polled, 82 percent of Americans supported ratifying the CTBT.

The U.S. scientific community protest was one of the loudest ever voiced. In an unprecedented incident of collaboration, all 32 living Nobel Laureates in Physics signed a statement that it was imperative that the Senate approve the treaty “to halt the spread of nuclear weapons.” This signed note of protest did receive news coverage, but on page A16 of the *New York Times*. Meanwhile, the partisan politics that the statement left in its wake took center stage on page A1 during the second week of October 1999. The American Geophysical Union and the Seismological Society of America also released yet another unprecedented joint statement expressing “confidence in the treaty’s verification scheme.”

The U.S. media failed to make the connection between the fact that the U.S. government continues to pressure and strongly criticize foreign governments for their development and testing of nuclear technology while continuing to conduct nuclear tests and expand its nuclear technology through the Stockpile Stewardship Program. Since 1994, the U.S. government has conducted seven underground tests. These subcritical tests (tests that do not maintain a chain reaction) and the accompanying protests were reported in papers all around the globe outside the United States.

The subcritical underground tests have continued. One was carried out on February 9, 1999, and three more in the fall of 1999. All four tests—bringing the total since 1997 to 10—were conducted with less than 170 grams of plutonium and were carried out in the name of “continuing to understand the aging state of our nuclear arsenal.” U.S. officials argue that these tests do not violate the CTBT because they do not sustain the chain reaction necessary for a true nuclear explosion. Russia is the only other country to have carried out such tests in the last decade.

Looking beyond the nationalistic rhetoric, these tests have sent a significant message to the global community: the United States can do what it wants while other nations exploring nuclear technology are a “threat to world peace and security.” The media has yet to focus on how the rest of the world perceives U.S. actions and our apparent hypocrisy. There was little coverage of the massive outcry and protest going on outside the United States. European leaders Tony Blair and Gerhardt Shroeder along with many other heads of state voiced their collective support for the Senate’s
ratification of the agreement. These leaders poignantly raised the issue that the rest of the world was watching to see what the “leader of the free world” would do. A December 3, 1999, *Washington Post* article noted, “with the Senate rejection, the United States has bounced the check it wrote when it signed the test ban treaty in 1996.” The CTBT has for decades been viewed as the ultimate test by non-nuclear states of the nuclear powers’ commitment to nonproliferation. Little media mention was paid to the threat that non-ratification may have upon the overarching Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and Ballistic Missile Treaty (BMT).

The work that continues on ASCI has exceeded the initially allotted $45 billion (over a 10-year period), and has resulted in the United States alone possessing a battery of the world’s fastest super computers for conducting simulated nuclear explosions.

In the summer of 1999 the General Accounting Office strongly criticized the Department of Energy’s ASCI program, citing weak management, inconsistent progress and an absence of performance measures. The budget overrun has risen into the billions of dollars for the period 1996 to 2004.


1998 #7 CENSORED STORY

**GENE TRANSFERS LINKED TO DANGEROUS NEW DISEASES**

A major public health crisis is brewing as both emergent and recurring diseases reach new heights of antibiotic resistance. At least 30 new diseases have emerged over the past 20 years, and familiar infectious diseases like tuberculosis, cholera, and malaria are returning in new more vigorous forms. By 1990, nearly every common bacterial species had developed some degree of antibiotic resistance, many to multiple antibiotics. A major contributing factor, in addition to antibiotic overuse, just might be the
transfer of genes between unrelated species of animals and plants, which takes place during genetic engineering. There is currently no independent investigation of the relationship between genetic engineering and the etiology (cause, or origin) of infectious diseases.

The technology of genetic engineering, or biotechnology, uses manipulation, replication, and transference techniques to insert genes “horizontally” to connect species which otherwise cannot interbreed. Normal genetic barriers and defense mechanisms are in this way broken down. Genetic engineering can also result in antibiotic-resistant genes, which can inadvertently spread and recombine to generate new drug and antibiotic resistant pathogens. This, say the authors, has occurred. Horizontal gene transfer and subsequent genetic recombination may have been responsible for bacterial strains that caused a 1992 cholera outbreak in India, and for a streptococcus epidemic in Tayside, Scotland, in 1993.

Biotechnology is presented to the public as a highly precise science. Genes never work in isolation, but rather in extremely complicated networks with other genes which can cause genes to replicate, reorganize, or even travel outside the organism. DNA released from cells may not be readily broken down in the environment, so it can retain the ability to transform other organisms.

Biotechnology firms have billions of dollars invested in these new technologies, and are concerned that their speculation bubble may burst before they can recoup their investments. In Europe, where the public support for such programs is dismal at best, EuropaBio, the non-government organization representing the interests of the biotech industry, hired public relations firm Burson-Marsteller to initiate a campaign to promote the benefits of biotechnology.

There is an urgent need to reassess the safety regulations pertaining to genetic engineering, and it is vital that this research be conducted by independent groups. Opposition to gene biotechnology has “skyrocketed “in Europe.

Although an upsurge in the number of cases of drug-resistant diseases often grabbed the headlines of U.S. newspapers and television news programs in 1999, popular consensus has been to attribute the cause to the overuse of antibiotics. The possibility of the transgenic mutation of disease bacteria has been overlooked by all but the most specialized publications. And although there was the beginning of a dialogue in 1998 about the possible dangers of generating new strains of viruses and bacteria through biotechnological blunders, most of the attention has been diverted to that of genetically modified foods (see 1998 Censored story #3).

