THE PEOPLE'S COMMUNICATION CHARTER:
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The updating of seemingly progressive international communication principles for the new millenium seems like a positive move. A lot has happened politically and technologically since the heyday of the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) in the late 1970s and early 1980s. But implicit in the act of drafting the Charter is the recognition that the iniatives of the NWICO days - e.g. the Mass Media Declaration, the MacBride Report, and the International Organization of Journalists (IOJ) Mexico Declaration - achieved little or nothing.

My critique of the Charter is based on three main arguments.

First, it is long on communication, but short on politics. This is a criticism that I made before of the NWICO initiatives. While communication activists have been very aware of the problems caused by industrialization of the mass media and global inequalities in the in communication, they are not as sophisticated in their consideration of the political economy of reform. Understanding where the power is located is the first stage in any reform strategy. The Charter seeks change but is reluctant to identify specifically who will be responsible for making the change. Interestingly, mass civil disobedience by the "people" is not suggested. Instead, there are appeals to international law and UN documents, a clear indication that the Charter is as much an appeal to the states system as it is to populism. This discussion of power then inevitably takes us to discourses on authority, order versus chaos, and brands of justice.

Second: Where is the postmodernism in it? I ask. One would expect a progressive "People's Communication Charter" to at least give a nod to

postmodernist ideas, but the document is strikingly modernist, a feature that surely tarnishes its credibiblity with a non-white like me who has been oppressed by enough modernist projects already. We are told that the principle of freedom of information can be violated for only "good reasons." Whose "good reasons"? Similarly, to what brand of "training" is Article 11 referring? And just as terms such as "communication" and "media" are defined at the beginning of the Charter, there must be a careful definition of the species of "democracy" referred to throughout the document. I suspect the Charter is part of an enterprise to perpetuate social-democratic principles. If that is so, such a recognition gives the Charter a clear ideological identity and location, and makes more transparent the modernist character of its claims to universalism.

My third argument is on that very point of universalism. The Charter is not ideologically dissimilar to documents produced by the conservative World Press Freedom Committee (WPFC) and Inter-American Press Association (IAPA) because it attempts to construct credibility by claiming universality. In the wake of the failures of legalist attempts to control and order the international communication system, groups such as the WPFC, the IAPA, and now those behind the People's Communication Charter, have turned to what I call *extra-legal* strategies. (See my *News Revolution*, pp. 133-135.) But, to paraphrase one writer on international communication, claims of universalism usually include some project of domination. Similarly, how often do we see individuals or organizations in Africa or Asia setting forth documents that are meant for universal application. There is a certain arrogance of ideology that both the right and the left in Europe and North America seem to share. Why should the missionary position be assumed?

Response to the Draft People's Communication Charter

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Who can argue with the basic premise of the draft Charter: that the ability to communicate and receive information is, or should be, a fundamental human right? Throughout history, the need for people to express themselves and to obtain knowledge which would help them shape their own destiny was probably never less than it is now. Yet the Charter is timely because the development of electronic technology has now put universal access to the mass media and the world's extensive information resources tantalizingly within reach.

On the other hand, the Charter sets forth certain values that are at least debatable and sometimes inconsistent. Does the right of people to receive information free from censorship really take precedence over the needs of some countries to progress with their agendas for economic development free from the distractions of the commercial marketplace? Do we really want to advocate imposing liability on irresponsible information providers, or can we rely on the marketplace of ideas to be the best regulator? Why should some rights, such as the right of universal access to cyberspace, be absolute and universal and others, like the right of privacy, be relative?

Wider access to the communications media and to information resources would be a positive accomplishment in and of itself. Yet the Charter could focus more on the need to assure a meaningful ability to communicate and especially to the maintenance of high

quality information. Central to these objectives are the roles of libraries and librarians, schools and teachers, and the responsibility of all governments to support them financially.

It is unclear to me whether access to the media and to electronic information helps or hinders social organization and development; or whether it is even a major factor in those activities. In any event, one could argue that the achievement of universal education to a minimum level coupled with free and easy access to the repositories of information on science, history and the arts should be placed much higher on the public policy agenda than the attainment of computer literacy; and much higher still the guarantee of a minimum standard of living so that people are able to concentrate on learning and communicating instead of just surviving. Prior to these accomplishments, the People's right to communication lacks the prerequisites to be a fundamental human right.

In the end, and at the admitted risk of making its content somewhat controversial instead of fairly easy to accept, The People's Communication Charter could use prioritizing and also more concrete steps for implementing its objectives. The recent environmental conventions called upon governments to do certain things by certain times. The People's Communication Charter would be a more ambitious document if it included quantifiable goals and milestones for accomplishing them.

Response to the People's Communication Charter
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Response-ability: How one responds to the People's Communication Charter (PCC) depends upon how one construes what it is supposed "to do". It's objectives state that it "intends to contribute to a critical understanding of the significance of communication in the daily lives of all individuals and peoples" as well as attempt to "articulate a shared position on communication from the perspective of common interests, needs, and rights". However, the document as a whole actually strives to do more -- something more strategic and politically active -- and is being mobilized in this way (as evidenced by this conference, for example).

I am not sure that the PCC can take on this expanded objective. It claims too much, tends toward definitional and strategic conflation, and relies too heavily on the very ideological foundations, institutions, and strategies that have put us in this communications mess in the first place (i.e. international law, self-regulation, 1st world decision making dominance, universalist thinking, etc.). This is not to say that the PCC doesn't serve a real political purpose as one kind of gambit in the multiple and ongoing struggle to make both simple and advanced communications more accessible and responsive to "individuals and peoples". However, it seems to me that the PCC, as a means of more positively shaping the global "cultural environment" (a term which needs much more explication) by drawing attention to communications as a basic element, is a project that needs to be more clearly delimited, expressed, and targeted.

Audience Drives Assumptions: What is politically strategic depends upon environmental, institutional, socio-cultural, and (inter)personal power relations, as well as what elements one is attempting to influence in any particular historical configuration of these. To the language and normative assumptions of the PCC -- rights language and assumptions based upon liberal humanist philosophical tenets -- are clearly intended for audiences which either uphold these, or do not but are willing to entertain them for politically strategic reasons. Yet, as a document that on some level attempts to act as a catalyst for popular organizing, even the most basic assumptions of the PCC are problematic. I dare say the Charter would look quite a bit different if it reflected the input of many of those for whom it claims to speak. To the PCC claims a broad audience but one need only consider the sites to which the piece is addressed --"the media", "people", "media users", "communications professionals",and only very generally "people" (not so much "peoples"), etc. -- to see that the intended audience is significantly less broad than the Charter purports.

To the PCC drafters have chosen to use rights language. This exposes their (our?) bias toward the PCC as a strategy that will affect (inter)national governments and liberal institutions (i.e. the institutions invoked throughout the Charter and in the appendix). Indeed, the PCC could impact high level organizations which – for a number of strategic reasons – themselves might be interested in the PCC's intent or its "rhetoric". However, how this project translates to and from less formally franchised individuals and peoples is much less clear and, perhaps, much more salient.

Let the PCC clearly state to whom it speaks, for whom it would like to speak, and why it speaks the way it

does. Otherwise, even this "democratic" policy process does not approach the transparency called for in Article 13.

Changing the Subject – It seems to me that a major strategy required for the kind of social change implicitly envisioned here is an attempt to shift not only the conceptual (and thus material) parameters of these rights as the PCC attempts, but also to shift the means by which these rights or other "right systems" are constantly and consistently abridged. In particular, the structuring effects of dominant Western, liberal legal and economic paradigms must be radically revisited and revamped. Human rights and global markets only exist as a function of the legal sanctions which allow and enforce them. In the process of attempting social change, documents like the PCC have an obligation to draw attention to the limits of the assumptions and language that it uses strategically -- even as it is being used -- in order to begin to create space in which to change the linguistic and conceptual underpinnings and the subject positions which these allow.

Thus, on some level the PCC should more explicitly broach the point that (inter)national law and its applications are inadequate structures and processes in their current forms. This admission would make the document "strange" to those readers for whom it "naturally" makes "sense" (i.e. those who uncritically assume the legitimacy of law, rights, universality, etc.). This should also be the case for notions of "economy" and "markets". What kinds of economies and markets does the PCC invoke and upon what theoretical models are they premised? Inasmuch as the PCC is concerned with the globalization of communications (a discourse which by dint of use tends to equate globalization with transnational economic and administrative privatization of communications -- even when this is not the case in some countries); it would seem important to highlight the inadequacy and inherent inequity of the current economic models in use.

Women – A final note and one which is ironically tacked on to the bottom of my piece: the Charter speaks of individuals and peoples, and even cites indigenous peoples and children as groups which require certain "protections" through the advancement of human rights (this discourse, and the way that these groups seem "equated" in the discourse, is one I take issue with but do not want to pursue further here). I would like to draw attention to the importance of considering whether "women" should be specifically considered in a document such as this especially since women around the globe are highly under represented in media and government institutions, formal economies, and in many of the more enfranchised NGOs.

Sgramppling -- While I am critical of the PCC, I also believe that it does serve a very real strategic political purpose and can, at least, open the terrain of the debate(s). Attempting to counter the hegemony of economic, political, and cultural capital that exists in (inter)national technical, political, cultural, and economic networks such as found in communications systems is no small task. To the terrain is vast. There are many different approaches to social change and activism and I am of the opinion that most of them are needed. Attempting social change from non-dominant positions (these are relative to the context(s) and actors at hand) requires "sgramppling" -- scrambling and grappling at the same time. To the PCC is a good point of departure: Now, let's sgrampple some more.

Democracy, Children and Culture -- Comment on the People's Communication Charter Draft.

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The problem is not getting the media under democratic control, but regulating the media so that they serve democracy. To see how the regulation should be designed, we should understand what a democratic society requires of its media. I shall concentrate on the broadcast media here; the conclusions I shall draw do not necessarily apply to print.

The broadcast media serve three purposes (broadly understood). They facilitate a flow of information on public affairs and serve as fora for public political debate; provide educational programming for minors and continuing education for adults; and provide arts and entertainment programming. Of course, in practice these purposes are normally blurred, but they are analytically distinct. I would argue that the first two are properly matters for regulation, but the third is usually not. (So Articles 3 and 4, and 14 of the Charter seem right to me, but Articles 8, 9 and 10 all need considerable qualification).

i) Democracy

What should we mean by democracy? The best understanding of the democratic ideal is that individuals should have available to them roughly equal influence over their collective circumstances (within the constraints set by a standard set of liberal individual rights -- freedom of expression, freedom of association and movement, the right to a fair trial, etc). This conception of democracy is compatible with the establishment of representative institutions, but only where individual voters have available to them sufficient information and public deliberation to make informed and rational decisions about who do vote for, and mechanisms (like strong political parties and regular elections) which assure them that their representatives will act much as they have promised. How do the broadcast media figure into this conception?

First, good regulation of the media cannot be a substitute for getting other features of a democracy right -- if the mechanisms of representation (the voting system and the design of the legislative process) are flawed that must be addressed directly; and massive background inequalities of wealth, which increase the political power of the wealthy cannot be corrected by regulating the media. However, even if the representative and background institutions were perfectly democratic, poor regulation of the media would still inhibit democratic process.

Broadcast media play a crucial role in facilitating informed and rational decisionmaking by voters. During election campaigns voters have an interest in learning what political parties aim to do, and in hearing the best arguments for and against particular policy packages. This interest is NOT well served by allowing parties (or candidates) to purchase broadcast time, or by allowing them to set the terms of any formal debates. Nor is it well served by having broadcast journalists be the main interrogators in political debates -- especially in the US where competition among many news services gives individual journalists a strong incentive to treat politicians with unseemly deference. Much better would be a policy of allocating equal broadcast time to political parties, requiring broadcasters to honor this, and making the allocation conditional on candidate participation in set prime-time debates with prearranged formats.

Outside election campaigns the regulation is much harder: the aim is to ensure that both news and comment coverage of politics broadly construed is aggressive yet balanced. A genuinely representative range of voices should be heard, but all should be challenged by independent investigation and hard questioning.

Article 10 says that 'people have the right to participate in public decisionmaking on the provision of information, on the development and utilization of knowledge, on the preservation protection and

development of culture.....etc.' This worries me for two reasons. First, the perhaps implicit qualification that this right is not one which people have a great deal of discretion in exercising should be made explicit. For example, they do NOT have a right to decide (even democratically) that fascists and communists should not be able to participate in televised election debates, or should not get space for party political broadcasts. Second, I am very uneasy about the idea that 'the protection and development of culture' is something that lies within the remit of even a democratic state, for reasons I shall elaborate later.

ii) Children

Article 14 asserts the right of children to 'media products whcih meet their needs and interests'. This seems right, though it is worth elaborating what those needs and interests are. Children should not be seen as already having a culture. They are developing into autonomous self-governing persons, and the relevant developmental interests should be facilitated by their education. What they see on TV inevitably constitutes part of that education, and through TV (and to a lesser extent radio) they can be exposed to a wide variety of ways of life, ways of thinking about how to live, and cultural and critical experiences. There's no reason why most of their television watching should be deliberately pedagogical, but there is good reason to be suspicious of commercial motives in children's programming. Government regulation should reflect this: less concentration on 'educational broadcasting' and more on ridding children's TV of the profit motive: eg, by forbidding commercials during children's primetime and requiring that a certain proportion of broadcaster's budgets nevertheless be spent on programming for children. Article 14 also conflicts with an unqualified reading of Article 9, as I shall explain.

iii) Culture.

Government regulation of, and financial support for, the arts and entertainment function tends to be conservative, authoritarian, and inegalitarian. It's conservative because governments in normal times tend to want to reinforce the values which support the status quo; it's authoritarian because those who do not share the values are expected to pay for their promotion (either through taxation or by the costs imposed on them by regulation); and it is inegalitarian because it forces people who do not care about art/broadcast entertainment to pay for it, thus redistributing resources from them to those who do care about it. In deeply unequal economies there may be a case for some such regulation/funding, aimed at redistributing from the rich to the poor (though it is worth mentioning that transfers in most industrial countries which do this are from poor to rich/middle class, and also that it could hardly be a priority in countries like the US where inequalities of access to healthcare and education are serious). But in a society which had made good progress toward distributive justice it would be inexcusable.

Why, then, am I uneasy about Articles 8 and 9? Let's start with Article 8. It simply seems wrong to say that people have 'a right to a diversity of languages'. People DO have a right to speak whatever language they want to. But this does not imply they have either the right that some people speak other languages (which would be implied by saying they have a right to a diversity of languages) or the right that other people should financially assist the survival of their preferred language. A concrete case might help. The British government funds a Welsh language television station, S4C. This not only deprives most residents of Wales of access to the high quality programming of Channel 4 (the sister channel in England and Scotland) but requires that all TV owners help pay for the survival of the Welsh language. Why should the survival of the Welsh language be a concern of justice? All Welsh speakers in Wales also speak English. If they wanted to spend their resources on the survival of their language they would voluntarily fund a Welsh language channel. That they do not do so indicates that they have other priorities for their resources. Not only

English speakers, but also many Welsh speakers, have no interest in devoting resources to this channel. It may be that, because of mild past violations of the right to speak whatever language one wants, Welsh speakers have rectificatory claim against some English speakers for more resources. But it is quite implausible that they have that claim against other Welsh speakers.

What about Article 9? This asserts that 'people have the right to protect their cultural identity'. People DO have this right, but it is not an unqualified right. For example, while individual people have the right to identify with whatever culture they want, they do not have the right to impose that identity on their children. Nor do they have the right that sufficient number of other people share their culture for it to be viable. And while they have the right that no-one tries to prevent them from holding and expressing their cultural identity, they do not have the right that disproportionate social resources be devoted to sustaining that identity. SO I am uneasy with the claim that there is a 'right to express existing cultural variety through the media'. If this means only that there must be no restrictions discriminating against the expression of some cultures in the media, that's right. But if it means that cultures which cannot raise the resources for expression through the media through voluntary contributions, that just seems wrong.

'Ah, but', you might say, 'members of minority cultures are usually ALSO victims of distributive injustice -- so the reason they cannot raise the resources is that there is a background social injustice'.

That's true of some minority cultures, but not others. The Scottish aristocracy enjoys a minority culture which is made possible only because they are the beneficiaries of a distributive injustice. If we redistributed resources roughly equally, they would have NO RIGHT to more resources than other people on any grounds, including the grounds that otherwise they would not have sufficient resources to sustain their culture or express it in the media.

