

Public Interest Activism in Canadian ICT Policy:  
Blowin' in the Policy Winds

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***Abstract:***

In this paper the catalyzing influence of Bill C-61—a proposed amendment to the Canadian Copyright Act—and other recent ICT-related policy developments on activism in Canada is examined. The discussion expounds upon the role of academics and activists in fostering a broader public discourse about ICT policy, with attention being given to three key moments in Canadian communication policy: the development of the “information highway” in the mid-1990s and, in particular, the activities of the Information Highway Advisory Council (IHAC); the creation of the Telecommunications Policy Review Panel (TPRP) in 2005; and the current debates regarding the issue of net neutrality. The analysis demonstrates how “esoteric” digital policy issues are now seen by many Canadians as worthy of their energies. This suggests that politicians cannot afford to ignore their constituents’ concerns about such policy issues as traffic shaping, throttling, fair dealings, and anti-circumvention measures. And, likewise, that academics working in the realm of communication policy domain would do well not to overlook the role of citizens, grassroots groups and non-profit organizations in actively seeking a voice in the various structures of policymaking.

***Keywords:*** Canadian Copyright Act; ICTs; Canadian Communication Policy

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**Résumé:**

Dans cet article, l'influence catalyseur du projet de loi C-61, une modification proposée à la Loi canadienne du droit d'auteur, ainsi que d'autres développements d'activisme au Canada relié aux politiques des TICs sont examinées. Ce discours traite du rôle des universitaires et des activistes dans la stimulation des discussions publiques à propos des politiques reliés aux TICs avec une attention particulière apportée à trois moments clés de la politique communicationnelle au Canada: le développement de "l'autoroute de l'information" des années mi-1990 et en particulier les activités du Comité consultatif sur l'autoroute de l'information; la création du Groupe d'étude sur le cadre réglementaire des télécommunications en 2005; et le débat courant concernant le sujet de la neutralité. Cette analyse démontre comment les sujets de la politique numérique ésotérique sont maintenant perçus par la population canadienne comme étant dignes de leurs efforts. Cela suggère que les politiciens ne peuvent pas éviter les inquiétudes de leurs électeurs concernant les enjeux politiques tels que la formulation du trafic, l'étranglement, l'utilisation équitable et les mesures d'anti-contournement. Dans cette même perspective, les universitaires qui travaillent dans le domaine des politiques de communication ne devraient pas ignorer le rôle des citoyens, des groupes populaires et des organisations à but non lucratif de rechercher activement une voix dans les multiples structures de l'élaboration des politiques.

**Mots-clés:** Loi Canadienne du Droit d'Auteur; TICs; Politique Communicationnelle au Canada

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A controversial bill that seeks to reform Canadian copyright laws will not be introduced this week, federal officials confirmed on Thursday.

"As the minister stated in the House, he will table a bill when he and Minister of Heritage [Josée Verner] are satisfied that they have a bill that has struck the right balance between the rights of creators and the rights of consumers," said spokeswoman Deidra McCracken.

But Prentice backtracked on the plan after more than 50 angry protestors showed up to question him at the meeting, and an online group formed to oppose it on social networking site Facebook. The group was started by University of Ottawa professor Michael Geist, a chief opponent of the legislation, on Dec. 1. More than 20,000 Facebook users have joined the group since then.

(CBC News Online, 2007)

In the nine months following this CBC news report, activism against Canada's copyright reform legislation, Bill C-61, reached new levels, with more than 70,000 people signing onto the

Facebook group, Fair Copyright for Canada. At the time of writing the current membership of the group exceeds 92,000 and local chapters have appeared in more than 20 cities across Canada. The proposed bill catalyzed widespread and contentious debate among politicians, librarians, educators, creative artists, and citizens because of its strong anti-circumvention provisions and the restrictions it sought to impose on consumer and education exceptions. As Geist documented shortly after the bill actually was introduced in June 2008,

in the roughly 36 hours since... the outrage from thousands of Canadians has been nothing short of remarkable. The CBC has picked up on the story, reporting on the surge in online protests that include approximately 10,000 new members of the Fair Copyright for Canada Facebook group (nearly 50,000 members as of this writing), over 4,000 letters and emails sent through Copyright for Canadians, hundreds of comments on articles in the mainstream press (and this blog), and a huge number of individual blog posts.<sup>1</sup>