Meanwhile, the domestic biotechnology industry scored a standoff at a U.N.-sponsored summit in February 1999 on the dangers of genetic engineering. The U.S.-led coalition of six countries (a.k.a., the Miami group) blocked approval of a Biosafety Protocol on transgenic crops. Still, the summit represented the first unified attempt to assess and regulate the risks of biotechnological engineering. Ironically, the United States could not vote on the issue since the Senate had failed to ratify the 1992 biodiversity agreement in Rio de Janiero. The biosafety debate went almost unnoticed in the United States, although questions surrounding “Frankenstein foods” and the regulation of the biotech industries were heavily scrutinized outside our media borders. When the U.N. biosafety negotiations resume in Montreal in January 2000, countries will once again try to write “a treaty-like protocol among nations to govern the movement of genetically modified foods.”

Some medical professionals did take the threat of transgenic disease bacteria seriously, though. In May, the British Medical Association (BMA) “called for a moratorium on growing transgenic crops and importing unlabeled transgenic foods.” The BMA questioned whether antibiotic-resistant genes engineered into crops might increase the spread of drug-resistant pathogens. In a Richmond Times-Dispatch article, a Virginia Commonwealth University professor and infectious disease expert, Dr. Richard P. Wenzel, urged colleagues to consider what impact the possibility of biological warfare might have on the medical field. According to the Dispatch, Wenzel believes that “[t]errorists using biological weapons now have the frightening ability to alter the genetic makeup of producing organisms—pathogens—to make them resistant to antibiotics and vaccines.”
Hospital mergers with Roman Catholic Church medical facilities nationwide are threatening women’s access to abortions, sterilization, birth control, and in vitro fertilization. In 1996, over 600 hospitals merged with Catholic institutions in 19 states. These mergers and partnerships with hospitals and health maintenance organizations (HMOs) are impacting and impairing reproductive health care rights across the nation.

These collaborations have made the Roman Catholic Church the largest private health care provider in the nation. Why would they want to join forces with secular hospitals?

“The big money in the hospital comes when you have a closed system of doctors, HMOs, and hospitals all feeding each other in a closed loop,” writes author Christine Dinsmore.

In response to community pressure for access to reproductive medical care, some Catholic health care agreements have resulted in the formation of independently run women’s health clinics. Some activists, however, say it is a poor solution because separate women’s health clinics are often easier targets for anti-abortion extremists. In addition, Catholic hospitals often claim they will set up a separate women’s health clinic as part of a partnership agreement, and then simply don’t follow through.

These mergers also affect men’s reproductive medical rights. When a hospital moves to free-standing clinics for women only, men seeking vasectomies are forced to go elsewhere. Health care workers, clergy, women’s groups, and HIV/AIDS advocates are creating coalitions to inform
the public about possible future mergers. Currently there are few laws requiring community notification of impending non-profit partnerships, but activists are pressuring state lawmakers to pass protective legislation. California and New York are two states which introduced bills for legislative review. In response, a lobby called the New York Catholic Conference has made defeating these bills “a priority.” Such lobbies see these bills as forcing “Catholic entities to abandon their moral and ethical principles.” Stopping these bills has become “second only to banning late-term abortions,” says Ms. magazine.


COVERAGE 1999: While there has been a clear increase in mergers between Catholic and secular hospitals in 1999, there has been no proportionate reaction from the media. In fact, there has been no coverage or follow-up on the mergers’ impact on affected community services nor on how these changes have significantly impacted people’s lives. These mergers often result in the public’s inability to receive desired and often necessary reproductive health care.

Catholic mergers have accelerated. In 1994 there were six Catholic acquisitions of non-Catholic hospitals. In 1999, the Catholic church acquired 38 new hospitals, of which 25 were secular. The Catholic Health Association claims that only about 1 percent of hospital mergers result in a discontinuation of reproductive services. However, as reported by USA Today, Catholics for a Free Choice, a group that opposes the mergers because of the loss of reproductive services says that “of 127 Catholic/non-Catholic hospital mergers this decade, reproductive services were eliminated or greatly restricted in 48 cases.”

The Los Angeles Times reported, “Catholic Health Care West (CHCW), the largest owner of hospitals and the biggest merger participant in California, owns 46 hospitals. Tenet Health Care (a secular provider), by comparison, owns 42.” In a telephone study of 589 Catholic hospitals conducted by Catholics for a Free Choice concerning rape victims and their right to abortion, the group found that though Catholic health directives permit post-rape contraception in many circumstances, 82 percent of
Catholic hospitals did not offer this service. “Of those hospitals that denied the service, nearly one-third, or 31 percent, provided no further referral useful in getting the so-called morning-after pills that could prevent pregnancy,” wrote the *Boston Globe*.

In addition to the abortion issue, other problems remain, including those of birth control counseling, family planning, and emergency procedures categorized as “reproductive.” There is concern over the underreported and therefore silent absorption of women’s and men’s reproductive health care rights into large conglomerates overseen by Catholic directives. Unbeknownst to the general public, persons and families in need of these services have become casualties of what author Christine Dinsmore refers to as “Merger Mania.” In particular, there is a growing concern among the opposition to these mergers that in cases of rural and low-income Medicaid recipients, mergers may mean the complete loss of birth control and other reproductive services.