What about the more normal case -- say, Native American cultures? Certainly, most native Americans are victims of both distributive and historic injustices. Does this justify devoting disproportionate social resources to sustaining Native American cultures? I'm not sure. It seems to me that it justifies devoting immense resources to correcting the injustice, by providing the highest possible quality of healthcare; housing; pre-school and K-12 education; and, frankly, large cash handouts, to poor Native Americans. But such measures are not devoted to sustaining a culture, but to ensuring that each individual victim of injustice gets what they deserve. It would also likely be risky, over the long run, for the cultures, since well-educated children would be attracted by the rewards and lifestyles available in mainstream America, and would be well-equipped to attain those rewards.

There are two other considerations worth mentioning. The first is that offering support to a given culture which has been long derogated by mainstream society but still survives, may strengthen and develop the self-respect of individual adherents to that culture in ways that enable them to take much better advantage of other resources and opportunities available to them. Where this is true it suggests that rectificatory justice will be assisted by direct support to the culture. The other, contrary, consideration though is that direct support for a culture has to have in mind some picture of what the culture is. Too often this picture reflects either a static picture which benefits the status quo -- and, crucially, those who have greater power within the culture concerned -- or a forward-looking picture shared by a cultural elite. Either policy is elitist. Redistributing money to individual people, so that they can decide their own cultural priorities, including whether food and education matter more than art and sport, and whether they would rather see Diego Maradona on TV than Diego Rivera, is the ONLY non-elitist approach to cultural support.

"THINK-PIECE": DEMOCRATIZING GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS

Rosemary J. Coombe

My own work addresses intellectual property as a form of cultural power and a site for cultural politics in Western democracies and global digital environments. Intellectual property protections have beome potent weapons of corporate censorship, while those cultural forms protected by intellectual property -- media-circulated commodified texts of all sorts (literature, prose, music, advertising, logos, brand-names, celebrity images, cartoon characters, design motifs, trade dress, formats, program structures) have become increasingly significant cultural forms. Indeed, to the extent that images of Mickey, Marlboro, and Madonna (to take representative examples) are indicia of American cultural hegemony, their legal status as private properties makes it difficult to subject them to transformative critique without fear of legal reprisal.

The globalization of law, communications, and markets intensifies these tendencies. The abilities of people to appropriate and transform such forms to make them speak to their own needs and to make them relevant to local realities is greatly limited by Western intellectual property laws, which are now imposed as conditions of trade agreements drawn up between parties of greatly unequal bargaining power. By including intellectual properties as trade-related goods in global governance regimes, political questions are transformed into economic ones, national interests are subordinated to so-called international norms, locally specific needs are delegitimated, public accountability is foregone, and questions of democracy in communications are foreclosed. U.S. interests ensure that other nations respect their intellectual properties, but do nothing to ensure that the democratic protections for freedom of expression and the public interest exemptions which balance and limit these rights domestically will be available to others.

I am however, as uncomfortable with a vision of democracy which assumes complete freedom of speech and full access to all cultural forms as the only response to corporate possession of culture, broadly defined. Absolute rights of private property and absolute rights of public speech entertain only extreme points of a Eurocentric spectrum of possibility that needs to be challenged by the cultural mores of others. Peoples have other relationships to cultural forms -- trust, secrecy, guardianship, initiation,

sacralization -- which make models of access and ownership appear incredibly impoverished. To some extent this may be due to the hegemony of an Enlightenment understanding of civil society -- framed in terms of resistance to government control of speech and the censorship of textual expression -- which was concomitant with the expansion of a market in textual forms. In short, the notion of a public right of access to cultural works accompanies the existence of a market for them, but the public character of such goods has always been compromised by the limited forms of reception envisioned; consumption by the individual bourgeois citizen. Is a continuation of this individualistic model of civil society inherent in the Peoples Communication Charter and if so, should it be avoided?

Finally, I am concerned with what I take to be a commitment to the preservation of cultural identities to the extent that this is not balanced by a recognition that democracy in communications is desirable because it creates the cultural conditions in which new identities, identifications, and communities may be forged in globalizing conditions. In an era of pervasive intertextuality, the politics appropriate to democracy may demand a continual critical cognizance -- both of the radical contingency of social worlds and of the expressive activity involved in articulating its parameters. If we acknowledge politics to be cultural activity, then its practice will demand appropriate access to the materiality of both means and mediums of expressive communication. A radical democratic politics, then, may involve more than simply a libertarian celebration of regimes of freedom for appropriation. Postcolonial circumstances cut across the grain of postmodern practices and urge upon us a heightened sensitivity to the differential relations of others and their relationship to dominant practices of othering -- an ethics of contingency. Such a politics must enunciate an ambivalence with respect to proprietary claims and retain an ironic awareness of the historical contingencies of alignments between authorship and alterity. We need to avoid hypostatizing difference in our attention to alterity if we are to promote a politics sensitive to the ongoing production of meaning and emergent registers of cultural difference in global democracies.

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"Moving on up: Television and national reconciliation in Namibia"

The People's Communication Charter is an important symbolic document in its concern with the creation and protection of cultural environments (see e.g., preamble, Articles 1 and 9). Though the Charter emphasizes journalism and information, entertainment also contributes to the cultural environment in which peoples conceive of themselves as individuals, community, and nation. In the case of Namibia, African-American sit-coms form part of the cultural environment to the extent that they are used to direct some of the discussion about the meaning of national reconciliation and nation building in a post-apartheid era. At issue in this essay is not concern with some vague fear of cultural or media imperialism, which the Charter seems to imply, but with the very real ways that Namibian broadcast media might be opened to foster discussion about reconciliation across boundaries once established by apartheid.

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After 30 years of German colonization followed by decades of South African-imposed apartheid, Namibia gain independence in 1990 after a 24-year war of liberation. At independence, the Namibian government adopted a policy of "national reconciliation," which it enshrined in the preamble of its constitution. This policy was seen as f first step toward redressing large-scale economic, political, social, and cultural dispossession. At its broadest level, national reconciliation suggests that racial and ethnic groups, once divided by apartheid, put aside their differences to work toward national unity and economic development (see e.g., Forrest, 1994; Tapscott, 1993).

The policy of national reconciliation has stimulated debate about how to balance the interests of competing groups and to allocate resources equitably. The Namibian government has identified television broadcasting, though it remains largely an urban medium, as essential to the goals of national reconciliation and nation building (Gorelick, 1992; Lindeke, 1995). Namibia is a one channel TV nation; the sole broadcast authority, the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC), is a parastatal organization run autonomously (i.e., when the government is not violating the constitution by interfering in NBC's news operations) by an independent board of trustees. Namibians, however, with enough disposable income (meaning the white community, but with growing numbers of mixed race and some black Namibians who can afford the US$30-40 monthly fee) can subscribe to a cable service that offers South Africa's M-NET, SABC, and a choice of U.S.-based CNN or Discovery.[1]

What is different now about Namibian TV from the pre-independence period is that the target audience has been enlarged from the small, but privileged, white audience to all Namibians. NBC's policy charter states that the TV service's news and entertainment programming will operate "in the best interests of the country and its people, with particular emphasis on nation-building and development." Moreover, the charter maintains that programming should be "sensitive to the values of the people" and uphold the principles of human rights and national reconciliation set out in the Namibian Constitution (Gorelick, 1992: 83-84). In some sense, the charter's policy guidelines for NBC programming intersect with the state's own agenda for the development of

[1] Of course, these U.S. channels offer Namibians a choice between news where issues and events in Africa are portrayed as rooted in essentialized and primordial ethnic/racial conflict (Fair, 1993, 1996) or nature programs about a seemingly wild but people- and cultural-less Africa (Hicks and Wylie, 1993).

Namibia as an economic and political entity and the unification of various peoples, formerly divided along racial and ethnic lines into distinct geographic, political, economic, and social communities, as Namibians.

Part of this intersection can be seen in the government's slogan of "One Namibia, One Nation," aired ceaselessly in public service announcements on NBC. There also is the requisite development-related programming on agricultural, health, educational, and "cultural" (dances, food, clothing) topics. But, as some NBC officials have suggested (informally) to me, the broadcast authority has another programming strategy meant to advance nation building and national reconciliation, all the while being sensitive to the values of "Namibians": That strategy is the broadcasting of African-American sit-coms (usually Fox network products) to show "Namibians" (in this context, meaning black Namibians) black middle-class lifestyles and to demonstrate to "Namibians" (here, meaning primarily white Namibians and perhaps mixed race) the workings of racial integration. That these shows are American-made is no different from past patterns of importation of cultural products, where various African countries have imported 50-90 percent of TV programming. The difference this time in Namibia is that programs such as "Dallas," "Dynasty," and "Bay Watch," which are part of white America's definition and imagination of an "American" society where non-whites are either invisible or silent, have been replaced by shows such as "Martin," "Living Single," and "The Jeffersons" (representing black middle-class lifestyles) and "21 Jump Street" (showing racial integration through multicultural policing by the state).

In the context of national reconciliation and nation building, this programming strategy seems to represent an ongoing struggle against semiotic rule and prejudicial signification. The images and ideas contained in programs such as "Martin," "Living Single," "The Jeffersons," and "21 Jump Street" are not nomadic as is often the case in the flow of cultural products transnationally. Rather these shows were chosen,[2] with an expectation that the images and ideas conveyed could and would be suitable in the construction of a national culture, where the vestiges of apartheid are erased and racial differences eradicated.

The tricky part of using African-American sit-coms as models for national reconciliation and nation building in Namibia is that these programs were and are produced out of a particular historical, political, and cultural moment of de jure and de facto racial segregation in the U.S., a segregation that exists but is denied as existing. These shows are produced in a era in which blackness is almost always defined against whiteness rather than as an independent cultural experience. These issues may not be known or be important to Namibian TV viewers. But it might be argued that shows such as "Martin," "Living Single," and "The Jeffersons" - aired out of their historical, political, and cultural context - replace race with class position as the defining characteristic. Certainly, the characters are all still black, but what matters most is that they have moved or are moving on up to middle classdom. In this setting, racial difference as a central social organizing principle and as a condition of individuals wanes in political, economic, and cultural importance as higher class positions are attained (see also Tucker, 1997).

The crowning myth of assimilationist America that race does not matter or determine social position is transferred elsewhere. That race and class interact in pernicious ways to keep many non-whites marginalized, while still believing in their ability to win the middle class gauntlet, is what American TV entertainment is all about here and abroad. In Namibia, the lesson of "Martin," "Living Single," and "The

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[2] Albeit choice often is determined or influenced by the cost of programming packages. NBC, like most other public broadcasting authorities in Africa, is heavily constrained financially.

Jeffersons" is that individual hard work alone ensures a middle class lifestyle with all its consumer trappings. Forget about a history of colonization and apartheid, forget about national and international structural inequalities that have been built on racial classifications intended to limit political, economic, and cultural opportunity. If "Martin," "Living Single," and "The Jeffersons" are to serve as cultural maps in a post-apartheid Namibia, then the message seems to be that national reconciliation and nation building will come when black (and perhaps mixed race) Namibians take these projects on as their personal and individual responsibilities. White Namibians, who control the bulk of the economy, are off the hook: NBC airs no entertainment programs instructing whites (perhaps because there are certainly no U.S. imports to be had) on the consequences of discrimination and inequality for whites and non-whites.[3] (Plus many have opted out of Namibian TV as offering them little, preferring instead M-NET.) In the end, NBC's programming of African-American sit-coms manages culture in such as way as to sustain the hierarchy of race under the guise of encouraging a more just, equal, and democratic society in which all Namibians can achieve higher living standards.

While some officials at NBC maintain that the broadcasting of African-American sit-coms fulfills Namibia's need for national reconciliation and unity, these programs nevertheless supply a borrowed vision. National reconciliation as a policy and as a social goal is fraught with differing interpretations not only among whites, blacks, and mixed race but within those racial groups, as well as within governmental circles and among various political parties, businesses, and social activist organizations (church, women's labor, student, "traditional"). As a symbolic document, the People's Communication Charter only can address the need for peoples to create and protect their cultural environment. What a "cultural environment" is and which groups at what level get to "protect" are left ambiguous in the Charter (save for the document's paternalism). If Namibians so choose, what they may be faced with is the difficult task of democratizing NBC and its programming to allow various Namibian voices - rather than American - to be heard.

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Democratizing Global Communications
"Think Piece"
Jean Grow-vonDorn

In reading the charter I am struck by the optimism it exudes, in the face of massive economic, political and social barriers. I could not help but think that this optimism is either driven by a powerful consciousness and undeterred by the overbearing realities of global economics and politics, or over-confidence courting disappointment. Either way, as I finished reading the document I found myself asking "how."

How do we, charter members or various communities and organizations at large or scholars, encourage and support the principles of this document when, as the preamble states, "growing numbers of countries information and culture are not provided primarily as a public service but for private gain"? Sadly "private gain," economics, seems an extremely powerful factor or perhaps I am just a pessimist. Further, how can people "develop their own communication channels through which they can speak for themselves" or "have a voice in the making of polices that shape their cultural environment," when often basic necessities such as food and shelter are more pressing priorities?

Are we not in some sense as arrogant as the governments and corporations (the creators of "private gain"), who more often than not, ignore the very basic needs of the peoples who depend upon them, to varying degrees, for protection or employment? Are the needs for communication, as stated in this document, so pressing that resources which might otherwise be used to satisfy basic needs, to be diverted to the issue of communication? How do we address the issue of cost of implementation in relation to the cost exacted in terms of basic human needs? With these points in mind I now refer to a few specific articles in the charter.

If, as in article 7, one was given for a rebuttal the "same prominence as the original expression," how could most individuals or community groups supply the print or electronic product to fill the original space? Communication, in terms of media, is not just about the space in which to print something or the airwaves across which to transmit it. Communication is also about production. It seems inconceivable that the average citizen or

citizen's group could economically respond, in kind, even if Article 7 was abided by, by each and every media provider.

Article 8 implies, diversity of languages is essential to sustaining a thriving global cultural environment, which is a valid point. Yet, I can't help but wonder about the economic implications of this article, as well as the limitations which it implies. If it were possible to fund media for minority languages, do those people then speak only to each other with the potential loss of their voices, their ideas, within the larger global communities? Is turning inward, as the global expands outward, the answer? My question is in many ways the opposite of the question article 8 seems to be asking; i.e. do we really want to limit the sounds of the voices to be heard, to only the ears which can both hear and understand them? Both questions need to be looked at in the same moment. It is not necessarily a case of either or.

Article 10 gives me cause to wonder what media provider would willingly allow "public decision-making on the...structure of media industries"? It seems impossible to image this as a realistic possibility, in light of the recent sell off of U.S. commercial airwave space. Perhaps I am a pessimist, but I find it hard to ignore the economic realities of the global marketplace.

Is there not some other way of directing our energies so that we have a more realistic possibility of achieving our communication goals? It seems to me that strategies to consider might be those which employ the same tactics used by the economic giants, the entities who currently rule the global marketplace. I am not quite sure what those tactics might be, but as I read this document it occurs to me that a look at the situation, through the eyes of the "opposition," may be well worth while.

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Position paper for Democratizing Global Communications Conference

The People's Communication Charter is a highly worthwhile, broad based call to action that justly recognizes the central role that communication, particularly the mediated variety, plays in cultures all over the world. It stands on principles of democracy, resistance to social and political hierarchies that would subordinate certain groups of people to others, and diversity and openness in media processes. In its recognition that media control is increasingly concentrated in the hands of global commercial corporations, it champions noncommercial and public alternatives to achieve the goals of a truly democratic communications environment. Yet I believe that the nature of this commercial/public opposition needs to be more closely examined, in order to avoid falling into traps that await both on the left and on the right of this traditional and seemingly taken for granted assumption of opposition.

Thus I want to address the dangers of the mind-set that can be reductively expressed as "commercial = bad, public = good" which seems to underlie some of the Charter's precepts, as for example in paragraph one on page two, part of the Preamble. Here it is asserted that the "concentration of commercial operators on the world communication market erodes the public sphere, displaces public media, endangers the provision of a plurality of opinions and a diversity of cultural expressions, and generally fails to provide for a country's cultural and information needs." A clear duality between "commercial" and "public" is here stated, but without a close analysis of what these categories mean. Imagine a situation in which the "public" media of a country is tightly controlled by a repressive government or social class, where the introduction of a "commercial" service actually provides a much-needed alternative to the restrictive

"public" sphere. The comfortable duality of the Habermassian model begins to break down.