In a video posted on his blog and on You Tube, Geist encouraged Canadians to continue to creatively protest Bill C-61 through innovative and diverse methods including, blogs, wikis, videos, mashups, op-eds, and letters to the editor. In line with this “call to arms,” video clips of Parliamentary debates and media reportage of Bill C-61 were posted on You Tube, and a “C-61 in 61 Seconds” video competition resulted in several humorous and trenchant observations about why a “made in the U.S.A.” DMCA-style copyright law was not in the best interests of Canadians.<sup>2</sup>

The election call in September 2008 effectively rang the death knell for Bill C-61, but this legislation or some variant thereof, seems likely to be resurrected during the new parliamentary session. The citizen furor over Bill C-61 (including the publication of opposing op-eds in the mainstream press and proclamations against the bill from librarian and educational groups) will surely continue and escalate when the bill is re-introduced. Online activism against the bill has set a new standard for effective public interest awareness-raising and mobilization, as well as influencing mainstream media coverage, which has not always been the case with ICT public interest policy activism during the last decade.

In this paper I offer some personal reflections on ICT activism in Canada during the past decade, focusing on specific events, issues, tactics, and obstacles. From a brief synopsis of where we have been, I then offer some reflections on where we are going, how academics in tandem with public interest groups can continue to shape policy debates in meaningful ways, and some cautionary remarks about sustainability and capacity-building among grassroots and citizen-led groups.

The discussion looks at three specific policy moments: the development of the “information highway” in the mid 1990s; a decade later, the activities of the Telecommunications Policy Review Panel (TPRP) in 2006; and current debates over net neutrality. It should be noted from that outset that a variety of ICT policy and activism will not be touched upon in the pages that follow. These include, privacy activism, community responses to Industry Canada’s digital divide programs, such as the Community Access Program (CAP), activism by women’s groups to ensure universal access, and Canadian responses to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and internet governance.<sup>3</sup>

My reflections emanate from my stance as a Canadian academic-activist whose research interests and contributions on the social, policy, and ethical aspects of ICTs straddle the line

between academic and non-academic audiences, including policymakers and non-profit groups. Of course my position is not unique. Many critical communication studies scholars in Canada also produce research with community and public interest groups, with the goal of influencing debates for multiple communities, whether academic-, policy-, or locally-based.<sup>4</sup> The historiography of Canadian communication scholarship was influenced by the priorities of government commissions related to communication and cultural policies, and much recent scholarship still attends to contemporary media policy debates (Shade, 2007). As Canadian scholars we are encouraged to produce funded research that can demonstrate policy impacts. The Social Science and Humanities Research's Initiative on the New Economy program, for instance, was explicit about this policy imperative.<sup>5</sup> And for many of us, our scholarship and activism translates into pedagogical elements in our teaching at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

### **We'll Just Lay Some Last Mile Fibre, And Have It on the Information Highway**

“The information highway is headed for a dead end,” Shawn Yerxa, in the first of 81 presentations, told the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission yesterday.

The federal regulator broke tradition and launched the hearings with presentations from citizens' groups, such as Yerxa's Public Information Highway Advisory Council, rather than industry representatives.

CRTC chairman Keith Spicer said the hearings “come at a critical time in the history of communications. Within a very short period of time, we've witnessed the virtual explosion of information technologies that will someday no doubt reshape our lives in ways that even the richest and wisest entrepreneurs haven't begun to dream of”.

(Austen, 1995)

In retrospect, it is remarkable that a large photo of Yerxa flanked by reporters and citizens was splashed across the front page of many business sections of the then Southam-owned newspapers. Perhaps equally remarkable was that the CRTC chose to embark on their week-long hearings into “Convergence and Culture on the Information Highway” (CRTC, 1995) with presentations from a bevy of public interest groups, some of which had been spontaneously created with mere volunteer pluck and acumen, rather than the usual industry heavy-weights.