Not only has the mainstream U.S. press neglected to inform the public of mergers between secular hospitals and the Roman Catholic church, it has neglected to address those groups fighting for and against such mergers. Paul Yde, an antitrust lawyer with Vinson & Elkins who represents Christus Health, says, “The Catholic systems have no interest in monopolizing the family planning services prohibited by its religious directives. Their goal is to have no connection with those activities.” According to *USA Today*, Michael Pruitt, an attorney, and the vice president of mergers and acquisitions for Christus goes on to say, “It’s a religious issue…. Our health care directives control how we express our faith through the provision of health care.”

Opponents to the mergers—the National Organization for Women, the National Family Planning and Reproductive Health Association, and others—redirect the argument, maintaining it is a health rather than a religious issue. They have employed “antitrust guidelines” in fighting the mergers, and are using the National Women’s Law Center’s antitrust handbook. It has been handed out in communities that are being affected by Catholic hospital mergers and at family planning conferences. Experts say the activists can be strong deterrents to Catholic hospitals’ expansion plans.

California Assembly Bill 525, introduced by Democratic Assemblywoman Sheila James Kuehl, also went almost completely
unnoticed. As briefly reported by the Los Angeles Times, Kuehl’s bill, the Health Care Access Bill would have required “all health plans, including commercial HMOs, to guarantee the full range of services within their provider network, require[d] all HMOs to inform patients about how to access the full range of services and any limitations on services purchased through their plan, and require[d] that any health facility that receives tax dollars through public bond or loan programs make all reproductive services available by contracting with others, where necessary, to provide them.” The bill would also have required “any merger where non-profit assets are being transferred or acquired be approved by the attorney general, and that one aspect of approval involve the impact on the provision of reproductive health service.”

Regardless of one’s stance on reproductive healthcare issues, without mainstream U.S. coverage on this topic and the availability of knowledge that would follow, neither the topic nor the issues can be addressed by the public. As Assemblywoman Sheila Kuehl reminds us, “If you are among the majority of Americans who believe that the ability to make choices concerning reproduction is secured in the Constitution, think again. The struggle, primarily by women, to secure reproductive health services … has shifted from the halls of justice to the halls of medical centers and hospitals. Women, who spend 68 percent more on health care per year than men yet earn significantly less per capita, deserve at least to be certain that hard-won rights do not disappear, one hospital at a time.”


1998 #9 CENSORED STORY;
1997 #16 CENSORED STORY

U.S. TAX DOLLARS SUPPORT DEATH SQUADS IN CHIAPAS
The passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) ushered in an era of unprecedented military and corporate domination over the already beleaguered indigenous citizens of Mexico. On the day NAFTA went into effect, the Zapatistas of Chiapas in southern Mexico rose up in rebellion against the exploitation that they feared they would incur. Though the initial violence did not last long, the Zapatistas have continued to resist intrusions into their communally held lands, or *ejidos*. Owned and inhabited by the indigenous people of Mexico, the *ejidos* have been farmed collectively since the Mexican Revolution after the turn of this past century. With the passage of NAFTA, the Mexican government is pushing for the elimination of these communally held lands. By privatizing the land, the government hopes to make lucrative deals with multinational corporations.

Many Zapatista-controlled lands in Chiapas sit on major petroleum reserves that are second in size in the Western hemisphere only to Venezuela. Major deals have already been brokered between the Mexican government and multinational corporations for the development of forest and petroleum resources in the country. The absence or lack of enforcement of environmental and labor regulations in Mexico makes the nation particularly attractive to corporations from more regulated industrial nations.

One company, Pulsar, has presented a project to plant (non-indigenous) eucalyptus trees over 300,000 hectares throughout Chiapas and surrounding territories, and has contracted to sell the wood to International Paper (IP).

In December 1997, 45 unarmed indigenous Mayan Indian men, women, and children were massacred, their bodies dumped into a ravine near the town of Acteal. Accounts of torture continue to surface as the local Indians mount a campaign of primarily peaceful resistance. The group allegedly responsible for these and other atrocities are members of the Mexican Army Airborne Special Forces Group (GAFE)—a paramilitary unit trained by the U.S. Army Special Forces. Mexican soldiers are being trained with U.S. tax dollars to fill the GAFE ranks and fight an alleged War on Drugs. The 1998 Clinton Administration budget allocated $21 million for the Mexican Drug War. Anti-drug efforts continue to focus on Chiapas when, in fact, it is the least active of all Mexican states in drug production and trafficking. The level of autonomy desired by the Zapatistas both politically and economically stands to significantly affect multinational business ventures.
and Mexican government control of future oil and plantation agriculture development.


COVERAGE 1999: As the Zapatista movement enters its sixth year, the Chiapas dispute continues to receive significant U.S. and international coverage. December 22, 1999, marked the second anniversary of the Acteal massacre. Relations between the Zapatistas and the PRI government remain tense and peace talks have been stalled. Throughout 1999, the Zedillo-led central government made several unsuccessful “attempts” to restart the peace process. The Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) has not engaged the government, protesting that an agreement was already brokered in the form of the 1996 San Andres Accords for Indigenous Rights which would have granted limited autonomy to indigenous villages. The Mexican government rejected this agreement and refused to abide by it until significant “Zapatista changes” were made, leaving the situation in its present stalemate. The EZLN responded by implementing the accord itself, establishing civil courts, village commissions, and decision-making assemblies according to indigenous law, and taking over government functionaries within its territory.