Add to this such critiques of Habermassian duality as the work of Nancy Fraser, among others, which states that the public sphere, as traditionally conceived, excludes certainly culturally defined groups from full participation even as it claims to be open, and it becomes clear that these handy categories often beg the real issues. Accepting this duality at face value can lead to two deleterious effects:

1) It can allow public sector media to escape the scrutiny that should be brought to bear on them, permitting social and cultural elites to dominate and marginalizing those whose cultural and economic capital will not allow them to participate on an equal level. "Non-commercial" does not mean democratic, nor does "public" or even "community," necessarily.
2) It leads to commercial media being dismissed out of hand as incapable of providing progressive and democratizing communication, despite ample evidence to the contrary. This cuts off a more informed and analytical critique of what commercial media might do to further the agenda of this charter, and discounts the experience of everyday people who do, in fact, use the commercial media to form and disseminate cultural knowledge and information often despised by cultural elites who control the more traditional forms of public media institutions.

I do not want to act as an apologist for corporate media, simply reversing the terms of the above equation. Instead, I suggest that both simplistic anti-commercialism and too-facile endorsement of public media be re-examined with this critique in mind.

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Response to The People's Communication Charter
Janine Jackson/FAIR
August 8, 1997

As an "on-the-ground" media critic and activist, I have a somewhat complicated relationship to charters, resolutions, declarations. The articulation of principle is valuable in itself. A document expressing certain core ideas is useful because it gives a resonance (or an "echo effect") to individual voices and efforts that can be seen to be all supporting or expressing the same basic value; and because it creates a sense of solidarity among those engaged in those various efforts.

Such a document must be rigorously simple, though, to allow for its adoption by people and organizations who disagree about many things. It has to express their areas of 'overlap'—areas which I believe are large among groups advocating media democracy. It must provide a kind of support or undergirding for their myriad individual "program" goals, but not distract from, or appear to run counter to these goals.

Such an expression of core principles and shared goals can, I believe, be concretely useful as an organizing tool—quite apart from its fate as legislation—and I would say it should be *shaped* so as to be useful in this way. It provides a catalyst for coalition building, and a rhetorical focus that can integrate various groups and campaigns. Maybe the Equal Rights Amendment isn't the best example, but that effort, though it failed in its stated intention, did help forge lasting inter-group connections, as well as train numerous feminist leaders, speakers, organizers.

J. Jackson / FAIR
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Having said that, the connection between such a document—however forceful and convincing—and the real world of media still seems an indirect one. The fact is, the U.S., for one, has many laws, regulations and even institutions that ought to have prevented the current state of affairs but have not. The gap between what the U.S. government and media owners have committed to "on paper," and the actual situation they create and maintain is demonstrable.

The practical response to this is to demand enforcement of existing laws and to try to craft specific legislation to answer specific complaints (around anti-trust issues, for example) or to target particular media outlets for particular breaches. Such an approach has the satisfaction of immediacy, but is frustrating since we increasingly recognize the need for overarching, systematic change.

We really want a fundamental "paradigm shift" in the way media are understood—from properties operated privately at a profit and consumed passively, to public spaces for the exercise of the human right of communication. Such a shift, of course, can not be legislated. But policies can be advocated and employed which would change the current system enough to let glimpses of the potential, truly democratic media to shine through.

As a beginning: Just as it would be a tremendous advance for U.S. law to no longer treat corporations as 'individuals', it would be a major victory to get governments simply to address the unique power media have to impact communities and political decision making—to see that media are not widgets, and must be treated differently in terms of anti-trust, corporate crimes requiring compensation, public accountability, transparency of operations, and democratic and open governing structures.

Taking note of glocalization:
global communications in the postmodern world

Think piece submitted for
Democratizing Global Communications Conference
University of Wisconsin, Madison

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August 8, 1997

Taking note of glocalization:
global communications in the postmodern world

We live in a paradoxical age which can be best described by a paradoxical phrase: "glocalization" -- an at-once-global-local world. The world we live in, as Homi Bhabha suggests, is a site of vulgar hybridity where traditional boundaries of difference become the transgressive centers of identity, and conventional centers of identity

become the new boundaries of difference. The paradoxes and contradictions of glocalization are many; some immediate and others more mediated. In this short piece, I will only allude to the many challenges of glocalization for strategic political interventions, as outlined in the "People's Communications Charter."

Many of the transformations of glocalization can be characterized in terms of two major developments in contemporary international communications and cultures; aptly summarized by Cees Hamelink and Hamid Mowlana, among others. The first of these developments, is the creation of a New World Order of Communication and Information. This World Order has been made possible by recent technological, and political-economic developments in industrialized nations. The second major development is the rise a new-er world of postmodernist (dis)order which legitimizes schizophrenic desire for the self and the other, the global and the local, identity and difference. The schizophrenic desire for the postmodern is manifest in the perpetual struggle for self-empowerment and dis-empowerment around the world.

The "People's Communications Charter" is a premiere example of this desire to redress the postmodern contradictions of the information society based on modernist notions of universal human rights, public (state) rights and private (individual) rights. However, the schizophrenic desire for the postmodern goes beyond the concepts of information and communication, even as it is produced by and productive of their modernist tenets. The "Islamic community paradigm," propounded by Hamid Mowlana, is an example of this desire to go beyond the information society paradigm toward the notion of a "cultural ecology" of the postmodern environment. In the context of the Islamic community paradigm, Mowlana argues that it is important to address the cultural ecology of Islam before attempting to redress issues of global communications and information flows.

In my own work, I examine the cultural ecology of global, national, and local flows of information in India in terms of Gandhian models of communications and community relations. These alternative models -- Islamic, Gandhian and many others -- point to the central contradiction of the new postmodern world of information (dis)order, for which my preferred term is glocalization. In this postmodern world of glocalization, the demands for a new-er information order can be easily addressed -- but never completely redressed -- in terms of technological, economic and political flows of information. For, the roots of the contradictory movements of glocalization lie in fundamental onto-theological differences between and within cultures. Unfortunately, only fundamentalists seem to be the most willing to take note of the fundamental contradiction of glocalization. That is precisely why interventions in, what Mowlana calls, cultural ecology become crucial in contemporary international communications.

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Media, Humanities and the Medieval Turn

The end of the millennium is steeped in growing contempt for knowledge that does not appear to have direct technological application. The uncritical glorification of the market-driven media culture is best exemplified by the rise of television as the dominant medium for the dissemination of public culture after the Second World War. It is especially after the end of the so-called Cold War, that certain segments of the American power structure have concluded that due to the lack of a global enemy, there is no longer need to invest in the humanities, since these disciplines can only contribute to the excess of knowledge among those who may rise to challenge the economic and political privileges of those same power structures. George Bush's proclamation of the inception of the "new world order" has frightening similarities to Adolph Hitler's proclamation of a "new European order" half a century ago. This time around, however, the projected conquest is not limited to Europe but extends to the entire planet, while the means of subjugation are no longer primarily military, but economic and financial. The world dominated by the "sole remaining superpower" through the imposition of its own "internationalist nationalism" begins to bear an uncanny resemblance to the medieval order in reaction to which the humanist rebirth began in Italy in the second half of the fourteenth century.

The most striking example of this "medieval turn" is the proclamation of the U. S. State Department philosopher Francis Fukuyama about the "end of history" achieved by the triumph of Western liberal

democracy over all the other ideologies. Instead of the empire, the church and the feudal social order that guaranteed the stability of the medieval order, we find ourselves in a global community dominated by the multinational corporations, the global media system and post-industrial capitalism which seem to rule over the postmodern condition which currently structures the reality of the human subject. The most disturbing similarity between the two historical moments is the desire of those ruling institutions to convince the human subject that the order within which it exists has to be accepted without conditions and with a force of a "natural" order which cannot be modified to the slightest degree by the individual or collective action of those subjected to the symbolic order in question. The existing hierarchies must be accepted as the consequence of a higher law which is imbued with the power of either God or the State which are posited as the symbolic centers of this anti-humanist world view. The humanist rebirth's insistence on individual's ability to enter the dialogue with such apparently immutable sources of absolute power through the emphasis on freedom are best exemplified in Pico della Mirandola's Oration on the Dignity of Man, which stresses the capacity of human subjects to create, improve and change the reality of their world.

I believe that the future of the humanities is predicated in understanding and reinterpreting Pico's call for freedom of the human being from the bonds of any kind of determinism which imposes itself on the existence of both the individual and the polity today. The media will need to play a crucial role in this process, since they have a potential to serve the interests of the public at large and not only the shrinking number of corporations, whose advertising outlets they have gradually become.

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Response to THE PEOPLE'S COMMUNICATION CHARTER

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28 July 1997

The PCC is a magnificent manifesto, staking out core democratic principles for communication. It is written in jargon free language that should appeal to people across the political spectrum. For democratic activists this can be a valuable organizing tool.

But the PCC is not without limitations and I would like to discuss two of them.

First, although the desire not to needlessly antagonize potential supporters is admirable, it loses its appeal when the analysis must be watered down to the point of being toothless. The most important thing is to tell the truth and let the chips fall where they may. And the truth -- implicit in the PCC -- is this: the global communication system is a main component of the neoliberal world order, in which the rule of the wealthy and powerful is encouraged and the interests of all others are relegated to the trickle down. Market-driven journalism, culture and communication have decided limitations for democracy in this context.

Moreover, these are not competitive markets in any sense. The global communication regime is dominated by ten mostly U.S. based transnational media conglomerates, and another three or four dozen firms occupy all the remaining positions of significance. All of these firms are closely linked through joint ventures and strategic alliances. It is not so much a matter of the USA versus the Third World as it is capital and commercialism against all else. The system is set up to service Wall Street and Madison Avenue, and has launched a commercial carpet bombing on the people of the world. It is also part and parcel of a massive narcotic best suited to mute the democratic aspirations of the world's peoples. As the billionaire head of Televisa, Mexico's huge media firm which is closely tied to the largest US media giants, stated in 1991: "Mexico is a country of a modest, very fucked class, which will never stop being fucked. Television has the obligation to bring diversion to these people and remove them from their sad reality and difficult future."

Of course -- as U.S. academics and corporate PR hacks exult in reminding us -- the system generates some good material and audiences are capable of interpreting commercial fare in resistant manners. But these are second order observations that must always be put in the context of the first order phenomenon. And the first order is a profit crazed disaster. For developing nations that lose nearly all control over the dominant media, the

implications are a loss of sovereignty and any hope for a viable democratic social order.

Second, the PCC underestimates the political nature of the struggle for democratic communication. This is underscored by the PCC's emphasis upon media self-regulation as some sort of solution. Asking these profit motivated firms to curtail what they must do or else face economic death is akin to asking tigers to starve so the little creatures can frolic freely in the forest. Better than worry about self-regulation, we should work to strengthen media workers trade unions, as these are the only hope to counter corporate power form within. Nor is it enough to merely work to set up nonprofit, noncommercial media on the margins of the status quo, though this, unlike self-regulation, is a crucial activity. We need to battle for the heart of the system.

The only solution is political and it is a politics that must be based on organization and significant popular support. No matter how brilliant our arguments, the political powers-that-be are largely complicit with the neoliberal communication order. Moreover, media issues alone have never been able to generate the type of popular support necessary to topple an existing empire. The way out is to link media and communication reform to a broader democratic, anti-neoliberal political platform. No matter how we dance around this issue in our manifesto there is no way we can avoid what is an explicitly democratic left political mission. In view of the centrality of media and communication to the new world order there is no other option.

People's Communications Charter

Reaction piece

By focusing on the public's communication rights as an end in itself, the People's Communication Charter runs the risk of providing free advertising and market testing for the very corporations it decries as acting outside the public interest. In particular, the sales directors of new technologies corporations (Microsoft take note!) would be the first to appropriate this charter as part of their marketing strategy.

This risk underscores the point that communications must be viewed not as an end in itself, but as a means to a greater end. AT&T ads to the contrary, most people in this country and the rest of the world don't need freedom of expression via email, or the right to reply on their cell phone, or any other communication option nearly as desperately as they need a regular income, food on the table, or a doctor. Having access to the web won't get you health insurance, or your job back if you were laid off.

A people's communications charter, therefore, should start from the premise of social change, of economic equality, of the right to a decent standard of living. These rights are more universally understood and immediate than the right to communicate. A communications infrastructure should be built as one tool for achieving these rights.

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"Think Piece" responding to the People's Communication Charter: A Canadian perspective regarding the democratization of communications by David McPherson

In Canada, there is a growing problem of media accountability as society attempts to redefine the journalist's role in a global age. As noted in the preamble to the "People's Communication Charter," every individual regardless of race, gender, or class background should have equal access to communication tools. However, this inherent right of the individual to freedom of expression, first offered by J.S. Mill in his book On Liberty, is becoming harder to achieve in this global age. As the vehicles for communication have grown, so have the problems and issues surrounding the delivery and dissemination of information by journalists for mass consumption. I agree with the Charter that in order to achieve a global communication paradigm, bodies must be created to regulate the media and establish ethical standards. Due to increased technology like fibre optics and e-mail, clearly demarcated borders are becoming less tangible especially in the cyberspace world.

The concentration of media ownership, especially in the area of newspapers, is a major problem faced by the Canadian media. This concentration has limited the freedom of journalists to report on issues fairly and objectively. Media moguls like Conrad Black and

the Thompson family own many newspapers which restricts the journalist's goal of reporting objectively because they are instructed to write in such a way that will meet the owners standards. The public is then affected by this media concentration because, as more papers are placed in the hands of fewer individuals, the information they obtain will often only reflect one viewpoint. Article 3 of the charter addresses this concern stating that people have the right to "receive a range of information and cultural products designed for a wide variety of tastes and interests."

In response to Article 17 which states, "the media should avoid the prejudicial treatment of persons," I would agree that this goal is important, especially in multi-cultural societies like Canada and The United States. Today several large news organizations such as American Press, United Press International, Reuters, and Canadian Press dominate the delivery of news concerning third-world countries. These large news gathering organizations tend to perpetuate stereotypes. The fact is that almost all the news reported from third-world countries concerns violence, natural disasters, and wars. It is rare that you read stories about everyday life in these countries which show another viewpoint and a more positive insight into the lives of another culture.

I think that the Charter is a good working document that highlights the need changes in the world of communications. The media have a social responsibility to provide information in a fair and objective manner. New measures must be taken by governments of all countries in order for people around the world to maintain their right to diverse opinions.

Critique of the Peoples Communication Charter

Steven E. Miller
Author of "Civilizing Cyberspace: Policy, Power, and the Information Superhighway"

Power, as the Frankfort school taught us, is the ability to structure an environment so that its inhabitants take actions that serve your interests, preferably by having them believe that they are freely making their own choices but under the threat of explicit coercion if necessary.

In that context, communication is clearly an instrument of power and the unequal distribution of communication capability leads to domination and inequality. Therefore, the Peoples' Communication Charter call for increasing everyone's access to the tools required for inquiry, speech, conversation, and reception is an important democratic demand. However, developing an effective strategy requires a richer understanding than the PCC exhibits of the blurring line between interactive and broadcast media, as well as the appropriateness of different media for different purposes under different circumstances.

Similarly, the richness of human existence includes much more than what can be included in commercial relationships, particularly given the marketing sophistication of today's global firms which gives them a dangerous advantage over most individual consumers (as well as over most workers and even most nations). Insisting that public policy protect non-commercial communication is an important aspect of protecting our quality of life. However, the PCC needs to be clearer about what is meant by its call for communications systems "independent from governmental, political or economic control." It should be more explicit in promoting "participatory design" of technology by everyone that it will impact.

The PCC seems to take a very Western position that privileges individual "rights" over the community's "right" to protect itself against subversive external cultural (or other) influences.

Culture and community seem to be positioned in the PCC as "private" and "voluntary" aspects of life. Is there an absolute and universal right to unbridled freedom of speech? Is there a way to distinguish commercial speech from civic dialogue? Perhaps it would help to have more discussion of the underlying values that should shape the structure and content of communication -- beyond the undefined short list of "dignity, integrity, equality, and liberty." What about "solidarity" or any other aspect of supra-individual existence? Merely saying that people should act "through their organizations" is not enough. The major ethical dilemma of our time is finding ways to maintain meaningful social connection despite the commercial culture's relentless thrust to atomize us. The PCC begs for a more explicit discussion of social ethics.