The various groups that were created in the mid-1990s coalesced from a collective concern that public interest issues—universal access, privacy protection, creation of Canadian content and transparent governance—should be an intrinsic facet of the development and diffusion of digital technologies such as the internet. The CRTC Convergence hearings and the Information Highway Advisory Council (IHAC) were the two catalysts for public interest activism.

The CRTC's Order in Council P.C. 1994-1689, proposed a public consultation on the “vision of competition” emanating from technological development, considered issues surrounding convergence (e.g., should phone companies hold broadcast licenses and deliver movies over phone lines?); content (e.g., how can Canadian cultural content be protected?);

access and competitive safeguards (e.g., how can universal access be achieved?); and broadcast definitions for broadcasters, cable TV operators, and the telephone companies.

IHAC, established in 1994 by the then Minister of Industry, John Manley, had as its goal to make recommendations on a “national strategy to govern the evolution of Canada’s advanced information and communications infrastructure respecting the overall social and economic goals of the federal government” (Industry of Canada, 1995) through three main objectives: 1) job creation through digital innovation and investment; 2) reinforcing Canadian sovereignty and cultural identity; and 3) ensuring universal access at a reasonable cost. Working groups were established to cover these interest areas, with IHAC Chair David Johnston assuring Canadians that the composition of the working groups and committee members reflected a diversity of Canadians. However, public interest groups were not appeased, arguing that the composition of the IHAC groups and members was dominated by corporate groups, commercial media institutions, and big telecom, to the exclusion of public interest groups interested in the impact of new technologies on social issues such as equity, democratic participation, social justice, and employment.

Notable public interest grassroots groups that were spawned in the heady first days of the information highway excitement included the Coalition for Public Information (CPI), founded by the Ontario Library Association as a national non-profit coalition of public interest groups and individuals “to foster broad access to affordable, usable information and communication services and technology”; the Public Information Highway Advisory Council (P-IHAC); the Electronic Public Space Steering Group; Telecommunities Canada (a coalition of community-based free-nets); and the Alliance for a Connected Canada (an umbrella group of ten social policy and labour groups including the Public Interest Advocacy Centre/PIAC, Telecommunications Workers Union/TWU, CPI, Telecommunities Canada, P-IHAC, la Fédération nationale des associations de consommateurs du Québec, the Information Policy Research Group/IPR at the University of Toronto, the Council of Canadians, and the McLuhan Program in Culture and Technology). With the exception of Telecommunities Canada, PIAC, IPRP and the Council of Canadians, none of these groups exist anymore. Once the IHAC and the CRTC hearings were over, the grassroots groups effectively disbanded, although certain individuals remained policy activists, intervening in other digital policy initiatives.<sup>6</sup>

Writing in 2001, with the aim of assessing seven years of public interest activism particularly related to internet access, my colleagues and I noted that the tactics used—participating in advisory bodies, developing public documents, appearing at official hearings, convening public events, and meeting face-to-face with officials—had produced some noticeable results. These included, increasing connections among groups and individuals and a,

clearly articulated a broadly shared vision of what universal access in a networked world can mean and had some influence on the wording of official policy recommendations. However, there has so far been no discernible effect on actual policies or practices, and there is little prospect that further efforts in the same direction will change this situation.

(Clement, Moll & Shade, 2001: 43)

Clearly we, as did others, felt that our entreaties and energies had reached the end of that perhaps dusty and certainly digital highway. Writing three years later, Marita Moll and I commented on the changing rhetoric from “information highways” to “smart communities”, with

an attendant increase in commodification, privatization, the capitalization of communication and culture, and policymaking that,

privilege[s] the prosperous over the populace, that treats citizens as consumers, and that favor[s] consultation through elite summits of the pay-per invited, while the uninvited, whose lives and livelihoods are being effected by the conversations inside the stately rooms, are left outside the doors, protesting in the streets.

