Peter Wilkin. *The Political Economy of Global Communication: An Introduction*. London: Pluto Press, 2001. vi + 163 pages. Paperback. ,14.99.

The author of this book has enriched international political economy by introducing a new aspect, namely, the impact of the steadily advancing global communications industry on economies and societies and, more specifically, on human security. The latter is a broad-based concept developed by the UNDP to reflect, through certain key indicators, human well-being. This consists of a very strong element of social justice in which human beings can satisfy their needs by organising the appropriate political, economic, and cultural institutions within a framework that provides the maximum level of participation and autonomy. For the latter to be achieved, it is essential that people have the means to decide what they wish to do in life and then can translate these wishes into actuality. As the author quotes Streeten, human security is "a broad approach to improving human well-being that would cover all aspects of human life, for all people, in both high-income and developing countries, both now and in the future" (p. 5).

The rapid changes in technology have brought about a revolution in what ordinary people see and digest from the contents of international news, soap operas, talk shows, and other related programming. This dissemination of information, which has a very strong cultural content, largely West-inspired, can have damaging consequences on the developing countries, and on those societies whose cultures are more conservative, and, ultimately, also on the condition of human security.

This may be disturbing in its own right as a form of "cultural imperialism", but what is worrying and a matter of great concern is the growing power of global communication networks, both political as well as economic. This growing power has positive and negative implications. Take, for example, Rupert Murdoch's substantial interests in the print and electronic media. His control over his media conglomerate is so comprehensive and total that whatever position he takes on any issue is reflected across his media and communication empire. More recently, he has been a strong and vocal supporter for a war with Iraq. What is interesting is that editors of his various newspapers and other publications have also supported him. To quote a few examples "Failure to disarm Saddam would make the world a much more dangerous place", in *The Australian*; "The tyranny of Saddam and the danger to innocent lives demand the world responds", *Sydney Daily Telegraph* (both quotes taken from the *Guardian Weekly*, February 27 - March 5, 2003, p. 22). What should be of great concern to the general public is the concentration of economic as well as political power in an individual to influence world public opinion. The myth of a free and objective communication media in electronic or print form, on which the West prides itself, is just that, a myth. This book, therefore, examines the interlinkages between the powers that control global communications and human security.

The book is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 discusses the issue of human security with respect to global communications and how it fits into the social, political, and economic life of a people. As is evident from studying history, both democratic and authoritarian governments have relied on the rapid improvements in communications technologies in the 20th century to control and disseminate information.

Chapter 2 reviews the existing global communications industry and, in a way, forms the central core of the book. In this chapter, Peter Wilkin presents an historical overview of the global communications industry with particular emphasis on the structure of this industry. In recent years, the number of corporations in the communications sector have merged with each other and have become powerful economically as well as politically. The element of competition has been reduced and the emergence of oligopolistic trends has been observed. The question then arises: How to regulate and control such communication giants so that the public interest is best served? This is an important issue which has been raised in this chapter.

The remaining chapters of the book further elaborate on the interrelationship between human security and the changes brought about by technology, politics, economic decision-making and related concerns. These chapters discuss the implications of the increased concentration of economic and political power of the global communications industry on human security with respect to human autonomy, i.e., the freedom to take decisions in the best interest of human beings. These chapters also discuss the role of information technology in altering global social and political relations as well as their impact on society.

The author presents some interesting nuggets of information with respect to asymmetric patterns of spending, which is reproduced in the table below. The source is the UNDP *Human Development Report*, 1998, as given by the author on page 68 of the book.

Comparative Annual Global Expenditure
(US$ billion)

Basic education for all	6
Cosmetics in the US	8
Water and sanitation for all	9
Ice cream in Europe	11
Reproductive health for all women	12
Perfumes in Europe and the US	12
Basic health and nutrition	13
Pet foods in the US and Europe	17
Business/entertainment in Japan	35
Cigarettes in Europe	50
Alcoholic drinks in Europe	105
Narcotic drugs in the world	400
Military spending in the world	780

        One conclusion that can be inferred from this table is the importance that people attach to education, which has been recognised as a basic right by the United Nations. The high levels of military spending, on the other hand, reflects the potential willingness of human beings working to develop ingenious methods of killing each other.

        This is a timely and topical book written with clarity and simplicity which throws light on a subject that has not received the attention it deserves. It is also insightful, extensively researched, and an extremely good read. It is strongly recommended for students of political economy and international relations as its approach to the subject matter is multi-disciplinary. It lays the foundations for future research in this very important area given the increasing complexities that confront both post-modern and modernising societies in the world. The book is also frightening in that it raises the spectre of governments with access to modern communication technology being able to spy on their citizens without their being aware of it. Basic information with respect to tax payments, health status, and credit status, for example, can be used in ways which may deny a citizen his basic rights. The researched material is well supported by an index and a bibliography/reference section that is fourteen pages long.

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