

## Whose Voices?

by Mary Beaudoin

Josh Silver, president of the media advocacy organization, Free Press, issued this statement:

Yesterday [January 17, 2011], the Federal Communications Commission blessed the merger of Comcast, the nation's largest cable and residential provider, with NBC-Universal. The Justice Department immediately followed suit, removing the last obstacle to the unprecedented consolidation of media and Internet power in the hands of one company.

You should be afraid...

The new Comcast will control an obscene number of media outlets, including the NBC broadcast network, numerous cable channels, two dozen NBC and Telemundo stations, movie studios, online video portals, and the physical network that distributes that media content to millions of Americans through Internet and cable connections...Culmination of the deal, combined with the FCC's recent, loophole-ridden 'Net Neutrality' rules, sets the table for Comcast to turn the Internet into cable television...The merger further squeezes what's left of independent, diverse voices from the television dial, laying waste to President Barack Obama's promise to reign in runaway media consolidation.

A week later the St. Paul Pioneer Press reported Hubbard Broadcasting, which currently operates four radio and 12 TV stations in Minnesota, Wisconsin, New York and New Mexico, is poised to purchase 17 major radio stations in a number of cities? among them: Washington, D.C.; Chicago; St. Louis and Cincinnati. With headquarters in St. Paul, Hubbard is known for its largesse to groups that support right-wing political candidates.

Ironically, while the power structure in Washington makes dubious claims about supporting democratic reform in the Middle East, it creates repression at home by supporting media consolidation, as well as pursuing subpoenas on activists and charges against whistleblowers who have exposed the brutality of US foreign policy. These are the defensive tactics of a government that is afraid of its people knowing the truth and feeling empowered to do something about it. And, unfortunately many people are susceptible to believing the limited perspectives provided by the mass media. But repressive tactics have also served to expose hypocrisy further and energize grassroots movements more?people are exercising their power: supporting remaining independent media, speaking freely as is their right, demanding subpoenas on activists be dropped and that persecution of whistleblowers stop. As Bolivarian democracy sweeps South America and Egypt, Yemen and Tunisia demand freedom from autocratic rule, we ought to be able to have the freedom of speech, assembly and association here, as well. Join people on

the street for those who are under attack everywhere, at home and abroad. Marches and rallies: March 19 and April 9. See calendar.

Mary Beaudoin is the editor of the newsletter, worldwideWAMM. She wrote this report for the WAMM Media Committee.