(Moll & Shade, 2003: 8)

### **Stuck Inside of Ottawa (or is it Toronto?) With Those Policy Laundering Blues Again: Telecommunications Policy Reform**

Commenting on a review of (mostly U.S.) public interest media activism and scholarship, Napoli (2007: 55) notes an emphasis on activism in the mass media sector rather than in the telecommunications sector and posits that the framing of telecom could be related more to traditional economic regulation with links to the broader consumer movement than being “reflective of the social regulation issues and concerns that have better characterized the areas of emphasis of the media reform movement... Clearly, then, there is a need for more research that explores activism in the telecom sector through a media reform lens.”

In Canada, just such an opportunity presented itself in 2005 with the creation of the three-member Telecommunications Policy Review Panel (TPRP) that was launched to “modernize” the 1993 *Telecommunications Act*, and to ensure the international competitiveness of the Canadian telecom industry (TPRP, 2005). Public input into the process was minimal. Following the release of the first round consultation paper, the second round sought input into the first round. Two public forums were held: one in the Yukon Territories for public interest groups and the other in Gatineau, Quebec, mostly for industry groups. The Panel received 200 submissions totaling thousands of pages that were dominated by industry and government concerns about issues such as competitiveness, productivity and deregulation. Indeed, a subsequent content analysis revealed that Aboriginal, consumer, women’s and community groups represented only 15.5% of the total submissions received, versus 60.1% for industry groups.<sup>7</sup>

Released in March 2006, the Final Report’s major recommendation was for less regulation and more reliance on market forces, the latter being seen as the promotional engines for the accelerated growth and competitiveness of Canada’s telecommunications industry (TPRP, 2006). The various community and public interest groups that did participate and comment on the Final Report were dismayed by the lack of attention given to the positive role that government regulation can and has played in fostering Canadian innovation at international and local levels, the significant impact of community-based groups in supporting access to ICTs in the Canadian telecommunications infrastructure, and the need for continued government support of programs that aim to ameliorate various digital divides (Longford, Moll & Shade, 2008). Essentially, this report gave the green light to then Minister of Industry, Maxime Bernier, to take a “hands-off” approach to telecom regulation. To this end, he overruled subsequent CRTC decisions on the regulation of Voice over Internet (VOIP) services (November 2006), allowed telcos the power to set their own prices as long as a telephone company, cable company, and an unaffiliated wireless carrier were in the same area (December 2006) and oversaw the deregulation of local telephone services (December 2007) (Ibid; Moll & Shade, 2008).

Media criticism of the TPRP was scant. The business pages of the major Canadian newspapers paid attention primarily to the commentaries of the major telcos, while public interest voices were, essentially, muted. Telecom was thus framed as an industrial or consumer concern, rather than a social and cultural consideration. One lone dissenter's voice was, however, heard. Responding to an increase in private sector legislative drafting, Liora Salter, a York University Professor of Law, who specializes in communication and public interest law, was quoted in the *Globe and Mail* as stating, "I've never heard of such a thing" (McNish, 2007: B8).

The "thing" that Salter was specifically commenting on was a privately funded Model Telecommunications Act based on the TPRP recommendations. Funded by major telcos—Bell and Telus—and drafted by former TPRP panel members Hank Intven and Mary Dawson, both at law firm McCartney Tétrault, the industry-friendly document is astonishing in its precedence (Longford, Moll & Shade, 2008). Presented at the 2007 Telecom Summit, an industry-dominant annual event, the Model Act is a salient example of "policy laundering" which "involves the cycling of policies that lack political legitimacy through outside institutions in order to enter them into circulation despite their lack of acceptance".<sup>8</sup>

Whether the Model Telecommunication Act will have a tangible impact on future telecom legislation is not known at this time. However, what is certain is that organizations who are concerned about a model of telecom in the public interest simply do not have the deep pockets to muster up a lengthy model report based on their concerns of telecom access, equity, and policy transparency.

### **Net Neutrality – No Matter What Gets in the Way... I'll Just Sit Here, and Watch the Packets Flow...**

One year later, and in contrast to the TPRP panel, telecom issues in the guise of network neutrality were prevalent in the media and a topic of much internet activism. In a speech given at the 2008 Canadian Telecom Summit, Konrad von Finckenstein, Chairman of the CRTC said with respect to net neutrality: "Fundamental issues of technology, economics, competition, access and freedom of speech are all involved... it is one of the polarizing issues of the day. It will have to be addressed and debated by all of us" (CRTC, 2008).

