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Anti-Copyright

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Dublin last weekend saw about 400 people take part in a demonstration against the intention of Seán Sherlock, the Labour Party Minister for Research and Innovation to bring into law a requirement for Irish internet service providers to block access to sites that allow the downloading of copy righted material. This is a similar law to the SOPA and ACTA laws that Hollywood & music industry lobbyists tried unsuccessfully to force through the US Congress. A second demonstration is to take place this Saturday.

The film & recording industry have been trying to force though an Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) for some time, measures that are intended to introduce draconian punishments for those with no direct involvement in making copyrighted material available. That is rather than going after sites like Pirate Bay or even individuals downloading such material the lobbyists are targeting internet service provides and web sites who site in between Pirate Bay and

an individual downloader. A bit like prosecuting a toll booth operator because a car used to rob a post office in Cavan passed through the toll booth on the way from Dublin.

The impact on internet privacy is liable to be huge but this is a much bigger story than that. The old capitalist model of copyright and goods distribution is fundamentally broken for anything, like music, or film. or software, which can be digitized. SOPA & ACTA are attempts to shore up that model, attempts that will almost certainly fail even if passed into law but which will do enormous damage to both privacy (because to catch you they have to monitor you) and innovation. Which is why many new media corporations like Google & Facebook are lobbying against these bills — they don't oppose making billions from people's ideas (what is Facebook but a collection your and your friends ideas) — they just want to change the legal framework that capitalism controls this under so its them rather than Hollywood that makes the billions.

What is more interesting than the inter-corporate battle about how copyright will be managed in future under capitalism is the idea that in the de facto rejection of copyright ownership by billions of people involved in downloading and in the work that goes into the Free/Open Source software movement we are getting a glimpse of a post-capitalist society coming into being. Paul Bowman explores that idea in some detail in the article 'SOPA & ACTA in the fight against actually existing communism' . In 2005, Bill Gates called the free culture/open source movement *"new modern-day sort of communists who want to get rid of the incentive for musicians and movie-makers and software makers under various guises."*

Both suggest there is much more at stake here then whether or not you'll be able to download the next season of Game of Thrones, important as that may be. Despite the wet weather last weeks demonstration was lively but it was only one of dozens held across Europe.