
Freedom of Press in Latin America: What is it Worth?

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Over the years, in the Latin American region, the relations between the media and the States have been complex. Beyond the long-term interests and needs of the country, what governments have often done is try to accommodate communication regulations in their favor, instead of formulating comprehensive and lasting policies in that area.

This is because the rulers have acknowledged the capacity of public seduction of communication. It has, as the Colombian professor Omar Rincón has stated, a huge strategic value in economic, technological, and political terms. Through the media, citizens can be influenced to accept an economic, political and social model, in which certain norms, values ??and principles are followed. Hence, dominating the media is the desire of governments, businessmen and political actors.

In a similar way to other parts of the world, in Latin America communication platforms are part of conflicts that can put democracy and peace at risk. At the same time, they continue to be a business, a peculiar type of company that not only produces economic capital for its owners, but also symbolic capital useful to the interests of the dominant groups.

One of the problems surrounding the role of the media in the region is related to the bourgeois liberal tradition —a legacy historically linked to the very formation of the national States in this hemisphere—, which has not been able to be overcome even in countries where the so-called progressive governments have accumulated several decades in power during this century. Thus, in the name of freedom of expression and press, the media have been complicit in unjust sentences against leaders with popular roots, and have systematically omitted, made invisible and disqualified alternative discourses to a reality that's exclusive for millions of inhabitants.

Meanwhile, they have participated in the formation of apologetic attitudes towards politicians and agendas whose impacts have been harmful to large part of the citizenry. Up to the point, important media empires have contributed to certain characters with fallacious, implausible and almost irrational proposals reaching the highest levels of management in their countries.

Today, fighting against this state of affairs is not an easy task.

Frequently, it's about information monopolies in which a few businessmen own many media means. Or what's the same: a media concentration associated with economic and political power, a media concentration that exists for the profit of its owners and to ensure the hegemony of the dominant classes.

This is what the aforementioned Colombian professor, a specialist in journalism and political communication, has written: "in general, the tendency is for the media to inform and think and do right-wing politics, and there's no desire to offend either the ruling power or the power of the advertiser."

But if freedom of the press in such media in Latin America has such narrow asymptotes and is in fact subordinated to exclusive powers, what good is it to us?

Translated by Amilkal Labañino / CubaSí Translation Staff