That von Finckenstein publicly acknowledged the need for a major public consultation on net neutrality was greeted by many public interest groups and citizens favorably, given how this rather obscure yet essential element of internet operability had galvanized a variety of supporters and strange bedfellows in the U.S. and Canada.

Net neutrality focuses on how internet infrastructure is built, who pays for it, and who benefits from it. Net neutrality ensures that the internet contains no centralized control mechanisms and that those who own the networks do not also control the content that runs through them. These debates thus concern restrictions on free speech and access to information represented by the actions of some internet service providers to control traffic flow on their services (Barratt & Shade, 2007). Ben Scott, Policy Director at the U.S.-based Free Press, explains that

net neutrality means non-discrimination: the idea that all internet content should be treated fairly and equally... Without net neutrality, our broadband network owners could interfere with user choice on the web and give special priority to the websites, applications, and services they own or favor.

(Scott, 2008: 83)

The creation of a two-tiered internet, wherein content and applications are not treated equally, is a major impediment to continued innovation and creativity for citizens using and producing internet content. According to Geist (2008: 80), given the recent actions by some telecom providers, “the need to prevent a two-tier internet in Canada has never been greater”.

Scott (2008) described U.S. activism, which brought together a coalition of academics, activists, consumer groups, technology firms, and policymakers to battle Congressional actions that would have abolished net neutrality. The SavetheInternet Coalition was a non-partisan strategy that involved an “inside-outside strategy”. Insiders (i.e., lobbyists, policy experts, and researchers) and outsiders (i.e., citizens, activists, grassroots outreach) worked together to dissuade a Congressional vote on net neutrality in 2006, and to force AT&T to respect net neutrality as a condition of their acquisition of BellSouth. The issue, however, is certainly far from over. Introduced in 2007, the *Internet Freedom Preservation Act*, S. 215, will reinstate net neutrality provisions, and has been referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation. If Barack Obama, one of the co-sponsors, becomes President, the Act may well be expedited.<sup>9</sup>

In Canada, activism for net neutrality took many forms, uniting online education and resources (e.g., blogs, liststervs, websites) with offline actions (e.g., policy mobilization, rallies, forums). Informational websites included the What is Net Neutrality? site, initiated by the Canadian Research Alliance for Community Innovation and Networking (CRACIN) and developed by graduate students; the neutrality.ca site, and the Canadian Internet Policy and Public Interest Clinic (CIPPIC) resources on net neutrality.<sup>10</sup> An umbrella group, SaveOurNet.ca, consisting of a coalition of over 250 citizens, and approximately 65 businesses and public interest groups, is coordinated by the Campaign for Democratic Media (CDM). Its four principles include the following:

1. The CRTC should STOP Bell, Rogers and other Internet Service Providers from interfering with private Internet communications and content (Throttling Traffic).
2. We need to protect innovation, competition, free speech, and Canadian culture, by protecting the principle of Net Neutrality and the Internet's level playing field.
3. Canadian government officials should develop and enforce Net Neutrality rules that ensure Canadian Internet users have open access to applications and content of their choice.
4. We need increased broadband access, competition, transparency and choice for all Canadians.<sup>11</sup>

In May 2008 SaveOurNet.ca organized a protest on Parliament Hill, that attracted some 300 citizens who chanted “Our net not for sale,” and “Whose net? Our net” while Charlie Angus of the Federal NDP announced his introduction of a private member’s bill for net neutrality principles in Parliament (CBC News, 2008; NDP, 2008). Angus’ bill was precipitated by the Canadian Association of Internet Providers (CAIP) CRTC complaint over Bell Canada’s decision to expand its internet “traffic shaping” policy from retail to wholesale internet service provider (ISP) customers (Sorensen, 2008). More than 1500 letters in support of the CAIP were



submitted to the CRTC, with lengthy submissions from public interest groups including the CDM.<sup>12</sup> In their submission to the CRTC on behalf of CDM, CIPPIC argued that Bell must cease and desist from throttling CAIP members' internet traffic because it discriminates against users and content providers who use peer-to-peer traffic contrary to s. 27(2) of the *Telecommunications Act*; undermines s. 7(g) of the Act, that encourages innovation in the provision of telecommunications services; is a violation of the principle of common carriage and of s. 36 of the Act; and under s. 7(i), raises privacy issues related to use of telecommunications services (Comments of the Campaign for Democratic Media, 2008: 15-16). At the time of this writing, the CRTC decision of CAIP against Bell Canada had not been released, but it is anticipated that this decision, plus a forthcoming CRTC hearing for their New Media Project Initiative in the winter of 2009, will once again raise public discourse and debate about net neutrality.

