

Authors' Rights for all

OF COURSE journalists want **Creators' Rights**. And of course scientists and novelists and poets and screenwriters and directors – and performers – are in favour of Authors' Rights. Our living depends on having the right to say when and where our works are used, so we can negotiate fair payment for each use. So of course we have self-interest. But Authors' Rights work for everyone. Almost everyone, anyway.

WHAT IF Rupert Murdoch and Bill Gates owned the first draft of history outright – with the right to change it? Journalism, whatever its faults, really is history in first draft. Two key Authors' Rights are the right to be named as author, and the right to defend your work against distortion – the crucial "Moral Rights". But media moguls are actively undermining these rights. Wherever the law lets them, especially in the US & UK, they demand that reporters and photographers give up these rights. That gives them the right to alter the work.

SAYS WHO? Put news or recorded culture into a computer, and it can be almost instantly changed. Pictures and text can be manipulated.

Corporations want to re-work and re-package stuff, paying once and selling it over and over. But there's a deeper question. Who do you trust to guarantee that what you see is the real thing – a few corporations, or individual creators and researchers? Full Authors' Rights let creators defend their work against manipulation.

AUTHORS' RIGHTS are human rights. "Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author". That's what the UN Human Rights Declaration says. But the UK, like the USA, does not have full Author's Rights, which stay with individuals. It has copyright, and its law opens with the words "Copyright shall be a property right". And this is the heart of the conflict. Should news

articles, art and recorded culture be treated as mere commodities, like salt or sneakers?

BUT ISN'T COPYRIGHT about corporations over-charging me? Creators constantly battle to stop corporations grabbing our copyright, and to get a fair share of what you pay. Creators are members of the public too, and have a common interest in diversity and fairness.

IMAGINE NO RIP-OFFS. Imagine that John Lennon – or Yoko Ono – had the absolute right to say *no!* to the song *Imagine* being used in tacky advertising. Imagine it simply wasn't possible for a musician to sign over total artistic control to a bunch of bean-counters. It's easy if you try.

IMAGINE RESPONSIBLE JOURNALISM... Strong Authors' Rights mean that individual journalists take responsibility for what they report, and how. Weak Authors' Rights let them abdicate responsibility to the boss. Is it a coincidence that journos in the UK, where you have *no* rights in works made "in the course of employment", are... a little more cynical than elsewhere?

INFORMATION 'WANTS TO BE FREE' It wants to be free as in "free speech", not as in "free beer". If corporations own works outright, they want to lock them away in closed, private databases. If creators have rights, it's in our interest to make them

as openly accessible as possible. No need to subscribe to each corporation's site. You search the public Web. You find news, or music, or whatever. You pay 10¢ to keep a copy. The creator gets, say, 7¢. No bureaucracy is involved: the computers look after it, once you agree.

SO IT'S ABOUT MONEY after all? Well... if you want *independent* reporting and music and so on, creators and researchers have to eat. And we can't do quality work as a hobby.

WHAT NOW? The websites below will give you more information on campaigns to change the law so the English-speaking world can catch up with proper Authors' Rights, for employees too. Right now, freelances do have some rights. Don't sign them away. Don't make them do it.

