
Editorial

The Super Highway

"Will the World speak English" asks *The Times* of 24 February. This is an article on the information society which is about to overtake us like it or not. For those of the Editor's generation, it is not so easy to adapt to telecommunications, computers, modems, software, bytes, etc, etc. However, if the language on the super highway is to be English, perhaps she still has a chance to come to grips with it! At present Internet is the nearest thing to a global information highway which exists and much of the material on that is in English (or as Matthew May says in his article "American to be completely accurate"). It appears that progress in translation may well be a hold-up before the truly global highway is completed.

The G7 Summit, to be held in Brussels at the time of writing this is scheduled to discuss the future of the information society. The ministers from the G7 countries aim to achieve broad agreement on the future development of information super highways. Jaques Santer is quoted as saying that "enriching and uniting humankind and not impoverishing or dividing it must be the aim of working towards the information society" – a grand vision one feels, but can it really be achieved?

Doubt has already been expressed about the regulation of the material on Internet. In a programme

on BBC recently a barrister posed the question of whether English law would be broken by accessing material in another country which would be considered obscene in the UK, but is legal in that country. There will, no doubt, be many such problems to be faced with unlimited access to materials from all other cultures.

One can also envisage massive frauds taking place with very little control where large sums are transferred electronically across borders. It is obviously going to be of major concern to have proper regulation of world-wide communications and it is to be hoped that the current vogue for "deregulation" does not apply too freely in this field.

In the EC Commission "Work Programme" published recently, regulation of telecommunications is to be a key priority. Proposals will be issued for common rules for postal services, liberalisation of voice telephone, ensuring access to and connections between networks and harmonising licensing procedures. Proposals already pending including recognition of satellite television licences, development of mobile phone networks and data protection. It is the last of these which will no doubt be one of the most important.

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