### **The Academic and Activist Nexus: Challenges and Opportunities**

In Canada, academics working on media policy issues have not to date, with some exceptions, explicitly identified themselves as part of a "media reform movement" as has been the case south of the border.<sup>13</sup> There, organizations bringing together activists and academics, notably Free Press (one the co-founders was Professor Robert McChesney of the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign), have launched four increasingly successful National Media Reform conferences, worked the Beltway to shape media policy legislation, and engaged a wider constituency of grassroots organizations, consumer's groups, and citizens. Media justice organizations include many non-profit and grassroots groups who view media as a civil rights issue and thus advocate for social justice through promoting informed media policy that particularly addresses concerns of gender, race, and class. Media justice is situated within the burgeoning global Media Reform Movement. "I don't think there is a movement that has grown so fast in the last seven years", enthused Stanford University intellectual property scholar Lawrence Lessig at the 4<sup>th</sup> annual National Conference for Media Reform in Minneapolis in June 2008, which brought together over 3,000 participants—activists, scholars, and the general public. This movement is broadly concerned with media and democracy issues including, the impact of increased media concentration of ownership on ensuring a diversity of voices and quality journalism; curbing market-led media policies favoring de-regulation that lead to an evisceration of independent, local, and educational media content; promoting policies for universal broadband access; and internet freedom, including network neutrality.

From a critical communication studies perspective, McChesney (2007) argues that the marriage of academic endeavors with activism should be a key element of communication studies. He laments, however, the tensions inherent in U.S. scholarship between administrative and critical perspectives, an ideological and methodological tension that is not as prone and prevalent among Canadian communication scholars (Hamilton, 2006). Napoli (2007: 26), in his review on media reform literature, comments that much of the scholarship appears to be "internally-generated... That is, many of the researchers examining the movement from an academic perspective are (or were) themselves participants in the movement." This is not a surprising statement, and the same can be said with respect to the Canadian scene. As mentioned earlier, our funding for external grants from SSHRC and other entities typically demands a statement on the policy dimensions and efficacy of the research for which we are seeking funds.

In the U.S., the often fraught tensions in securing funding that has a public interest policy goal, and the pressures for academics and activist groups to work together in mutually productive ways has been the focus of one research project that seeks to ameliorate these two communities. The Social Science Research Council's Necessary Knowledge for a Democratic Public Sphere (NKDPS) Collaborative Grants in Media and Communication "are designed to raise incentives for academic-advocacy collaboration in the design, conduct, and application of research." NKDPS, funded by a grant from the Ford Foundation, includes the aforementioned collaborative grants program, a Data Consortium wherein datasets used in media and communications policy are made available for researchers, and the hosting of several workshops and conferences bringing together international scholars and policy activists. A recent initiative is Making Communication Research Matter, wherein international scholars comment on the interrelationships between research and policymaking.<sup>14</sup>

One organization that has been successful in mobilizing Canadians in media reform issues is the Campaign for Democratic Media (CDM). It is a

national, non-profit and non-partisan media reform organization, comprised of a network of civil society organizations, consumer organizations, labour groups, media advocacy groups, academics, grassroots media activists and other Canadians that are interested in helping to create the conditions for diverse, accountable and quality Canadian media to thrive. CDM's primary goal is to increase public awareness and informed participation in Canadian media policy formation.<sup>15</sup>

The CDM was initiated following a 2007 University of Windsor conference, *20 years of Propaganda*, and a workshop held in Vancouver at the same time, called *Media That Matters*. The CDM consists of an array of organizations (labor, public interest, independent media, political parties, and individuals) and has intervened in many recent policy briefs. Its activities have included mobilizing more than 2000 Canadians—as part of its "Stop Big Media" campaign—to fax comments to the CRTC for the 2007 Diversity of Voices hearing on media concentration in Canada, advising the CRTC on their proposed New Media consultation, and initiating the aforementioned SaveOurNet.ca campaign on net neutrality.