The Mexican military has continued its campaign of large-scale militarization in the region, bringing in over 50,000 troops. This equals one soldier for every nine inhabitants in an area which has only one doctor for every 18,000 residents according to the Mexican government’s own statistics.

Small conflicts continue to occur as the Mexican military works to move further into the Zapatista-controlled jungles. An August *New York Times* article describes several Zapatista acts of civil disobedience against the Mexican government’s road building and surveying crews. The *Times*, among others, explained the importance of such roads to the Mexican government, which plans to use the new transportation infrastructure to harass the rebels and continue paper-tree plantation development. When the
Mexican military was brought in to protect construction crews, students from Mexico City arrived *en masse* in response to a Zapatista call for support. The Mexican government quickly agreed to halt construction on August 26, 1999.

Conservative estimates put the number of displaced indigenous people at tens of thousands. The Mexican military persecutes locals arbitrarily perceived to be “cooperating” with the Zapatista rebel forces. President Zedillo and Chiapas Governor Roberto Albores Guillen continue to work closely in coordinating the military activities and presence.

The majority of media outlets do not explain precisely why the Indians of Chiapas are revolting against the government, nor the level of military support the U.S. provides. Because of the inattention to overarching conditions and specific details, the media coverage tends to add to the confusion of an already complex issue. First, the Mexican government continues to work with multinational export corporations and paper manufacturing companies to privatize the collective landholdings of the local people. An article from *Dark Night Field Notes* dated December 1998 states that the policy of the Mexican government continues to be that of taking valuable agricultural or undisturbed lands and turning them into plantation agriculture or eucalyptus mass monocrops for the international paper and pulp industries.

All the while Mexico cannot feed its own people. Chiapas is home to 3.2 million people. Approximately 40 percent of its population suffers from some level of malnutrition, and 50 percent is illiterate. Hundreds of millions of Mexican federal dollars have been poured into the conflict zone as the government attempts to selectively wean entire rebel villages away from the Zapatista movement. Chiapas now receives more assistance from the Mexican government for education, health care, and housing assistance than any other state.

Chiapas has been exposed to foreign business activities since the 1960s when the World Bank moved in and converted large tracts of indigenous land into privately held cattle ranches. The 1970s oil boom that followed resulted in a massive degradation of the local environment and the loss of already-scarce farmland.

The Mexican government and military came under condemnation from myriad sources in 1999 for their human rights abuse. An official delegation
of Spanish observers who visited Chiapas concluded that the Acteal massacre could not have taken place without the complicity of the Mexican army. The report was submitted to the European Union and the United Nations. The U.S. State Department released other reports with similar findings as did the non-profit monitoring groups Human Rights Watch and the Inter-American Human Rights Watch Commission.

The French news-gathering organization, Agence France Presse, was one of a few media outlets to cover the introduction of a resolution in Congress calling on U.S. Secretary of State Albright to broker a peace deal in Chiapas. A coalition of U.S. Senators headed by Vermont Democrat Patrick Leahy drafted the proposal, which stated that the U.S. military should have no part in the ongoing human rights violations in Chiapas. The news that the head of the pro-government paramilitary squad responsible for the Acteal massacre was sentenced in a Mexican court to 35 years in prison while 23 other men were sentenced to lesser terms also went widely unreported.

In November 1999, the Mexican government indicated it would cease accepting all future counternarcotics funding from the U.S. government. This bold move stems from mounting dissatisfaction on the part of the Mexican military with the “my game, my rules” U.S. funding. It has expressed discontent with the quality of military hardware received, especially outdated helicopters. In addition, the U.S. government began implementing stricter rules and monitoring practices for funds and equipment given to Mexico to insure they were used only for the drug war. Prior to the refusal of aid, the Mexican government was the largest recipient of International Military Education and Training (IMET) funds in Latin America. Without the power inherent in a financial relationship as powerful as “the drug war,” the United States has lost any influence it may have had to prevent human rights abuses throughout indigenous conflict zones like Chiapas. The Dallas Morning News was one of only a handful of papers to cover the significant event.

Mexico may be trying to hide rampant corruption in the upper ranks of its military from the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). Still, the training of elite Mexican paramilitary forces at the School of the Americas (SOA) in Fort Benning, Georgia is scheduled to continue. In fact, the number of Mexican graduates from the SOA has increased from approximately 15 per
year in 1994, to well over 300 in more recent years, an increase of 2,000 percent.

The U.S. government continues to assert that it has no direct involvement with the Chiapas operations. Yet independent observer reports have documented the temporary detention of two U.S. military personnel by Zapatista forces in their region. The U.S. military is responsible for providing the Mexican paramilitary forces with state-of-the-art telecommunications technology that enables them to move between indigenous villages with destructive efficiency. The difference between counterinsurgency and counternarcotics with the Mexican forces can be described as fuzzy at best.

