

NEW DIRECTIONS: AN INTERNATIONAL VIEWPOINT^{*)}

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An international viewpoint reflecting the non-aligned grounds in Europe and in much of the so-called Third World is bound to cast critical light on fashionable visions of reasoning about future communications. Two overall stereotypes need to be thoroughly questioned, problematized:

First, Communications Age. This notion typically suggests that advanced industrialism essentially leads to an information society whereby dominant social and economic activities take the form of information rather than material. Such a perspective is supported by well-known facts about transformations in the structure of labor force and in the methods of storing and transmitting information in the service of production and management. Inspiration to the same perspective also emanates from the pressure of developing countries in political forums such as Unesco demanding all forms of communication to better serve their interests. Even Marxist-Leninist positions give support to a vision of Communications Age in that the struggle between ideologies is seen to occupy an ever more central place under conditions of advanced capitalism and socialism.

Yet the vision is ill-founded and misleading, just like Daniel Bell's theory of "post-industrial society" (with variants such as Zbigniew Brzezinski's "technocratic age") is ill-founded and misleading. The problem with these "theories" is that social development is seen in technocratic terms by looking at methods employed in production and management, at the outer lifestyles of people and at the formal aspects of running society. Absent from such a perspective is a truly historical dimension along which the emergence of man and the development of civilization may only be adequately described and understood. And what is even more significant, absent is an analysis based on social classes; indeed

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the class aspect is displayed as an obsolete notion done away from history by the "post" stage of industrialism. Critical approach to such "theories" proves that they constitute more of ideological manipulation than of social science. In the case of Communications Age, the fallacy is exposed already when one sees that (a) not only materia but also information has had its crucial role throughout the history of man and his productive activities, that (b) information and communication are no isolated social phenomena but integral parts of other, usually more fundamental phenomena, and that (c) all communication phenomena, like the rest of social life, carry conflicting social interests whereby no piece of social information can ever be completely neutral, "independent" or "free" from fundamental social forces operating within and between societies.

This ABC is naturally understood by those coming from developing countries where a struggle for survival is an everyday reality, and it is only logical that the movement of non-aligned countries has declared a new international information order to parallel the program for New International Economic Order. The lesson seems to be much harder for the western thinking, although there are signs that enthusiasm by manipulation becomes increasingly replaced by critical reasoning (recent examples of such reasonable western voices are to be found in the Winter 1981 issue of The Journal of Communication, see "The survival of human values" by Douglas Cater, and in the January 1981 issue of Inter-Media, see "Informatics is a political issue" by François Régis Hutin). A sensible call from France (Hutin), after making the point that informatics is typically "becoming the holy grail of the West" understood as "the panacea for unemployment and trade deficits, for melancholy and boredom" has this advice to offer: "Stop. The bandwagon is rolling too fast. The enthusiasm is too forced, too much."

Second. Global Village. This stereotype, well-known as a McLuhanian vision and more recently elaborated by such authors as Itihel de Sola Pool, suggests that technological development and economic integration will demolish the nation-state as a frame of social order to be replaced by a more or less universal marketplace of production and consumption facilitated by rapid transfer of information and materia and not complicated by such "anachronisms" as national frontiers. Combined with the vision of Communications Age, this is a paradise for "free flow of information" in a planetary scale.

Again, such a vision is supported by certain aspects of contemporary development: increased trade and other economic exchanges between various parts of the world, more direct contacts through mass tourism between distant societies and virtually instantaneous communication links across the globe. But like in the preceding case, the vision itself offers a false theory of reality. It is far from an inevitable trend that national frontiers are withering away and that societies are pushed by technology into a relatively homogenous "United States of the World". There is a lot of fresh evidence to the contrary, beginning with the revival of Islam as a force against mechanical annexation of societies such as Iran into the western way of life, and ending up with separatist movements such as the Basqs and the Kurds showing how even well-established political and military order is shaken by new frontiers being erected inside a nation-state. Furthermore, here like in the preceding case, it can be shown that the stereotype serves as a functional device in ideological manipulation in introducing a world with no conflicts of interest - not to speak of a historical struggle between antagonistic classes and respective social systems, capitalism and socialism.

However attractive it may be for a western eye to perceive the world of the twenty-first century in terms of a universal technoculture, it is wishful thinking rather than a serious prognosis. Despite all communication the world continues to be divided, not only between nation-states but in many cases within societies as well.