The CDM uses different methods to get the word out. Its website includes news items, CDM briefs, blogs, videos, action items and featured campaigns, and membership information. There also is a MediaActive e-list and a Facebook group. Its greatest challenge however, and not unique to many public interest groups, is sustainability. While it has a small grant from the U.S. Endswell Fund of the Tides Foundation, it relies on member donations through the Media Democracy Project. National coordinator Steve Anderson was a full-time MA student in Communication Studies at Simon Fraser University when CDM was launched and now works for the organization on a full-time basis. Unlike other media justice organizations in the U.S. who have access to foundation support, the CDM cannot access these resources, and government support for social justice groups under the Conservative Party is scant to nonexistent. Elaborating on this situation Anderson comments,

What we need is one big funder to let us really get this off the ground, a funder that is committed to the project, so we aren't worried about chasing small grants all the time. I spend most of time fundraising probably. Alternatively we could

have a grassroots base of supporters, but it's really hard to build that without something substantial to start with.

(Anderson, personal communication, September 29, 2008)

He adds that another barrier in accessing funding is convincing potential donors that media reform issues are integral to their organizational objectives:

We're finding that many potential supporters have never considered media or communication issues as part of their mission, despite the clear connection to their overall mandate. Educating funders on the necessity of supporting media reform is an area that needs attention.

(Ibid)

Engaging citizens on the policy issues can be challenging, because much of the discussion is "esoteric", but Anderson concludes that, "once media and communication issues are explained outside of the policy rhetoric, average people are almost immediately upset and engaged in these battles" (Ibid).

Recent citizen activism on copyright reform and net neutrality bears this out; as do the many creative ways online tools have been deployed to generate feisty and humorous responses to proposed policy legislation. That these digital issues are politicizing youth is not surprising. For example, two young high school women who confessed to skipping school, wearing homemade t-shirts ("Are you willing to pay to meet me on Facebook") and carrying homemade signs ("I'm emotionally attached [sic] to my net neutrality: Can I keep it please?") were videotaped at the Parliament Hill rally on net neutrality.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, during the question and answer session at a public discussion on Bill C-61 given by Michael Geist at Concordia University, a young woman noted that she was not old enough to vote yet, but wanted to get involved. What could she do? The crowd (academics, local geeks, and members of the Montreal creative community) clapped approvingly.<sup>17</sup>

"Esoteric" digital policy issues are now seen by many Canadians as momentous and worthy of their energies. Politicians cannot afford to ignore their constituencies' concerns about traffic shaping, throttling, fair dealing, anti-circumvention measures, or foreign ownership of their communication industries. Neither can academics working in policy fail to consider the role of citizens, grassroots groups, and non-profit organizations in actively seeking a voice in the various structures of policymaking. In describing her academic training in the early 1960s under the scholar and activist Dallas Smythe, Gertrude Robinson (1998) described how Smythe pushed his students in a political economy of the telephone industry class to "think dirty". Assessing this influence on the formation of her feminist sensibilities, Robinson comments;

'Thinking dirty'—what a powerful metaphor for describing the academic endeavour. At one and the same time it provides a strategy for inquiry and an attitude toward life: the knower who is not content with merely studying social processes but wants to change them through his actions.

Think Dirty. Beyond a siren call, this is an apt strategy as we continue our work in media policy and reform issues, educating, engaging, and energizing citizens and policymakers on many issues, at many levels, and through different tactics.