Most distressing of all is that despite its desire for universality, the PCC suffers from the lack of mention of "universal design" that will allow everyone, regardless of physical (dis)abilities to fully utilize all aspects of communication (or other) technologies. We should understand by now that all of us go through various levels of capability over the course of our lifetimes and products need to be designed to accept that reality.

Communications are embedded in a complex tapestry of other power relationships that shape, and are shaped by, communications interactions. In fact, most of us treat communications as a component of other activities rather than as a sphere of activity in itself -- despite our move to an increasingly virtual and symbolic world and the humanizing power of interaction with others. By abstracting communications from the experienced reality of most people, the draft PCC gains generality but looses some of its relevance and appeal. People are motivated by the need to communicate about something, to interact for some purpose. While communications is not just an organizing tool, if it seeks to be an organizing vision the PCC needs stronger links to the broad set of human-rights that are the generic goal of our activity.

Response to the Peoples Communication Charter
Steven E. Miller
Author of "Civilizing Cyberspace: Policy, Power, and the Information Superhighway"

Just as yeast transforms flour and water into rising dough, some technologies seem to change everything around them. Steam power and electricity, the telegraph and the internal combustion engine all had impacts that rippled through the entire society, creating new opportunities and directions while closing off others. If the inventors of the first horseless carriages were brought back to life, they would recognize today's cars as the mechanical descendants of their early machines. What would amaze them is the way the automobile has impacted every aspect of daily life: the rise of suburbs and industrial parks, what we do on our vacations, teenage sex life, and popular culture. Transformative technologies bring profound and subtle changes. People living through the process sometimes feel dislocated, as if they're caught between alternative universes. Modern telecommunications is just such a phenomenon.

But even as technology upsets some aspects of the status quo, undermining the status of some groups while empowering others, changing opportunities and lifestyles, over the past couple of centuries the changes caused by technology have generally acted in one overall direction -- to reinforce the expansion of market relations into more aspects of our individual and social lives. Technology has been used to facilitate the creation of the "modern world" by:

* breaking up traditional communities and extended families, resulting in the liberation of individuals to both seek their own destiny and to be available for more "efficient" labor market utilization, bringing together disparate groups through commercial relationships while creating new hierarchies of wealth and power;

* replacing self-made goods, voluntary mutual aid, and community-based cultural activities with commercialized substitutes that bring an abundant and wider world within reach but leave us with short-term and often superficial satisfactions; and

* increasing our overall productivity, creating enormous wealth and world-wide trade, while leading to increased inequality and the transfer of control from local groups to less accountable and more distant elites.

The development and deployment of information and communication technologies (ICT) will continue and strengthen these trends unless we consciously design them to do otherwise and create the institutional capability to implement our plans. We need to explicitly promote non-commercial "space" in every communication channel. We need to affirmatively support the content and activities that bring us together around our common needs and wishes rather than draw us apart.

But we also need to be careful about how fully we embrace the new technologies. It is possible that they are being implemented in ways, as has happened with commercial television, that make the process of engagement with the media more powerful than any particular content message it carries. That is, no matter how irreverent a commercial TV show may be, no matter how amoral or subversive to traditional institutions or values, the ultimate impact of watching TV is acceptance of individual consumerism as a desirable lifestyle. The rise of "web broadcasting" is a dangerous indication of the way commercial interests intend to shape the new media.

The People's Communication Charter speaks directly to the issues of social communication. Separating out those issues allows us to think of the human connection to this powerful force. But to guide our thought and action, we need to keep our broader goals and context in mind. Merely enunciating our "rights" -- important though that may be -- is not enough. We need a vision of the kind of life and world we seek to create.

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is.

Toby Miller

The PCC is a most significant document, in that it comes to us at a moment of unparalleled privatisation and globalisation of the media, when the old accountabilities provided by public broadcasting are threatened by extinction or commercialisation, when the capitalist press is increasingly driven by niche marketing rather than textual fidelity and social responsiveness, and international organisations have been starved of funds by the UN debt of the United States. Most of what I say below is critical, but this is offered in a spirit of overall appreciation of the need to take a stand against these developments. The one aspect missing from the Charter that I would like to see included is that of pleasure: that television and other media provide people all over the world with immense pleasure, the key to their importance as resources. Soemtimes, this pleasure comes from the shock of difference, and at other times from the familiarity of sameness. But the combination of transcendence and confirmation is key to the media, and any attempt to reform it should work with that basic precept.

The Charter commences with some significant assumptions that we need to address. First, the issue of censorship: what are the differences between, in old-fashioned liberal terms, positive and negative freedom? We can all identify obvious restrictions, but what about restricting access to equipment, money, training, and band width--are these acts of censorship? And if we want to look at the positive freedoms line, how far can we take it inside either representative democracy or private ownership? What is reasonable when we no longer have an agora, and the media seek to operate as economic rationalists?

Second, the issue of stereotypes: the problem here is that stereotypes are in some ways inevitable--rednecks come from the south, men are violent to women and so on are prevalent, and in some cases reasonable empirically. The practice of generically patterning people is pretty universal. I cannot imagine a pure world without generalised remarks that deride categories of people (or valorise them)--they form part of the process of making ideal types. So whilst I am opposed to hate speech, most people who are opposed to it do so by using stereotypic identifications themselves. So the idea of a ground of signification immune to genre needs more work. It seems to me that we need community discussion between journalists, directors, producers, actors, and scripwriters to understand the representative function of what they do, but not predicated on the idea of disavowing stereotypes--try

having a conversation without using them.

Third, the question of access to knowledge: here, the issue is in part to do with what counts as knowledge. The line about free flow of information can run dangerously close to the modernisation ehtos of the 1960s, where the West had liberal knowledge and national institutions, and the remainder of the world needed to lose its forms of knowledge in order to catch up. Plus free flow of information often leads to loss of information, as the plant variety rights question has steadily revealed since 1930: when common knowledge is corporatised, it is lost to the people outisde commodity forms. The notion of perfect knowledge is also crucial to the reactionary human capital argument from neoclassical economics, and needs to be guarded against for that reason, as well. Lastly, it is imbued with liberal ideology, which is simply inappropriate for cultures that work with restricted knowledge derived from social status (for instance, gendered knowledge distinctions amongst tribal Aboriginal Australians).

Clearly, these three topics are crucial, but I want from the first to caution that there is danger in assuming that the bad objects identified in the PCC can be destroyed or that its good objects are always and everywhere desirable.

Early on, the document also mentions citizenship, a topic of great importance, but generally via exclusion. Many people in the world are not citizens of the countries where they work and live, or citizens of the places that give them most of their media information. Each time the new nugget called 'citizenship' is mentioned, we need to look at how well it applies to the disenfranchised, and especially in a transnational media environment. This becomes critical in Article 19. Who are the citizens, of where, that will complain about multinational satellite services?

The reference to commercial ownership concentration is important, but again requires care. Diverse ownership does not produce diverse outcomes, as any content analysis of news programs or the old world of evening papers will demonstrate. What matters, increasingly, is niche targetting of demographic areas by advertisers--that brings "diversity." The diversity claim at the level of ownership is a longstanding one, but it is again characteristic of neoclassical economics. Textual diversity and political diversity are not to be drawn from it.

Article 8, on language diversity, is an important one, but again begs the question of targetting. In a capitalist system, profit-oriented media organisations are responsive to purchasing power. In a mixed-media system, they respond also to representative political movements. But both reply to the pressure of numbers, so the issue remains how to connect the media to the dispositions of businesses and governments without binding them to those agendas. A retrun to the Asia-Pacific-Western European broadcasting ethos is possible, but needs to lose its notion of uplift and censorship.

Article 22, on trial coverage, is complex. The level of public interest in judicial conduct in the United States is at an all-time high, with professional elitism endangered by Court TV and other sites. Whilst trial coverage can be absurd and invasive, so can other accepted news-gathering

techniques, such as journalists entering players' dressing rooms after sporting fixtures and interviewing them when they are neither rested nor prepared and are in semi-private space. There are real benefits to allowing cameras to go where elite commercial and governmental people exercise control, far greater than to those places where footballers are in the tub.

All of that said, there is a clear need for accountability from the media to those represented in it. The charter is a first step towards this and deserves our recognition for that fact. Its weaknesses indicate the necessity of working with community groups outside the First World; its absences indicate the necessity of dealing with the problematic of pleasure--what make the media work.

Toby Miller

Comments on draft Charter from Bella Mody

We have to congratulate Cees for listing major structural problems. I can think of no one who could have done a better job. How can we strengthen his work?

I like a "PEOPLE'S ----" ANYTHING so I am in favor of a people's charter. I recognise we define our humanness in and through communication with others so a communication charter is essential. I don't mean to be facetious. Alas, I only have questions and no answers. Perhaps, we can organise our discussion around A. Content and B. Form.

Content: e.g. Is there anything else we should say?
Form: e.g. to elicit action, should we call it a Charter, or would it be more acceptable if we called it something else?

I look forward to hearing from others who have thought through or have had experiences with a listing of ideals across financial and political regions and how they can be most effective. What is the most effective Charter we can agree on: what are its characteristics?

What is our goal: To make which group of powerbrokers do/think/feel what? Do we want to raise consciousness or do we want to facilitate action? Are some things more important than others or all equally important? I suspect the power of a Charter comes from its being common in content for all places and peoples: we need to win support from those leaders in the South who say

their priorities and pace are different from the early industrializers in the North. Since we recognise this is a strategic document, let's think strategically.

In these corporate times, can we think of the End and the Means as **strengthening agency**, i.e., celebrating civil society and grassroots group communication...can we address this charter to local voluntary organizations who resonate with its general principles and are willing to work to prioritize and flesh them out for implementation?

When political democracy is reduced to a voting charade and economic democracy means an employee-owned business like UPS, at this distance who are we to specify what people's participation in domestic communication decisions means? Yet, the Charter needs to go beyond platitudes to specify which people, what decisions... Over 70% of the world's population have never made a telephone call. India has had Citizen's Advisory Boards in local telephone departments, radio stations and TV stations with specifications about the different religious and occupational groups they should represent. However, all meetings are nominal, occasional, self aggrandizing, and ceremonial; in large national systems, how can they be otherwise without strong decentralized (and networked) grassroots organizations who demand any different?

The Charter mentions the need for a voice for people on cultural policy. Local groups would best know how to link information and communication needs to the needs for food, clothing, shelter and education where upto 30% live at poverty

Mody -3

levels. I seem to remember one of the UNDP's annual Human Dev Reports does this. Perhaps, we can invite some one from that office to come to the meeting... Local agents would best know how to operationalize principles about how control of communication is essential for freedom of action, and how new technologies widen gaps. As a fast step towards Charter development, can we agree on a workbook of general principles, with freedom for local groups to prioritize them and develop national illustrations? We could provide illustrative text. This global process of filling in the blanks locally (how local?) would itself be a means to raise consciousness; it would also satisfy the need for a Charter with local relevance and roots.

"Information and Communication" by Alfonso Morales, University of Arizona

Shannon and Weaver, in their "Mathematical Theory of Communication," began with the idea that information is "a measure of one's freedom of choice when selecting a message." For them communication is a one-way process, fine for engineering but not so good for understanding social life. If we change "selecting" to "constructs" we make clear the idea that communication and information are two sides of the same process; and furthermore, that the process is about creating and conveying elements of experience. Each context from which communication is created is the reality as understood by the communicator. Consensus about that context and reality is always a problem. But substantial consensus about a context is in effect a paradigm, a picture of reality. Information is the measure of one's freedom of choice when constructing a message about that reality. Constructed messages are communications which create and maintain information. Motives, interests and practices found distinct paradigms and are tools with which paradigms change. Communication regarding existing and possible motives is a key element for the organization and change in existing paradigms of communication.

This perspective implies many ideas. The first of which is that ideas themselves are established, practiced and changed in the course of communication. Additionally, information from one paradigm can occasionally be used to further an individuals purposes in some other part of life. Furthermore, communicative practice is rooted in the habits and interests of the participants. Knowing this permits us to understand how people create the variety of types of relationships they have with one another. Knowing this also helps us to understand how people change ways of relating to each other. Since life is multi-systemic, information and communication from some parts of life found changes in other parts of life. This is to say that the "reality of our cultural environment" is nested in distinct habits and purposes some of which are

more relevant than others and meaning also that people's capacity to communicate need not always be fully mobilized to cope with each part of life. The trick is to know when the components that found stability in some parts of life are useful enough to promote the flexibility needed in other parts of life. In other words all cultures have freedom and tolerance within their traditions, yet they all also have repression and intolerance. Care must be taken to identify those aspects of distinct traditions around which to mobilize communicative consensus upon which to found stability from which trickier parts of life might be approached. I see the "People's Communication Charter" as such a consensus building document, with backward linkages (and assumptions) to philosophical and social traditions and forward linkages (and assumptions) about social change and about alternative ways of organizing communication.

Communication is essential for freedom of action, but the idea of choice presumes some structure from which some choices are made more valuable than others. This idea of structure is no more than the accumulation of information in a paradigm described above. People's interests and commitments make such paradigms real and useful as guides for how to behave and how to evaluate other people's behavior and how to choose from among alternative behaviors.

You can see that what I have done here is to chart the assumptions (as I understand them) that underlie communicative processes. By revealing these assumptions as a choice for guiding communicative behavior I hope to have reminded us of a method by which distinct interests are established by examining communicative behavior and how social relationships are established and changed in the course of the process of communication. It seems to me that a variety of projects are called for, from reviewing philosophical/historical foundations for open communication to theorizing and implementing policy oriented accounts for such. All of these offer exciting prospects for the many types of people interested in the PCC.

From: <jnichols@captimes.madison.com>
X-Sender: jnichols@mail.midplains.net (Unverified)
Mime-Version: 1.0
Date: Wed, 13 Aug 1997 12:43:27 -0500
To: Sousan Arafeh <smarafeh@students.wisc.edu>
Subject: Re: PCC response

In a technological age, where the concentration of media ownership has made the news a product and turned entertainment into a lifestyle, media activists must be cautious not to construct a "response" to the crisis of communications that is as complex and off-putting to citizens as the crisis itself.

That is the challenge I see in any dialogue regarding issues of corporate control of information and culture. And it is the biggest challenge faced by thos ewho would seek to develop a People's Communication Charter. In its current form, the PCC is well written and well thought -- far more well written and well thought, in fact, than 90 percent of what has been written on these issues.

What the document lacks, at this point, is a streak of old-fashioned populism. The great reform movements throughout history have always borrowed a bit of advice from Henry David Thoreau: "Simplify." They have always understood that, if a movement cannot to summed up in a slogan, it isn't much of a movement. "Eight hours for work, eight hours for sleep, eight hours for what we may" was not merely a good line, it was a reasonable summing up of the entire platform of the eight-hour day movement. "We want bread and roses too" remains the best platform yet presented for a labor movement that seeks not only economic gain for its membership but a more humane and functional worklife for all citizens.

The PCC cannot and should not be reduced to a slogan. But it does need to have the clarity and the absolute sense of purpose necessary to the development of that slogan. This means that a clearer statement of what is amiss is needed. Democracy is not threatened by a media that is motivated solely by profit; it has been destroyed by a media that is motivated solely by profit. Witness voter turnout in the 1996 presidential campaign -- which the medi turned into a spectator sport -- and consider, seriously consider, the collapse of citizen engagement in every sector of society.

Similarly, the concentration of control of media in the hands of a few multinational corporations is not a threat. It is a reality. The suggestion that alternative media can be developed, and that this alternative media can become a realistic player in the lives of citizens in developed nations, is a pipedream. Do something innovative on the Internet and you'll see what I mean -- if you idea has any salience or potential, Microsoft will buy it. Start a "zine" and you will meet an identical fate. The same goes for "independent" and alternative record labels, magazines, newspapers and broadcast outlets. I don't discourage people from engaging in these worthwhile endeavors, I simply warn them that if they are good at what they do they will soon be negotiating with Bill Gates about how much of his $9 billion in liquid assets they can expect to be paid. To those who think that media conglomerates maintain a Cold War-era hands-off policy when it comes to subversive ideas, I would merely offer a reminder that the greatest public hearing William Burroughs ever received was in a Nike commercial.

