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FRENCH COMMUNITY TV IN TROUBLE AND NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT.

Reports from France indicate that the community TV over there is in big trouble. Non profit TV's as Zalea TV were suddenly prohibited from broadcasting their programmes during political elections.

According to Rym Morgan, this is unacceptable and community TV organisations and Non profit producers decided to face this dramatic interpretation of the law by broadcasting without

authorization for defending liberty of expression.

The first chosen date is 6th of April 2002, the official day of presidential political election campaign in France. Several similar structures all over the world have joined and expressed their solidarity with the Free TV's movement in France. Below is the communiqué signed by members organizations belonging to the "Audiovisual Third Sector" (non profit, community -based).

Just eighteen months after free television was finally legalized in France, and the Audiovisual Third Sector finally acknowledged, the sector as a whole (producers, directors, broadcasters) judges the present situation inadmissible

1. The French Audiovisual Board (CSA) has arbitrarily forbidden the attribution of frequencies to free television during the first semester 2002. The CSA argues its incapacity to verify (free tv's) respect of the electoral code during the coming campaigns. It would mean too much work! This censorship is in total opposition with the terms of the new Freedom of Audiovisual Communications Act. Are we to understand that the CSA is incapable of meeting its requirements?

Excerpt of the letter of refusal addressed by the CSA to various community TVs: ³In view of the coming electoral campaigns, the CSA, as noted during its 15th November 2001 plenary session, has decided to avoid delivering licenses to broadcast during 2002's first semester to temporary generalist tv projects, namely airing of magazines and news spots. The Council, who bases its decision on the difficulty (it would have) in controlling program content, thus aims to avoid potential conflict in view of obligations pertaining to article L.52 of the electoral code. The Council further esteemed that delivering temporary licenses must be appreciated in view of the theme, the nature, and the length of programs.

2. The cable and satellite operators seem to have fallen in line, perhaps unwilling to displease the CSA. Here again, the total black out on alternative and community non-profit programs persists.
3. Regarding the second semester 2002, the CSA has already announced that no Hertzian broadcast licenses will be delivered, this time because of the (largely overdue and still no date announced) launching of Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) and its hypothetical chances of success. Excerpt of the letter addressed by the CSA, October 2nd 2001, to one community TV: ³We must ensure the balance in equality of treatment between the various potential candidates (to DTT), which may lead (the CSA) to deliver no temporary licenses during the period in which we will study the files².
4. The report on the conditions of the development of community television that the Government should have presented to Parliament before August 1st 2001 (in the terms of the above-mentioned law) is still unfinished and will not be available for discussion during the current Parliamentary session, that ends February 22nd 2002. Amongst other things, this report was to present proposals to the government for the creation of a system to assist funding of free television and community production, and to assume the costs of transport (by means of ³free must carry²).

Results:

- Free television is banished from the air, censored, muzzled while the³ democratic² debate on the country's future is staged by the TV channels belonging to the big industrial groups and the State.
- Free television cannot say when its channels will next be licensed to broadcast. They only know it will be in a long time during which the immense wealth of community production will not be seen.
- Free television has no guarantee that the authorities really have the will to establish their economic viability, just when they are about to file candidacy for DTT, on the local, regional and national levels.
- Free television has no means of pressure on the cable and satellite operators who refuse to make the slightest effort to relay their programs.

In short, these recurrent interments of the issue seem to bring us back to stage 1, faced with hypocrisy, double language, discrimination, disregard for the freedom of speech, for plurality and the right to information. Such obstacles to the democratization of access to television are not only to be found in France. Free television is almost everywhere victim of the ultraliberal merchandisation of communications, information and culture. In the name of profit and market logic, a handful of industrial groups are gradually buying up the totality of audiovisual space and in doing so, eliminating all counter force, too often with the benediction of the public authorities. Free television is threatened in countries where it has long existed, and its development is questioned in countries where it is just emerging.

It is inconceivable that in France today free television and community programs dispose of no space on the air during the electoral campaigns. For this reason the Free Media Movement will climb onto the rooftops to pirate broadcast on Saturday April 6th 2002 (the official campaign starts April 5th). Free television, in France, in Europe and elsewhere in the world belonging to the Audiovisual Third Sector (TSA), guarantee their active support and participation and will be bases for the organization of the day of action, aiming to occupy audiovisual space and to inform the public.

PRIMITivi on the agenda of the 4th International Encounters of the TSA, in Marseilles, from March 22nd to 25th, hosts preparation of this day of action.

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