Consequently, adequate preparation for the future cannot be based on more or less fictional visions of western life projected into the Global Village, understood as a homogenous marketplace for free enterprise - a 18th century dream of Adam Smith to come true in an illusion of the 21st century. Instead, a farsighted student of future begins his lesson with the historically determined formation of each society and its socio-cultural peculiarities and then proceeds to be prepared for international cooperation in a democratic community of sovereign societies. This does not mean that economic and cultural activities across nations would be reduced, but it does mean that there will be more international equality and more mutual benefit, instead of dependency and domination in the future family of nations. Let us recall how the majority of today's nations set the objectives in the final declaration of the 1979 summit of the non-aligned countries:

"The Sixth Conference of Heads of State or Government appeals to all peoples of the world to participate in efforts to free the world from war, the policy of force, blocks and block politics, military bases, pacts and interlocking alliances, the policy of domination and hegemony, inequalities and oppression, injustice and poverty and to create a new order based on peaceful coexistence, mutual cooperation and friendship an order in which each people may determine its own future, attain its political sovereignty and promote its own free economic and social development, without interference, pressure or threats of any kind." (Paragraph 9 of the Political part)

This means no more and no less than materializing the ideals codified in the Charter of the United Nations and in other principles laid down for healthy international relations. In other words, there are good grounds to believe that international law and order, as formulated in the 20th century, will finally be put into practice in the 21st century. While this is no revolutionary vision of the future, it does imply painful surgery in a number of sensitive western hemispheres. As far as the field of communication is concerned, the course is indicated by how the movement of non-aligned countries sets the objectives for a new international information order which is seen to be based on

- "(a) the fundamental principles of international law, notably self-determination of peoples, sovereign equality of states and non-interference in affairs of other states,
- (b) the right of every nation to develop its own independent information system and to protect its national sovereignty and cultural identity, in particular by regulating the activities of the transnational corporations,
- (c) the right of people and individuals to acquire an objective picture of reality by means of accurate and comprehensive information as well as to express themselves freely through various media of culture and communication,
- (d) the right of every nation to use its means of information to make known worldwide its interests, its aspirations and its political, moral and cultural values,
- (e) the right of every nation to participate, on the governmental and non-governmental level, in the international exchange of information under favourable conditions

in a sense of equality, justice and mutual advantage,
(f) the responsibility of various actors in the process of information for its truthfulness and objectivity as well as for the particular social objectives to which the information activities are dedicated."

(From resolution adopted by Fourth Meeting of the Inter-governmental Coordinating Council for Information of the Non-aligned Countries in Baghdad, June 1980)

All this is based on principles endorsed by the United Nations but it is still considered in the West to be by far too radical, as could be seen in the debate on the so-called Macbride Commission at the General Conference of Unesco in Belgrade last fall: the non-aligned proposal containing the above-quoted principles was forcefully resisted by the western bloc led by UK and USA, to the effect that the final compromise resolution was heavily watered down -- and flavoured with free flow paraphraseology. ^{However} it is to be noted that the consensus reached at Unesco does not compromise what obviously is most essential in the objectives of the new order: that it should be based on the fundamental principles of international law.

It is naive to believe that tomorrow will bring us a Communications Age in the Global Village, and it is equally naive to believe that a versatile and egalitarian community of nations with democratic rules of international behavior will emerge without bitter struggle. Tomorrow will bring us at least equally complicated and difficult times as the contemporary period of late 20th century has proved to be.

To be precise, times are getting worse -- unless a key problem facing humankind will be solved: the preparation for a nuclear holocaust and in general the use of military force in solving international conflicts. Arms race, especially of strategic nuclear weapons, constitutes a global problem of such dimensions that it supersedes all other questions of life and death facing humankind today. Take the hunger and diseases among two thirds of the world's population: is it not a paradox in a world where all development and emergency aid represents only some five percent of the combined expenditure for armament? To put it straight, we are -- or rather the militaristic forces dominating policies in our countries are -- 95 percent more interested in destroying life on this planet than safeguarding the preconditions of human survival. Indeed, the so-

called North-South problem proves to be much of the East-West problem, and there is growing understanding of the fact that no real progress in solving the global problems can be achieved unless determined end is put to the arms race and disarmament be gradually achieved (an outstanding indication of such a recognition in contemporary western thinking is the report of the so-called Brandt Commission, "North-South, A Programme for Survival", 1980).

One might ask what such an alarming global perspective has to do with communications in the 21st century. A general answer to this question is provided above: communications cannot be separated from the rest of socio-economic-political issues, and the more crucial these issues are, the more relevant they are to the field of communication as well. But there are further reasons which make problems of arms race and disarmament of particular relevance to the considerations of the present symposium. First, in the West the mechanism of arms race includes the mobilization of the public opinion in support of increased "defence spending", and the mass media are crucial instruments in this process of manipulation (developments in the USA provide a ~~concrete example~~ ^{concrete example} of this with "free" media becoming increasingly controlled by a militaristic orientation of the government). Second, industries producing and maintaining communications infrastructures of the electronic age have more and more merged with the so-called military-industrial complex. Thus not only ^{have} the contents of the mass media been conditioned by military interests but the technology and in many cases also the management of communications - mass media and telecommunications alike - depend increasingly on what is good for "defence", or to unmask this manipulative term, for destroying life, killing people.

Consequently, speaking about the neutron bomb or SALT treaty is not only relevant in the context of communications in the 21st century but it is analytically well-grounded. If such a viewpoint appears as remotely "political", it only proves how pervasive and dangerous is the western dominant thinking and how urgent is the task of adopting a more critical and realistic perspective.