The only real "alternative" is political activism. And that activism will only occur if great masses of citizens become engaged by the idea of organizing, joining mass movements and voting with the purpose of reestablishing an element of citizen control over the structures of media in their own nations and internationally. That control must begin with full public funding of quality, professional broadcast outlets that can offer a genuine and broadbased alternative to privately held media. It must extend to the enactment of sweeping anti-trust legislation, which will deconstruct conglomerates -- particularly those that have sapped virtually all serious dialogue from the print media. And it must feature clear and unyielding support for the right of media workers to organize in unions, since strong media unions remains the single most effective and consistent force for quality and diversity within media.

The goal of a People's Communication Charter must be to inspire that sort of activism. And the document must do so with blunt, unyielding langauge that builds toward a very basic and broadly understood message, just as the anti-apartheid movement did with its unblinking support for sanctions, just as Gandhi did with the simple act of walking to the sea and gathering salt helped millions to understand the economic component in the struggle for Indian independence, just as just as William Jennings Bryan changed the very nature of America political debate by declaing that he would not be crucified on a cross of gold.

We are not talking about complicated issues here. The choice is between political, social and economic democracy on the one side and media conglomeration on the other. When we recognize that fact, and communicate it effectively and without fear, the journey toward a real democracy will begin.

Summary think piece by Kaarle Nordenstreng:

1. The PCC is a welcome instrument of symbolic political intervention. However, it is unrealistic to expect that its implementation can be legitimately formalized even to the extent of what is stipulated under Article 26. A more realistic direction may be to use it as a vehicle of creating and maintaining watchdog functions over various official bodies (at UN, Council of Europe, etc.) which are entitled to implement international instruments.

2. It is important to expose and clarify the theoretical paradigms and normative assumptions that lie behind the criticisms of current media trends. As noted in my lessons of the NWICO debate (passage follows separately), a global idea is the more durable, the more articulate its substance is in public discourse. From this point of view, and also to meet scholarly criticism from those sources which accuse the PCC of dogmatism and simple-mindedness, a more nuanced analytical view is needed on concepts such as "distorted and misleading information".

3. The empirical foundations of criticisms of current media trends should be accumulated, elaborated and updated as a permanent monitoring system. As to content monotoring, see my opening chapter in the forthcoming book on international media monitoring (to be distributed).

Return-Path: taprice@students.wisc.edu
Date: Tue, 12 Aug 1997 12:31:01 -0500
To: Sousan Arafeh <smarafeh@students.wisc.edu>
From: Your Real Name <taprice@students.wisc.edu>
Subject: Reply to People's Communication Charter

I will take as a point of departure the People's Communication Charter, speaking to Article 14:

Article 14: Children have the right to media products that are designed to meet their needs and interests. Countries should take necessary steps to provide and make available quality cultural and entertainment products, including by public provision when commercial media fail in this regard.

Worldwide we are envisioning the widespread exploitation of children through the reinstitutionalization of slavery and child labor, but also through the use of commercially sponsored media products in the schools.

In Pakistan children stitch soccer balls; in China, Indonesia and/or Vietnam NIKE and REEBOK athletic shoes are produced by young women in toxic, noisy and abusive conditions then shipped to the consuming American public at exorbitant prices, far exceeding the "wages" paid to the workers who created them.

In American public schools the demand for REEBOK shoes is largely facilitated through commercials, "media products", placed in the classrooms; PETV sponsored by REEBOK, delivered by CHANNEL ONE, inclines students toward physical fitness, but also toward REEBOK's wares.

In effect, the scenario just described is an example of how to contextualize an otherwise fragmented picture...exploitation of children in Indonesia, China, Vietnam and Pakistan and marketing via classroom media products to children in the US of A. A thread runs through the social relations of labor-exploitation, commodification-(mis)education and consumption. As democratic communications advocates, I see our task as putting the fragmented information in our globalized society together to make sense of this socially constructed (and thoroughly exploitative) process.

The process of putting fragmented information together, back into context, is a political endeavor. In other words, defining the real process by which media product (commercial in the classroom) is the link between the social relations of child-labor-exploitation, and child-consumer-consumption, is to take a political position with serious consequences given the neoliberal economy we live in today.

The People's Charter is on the right track; what is lacking is the political will at least in the words of Article 14 to explicate the link. To say that "children have the right to media products that are designed to meet their needs and interests" brings up the political question(s): whose needs, whose interests are served when the student is to be entertained? Is it in the student's need or interest to watch PETV, a REEBOK sponsored commercial in his/her classroom? Or is it more important to the students' need and interest to watch a video displaying the plight of children slaving in Indonesia, Vietnam, China or Pakistan making the products we buy? What do we mean by interest or need in either of the two scenarios?

The issue(s) as stated in Article 14 are broad; countries should take necessary steps to ensure quality cultural products find their way to children. I believe fundamental in this regard is considering the "educational quality", not just "quality". The "educational quality" of a media product can be judged according to standards of, for example, political autonomy, economic sovereignty and ecological sustainability.

The issue of media products in the interest of children needs to be measured against a set of criteria, internally valid yet universally applicable. A media product for students in the United States needs to tend toward sustainability of the learning ecology of public education, especially since the "model" of American public education is used to justify reform efforts worldwide.

It is the American public education ideal of freedom and egalitarianism geared toward citizenship building with rights and responsibilities that is truly the only means of standing in the way of the corporate juggernaut which targets the schools through propaganda and harmless sounding "media

products".

Economic sovereignty and political autonomy are criteria which are at this time exceedingly more important in the globalized "third world" nations just described, although the United States is catching up. A "media product" in Vietnam, China, Indonesia, and or Pakistan, should respect the economic sovereignty of the people who labor and the political autonomy of the peoples who live in the aforementioned nations.

For children who labor under slavery conditions, the media products at their disposal are of perhaps little consequence to their immediate situation. On the whole however, language which acknowledges the right of a country to have media products unbridled by totalitarian, neoliberal commercialization is critical. Language which reflects the true needs and interests of the country is that which recognizes the sovereignty, autonomy and sustainability of the people at large. Lest the reader suggest that these are outmoded concepts in the new world globalization underway, pause for a moment and reflect on the day when we as Americans lose sovereignty, autonomy and sustainability over our communication infrastructure. Are we ready for this scenario? If not why would we expect it of others?

A case in point: American and European telecommunications corporations are taking over state telecommunications infrastructures to ensure the flow of "media products" at odds with the interests or needs of the laboring children in "third world" countries. We need look no further than the track record of those who have pushed "media products", in commercialized classrooms here: can we expect anything less than Whittle Communications in a China, or an Indonesia?

The language in Article 14 needs to be more explicit and reflect this reality!

The People's Communication Charter and the Global Regulation of Communication

Contribution to 'Democratizing Global Communications'
Madison, Wisconsin, USA, 26-28 September 1997

Marc Raboy, University of Montreal

Even before we look at its substance, the People's Communication Charter (PCC) stands as a symbol of the burgeoning global movement for the democratization of communication.

This movement is truly 'global', not only in that it is genuinely worldwide, but also insofar as it traverses a wide range of different fields interested with an interest in the democratization of communication.

The Charter's sponsoring organizations illusrate what I mean: here we find a global network of media practitioners (AMARC), a coalition of media activists and lobbyists (CEM) and a network concerned with global relations across north-south and other forms of cultural barriers (TWN). The Charter's author is the past president of the International Association for Media and Communication Research, a global grouping of scholars engaged in the field of communication studies.

I look at the PCC not so much as a text, but as an instrument for mobilization. Well then, mobilization for what? In my view, the most important issue that needs to be addressed globally with respect to the democratization of communication at the present time is the need to create new mechanisms for global media regulation, and to ensure that these develop democratically and in such a way as to guarantee the permanent participation of people, through the associations that they create to represent them, in designing the structures and policies that will shape the global media system.

We have not yet come very far in fleshing out what such a system - a democratic global media system - would look like, as those who are concerned with this question have been essentially fighting a rearguard battle for at least the past 15 years, since the cataclysmic denouement of the New World Information and Communication Order debate in UNESCO.

Historically, concrete struggles over the democratization of communication have been played out at the national level, around questions related to structures such as the relationship between public and private broadcasting, around regulatory questions pitting more-or-less authoritarian states against agencies charged with the independent regulation of media systems, around national policies operating in a zone of negotiation between the often conflicting imperatives of economics and culture.

As the UN/UNESCO World Commission on Culture and Development suggested in its 1995 report, Our Creative Diversity, it may now be time to shift the locus of such debates from the national to the international level.

But how, and where? While serious discussion of media democratization issues has been taking place in isolated pockets of global fora, there is no central location for this, in marked contrast to the corporate project for media globalization which seems to be everywhere we look on the world stage.

Clearly, the first battle has to be to gain recognition of the legitimacy and importance of creating a democratic global venue for deliberating and enacting policies on communication issues. In this respect, the PCC can play a crucial strategic role.

On the Social Situation of World Music

Ronald Radano
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Historically, westerners have commonly perceived music as a phenomenon that plays by its own rules. While humanly created, it is thought to convey meanings that exceed immediate, local circumstances, embodying grand, transhistorical truths to which more mundane expressions can only gesture. Throughout the twentieth century, the effects of mass mediation have worked at once to demystify and enhance this belief in musical transcendence. The various modes of musical reproduction betray music's complicity with the quotidian processes of global capitalism, just as the world reach of transnational record corporations have succeeded in constructing a "universal" musical language, together with an accompanying aesthetics grounded in American racialist fantasy. Witness, for example, the current appeal of "tribal" dance music in the urban clubs of Europe and the U.S. or the international phenomenon of "world beat," cast discursively as an infectious, rhythmically grounded "spiritual" unity. The grand antinomies of market complicity/autonomy, capitalist structuralization/spiritual liberation speak to the power and presence of music in the late-century public sphere. It is the challenge of finding ways to harness this ironic structuring of music as an "anti-structure" that critics and activists might give some attention.

Indeed, the "Democratizing Global Communications" initiative would do well to consider this musical aspect. For at this time the lion's share of musical consumption in the world's metropoles

is regulated by an oligopoly of international record corporations with ever-increasing expansionist aspirations. Moreover, international radio and television broadcasts serve to reinforce the desire to consume western music products as they advance American racial themes of authenticity that, for example, explain the global appeal of hip hop and "street" style. The foreign musics that come back to western metropoles, in turn, are commonly cast within this same racialist discourse network in order to conform to colonial fantasies of difference. Rather than working to critique the variety of antagonistic figurations, a corporate regulated "world music" industry has successfully perpetuated them, while also assimilating emancipatory initiatives (e.g., Smithsonian Folkways Records) that aim to diversify the market.

While a daunting task, to be sure, an initiative that supports the continued growth of local independent radio/record operations worldwide, together with a more critically informed presentation and distribution of world musics in the U.S. and Europe would be a first step toward short circuiting this cycle. Such an effort might serve not to overturn the enduring global power of western romantic fantasies of music (an impossible task) but more possibly to enable active reinventions of and responses to them within the world's musical populations. Through these efforts we might begin to learn more about musical power as a global phenomenon and new ways of accessing it toward emancipatory ends.

Issues Surrounding Access to United States Government Information

"The People's Information Charter" includes the right of access to government information within Article 4 of the General Standards. This an essential right in a democracy not only because of the people's need to educate themselves for participation in decision-making, but also because of their right to hold government accountable and to reap the fruits of labors performed on their behalf and at their expense. Very few United States citizens, however, know the depth and scope of the information the government gathers or generates, or the systems that have been set up to make that information available to them. Even fewer have an awareness of the policy measures which have affected the volume of or access to government information, or which may affect citizen access in the future. I will try to scratch a piece of that surface in these two short pages.

Citizen access to U. S. government information is based on Title 44 of the United States Code, which provides for a system of approximately 1400 Federal Depository Libraries distributed throughout every state and Congressional district. Title 44 directs the Government Printing Office (GPO), a Congressional agency operating under the Joint Committee on Printing of the U.S. Congress, to arrange for the printing of information created by Executive agencies in fulfillment of their missions and to distribute those materials free of charge to the depository libraries. The libraries, in turn, process, store, and provide intellectual and physical access to the materials through the provision of finding aids, reference tools, and professional reference service.

The creation of information by the Executive agencies is, on the contrary, governed by the Office of Management and Budget's Circular A-130. This split of control over the information life cycle leads to the first obstacle to citizen access. Often Executive agencies simply fail to forward an information product to the GPO for printing--and thus for distribution. New desktop publishing technologies such as the DocuTech machine make agency publication extremely easy. At times, for example, GPO learns that a report has been issued only when a citizen, seeking access to information that has been released to the press, seeks that report at a depository library. Anyone who has spent hours trying to locate a specific piece of information

from an Executive agency knows how difficult citizen access to such a "fugitive" document can be. Budget-cutters in Congress are eager to eliminate the GPO and allow individual Executive agencies to distribute their own documents; thus an already significant problem would become virtually insurmountable.

A second obstacle to citizen access to government information arose during the Reagan administration in a push to privatize many government operations. Although OMB A-130 was revised in 1993 to modify some of its most onerous provisions, its earlier version resulted in at least a temporary reduction--perhaps by as much as 25%--in the amount of information created and distributed. In addition, it encouraged executive agencies to place "maximum feasible reliance on the private sector" for the dissemination of information products and suggested imposing user fees for government information. The revision has not completely reversed the process. Under pressure to "re-invent" themselves, agencies have dropped information products; provided products previously available in paper, microform, or multiple formats only in electronic formats, reducing accessibility for those without computers; begun charging for major document series (such as the United States Serial Set, a huge--and now expensive--collection of Congressional Hearings, Documents, and Reports) and for access to certain databases.

Reinventing government, which has included great reliance on information technology, has simultaneously increased access to government information for some while reducing it for others. Individuals (and libraries) with access to computers can now find huge databases of government information widely available on the Internet. Most is free to depository libraries if not to individuals--provided they have sufficient computing power to access it. Minimum technical specifications for workstations capable of handling the full range of government information increase frequently as the size and complexity of the data--much of it available in no other format--increases. Thus the indirect cost of gaining access to government information increases and becomes more and more of a burden, even to the depository libraries which strive to assist citizens.

Access to U. S. government information is by no means assured, as this incomplete sketch reveals.

Louise S. Robbins, Associate Professor, School of Library and Information Studies

Hemant Shah
University of Wisconsin

Media Globalization, Journalism, and the People's Communication Charter

Recent trends toward international concentration of mass media ownership, deregulation and/or privatization of national cultural industries, and new alliances between TNCs and IGOs[1] have left little space for news and information that questions the status quo, and even less space for material that forcefully advocates even limited structural change.[2] A prevailing global model of journalistic practice that emphasizes neutrality, "facts," authority, official expertise, and so on, has helped ensure that alternative views and oppositional voices remain largely unheard. This marginalization of dissent is among the conditions that gave rise to the need for a People's Communication Charter.

A particular method of reporting and writing, which evolved in Europe and North America during the late 19th and early 20th centuries,[3] has become the prevalent model of journalism throughout the world. James Carey has described this model as an industrial art: "The inverted pyramid, the 5 W's lead, and associated techniques are as much a product of industrialization as tin cans."[4] Essentially, this prevailing model emphasizes "objectivity" and neutral observation; letting the "facts" speak for themselves; and heavy use of officials and experts as sources and attributions. It is a model that results in journalism that describes events with little analysis, relies upon polls and statistics to illustrate social trends but offers little historical context, and provides no

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[1] The most recent work on international concentration of ownership and deregulation trends is Edward Herman and Robert W. McChesney, The Global Media: The New Missionaries of Corporate Capitalism, Cassell: London, 1997. For information on the recent meeting between UN leaders and corporate CEOs, see David Korten's article at http://iisd1.iisd.ca/pcdf.

[2] See Marc Raboy and Peter Bruck, Communication For and Against Democracy, Montreal: Black Rose Press, 1989; John Downing, Radical Media, Boston: South End Press, 1984; Peter Lewis, "Alternative Media in a Contemporary Social and Theoretical Context," pp. 15-19 in Alternative Media, Peter Lewis, Ed., Paris: UNESCO; Brij Tankha, Ed., Communication and Democracy: Ensuring Plurality. Montreal: Videazimut, 1996.

[3] See Mark D. Alleyne, International Power and International Communication, London: St. Martins, 1996; Oliver Boyd-Barrett, The International News Agencies, London: Sage, 1980; Michael Schudson, Discovering the News, New York: Basic Books, 1978.