The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, Mary Robinson, went on a fact-finding mission in Chiapas in early December 1999. She found herself “overwhelmed” by the documentation of refugee atrocities, and called for a significant reduction in the number of Mexican national forces present in the region. The list of noted abuses included arbitrary detentions, torture, disappearances, violence against women and harassment. The Los Angeles Times quoted Robinson as saying that the troop deployments are “very oppressive in certain areas, especially indigenous communities. I feel compelled to speak out about the level of violations, of cases of officials acting with impunity. I hope my visit has drawn attention to the problems.”

Finally, the regional debut of the recently released film Chiapas by Canadian filmmaker Nettie Wild drew moderate coverage in community papers around the country. Wild documented the repercussions of NAFTA on the poorest of Mexico’s poor: the Mayan Indians. The international attention the Chiapas issue is receiving has embarrassed President Zedillo and the PRI, the ruling political party that has been in power for over 70 years. The events in Chiapas may have domestic political implications as well when the Mexican population goes to the polls for national elections in the summer of 2000.

On May 28, 1998, Nigerian soldiers in helicopters owned and operated by Chevron were flown to an oil facility, also owned by Chevron, off the coast of Nigeria in order to attack student demonstrators who had peacefully occupied the oil barge. After multiple assaults, two students lay dead, and several others were wounded. One hundred and twenty-one youths from 42 different communities had gathered to oppose the environmental destruction brought on by Chevron’s oil extraction practices.

For decades, the people of the Niger Delta have been protesting the destruction of their wetlands. Discharges into the creeks and waterways have left the region a dead land, resulting in the Niger Delta becoming one of the most heavily polluted regions in the world. The students voiced their concerns many times but received no response. They organized the protests around the Chevron barge in order to draw the corporation’s attention to the environmental injustice. According to student leader Bola Oyinbo, approximately 20 of the 121 students surrounding the barge in small boats went on board to meet with a Nigerian Naval officer who was working for Chevron. Oyinbo stated that the students wanted to speak to a Mr. Kirkland, Chevron’s managing director. Although the director never came, other Chevron officials did arrive the next day and promised to set up a meeting with the students at the end of May.

The students agreed to leave the platform and attend the proposed meeting. As they were preparing to disembark, Nigerian soldiers in three
helicopters piloted by Chevron employees opened fire on the students. Two young protesters were killed. Eleven students were detained by the Chevron-backed “security force” and taken to the city of Akure for prosecution. Despite their previous agreement to meet with the nonviolent protesters, Chevron filed a complaint against the group, saying they were pirates and should be interrogated.

During his imprisonment, one activist said he was handcuffed and hung from a ceiling fan hook for hours for refusing to sign a statement written by Nigerian federal authorities.


COVERAGE 1999: The actions and positions of Chevron and other oil companies in Nigeria, as well as the disastrous relationship between Chevron and Nigeria’s indigenous people, remain a mystery to most of the American public as U.S. media sources continue to fail to report on the events unfolding along the Niger Delta.

After Democracy Now! broke the story in 1998, and a host of alternative publications including Project Censored drew attention to the issue in 1999, Chevron released a series of statements that eventually admitted involvement in the incident. One account by a Chevron employee stated that the company had no control over the actions of the military forces that arrived. Chevron simply called them and they came. However, only the Chevron helicopter pilots possessed the skill and expertise needed to land on the oil platform. Another Chevron statement acknowledged that the company brought the soldiers in with Chevron helicopters flown by Chevron pilots.

In 1999, Chevron Corporation contradicted its previously released statements when it claimed that the military forces called in were merely defending themselves against the armed protesters. They later admitted, however, that the protesters were unarmed. According to a first-hand
account by protest leader Bola Oyinbo on *Democracy Now!* the military forces fired from the helicopters both before and during landing.

Political and environmental upheaval continues to grip the southern Chevron-controlled delta region of Nigeria. In late November 1999, Nigerian soldiers murdered at least a dozen residents of the town of Odi in Bayelsa State. The campaign of violence, allegedly provoked by the kidnapping and killing of 12 policemen in Odi by anti-oil activists, went on for several days. Approximately 300 Nigerian soldiers were moved in to occupy Odi. Locals reported that almost all major buildings and most homes were razed as a retaliatory move on the part of the government-controlled forces. At the same time a letter written by Nigerian president Obasanjo threatening the governor of Bayelsa State that action “must be taken” was leaked to the local press. Obasanjo spoke of reassuring the oil executives that the government was “very much aware of the concerns of the oil-producing companies for law and order.”

The town of Odi has at least three capped oil wells owned by Chevron. Other communities that are under attack are also sites of Chevron wells. Five hundred soldiers were deployed on these assaults. “We will not allow the federal government of Nigeria to massacre us with military weaponry acquired with our God-given resources,” the Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities group said in a statement. But the violence continues to escalate as frustrated activists, continuously beaten, killed, and harassed during peaceful protests, begin to target oil facilities and workers.

The *Houston Chronicle* reported in November 1999 that according to the Sierra Club the environmental damage along the Niger Delta is “so extensive that the U.N. Conference on the Environment and Development has listed it as one of the most endangered river deltas in the world.” The gas flares in the region, which have occurred 24 hours a day for the last 40 years, is a “major contributor to global warming.”

