

The Race Against Lord Mandelson

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While you might not think so, the starter's pistol has metaphorically gone off.

You cannot take precipitous action in a crisis situation. While the Library Society of the World group should be lauded for coming to the aid of Walt Crawford in keeping *Cites & Insights* funded, that's not a stable way to operate. Preparedness is an essential thing when crises arise.

On April 8th the Royal Assent was given to the maligned Digital Economy Bill in the United Kingdom. Parliament was dissolved by royal proclamation on April 12th. Under the terms of the now Digital Economy Act of 2010, government ministers do not immediately begin to exercise the authority to block parts of the web deemed not merely to be infringing someone's intellectual property rights but to be likely to potentially infringe.

The blocking powers are interesting. They cannot come into force presently as Parliament is dissolved. The General Election in the United Kingdom is set for May 6th. At the end of May we will see the State Opening of Parliament. Depending upon which party has a majority, control of the two relevant government ministries that administer the Act may shift. Regulations would have to be laid before Parliament for sixty days before they can potentially come into force. If the statutory instrument for such is tabled early on in the new Parliament, we could see the UK Government exercising power to block out parts of the web as soon as late July or the middle of August. With the quite broad scope to the blocking powers and the possibility of bureaucratic capriciousness, parts of the Internet could disappear for Britons fairly soon with little rhyme or reason let alone any connection with actual infringement of intellectual property.

The *LISNews Bulletin* was released as a test run at Computers in Libraries 2010. It is an appetizer-sized example of what could come. With the situation getting exceedingly interesting in the United Kingdom and with LISNews having readers all over this planet of ours, we might have to move quickly to prep contingency plans in case the arbitrary and capricious web blocking powers enter into force in the United Kingdom. This is a strange case where having a printing and distribution partner in Europe would allow for an end-run around the lousy effects of bad legislation.

Thankfully time is on our side. If these powers entered into force immediately, there would have to be a scramble to get a contingency plan in place. Thanks to the procedural niceties of the British system, we have a couple months to come up with a plan.

Will the *Bulletin* be reborn under a new name for distribution in Europe? I really do not know at this point. Considering all the uncertainty happening in the UK with respect to web blocking and the present odious views of Gordon Brown's ministers, a big goal before the UK election is to try to publicize the nightmares created by the Digital Economy Act. Unfortunately the bill did have some bits to it that served the public good but did not lessen the overall damage to freedom caused.

Starting around May 8th inquiries will have to be made as to printing partners on the European continent and cost estimates will have to be started. Nothing can happen without a minimum number

of subscribers but until we have some other specifics nailed down we will not know what that might be. These sorts of inquiries take time. This would only deal with textual content since we want to fight on only one front at a time.

Money would have to be raised for this. Just as a local newspaper is not considered tax exempt, this endeavor would not be tax exempt either. Cool, hip open source tools were used in the production of the *Bulletin* and would likely be used for any successor publication. There would be few corners to cut costs with. Publication size would vary directly with the amount of funds available for production.

This mostly describes what is happening on the Erie Looking Productions end of things. What can you the reader do? At this point, please support the Electronic Frontier Foundation and the Open Rights Group. They are the ones fighting the fight right now while we plot and plan. If you can help them get this madness halted, hopefully the need for all this planning will be obviated.

I'm not holding my breath, though...