[4] James Carey, "Journalism and Criticism: The Case of an Undeveloped Profession," The Review of Politics, 26, 227-249, 1974; p. 246. See also the useful review of news production in Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reese, Mediating the Message, New York, Longman, 1991.

vehicle of expression for ordinary people at the grass roots level. It is the type of journalism that results in a numbing array of stories about scandals, violence, and intrigue that are full of political, ideological, and cultural biases and stereotypes. It is precisely the type of journalism that serves the interests of the owners of the global mass media firms because it rarely asks critical questions about the impact of global capitalism, the exercise of neo-imperial power, the unequal dispensation of social justice, and the sometimes-grim prospects for cultural survival.

If journalism is to promote the ideals embodied in the People's Communication Charter and assume a more meaningful social role - i.e., for it to be more fully diverse, more politically and culturally relevant, more participatory and democratic, and more accountable to the public - journalistic routines and practices must change (along with, of course, certain aspects of the corporate structure of mass communication industries). Journalists must begin to raise fundamental questions about power, inequity, and identity. This effort requires that journalists embrace progressive ideals, actively interpret "facts," let ordinary people speak about their experiences, and make moral and ethical judgments about the nature of capitalism.

Such an approach requires specific reporting strategies that move away from the short-sighted, myopic definitions of news and how to cover it. The idea of journalistic objectivity must be recognized as a myth and be replaced by a view of journalistic work in which the reporter is an integral part of and involved in the community which he or she reports. There must be emphasis on processes rather than discrete events; dynamic explanations that provide cognitive "maps" to illustrate the significance of issues rather than static descriptions; the grounded knowledge of ordinary people rather than the "science" of polls and statistics; a wide range of sources rather than officials and experts; and an explicit commitment to social change rather than professed neutrality. Clearly these tasks represent the rudiments of a very different model of journalism than the one prevailing world-wide. This alternative model may be called "emancipatory journalism" in order to highlight its liberating and democratizing potential.[5]

Implementing an emancipatory model of journalism world-wide requires a drastic change in the organizational and corporate culture of newsrooms as well

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[5] A detailed discussion of emancipatory journalism is in Hemant Shah, "Modernization, Marginalization, and Emancipation: Toward a Normative Model of Journalism and National Development," Communication Theory, 6, 143-166.

as in schools of journalism education. Journalists must view themselves, as Edward Said has suggested, at the "service of criticism, community, and moral sense,"[6] and not in the business of preserving the status quo, even while the media organizations for which they work may do exactly that. Journalism educators, rather than primarily emphasizing the mechanics and procedures of doing journalism, must prepare students for a career of active (and activist) journalism and encourage them to be immersed in the life of the communities they serve.

These paradigmatic shifts in the ways journalism is practiced and taught will require formal and informal "training" programs for professional media workers and journalism educators (as PCC Article 11 suggests). Because media organizations are likely to find such efforts unappealing and even frightening, they are unlikely to fund these efforts. Organizers of these training programs must instead form alliances with and draw support from NGOs such as Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Center (AMIC) in Singapore and private agencies such as the Ford Foundation.[7]

Media theorist John Hartley has written: "As the sense-making practice of modernity, journalism is the most important textual system in the world. Of all the means by which language is capitalized and communicated, only drama competes with it for the same global extension, social pervasion, formal variety, and scope of subject matter."[8] If Hartley is right, then true democratization of global communication must begin with an overhaul of current journalistic practice.

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[6] Edward Said, Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How we See the Rest of the World, New York: Pantheon, 1981.

[7] AMIC has sponsored training programs in the methods of emancipatory journalism for Asian journalists since the 1960s. Ford Foundation is supporting the Progressive Media Project (in Madison, Wisconsin), which solicits and distributes columns by progressive writers, and the Maynard Institute for Journalism Education (in Oakland, California), which has for nearly 10 years trained journalists at mainstream news organizations to respect and report diversity in their communities.

[8] John Hartley, Popular Reality: Journalism, Modernity, and Popular Culture, Arnold: London, 1996, p.32.

Hemant Shah
University of Wisconsin

The Rights of Journalists: Human Rights in the Newsroom

Journalism can be a dangerous profession. When reporting on wars, riots, and other civil disturbances, journalists often place their own lives in jeopardy. Even when they are not reporting on various kinds of violent interactions, reporters may face death and many forms of intimidation from government agents, drug lords, the military, political thugs, organized crime, mercenary groups, etc. One only needs to scan issues of Index on Censorship or any annual report of the Committee to Protect Journalists to be convinced of the scope and depth of the problem. As a result, it is vital, as Article 5 of the Charter suggests, to support all efforts to formulate and implement "effective measures to ensure the safety of journalists," so that they are "recognized as civilians enjoying rights and immunities accorded all civilians in order to conduct their professional duties without harm."

However, certain journalists face yet another form of intimidation that violates their human rights. This additional danger comes not from soldiers or police or judges, but from fellow reporters, editors, and publishers. The problem is discrimination, bigotry, and cultural insensitivity, inside the newsroom, by members of dominant communities against racial, ethnic, and other minorities. Take the US as an example:

* The award-winning columnist Jimmy Brislin once publicly called a Korean-American colleague a "slant-eyed cur" after she privately criticized him for writing what she thought was a sexist column. Brislin apologized for letting the slur "slip out" and he reamined in his job.

* A 1993 survey by the National Association of Black Journalists found that 73 percent of its members thought that blacks were less likely than others to receive promotions. On the other hand, two-thirds of white reporters thought blacks received preferential treatment, according to a 1991 survey.

* Anita Dorren Diggs's observation about the life of black professionals is true of all journalists of color: White colleagues and supervisors feel no obligation to recognize styles and sensibilities of minorities, let alone acknowledge that they exist. Yet, journalists of color are often assigned by white editors to cover stories on the "minority beat."
* In 1995, about 10 percent of the work force employed at daily newspapers was African American, Asian American, Latino, or Native American. About 7 percent of all positions involving editorial decision-making were staffed by racial minorities.

These kinds of actions, attitudes, and conditions create a hostile work environment for racial, ethnic, and other minorities employed in US newsrooms. This type of newsroom culture can create certain expectations (to be deferential and accommodating, for example) for the way minorities ought to behave, think, and work. Such pressures can circumscribe and constrain the freedom of minority journalists to report and write in ways they deem appropriate - a clear violation of their dignity, integrity, and liberty. In addition, and equally as important, news consumers are denied perhaps unique insights and interpretation of events and issues.

Obviously, we should not minimize either the danger journalists face when they leave their newsrooms to report on war and other violence or the need for mechanisms to protect the rights of journalists as the carry out their professional responsibilities. But we must also remember the hostility that some reporters face from their own colleagues and supervisors and demand a discrimination-free working environment for all minority media workers.

Marion Smiley/Department of Political Science/UW Madison

Democratic Rights of Communication

I.)Why is the charter important?/ The charter is important because it both pinpoints the respects in which global communication as now structured is anti-democratic and underscores the potential power of such communication as a democratizing force. Moreover, unlike other tracts on global communication, it construes communication, not just as a human need or as something that has political content, but as a kind of politics itself. As such, it shifts the burden of justification away from social democrats to private owners of communication. In particular, social democrats are no longer forced from the outset to justify their violation of a private right. Instead, private owners of communication are forced to justify their potentially undemocratic communicative practices.

II. Partial Limitations/ But there are, I think, three related drawbacks to the charter, all of which amount to unnecessary open-endedness and render it less compelling (and practical) than it might otherwise be. First of all, we are not told why the state in particular has an obligation to respect/enforce these rights or how distinctions might be drawn between different kinds of communication vis-a-vis regulation. (What kinds of communication can legitimately be regulated and what kinds cannot?) Nor are we provided with a sense of how we might deal with the clashes between liberty and equality that inevitably arise in the field of communication, clashes such as that between the liberty of individuals to express ideas that denigrate particular racial, gender or cultural groups and the presumed equal standing of these groups in the community.

III.)Sources of Difficulty/ The problem here is not with the amount of control asserted or its association with rights. Instead, it is with the particular way in which these rights are asserted, i.e. as moral rights grounded in dignity, liberty and equality. While moral rights are of course important, they do not by themselves tell us anything about the state's obligations; they are too open-ended (as well as impractically absolute); and, to the extent that they rest on both liberty and equality together, they are -- without a set of criteria for balancing these two values -- internally at odds with each other.

IV.)Remedy/ I would instead assert the right to communication as a democratic right and underscore that it is a right to three things: the knowledge necessary to democratic participation (which means, among other things, knowledge that is neither distorted nor narrowly biassed toward one set of interests or perspectives); control over the means/institutions of communication, i.e. accountability; and representation of one's particular culture and/or identity. How might such a formulations help us vis-a-vis the above cited drawbacks? First of all, since the state presumably has an interest in maintaining democracy, it has an interest in respecting/enforcing the rights in question. Second, distinctions can be drawn between different kinds of communication vis-a-vis regulation by selecting only those forms of communication to regulate that promote the above three rights. Finally, conflicts between free expression and the equal standing of groups can be mediated by considerations of democratic participation. Among other things, when the free expression by some members undermines the possibility of participation by others, equality takes precedence over liberty.

lcd

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August 4, 1997

Ref.: GS/1.7

Dr Cees Hamelink
Centre for Communication and Human Rights
123 Burgemeester Hogguerstraat
NL-1064 CL Amsterdam
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Dear Cees,

Re: The People's Communication Charter: The WACC Response

It is my pleasure to inform you that the WACC has decided to endorse the People's Communication Charter (PCC). The PCC was discussed by the WACC members in its eight regions and also by the Central Committee, its governing body who decided to endorse it during its last meeting in Budapest, 26 June-2 July 1997.

WACC understands that PCC is a substantive, timely and entirely appropriate set of principles that privilege people's right to communicate. At the same time WACC affirms the need for a common charter and recognises the PCC as an invaluable evaluatory tool and its usefulness in carrying out a global audit of the democratisation of communication in society.

We would like to share with you the following response that reflects WACC's particular position as an international ecumenical organisation, widely involved in supporting and assisting the democratisation of communications both in the South and the North, and that we would like to be incorporated in the Charter.

1. With regard to the basic problem of justice (c.f. old Article 22, new Article 15), it is not how the media cover trials that should be emphasised but the issues of gross injustice in global communications that exist world-wide. The PCC uses generalisations and neutral language to create a common platform, but this language of generalities hides the realities of difference and the fact that there are disadvantages and double disadvantages that some people (not all) face. For example, issues related to justice in communication depend on the relative positions that people occupy in society. Old Article 22 (new 15) is entirely

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appropriate to the peculiar situations that have arisen in some parts of the developed world where television, as a major site for mediation and commerce, broadcasts particular interests that might affect criminal trials in process. But for the people of the South, and on the global scale of communications justice, such instances are less important than many people who, for reasons of birth or prejudice, have been denied communication.

2. It follows that people in the South, in addition to the accent on rights, would like equal weight to be given to the need for responsibilities and that this be reflected in the entire text rather than tacked on (as was done in old Article 25 - no new Article appears to have replaced this one). This understanding is linked to the simple premise that a collection of individual rights does not add up to a collection of common rights. For rights to be common, people need to recognise that their right to culture and communication is contingent on giving the same right to their neighbours. This is fundamental to the establishment of community. It also recognises that private citizens sometimes exercise power that limits the actions of other citizens and that this is in addition to and different from the power exercised by the state and corporate media establishments.

3. We think that it is necessary for the right to religious identity to be included because for some people it is the bedrock of their culture. (The protection of this identity can be included in old Article 9, new Article 8.)

4. While we recognise that existing international law can be used in the last instance to settle matters related to the violation of rights, we also recognise its limitations and the fact that it is, presently, both used and misused. We believe that what is needed is an overhaul of international law in the interests of the global community of nations.

5. We fully endorse the need for an ombudsman modelled along the lines of a tribunal. But the role of signatories in establishing this office needs to be further clarified.

Sincerely yours,

Carlos A Valle
General Secretary

cc: WACC Officers
WACC Regional Chairpersons
SSC

Democratizing Global Communications Conference
Madison, September 26-28, 1997

Reflections on "The People's Communication Charter"

by Shalini Venturelli
Professor, International Communication Policy
The American University
Chair, Communication & Human Rights Committee of the
International Association of Media and Communication Research

The Charter has a number of strengths. It recognizes that everywhere in the world, not just in the Global South, the governance of information and cultural systems rests no longer in the hands of states and communities as part of a public service model, but is being transferred wholesale to the commercial sector. It attempts to elaborate upon and reach beyond the fundamental right of free expression inscribed within international law, and articulate the significance of communication to the foundations of human life.

For this reason, the Charter suggests that unevenness in development of communication structures can create structural differentiation within economy and society, thereby exacerbating the gaps between rich and poor. Among the principal origins of uneven communication development, the Charter identifies monopolization of media systems by private corporate interests growing increasingly larger in scale and more concentrated in power. It opposes this global trend by inferring from Article 19 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, a "right of access," and proposes a complex new monitoring structure emerging from civil society, the state, and international organizations.

Finally, the Charter makes a unique contribution by bringing together a number of dimensions of communication from which rights can be derived, such as in the area of cultural rights. A clear basis for addressing cultural issues was conspicuously absent from the NWICO debate, though it was asserted within an ambiguous set of assumptions by states in the Third World during the Cold War. The Charter attempts to pick up the

thread and to establish a more universal concern for culture--its protection, autonomy, and regulation. Though the effort is somewhat disjointed and scattered in unconnected references and unexplained assertions throughout the document, I believe that with some further effort, this could become one of the principal pillars of the declaration.

Accordingly, in an effort to further strengthen the Charter's effectiveness, I suggest the need to refine and develop some of its ideas while also addressing some of its logical and substantive problems. While present space constrains the scope of such a discussion, the starting point for revision should involve a precise definition of "communication" as a precondition to articulation of the particular body of rights which may be logically inferred. Different notions of communication point to different structures of rights just as an ambiguous notion suggests no rights at all. The Charter makes a feeble attempt at this as late as the bottom of the second page with the statement that "communication refers to all interactive processes" (p. 2) Asking the world community to recognize that "communication is basic to life" (p. 2) says very little since people communicate with or without the affirmation of their institutions and governments. The question, it would seem, is what particular kind of communication--its dimensions and character--forms the central concern of the Charter? What is really the central issue with respect to the right to communicate? This needs to be clarified and foregrounded towards the beginning. Lacking a sense of priorities in identifying which right comes first and forms the basis of the other rights, one cannot expect to make a real transformation in thinking.

In my view, the document ought to identify those dimensions of communication that are central to the functioning of political freedom and to the grounds of legitimacy of self-determining societies. It is of little international relevance to specify principles of interpersonal interactions among individual parties. To be effective, the Charter must rule out those dimensions of communication belonging to the sphere of private relationships while specifically ruling in the domain of the common interest, the public,

the political, and the cultural. This will in turn require addressing assumptions regarding the meaning of democracy, self-determination, and public space.

Other questions which deserve serious reconsideration in the Charter include:

The fallacy of equating political and cultural freedom with some concept of nature and "natural ecology" thereby replicating the fallacy of a natural rights theory in utilitarian liberalism and further obstructing active transformation of the communication environment (page 1);

The problem of neglecting to distinguish democratic arguments regarding the sovereignty of cultural space from totalitarian arguments (pages 1, 4);

And a counterproductive focus on censorship to curtail "distortion of reality" in the media which would imply censorship, prior restraint, and negative regulation instead of clarifying and emphasizing the significance of enhancing availability of real and adequate information on grounds of diversity of expression through positive regulation (pages 1, 5).

An adequate human rights approach to communication will require attention to these core concerns. Perhaps these and other areas of progressive refinement should form the principal objectives of discussion and debate at the conference.

PCC Response -- Thongchai Winichakul, Department of History, UW - Madison

Only one comment on the Charter -- page 2, first line, first paragraph:

In many countries where the state power is so prevalent and strong, the concentration of communications operations are in the hands/control of the state. Commercial operations are one of the ways to expand the "civil society". Although it is difficult to say those commercial operations have expanded the "public sphere", they do "open up" or liberalize the power over communications, opening the opportunity for a plurality of opinions and diverse expressions than possible under state control.

The paragraph was written with too much of the "first world" experience in mind. The agenda in many "third world" countries remains to liberalize/decentralize/break-up the tight control and monopoly of the state.

PEOPLE'S OR PEOPLES' COMMUNICATION CHARTER?