After decades of military authoritarianism in Nigeria, a new civilian government is taking measures to hold the multinational oil companies accountable for environmental degradation and the death of Wiwa. In one of literally hundreds of foreign articles highlighting the situation in Nigeria during 1999, the British press (including the *Times* of London, the *Guardian*, and the *Independent*) covered the Nigerian government announcement and its implications. The newly elected president called
upon the oil multinationals to take responsibility for the destruction in the delta and for creating a restoration plan.

The plight of the inhabitants of southern Nigeria is but one example of the exploitation and host of injustices thrust upon indigenous peoples in the name of corporate and government mineral extraction. Multinational oil companies repeatedly state that they do not want to work behind military shields, yet hundreds of Nigerians died in oil-related violence in 1999. Nigeria is Africa’s most populous nation and its hopes for a future economic, political, and social rebirth rest with the country’s rich oil reserves, while the severe poisoning of its people and land continue.


1998 #11 CENSORED STORY

PRIVATE PRISON EXPANSION BECOMES BIG BUSINESS

Private prisons are one of the fastest growing industries in the United States. Under contract by the government to run jails and prisons, and paid a fixed sum per prisoner, firms operate as cheaply and efficiently as possible to insure a profit. This means lower wages for staff, no union, and fewer services for prisoners. Substandard diets, extreme overcrowding, and abuses by poorly trained personnel have all been documented as practices of this private business approach to incarceration.

The “need” for more prisons was created in the 1980s, say the authors, when many businesses in the United States decided to take their factories out of the country, seeking higher profits and lower wages. Most seriously hurt by these plant closures and layoffs were African Americans and semi-
skilled workers in urban centers. Both a drug economy and the international prison industrial complex have filled the gaping economic hole left by the exodus of jobs from U.S. cities. Currently, 1.8 million people are behind bars in the United States. Many, who once made a living wage, are now making only 22 cents per hour behind prison walls.

For those who have invested in private prisons, prison labor is like a pot of gold. There are no strikes, no unions, no unemployment insurance, or workers’ compensation. Prisoners can now be found doing data entry for Chevron, telephone reservations for TWA, raising hogs, shoveling manure, and sometimes making lingerie for Victoria’s Secret.

Investment houses, construction companies, architects, and support services such as those that provide food, medical supplies, transportation, and furniture, all profit by prison expansion. The investment firm, Smith & Barney, is partial owner of a prison in Florida. American Express and General Electric have invested in private prison construction in Oklahoma and Tennessee. Communication giants such as AT&T, Sprint, and MCI are getting into the act as well, gouging prisoners with exorbitant rates for phone calls which are often six times the normal long distance charge.

With the transformations in the global economy that have occurred over the past two decades, wage decreases and standards for workers have suffered. Privatization of prisons contributes to this cycle as the prison industrial complex rapidly becomes a primary component of the U.S. economy.


COVERAGE 1999: The expansion of private prisons has become an increasing part of the American criminal justice system, yet the major U.S. media outlets have found the subject to be of little concern. There was only minor mention of private prisons if a new facility opened, or when a legal grievance was scheduled for trial.

The alternative press further expanded its investigation into private prisons by focusing in four major areas: the growth of the industry and the players involved, the privatization of juvenile detention centers and foster
programs, the decline of human rights and conditions in private facilities, and the rise of the “new slavery” behind bars.

According to the *Progressive Populist*, billions of dollars are being spent each year on the construction of new private prisons while funds for crime prevention and rehabilitation continue to decrease. Four major corporations, says *North Coast Xpress*, have emerged as the big winners of private prison construction contracts including Corrections Corporation of America (CCA), Wackenhut Corporation, Correctional Services Corporation (CSC), and Cornell Corrections. The boards of directors of these companies include the chairman of major health care corporations, the executive director of The Rainbow Coalition, a board member of Knight-Ridder news service and the *Miami Herald*, and an administrator for the Washington, DC school system.

The *Progressive Populist* maintains that there is a “relatively new fad that has hit state governments—turning juvenile jails and foster programs over to private industry.” This has led to “corruption and abuse, and lax oversight by the state governments that have entered into contracts with the for-profit companies.” According to *Prison Legal News*, children have endured sexual and physical abuse, neglect, and even death while detained at private juvenile facilities.

Conditions continue to decline behind bars throughout the prison industry, and this is especially true of private prisons, according to Eric Bates in his *Nation* article concerning the growth of CCA. Minimal training and low guard wages increase the possibility of abuse while an emphasis on profits has caused the quality of health care and food provisions to reach an abysmal low. “[One] former guard explained how CCA got workers to take food from inmates to boost profits,” says Bates. According to *In These Times*, the situation is no better in women’s prisons. “The problem of rape and sexual assault is exacerbated in America’s booming private for-profit prisons, where guards have minimal accountability to prisoners or the public.” At the same time allegations of wrongful death and denial of healthcare are at an all time high.

Perhaps the most frightening aspect is the expanding use of prisons by corporations as sources of cheap or free labor. The storage and transportation of prisoners is itself profitable through the acquisition of lucrative government contracts at taxpayers’ expense. Yet the use of
prisoners as a slave workforce makes them doubly valuable. The private prison corporation can charge rent for the use of prison labor (or for providing the space) while corporations such as IBM, Nike, AT&T, and United Airlines get their work done for as little as 17¢ an hour. “Next to robots, corporate America can’t imagine a better workforce … sub-minimum wages, no health benefits, no unions, no vacation,” says the American Prospect. Daniel Harr in Social Policy maintains that at the same time for-profit prisons are “heavily invested in lobbying efforts to sponsor ‘get tough on crime’ legislation designed to place ever-increasing numbers of men and women behind bars for longer periods of time.”