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**Notes**

- 1 See the Copyright Protest Surge, <http://www.michaelgeist.ca/content/view/3031/297/> June 13, 2008.
- 2 See <http://www.youtube.com/user/FairCopyright4Canada>.
- 3 On privacy activism, see Colin J. Bennett, *The Privacy Advocates: Resisting the Spread of Surveillance* (MIT Press, 2008) and <http://web.uvic.ca/polisci/bennett/privacyadvocacy/index.htm>; Ian Kerr, On The Identity Trail, <http://iankerr.ca/>; David Lyon's The Surveillance Project, <http://www.surveillanceproject.org/>. On community responses to digital divide see the Canadian Research Alliance for Community Innovation and Networking, <http://www.cracin.ca>; women's internet activism see Leslie Regan Shade and Barbara Crow, Canadian Feminist Responses on Digital Technology, *Topia* (Spring 2004), URL: <https://pi.library.yorku.ca/ojs/index.php/topia/article/viewFile/2686/1891>; on WSIS see Marc Raboy and Normand Landry, *Civil Society, Communication And Global Governance*, Peter Lang, 2005.
- 4 For instance, Catherine Murray, Bob Hackett, David Skinner, Darin Barney, Marc Raboy, Becky Lentz, Paul Boin, Barbara Crow, Kim Sawchuk,. Also scholars in other disciplines: Michael Geist in Law, Val Steeves in Criminology and Law, David Lyon in Sociology, Andrew Clement in Information Studies, Ron Deibert in Political Science, Laura Murray in English.
- 5 INE research included The Canadian Alliance for Community Innovation and Networking ([www.cracin.ca](http://www.cracin.ca)); Everyday Experiences of Networked Services, URL: <http://www3.fis.utoronto.ca/research/iprp/ee/index.html>; the Surveillance Project (<http://www.queensu.ca/sociology/Surveillance/>); On the Identity Trail (<http://idtrail.org/>); Teaching and Learning Technology: Enhancing Equity for Canadian Youth ([http://ace.acadiau.ca/research/techequity/general\\_information.html](http://ace.acadiau.ca/research/techequity/general_information.html)); Children, Young People and New Media (<http://artsandscience.concordia.ca/comm/shade/>); and Digital Girls (<http://www.digitalgirls.org/>).
- 6 See the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Road Map compiled by Chris Bodnar, Marita Moll, and Leslie Regan Shade as part of the CRACIN research project. URL: [http://www3.fis.utoronto.ca/research/iprp/cracin/policy/e-policy\\_map.html#subhead6A](http://www3.fis.utoronto.ca/research/iprp/cracin/policy/e-policy_map.html#subhead6A).
- 7 Statistics compiled by Rachel Miles, Concordia University.
- 8 The Policy Laundering Project, URL: <http://www.policylaundering.org/>.
- 9 See S.215 at <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=s110-215>.
- 10 See [www.whatisnetneutrality.ca](http://www.whatisnetneutrality.ca), [www.neutrality.ca](http://www.neutrality.ca), <http://www.cippic.ca/net-neutrality>.
- 11 See <http://saveournet.ca/content/saveournetca-principles>.

- 12 Telecom Decision CRYC 2008-39, Canadian Association of Internet Providers' request for interim relief regarding Bell Canada's practices of 'throttling' its wholesale ADSL access services, URL: [http://www.crtc.gc.ca/PartVII/eng/2008/8622/c51\\_200805153.htm](http://www.crtc.gc.ca/PartVII/eng/2008/8622/c51_200805153.htm).
- 13 Exceptions include Hackett, Skinner, Boin, Lithgow and myself, all steering committee members of CDM.
- 14 See SSRC: [http://programs.ssrc.org/media/collaborative\\_grants/](http://programs.ssrc.org/media/collaborative_grants/), <http://programs.ssrc.org/media/dataconsortium/>, <http://programs.ssrc.org/media/events/>, <http://www.ssrc.org/essays/mcrm>.
- 15 See <http://democraticmedia.ca>.
- 16 See <http://www.saveournet.ca/content/net-neutrality-rally-ottawa-may-27-2008> and <http://saveournet.ca/content/net-neutrality-rally-photos>.
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Leslie Regan Shade is an Associate Professor at Concordia University in the Department of Communication Studies. Her research focus since the mid-1990's has been on the social, policy, and ethical aspects of information and communication technologies (ICTs), with particular concerns towards issues of gender, globalization, and political economy.

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