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The title of this "think piece" points to a major problem in the conceptualization of the Communication Charter. For Indigenous Peoples, all political activity is centered around the right to *self-determination*, that is, the right to make their own laws, speak their own languages, practice their own customs, make their own decisions, and own their own lands and territories. Self-determination is synonymous with *sovereignty* and implies recognition of their status as nations within the international community of Nation/States. They do not necessarily demand separate States; indeed, most Indigenous Peoples are content with being a distinct nation (whose rights are guaranteed and respected) within a pluri-national State. Thus, the Haudenosaunee (Six Nations) issue their own passports and demand that their treaties with the U.S. government be honored that recognize them as a sovereign Nation, but do not propose secession from the United States of America. This is a issue that is very complicated and highly politically charged. It has been debated in the United Nations for several decades and much of the debate is centered around the terminology of "people" versus "peoples". The "s" signifies sovereignty and self-determination, which are adamantly opposed by most Nation/States that enclose Indigenous Peoples. "People" (no "s") refers to a nebulous concept like "humanity" and does not imply any rights or recognition of collective, ethnic or historical distinctness. Consequently, the imprecise usage of "people" in the Charter ignores the political struggles of one of the major segments of global society that should benefit from such a Charter—Indigenous Peoples.

The Charter also skirts some of the issues of "property" and "intellectual, cultural and scientific property rights". The basic human rights referred to in the Charter (and identified in the Appendix) are *individual*, not *collective*, rights. Indigenous Peoples demand not only individual rights, but also collective rights for their communities, clans, lineages, and nations. In practical terms, the basic issue of the inalienability of property is questioned. In Indigenous societies, an individual may be the "holder", "keeper", or "steward" of a crop variety, song, or design, but s/he is NOT the *owner* of such. "Ownership" may rest with relatives and ancestors, as well as future generations—and maybe even plants, animals, or spirits. Knowledge (encoded and often enshrined in language, motif, body-painting, dream-paintings, songs, stories, traditional ecological knowledge, etc.) or genetic resources (animals, crop varieties, medicinal plants, etc.) are not, in fact, property in any sense of the word, since they cannot be sold, traded, or given away by any individual. Who, then, gives permission for knowledge to be disseminated on communication networks?

Furthermore, knowledge cannot be separated from the holistic context of society and culture. Plants, animals, and information about them that are removed from their environments lose some of their qualities. Thus, the reductionalism and particularism

of western science and commerce are alien to most Indigenous Peoples and pose threats not only to their communities, but also to the "components" that are removed for research, evaluation, classification, data analysis, or research and development. That can be taken as literally true. In other words, medicinal plants removed for pharmaceutical screening can harm the plant spirits as well as the people who handle them. By extension, drugs developed from such a process are dangerous to those who use them. Information about plants and animals can also cause harm to those who de-link knowledge from society. Thus, knowledge is not neutral, objective "stuff", but hazardous materials that must be handled with care--and carry with it great responsibilities. Indigenous Peoples feel strongly that scientists and communication experts fail to understand these principles of holism and the basic responsibility for knowledge. This problem has been exacerbated by the communications revolution.

Control of access issues are also not adequately addressed in the Charter. There is an implicit assumption that knowledge made available through communication networks is available with the awareness and permission of the originators or holders ("owners"?) of that information. Article 4, for example, states: "People have the right to gather information". Yet, all the Covenants and Conventions on Human Rights recognize the **right to privacy** as a basic human right. "People" certainly do NOT have the right to gather information—or use knowledge—without **Prior Informed Consent (PIC)** of the people(s) involved.

"Knowledge, innovations and practices" (the terms used in the Convention on Biological Diversity) of Indigenous Peoples and traditional societies are not protectable under international law (IPR law) because "folklore" is considered as being in the "public domain". Likewise, any information (secret, private, or specialized from an Indigenous perspective) published by a scientist about Indigenous cultures also goes into the public domain. And all data put into data banks on Indigenous knowledge also become public. Even if such data are acquired and published for non-commercial, "purely scientific" purposes, there is no guarantee that the scientific information is not "mined" or "bioprospected" by others (including the institutions that funded the research or for which the scientists work) for commercial gain. Much of the information in current data and information banks was acquired **without** Prior Informed Consent and therefore without the knowledge or permission of the Indigenous communities who provided the information. A Communications Charter must deal with these three issues: (a) inadequacies of existing IPRs for protection of information, (b) guarantees that PIC was acquired before information is "shared" (or "biopirated", if seen from the viewpoint of many Indigenous communities); and c) recognition of levels other than Nation/State and the individual, especially Indigenous Peoples and their Nations.

Democratising Global Communications
Madison, Wisconsin, September 26 to 28th 1997.
Seán Ó Siochrú:

Opening up to Democratic Media and the Broader Progressive Movement:
'Think-Piece' on the People's Communication Charter

The People's Communication Charter is intended as a tactical intervention into broader strategic efforts to democratise the global communication environment. Interestingly, its precise focus and role were left open at the outset, leading to its adoption and adaptation in a variety of contexts, adding weight and continuity to a number of events and actions. However, the more the PCC approaches its ultimate form in terms of content and structure, the more it must focus on the current strategic context and its specific role and contribution. Its life span as a 'rent-a-charter' to many an event must be nearing an end.

Efforts and instruments to democratise communication and media exist in different spheres, and the strategic relevance of the PCC should be considered in relation to each.

In the sphere of international law, rights supported in the Charter can claim some limited legal basis as outlined in its Annex. The language of the Charter itself mimics the 'legalese' of such international conventions and agreements. But its aim can hardly be to become incorporated, in whole or in part, into international law. There are also potential risks in utilising the PCC as a means in UN and other fora to press for supplementing e.g. Article XIX of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the current international climate and constellation of forces, opening the debate on a deeper right to communicate might, even with the best of original intentions, result at the end of the day in an *erosion of existing* rights.

In fact, the lack of a means to implement and enforce existing international agreements is probably a greater block to progress right now than the limitations of the agreements themselves. In this, the PCC can play a role. Attempts to prove violations of legal rights utilising the complex, uncertain and compromised means available have been found by some organisations to be counterproductive, absorbing a lot of resources with nothing to show for it. Publicity can be far more effective. And here the PCC's Ombudsman, if implemented on a sufficient scale and with sufficient support, could play a constructive role.

International law exists to a large degree in abstraction from real developments in media and communication. The issue currently of greatest concern is the extent of control that a handful of global corporations is exerting on media and communications globally, at a time when such media are playing an ever growing role in economic, social and cultural institutions. Although clearly mindful also of state abuse of the media, the PCC situates itself strategically in this context, proposing a set of guidelines, an understanding of communication, and an instrument that will not tolerate external control and domination. Its main features are as follows:

1. No matter how many endorse it, the PCC cannot in itself exert any direct influence on current trends in media. It is therefore symbolic in its effect - but symbols are precisely the currency of the media and communication.

2. Its main impact will thus be dependent on the extent to which it can integrate within, and reinforce, the broader movement for more democratic media. As an initiative firmly rooted within civil society, is it on the movements of civil society that it must rely most (as distinct from UN, state, private or even academic spheres). Its role and efficacy within this movement depends on its capacity to identify and build mutually beneficial and reinforcing alliances with the various elements of such a movement.

3. Although the role of the PCC at national level could be important especially in the long term, it is primarily at the international level that it can first gain the broad legitimacy and authority needed to exert its symbolic power. I believe that it must thus continue to focus on building itself within the international movement for media democratisation.

This movement is, at best, a loose grouping, only beginning to develop self-awareness and a shared agenda. At its core (depending on your vantage point) are a number of NGOs and institutions concerned directly with the media, for instance international NGOs representing community radio (e.g. AMARC, Vidéazimut, APC); organisations concerned with media abuse and censorship (e.g. Article XIX), trade union international (e.g. PTTI, IFJ) and supportive academic and other institutions (e.g. IAMCR in the past, and CEM). The *Platform for Cooperation and Democratisation* has also been set up as a forum for broad cooperation. The PCC is already involved in these, some intimately, and is as much itself a part of the movement as any other. On the one hand, the PCC can, and has received from this movement, endorsement across a wide geographical and social base. On the other, the movement is provided with a normative basis and a set of principles.

However, to date, the mutually beneficial growth of PCC and the media democracy movement is approaching a barrier. The basic constraint is that the *number and influence* of NGOs etc. that focus *exclusively or primarily* on media and communication is limited. A huge range of other globally important issues vie for international attention and influence, with communication coming relatively low when set against for instance, imbalanced economic growth and world wide impoverishment, reform of the Bretton Woods institutions, third world debt-repayment, environmental destruction, etc. This is not to say that the movement to democratise media should plan to elbow aside other pressing issues! Rather, both for the media democracy movement generally, and specifically for the role of the PCC, it is vital that common cause be made with these others.

The basis for it is there. The degeneration of the media environment into a global industry controlled by the few is integrally related to other global issues of concern mentioned above. The deteriorating media situation is impacting very badly on other areas of development, often in subtle ways: on long-term economic development in less developed countries; on the capacity to culturally regenerate; and so forth. Here, the media movement and other movements overlap in an area of common concern. Certainly, if the nascent media movement is to gain strength globally, it will be through securing the support of these others i.e. through showing that all progressive development will be far more effective, and the issues they address alleviated, if questions of media and communications are taken on board as part of the agenda.

To give one practical example: It could mean that aid-donor NGOs involved in development issues would explore in depth the implications of the new media regime for their long-term goals - and as a result join in or support the global media democracy movement.

This brings us to the potential strategic role of the PCC. The PCC, as compared to the other elements of the media democracy movement, offers a clear set of normative principles for other movements and organisations (e.g. aid agencies; single issue pressure groups - AMNESTY, GREENPEACE etc;) to focus on and support in relation to media and communication; a benchmark against which to assess their media environment and its impact on their target groups and activities. The PCC also offers a mechanism (the Ombudsman) to seek publicity and symbolic redress for violations that affect their clients and actions. Of course, endorsing the PCC would demand that such organisations explore its implications carefully in relation to their aims, and drawn through its practical activities - but this goes without saying.

The PCC, in turn, would as a result gain broader support and legitimacy and access to a set of possible test cases for consideration by the Ombudsman; and would become part of a larger movement.

In short, the mutually reinforcing strategic roles of the PCC might be:

- a means to highlight to absence of mechanisms to *implement and enforce* existing communication related rights;

- a bridge, one of a number, between the media democracy movement and broader progressive social movements.

However, the content of the PCC is in one aspect deficient, and this might limit its capacity to act as such a bridge. It fails to acknowledge the potential of *people's direct participation in media production and distribution*, not as a sector, but as means by which people directly create and interact. This is the sphere of alternative/community and participative media (democratic media, for short), such as community radio, access television, community networking using internet, alternative programme producers and distributors, and so forth. The preamble to the PCC, for instance, draws attention to the erosion of public media by commercial media, and the need for participation in media policy - but makes no mention of democratic media; under definitions, the term 'media' refers to publicly and privately owned mass media, but not to *collective* ownership and control; Article 6 talks about the right to distribute information and to access to distribution channels - but not to *creation*, and access to *means of media production*; Article 10 again refers to a right to participate in only public decision-making; Article 12 talks about skills to participate fully in public communication, but it refers mainly to the capacity to critically evaluate it; and so forth. Article 11, alone, refers to people's right to participate in, contribute to and enjoy the development of self-reliant communication infrastructures, but the context is clearly very general.

This weakness of the PCC could be very serious. First, deeper engagement with the alternative/community media elements of the broader media democracy movement will demand an explicit recognition of their growing prominence as a third strand alongside public and commercial media.

Second, such recognition will also be needed if the PCC is to act as a bridge to broader development movements and to attract their support. For these others recognise very clearly the tripartite division of state, public and civil society. Aid agencies, for example, see themselves as part of civil society. Critically, throughout all development domains, there is growing emphasis on participative, non-profit and development-oriented practices and institutions as a means to achieve sustainable and equitable cultural, economic and political development. The PCC should explicitly embrace these in the sphere of communication, invite them in to benefit from and enrich the Charter, and eliminate the implicit bias towards public service or commercial as the sole media models.

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Subject: my response

Thoughts on the People's Communication Charter
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My thoughts on the People's Communications Charter (PCC) are rooted in my own experience of almost thirty years in the politics of communication and as a cultural producer in the United States. I have worked as a producer in alternative radio; published several community and labor-based newspapers; and produced progressive alternative cable programming. In California, I organized statewide movements for community access to cable, and licensed an alternative public television station. I have also worked in commercial and public television news as a producer and executive producer, and have recently worked to develop new forms of public journalism on the Internet. Finally, I have been involved with the public journalism movement in the United States for about the past four years. I mention this range of activities because having worked in and organized around the cultural sphere, I am perhaps overly aware of the limits of communications movements in the U.S.

While I agree with almost all of the premises of the PCC concerning human rights and the need for a culture of free communication, while reading the PCC I have a difficult time placing its language, and to a lesser extent its goals, within the framework of democratic politics in the United States. I have tried to imagine passing it on to citizens that I have recently interviewed in Charlotte, North Carolina, Norfolk, Virginia, and Wichita, Kansas, among other places. Many of these people are community leaders at the grassroots, of neighborhood, housing, or social service organizations. Most are either white or African-American. They are acutely aware of the power of their local media to shape their community lives. Many have actively approached newspaper editors, either to ask for changed coverage of their communities, or, in many cases, to support changes that have come about from public journalism. But their primary concerns are community issues: schools and crime, especially, to a lesser extent the environment. Even though these people are all readers and activists, I cannot imagine them reading this document, making much

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sense of it if they could be induced to read it, or acting on it.

The language of the PCC seems more directed toward an audience consisting of United Nations functionaries, left NGOs, and particular left groups than any imaginable broader public in the United States. Perhaps this is the intent. If the assumption is that citizen-activists in the United States, most of whom lie well outside the orbit of the left, are not relevant, or are only relevant in the last resort, i.e. if the PCC represents a sort of international encirclement strategy, then perhaps there is some strategic intent linked to organizing. I am not convinced that this is the broadest or most democratic strategy for demonstrating the integral role that communications plays in shaping peoples' lives and conveying possibilties for democratic control of the communications system, certainly not in the U.S. But I realize that the PCC is oriented toward an international audience.

If it is to have much relevance in the U.S., however, I believe its language would have to be fundamentally transformed, and in the process, its goals might change. In the U.S. there are emerging movements for a restructuring of civil society and the public sphere. They tend to be local, oriented toward specific issue areas, and work within the rubric of community and responsibility rather than the language of rights that undergirds the PCC. This is why, I believe, the most successful example of imposition of restrictions on the communications marketplace in the U.S. has been in the realm of children's programming. Relatively small activist groups have been able to win larger victories because they speak the language of community and the moral responsiblity of the media to children. Were they to have framed this debate in primarily economic or political terms they would not have been able to mobilize the moral anger of so many groups and individuals at the grassroots who lie outside their orbit. At least for activists working in the U.S., and perhaps outside it, this linkage of control over private communications media to other, substantive concerns, might offer one example for a broader democratic strategy.

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FROM: URVASHI BUTALIA Kali Collective

I think something like the Charter is an extremely important document, strategically and symbolically. Symbolically, at an international level, there have been very few (in fact none that I know of) from a *people's* point of view. The NWICO, important though it was, was mainly an institutional response, so this kind of initiative is important. Strategically, because of the lack of accountability of corporate business, and the blurring of national borders that the so-called "globalisation" (and this to me is a misnomer - the correct term should be "Americanisation". If we meant what the word says, there would be free flow of information in all directions, not only from the U.S. to the rest of the world) brings in, we have to start organising at an international level, and nationally as well. One of the most dangerous things that corporate control of media and information have brought in is the illusion of "freedom" - because media are no longer only State-controlled, so it seems as if they are free, and people are free to choose. Something like the Charter, with its emphasis on transparency of information, can help to dispel this myth.

There are a few other points that, to me, are important to raise in such an exercise. I think we need to make it absolutely clear that while we speak, theoretically, of freedom of expression and information, we recognise, practically, that this is a term that is always - or has been so far - relative. It is always the freedom of some, at the cost of others. Marginalised communities, poor people, women, children, disabled people - it is only when all of these have freedom of expression, that we can truly give the term

meaning.