1998 #14 CENSORED STORY

POLITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS COMPROMISE AMERICA’S JUDICIAL SYSTEMS

America’s justice system is being compromised by campaign contributions to judges from special interest groups and corporate Political Action Committees (PACs). Although campaign fundraising scandals have drawn new attention to the way moneyed interests buy political favors in Washington, many of these same donors operate unchecked in a different venue: the state courts. The cost of judicial races is rising at least as fast as that of either Congressional races or presidential campaigns, as candidates for the bench pay for sophisticated ads, polls, and consultants. A recent study by the California Commission on the Courts found that the cost of the average superior court race in the Los Angeles area has more than doubled every year, increasing 22-fold from 1976 to 1995.

Fueling these campaigns is an influx of money from the tobacco industry, casinos, insurance companies, doctors, and businesses. Other contributors include defense lawyers and trial lawyers, unions and, recently, the religious
right. It adds up to a system of justice in which judges are compromised by the time they take the bench, and those who are perceived as unsympathetic to well-funded interest groups often end up simply kicked out of office.

The pleas from the legal community to regulate these contributions are being ignored. The American Bar Association, the American Judicature Society, and the Fund for Modern Courts have all recommended setting spending caps for candidates, putting limits on donations and providing free advertising. But effecting real changes is up to the states.

In 1996, the National Voting Rights Institute filed suit in Los Angeles on behalf of a coalition of civil rights groups, challenging private financing of judicial elections there. The group says that under the current system, money determines the outcome of judicial races, effectively shutting out those without sufficient means. The Nation’s coverage of this case illustrates the threat posed to our nation’s judicial system by a campaign process gone amuck.


**Coverage 1999:** During the past year, the U.S. media wrote extensively about campaign funding reform. States and special interest groups on both sides of the issue argued for and against campaign fund restrictions for local and national offices. However, little was mentioned about the effects of the election process and campaign funding on judges and the ultimate influence on their bench decisions.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution exposed how cigarette companies use campaign contributions and court challenges to insure that their products do not come under the scrutiny of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The issue came to the Supreme Court after split decisions in the lower courts. A North Carolina U.S. District Court judge agreed with the FDA that cigarettes are essentially drug-delivery systems. However, a Virginia appeals court reversed that ruling stating that by ruling in favor of the FDA, tobacco could be banned, something Congress never intended. The U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to decide whether the FDA can regulate cigarettes. A ruling favoring the FDA could dramatically alter the way our government and society treat tobacco.
The American Bar Association, which sponsors the Model Code of Judicial Conduct adopted in most states, amended the code to call for limiting campaign contributions and disqualifying judges from any case involving contributors who gave large contributions. This is the first nation-wide step to address the problems inherent in judicial elections.

The Washington Post ran a story about how some federal appellate judges have ruled on cases involving companies in which they own stock. (It overlooked the fact, however, that state and local judges receive substantial campaign contributions from trial lawyers.) In Denver, one story exposed how campaign funding for judges created a mini-crisis in Cincinnati, Ohio, over a case involving Chiquita Banana. Three judges had to recuse themselves because of having received campaign funds from Chiquita. A fourth judge took the case, even though she, too, had the same conflict of interest. Her explanation, “Such a removal encourages judge shopping and delays in getting cases resolved.”


1997 #4 CENSORED STORY

EXPOSING THE GLOBAL SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM

The ECHELON system, designed and coordinated by the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA), is one of the world’s biggest, most closely held intelligence projects. Unlike many of the Cold War electronic spy systems, ECHELON is designed primarily to gather electronic transmissions from nonmilitary targets: governments, organizations, businesses, and individuals in virtually every country. The system works by indiscriminately intercepting very large quantities of communications and using computers to identify and extract messages of interest from the mass of unwanted ones. Computers at each secret station in the ECHELON network automatically search millions of messages for pre-programmed key words. For each message containing one of those key words, the computer
automatically notes time and place of origin and interception. It also gives the message a four-digit code for future reference.

Computers that can automatically search through traffic for key words have existed since at least the 1970s, but the ECHELON system was designed by NSA to interconnect all these computers and allow the stations to function as components of an integrated whole. Using the ECHELON system, an agency in one country may automatically pick up information gathered elsewhere in the system.

ECHELON allows spy agencies to monitor public and private telephones, email, and telex communication networks. It potentially affects every person communicating between (and sometimes within) countries anywhere in the world. The exposure of ECHELON occurred after New Zealand journalist Nicky Hager interviewed more than 50 people who work or have worked in intelligence and related fields. Materials leaked to Hager include precise information on where the spying is conducted, how the system works, the system’s capabilities and shortcomings, and other details such as code names.

The potential abuses of and few restraints around the use of ECHELON have prompted other intelligence workers to come forward. In one example, a group of “highly placed intelligence operatives” from the British Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) came forward protesting what they regarded as “gross malpractice and negligence” within the establishments in which they operate, citing cases of GCHQ surveillance of charitable organizations such as Amnesty International and Christian Aid.


**COVERAGE 1999:** Since Project Censored’s 1998 yearbook, media exposure on the vast ECHELON system has grown, and public awareness of secret global surveillance has increased. Although mainstream media coverage on the issue has been moderate at best, interest in this secret spy network has been quite evident in alternative and foreign media since early 1998. Despite an overall low level of public awareness, ECHELON has been an object of concern for U.S. Representative Bob Barr who has endorsed
ECHELON-focused Congressional hearings and has helped to pass an amendment protecting American rights to privacy.

Nicky Hager, New Zealand journalist and Project Censored source, was immensely successful in gaining ECHELON exposure through his 1996 publication, *Secret Power: New Zealand’s Role in the International Spy Network*. Several current news sources quoted Hager’s extensive investigation into the closely held NSA project. In early 1998, the disclosure of an official European Parliament report entitled “In Appraisal of Technologies of Political Control” sparked a widespread panic throughout Europe concerning ECHELON. “While the report did draw needed attention to ECHELON, it and subsequent European press coverage built ECHELON up into some super-elaborate system that can listen in on anyone at any time, which goes beyond what Nicky Hager wrote,” stated a 1999 *Village Voice* article. Knowledge on the precise capabilities of ECHELON has yet to be made public.

Duncan Campbell, a British investigative journalist, prepared a report on ECHELON entitled, “Interception Capabilities 2000.” The European Parliament’s Science and Technology Options Assessment Panel (STOA) commissioned Campbell to uncover vital information about the ECHELON system because, stated STOA member Glyn Ford, “what is missing here is accountability, clear guidelines as to who they can listen to and under what circumstances these laws apply.” According to Citizens for Overt Action, “The report details how intelligence agencies intercept Internet traffic and digital communications and includes screen shots of traffic analysis from NSA computer systems.”

Campbell contends in his report that the ECHELON system targets the communications systems of known diplomats, criminals, and industrialists of interest to the intelligence community. The report charges that popular software programs, such as Lotus Notes and Web browsers, include a “back door” through which the NSA can gain entrance to an individual’s personal information.

“Interception Capabilities 2000” also provides an account of a previously unknown secret international organization led by the FBI called International Law Enforcement Telecommunications Seminar (ILETS). ILETS is working on building back door wiretap capabilities into all forms of modern communication including satellite communications systems. The
United States has never officially recognized ECHELON’s existence, but dozens of reports over the past decade similar to “Interception Capabilities 2000” have revealed a maze-like system with ECHELON’s capabilities.

Hager is quoted as saying, “ECHELON has a huge potential for violating privacy and for abuses of democracy. Because it’s so powerful and its operations are so secret there are no real constraints on agencies using it against any target the government chooses… [t]he use of intelligence services in these cases had nothing to do with national security, but everything to do with keeping tabs on critics."

Indeed, cases have been cited in a *St. Petersburg Times* article in which NSA is accused of using the ECHELON network to eavesdrop on Princess Diana and other high profile individuals and on institutions in order to steal proprietary secrets from European corporations to aid U.S.–based companies. According to the April 1999 article, a “former NSA employee appeared on German television last year and disclosed that the American government has spied on [a] German energy company” and then used the information to obtain a patent on the stolen idea. The former employee stated that the sale of the same company’s products in the United States was later banned.

A *Washington Post* article contends that Congressional interest in the ECHELON system was heightened when Representative Porter J. Goss, chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, asked the NSA for internal documents about its compliance with the 1978 Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA). Goss felt that the NSA might have been too cautious in approving new surveillance programs. However, NSA claimed attorney-client privilege and declined his request. This caused significant congressional unrest and prompted Goss to withhold NSA’s budget. According to the Post article, “Barr immediately joined the dispute from the opposite flank, suggesting that the NSA had refused Goss’s request because it was violating Americans’ privacy by indiscriminately vacuuming up communications.”

An article in the *Los Angeles Times*, acknowledging Barr’s strong conservative views (he was a supporter of the Clinton impeachment hearings), stated, “Barr is apparently such a foe of the federal government that he is taking on the federal intelligence agencies, organizations not accustomed to being challenged by Republicans.” Regardless of his politics,
which has kept some strong civil liberties groups from supporting his ECHELON endeavors, the congressman played an important role in informing the American public about the potential dangers of the unregulated spy system.

On May 17, 1999, Barr was successful in amending the Intelligence Reauthorization Act, requiring U.S. intelligence agencies to report to Congress on the legal standards justifying surveillance activities directed at U.S. citizens. In August, Congress released a press release stating that Barr and colleague Burton agreed to hold hearings on government surveillance programs.

October 21, 1999, was the first annual “Jam ECHELON Day” in which e-mail activists banded together in an effort to overload ECHELON databases. Organizers urged users to send as many messages as possible containing words such as “bomb” and “assassinate” in an attempt to overload NSA’s supercomputers. These “hactivists” were responsible for the first mass protest using electronic mail as the primary weapon.

The sheer magnitude of such a spy network has been of deep concern to many and was actually used by the producers of the major motion picture Enemy of the State. The film portrayed the NSA as an out-of-control agency listening in on unwitting citizens. Concerned with real-life implications, the Washington Post stated, “As the nation begins a new century, congressional hearings to redefine the agency’s boundaries are the best way to prevent life from imitating art.” A civil liberties group filed a lawsuit against the NSA on December 3, 1999, seeking information about ECHELON’s network.