I think also that while the question of respecting the cultural rights of communities is crucial, we need to perhaps add a caution that this should not become an end in itself. By this I mean that it's no use romanticising cultural rights: it is these sorts of things that have allowed, e.g. the Indian government, to sign the CEDAW but reserve clauses about cultural rights, which then end up being so detrimental to women. In many countries in our parts of the world, also, a resurgence of fundamentalism and communalism masquerades as cultural rights, and exercises a kind of arbitrariness, and violence of censorship which is frighteneing. So, the right wing hindu lobby in India can threaten the film industry with violence if film-makers portray hindus in a bad light, and succeed in getting the industry to agree. Somewhere along the way, a charter such as this needs to recognise that the issues are very complicated indeed (which of course it does) and that we need to also open up a space for a great deal of discussion and dialogue which can help us to clarify our own ideas.

Debate is important also because in countries like ours, e.g. the so called "freeing" of the media is now making for a great deal of overt/explicit display of sexuality. This is both a cause of concern, among parents, and of celebration, among those who feel that the hypocrisy of pretending that sex is something one doesn't talk about, is at last disappearing. But between calls for censorship, and calls for complete openness, there seems to be nothing that addresses the genuine concern people feel at, what is called "more sex and violence" in the media. All of this needs discussion.

The Stories We Sell
or
Why Do We Need the People's Communication Charter?
By
George Gerbner

Most of what we know, or think we know, we have never personally experienced. We live in a world erected by the stories we hear and see and tell. Stories socialize us into roles of gender, age, class, vocation and lifestyle, and offer models of conformity or targets for rebellion. They weave the seamless web of the cultural environment that cultivates most of what we think, what we do, and how we conduct our affairs.

The stories that animate our cultural environment have three distinct but related functions. They are (1) revealing how things work; (2) describing what things are; and (3) telling us what to do about them.

Stories of the first kind, revealing how things work illuminate the all-important but invisible relationships and hidden dynamics of life. They make perceivable the invisible and the hidden. Fairy tales, novels, plays, comics, cartoons, and other forms of creative imagination and imagery are the basic building blocks of human understanding.

Stories of the second kind depict what things are. These are descriptions, depictions, expositions, reports abstracted from total situations and filling in with "facts" the gaps in the fantasies conjured up by stories of the first kind. They are the presumably factual accounts, the chronicles of the past and the news of today.

Stories of the third kind tell us what to do. These are stories of value and choice. They are the instructions, cautionary tales, commands, slogans, sermons, laws and exhortations of the day. Today most of them are called commercials and other advertising messages and images we see and hear every day.

Ideally, the three kinds of stories check and balance each other. But in a commercially driven culture, stories of the third kind pay for most of the first two. That creates a coherent cultural environment whose overall function is to provide a hospitable and effective context for stories that sell. With the coming of the electronic age, that cultural environment is increasingly monopolized, homogenized, and globalized.

For the longest time in human history, stories were told only face to face. A community was defined by the rituals, mythologies and imageries held in common. All useful knowledge is encapsulated in aphorisms and legends, proverbs and tales, incantations and ceremonies.

The industrial revolution changed all that. One of the first machines stamping out standardized artifacts was the printing press. Its product, the book, was a prerequisite for all the other upheavals to come.

The book could be given to all who could read, requiring education

and creating a new literate class of people. Readers could now interpret the book (at first the Bible) for themselves, breaking the monopoly of priestly interpreters and ushering in the Reformation.

Stories can now be sent -- often smuggled -- across hitherto impenetrable or closely guarded boundaries of time, space and status. The book lifts people from their traditional moorings as the industrial revolution uproots them from their local communities and cultures.

Publics, created by such publication, are necessary for the formation of individual and group identities in the new urban environment, as the different classes and regional, religious and ethnic groups try to live together with some degree of cooperation and harmony.

Publics are the basic units of self-government, electing or selecting representatives to an assembly trying to reconcile diverse interests. The maintenance and integrity of multiple publics makes self-government feasible for large, complex, and diverse national communities.

One of the most vital provisions of the of the print era was public education, where face-to-face learning and interpreting could, ideally, liberate the individual from both tribal and medieval dependencies and all cultural monopolies.

The second great transformation, the electronic revolution, ushers in the telecommunications era. Its mainstream, television, is superimposed upon and reorganizes print-based culture. Unlike the industrial revolution, the new upheaval does not uproot people from their homes but transports them in their homes.

For the first time in human history, children are born into homes where mass-mediated storytellers reach them on the average more than seven hours a day. Most waking hours, and often dreams, are filled with their stories. Giant industries discharge their messages into the mainstream of common consciousness. The historic nexus of church and state is replaced by television and state.

Broadcasting is the most concentrated, homogenized, and globalized medium. The top 100 advertisers pay for two-thirds of all network television. Four networks, allied to giant transnational corporations -- our private "Ministry of Culture" -- control the bulk of production and distribution, and shape the cultural mainstream.

The Cultural Environment Movement was launched in response to the challenge created by the newe nexus of television and the state. Its Founding Convention of 261 delegates was held in St. Louis, Missouri, March 15 -17, 1996, in cooperation with Webster University. It was the most diverse representation of leaders and activists in the field of culture and communication that has ever met.

The concepts that motivated the Founding Convention were developed after 30 years of media research. But research is not enough; we must reclaim the rights gained through centuries of struggle. The new globalized and centralized cultural environment demands a new

approach. Working separately on individual issues, was not sufficient. Treating symptoms instead of starting to prevent the wholesale manufacturing of the conditions that led to those symptoms was self-defeating. Individual effort, local action, and national and international constituencies acting in concert can, together, help to begin that long, slow and difficult task. It involves:

* Building a new coalition involving media councils in the U.S. and abroad; teachers, students and parents; groups concerned with children, youth and aging; women's groups; religious and minority organizations; educational, health, environmental, legal, and other professional associations; consumer groups and agencies; associations of creative workers in the media and in the arts and sciences; independent computer network organizers and other organizations and individuals committed to broadening the freedom and diversity of communication.

* Opposing domination and working to abolish existing concentration of ownership and censorship (both of and by media), public or private. It means including in cultural decision-making the less affluent, more vulnerable groups who, in fact, are the majority of the population.

* Seeking out and cooperating with cultural liberation forces of other countries working for the integrity and independence of their own decision-making and against cultural domination and invasion. Learning from countries that have already opened their media to the democratic process.

* Supporting journalists, artists, writers, actors, directors, and other creative workers struggling for more freedom from having to present life as a commodity designed for a market of consumers. Working with guilds, caucuses, labor and other groups for diversity in employment and in media content.

* Promoting media literacy, media awareness, critical viewing and reading, and other media education efforts as a fresh approach to the liberal arts and an essential educational objective on every level.

* Placing cultural policy issues on the social-political agenda. Supporting and if necessary organizing local and national media councils, study groups, citizen groups, minority and professional groups and other forums of public discussion, policy development, representation, and action.

These were the considerations that found expression in, and led to the Convention's approval of, the People's Communication Charter as a basic document of CEM.

Some thoughts on the "People's Communication Charter"

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The following remarks on the "People's Communication Charter" draw from experiences in Latin American communication and media, the author's area of expertise. The Charter is particularly relevant in the Latin American context for the following reasons:

- The failed attempts in many countries of the region to provide an alternative to commercial media in the 1970s and the present hegemony of private conglomerates in the context of neoconservative policies implemented from Mexico to Argentina.
- The presence of alternative media that provide communication outlets for marginalized populations.
- Continuous government pressure and persecution of dissident media and reporters.
- Persistent violence against journalists even after the shift from military dictatorships to civilian administrations in the 1980s and 1990s.

One of the most crucial points addressed in the Charter is the distinction between public and private media. It is important to stress that the concept of public should not be confused with political, state, or government. A few decades ago, the state was identified with the promotion of democratic communication, the defender of the public's interests vis-a-vis the shortcomings of market-dominated media. The authoritarian component of Latin American states, however, was left virtually unexplored. Only during the struggles against authoritarian regimes in the past decade did the idea of civil society receive increasing attention in academic quarters and become central to political practices. The civil society concept provides a much-needed alternative to market-centered and state-centered models. It is not a coincidence that the movement for alternative media (community radio, grassroots video) gained momentum simultaneous with the intensification of anti-authoritarian struggles carried out by a number of organizations in civil society.

The protection of cultural identity is another issue that has been a subject of intense discussion in Latin America. The traditional antinomy between national vs. foreign media seems to straitjacket the debate

and ignore the fact that national doesn't necessarily mean democratic. The growing prowess of domestic media conglomerates in several countries in the region does not guarantee democratic communication. Quite the contrary: they often operate in favor of the powerful and raise the dangers of rampant commercialism and the elimination of alternative voices. The question is, how can the plurality of cultures that are encircled by different nation-states be strengthened and adequately represented in the media? How to offer alternatives to the rock of the state and the hard place of the market, both antithetical to the communication needs and cultures of masses of poor citizens and marginalized minorities? The Charter's emphasis on the need to provide basic literacy and media education is an urgent demand in a region where poverty and illiteracy have soared and levels of media consumption have grown remarkably in the last decades. Nor is the much-touted democratic potential of cyberspace a magic solution to chronic problems of exclusion and deprivation. Virtual space remains a far and remote space for millions who can't even fulfill basic needs, let alone get access to computer and telephone networks.

Notwithstanding the erosion of state sovereignty amid the intensification of globalization, the nation-state remains a dominant power center and concentrates important resources and decisions that greatly affect the communication opportunities of citizens. It's where an important part of the combined actions of local and international non-governmental organizations need to be directed to effectively nurture citizenship and to democratize local and national media structures.

Finally, the accountability of media organizations is an issue that only recently has gained attention. A long history of absence of basic democratic freedoms and the proximity of large media conglomerates and government powers have delayed a deeper examination of the rights and responsibilities of different media vis-a-vis the public. Recent cases of misinformation, invasion of privacy, and the live broadcast of trials and military actions have raised questions about ethical standards and intensified the debate about what values the media should promote. This is an extremely relevant issue in times when commercial media prevail almost uncontested, state-controlled media regularly function as mouthpieces for government officials, and alternative media experience substantial economic difficulties and the frontal opposition of governments and private groups.

THE PEOPLE'S COMMUNICATION CHARTER and "the People"

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THE PEOPLE'S COMMUNICATION CHARTER draft is an important effort and a deftly conceptualized statement that articulates both the dense array of obstacles to democratic control of the media, and hence of democratic and open public communication, and the beginnings of an outline of resistance to those obstacles. I strongly endorse the underlying principle of the CHARTER draft that democratic control of media is not only desirable but essential to a more just, democratic, and egalitarian society. And, I note with interest, from the perspective of a cultural critic and an activist, the CHARTER's formulation of "people's fundamental right to communicate under international human rights law" as part of its "PROTECTIVE STANDARDS" and of the "respect of human rights" as the fundamental principle of "PEOPLE'S RESPONSIBILITIES." The iteration, under the heading of OBJECTIVES of a "shared position on communication from the perspective of common interests, needs, and rights" is similarly an important and charged qualification to a framework that seeks to open media access to all peoples. There are three crucial linkages proposed by the CHARTER that are most striking:

--of open access to communication as essential to a democratic and just society;

--of the right to accessible communication as part of human rights;

--of the diverse communities and peoples included within its objectives under a "shared position" of "common interests, needs, and rights."

In the context of the laudable and carefully conceptualized framework of this draft, I would raise two initial but sympathetic questions. The first is of the concept of "the citizen" as opposed to "the people," as, for example:

in the opening statement: "It is time for individual citizens and their organizations";

and, under "ACCOUNTABILITY AND LIABILITY": "consistently with the fundamental right of citizens."

The considerable and important presence of non-citizen residents within a region and a state and of other peoples equally present--of refugees, exiles, unregistered residents--are increasingly a norm rather than an exception. And the rights of those various and diverse non-citizens are as fundamental a measure of the democratic and just 'quality of life' within a state as are the rights of its citizens. The tension--or simply slippage--in the CHARTER draft between the "interests, needs, and rights" of citizens and of non-citizen

residents is worthy of discussion. The state-centered or at least centralized potential of equitable and democratic access to media and communication is considerable, with its only-too-familiar attendant dangers. Who or what entity, for example, will engage in the democratic apportionment of information and media access or 'literacy' training from which we all benefit? The founding principles of the CHARTER need to straightforwardly attend to more than just citizens if xenophobia and national chauvinism is to be discouraged.

The second question, striking in a careful reading of the CHARTER, is its uneasy juxtaposition of "information" and "culture." Media do create and disseminate both information and culture; this is a perfectly comprehensible juxtaposition, on the one hand--especially if we understand culture as representations of social and cultural practices. But, at the risk of being fussy, culture is, but not only, a representation. It is also networks of practices and rituals and relationships; they include but are not limited to the media communication within and between cultures. And further, information, so-called, has a vexed relationship to culture--even if the Murdoch and CNN media regimes have increasingly normalized what's considered "information" and how that "information" is presented throughout the globe. This latter suggests the "culture" of information itself and its pervasive inflection by place-specific culture, so-called--the local made global. Was the astounding coverage and consumption of the O.J. Simpson trial in the U.S. (and beyond the U.S., the truth be said) an instance of media information or media culture? And from what place?

Something of the uneasy juxtaposition of information and culture is evident in the PREAMBLE's reference to "information and culture" that are "not provided primarily as a *public service* but for *private gain*" (emphasis added). While information as a "public service" instead of for "private gain" makes considerable social sense, it makes less sense to speak of culture as a "public service"; that suggests the utter institutionalization and making a representation of an at least sometimes and somewhat dynamic series of relationships and practices. A formulation that recognizes culture (and, in fact, information) as something more than simply an exchangeable commodity to be provided more equitably is worth discussion.

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Strategies for Democratizing Communications: The Impediments before Us.

Allen Hunter

Strategically it is important to consider the political and economic forces, or social actors, with a stake in the political economy and political culture of media and communications systems. It is useful to distinguish three major political perspectives toward the (politics of) the media and the constituencies which support them: 1) those committed to the profit-driven, consumerist and statist communications systems; 2) those that seek to recoup the purported traditional values of yesteryear; and 3) those who seek media and communications systems consonant with democracy, equality, and a respect for individual autonomy and collective identity.

I fear that at present the first two are better organized, have deeper pockets, and have greater ideological coherence than the third.

First, consider the groups with a stake in the status quo:

- Corporations: Communications conglomerates are central, but far from alone in having a stake in the status quo. Wall St. and Madison Ave. (finance capital and the advertising\public relations industries committed to "the market" and consumerism), national and transnational corporations and retail chains (that manufacture and sell telecommunications products and use mass culture to promote their goods and services and reconstruct production relations) also are committed to the status quo.
- Professionals and experts: The most powerful segments of numerous professional groups–lawyers, accountants, producers of mass culture, scientists and engineers in the communications industries advertising and travel agents, middle level corporate managers (committed to using communications/information systems for top-down control of employees), etc. –will be hostile to democratic movements.
- The state and politicians: Even the most democratic states have large sectors committed to undemocratic communications and information systems. Even if democratic movements could force states to regulate/break-up/transform communications empires, the military and surveillance fractions of the state are hostile to democratic oversight. Moreover, even liberal/democratic politicians who invoke an ethos of democratic, participatory politics have a short-term interest in using television, direct mail and other mass-mediated methods that treat voters as consumers.
- Consumers: Many people around the globe–not just in the U.S., Japan and Europe–are deeply ambivalent about what they (i.e. "we") want from communications and mass culture. We may want to be actively and democratically involved as producers and users of politically relevant information, but we also want to consume of mass-mediated culture and buy the iconic items of modernity. Many people (including some of "us" already committed to democratic communications and media) will need to be convinced that popular, grass-roots transformations of communications will not degrade cultural products or impose repressive cultural norms. Indeed, many hundreds of millions of people in poorer countries will understandably view attempts to democratize the media as an effort by the rich to keep the poor from acquiring the same consumer items the affluent already have.

Second, there are major political and cultural forces with have repressive cultural and political agendas. In the U.S. at least these movements are committed to deregulation of the economy but repressive control of the culture; hence they seldom view corporate power as the problem and focus on the liberal/secular/subversive values of media professionals and multiculturalist intellectuals as responsible for the degradation of the culture. These movements utilize cutting edge communications technologies; thus like previous authoritarian populist movements they use modern/post-modern technologies to impose the purported values of

imagined tradition.

- The U.S. New Right: In the U.S. contemporary cultural conservatives (secular as well as religious fundamentalists) attack elite liberals as the enemy. They make common cause as critics of political correctness, religious critics of secular culture, defenders of heterosexist, patriarchal, and western/"white" cultural norms, and critics of the supposedly liberal press.
- Fundamentalist movements: In other regions of the world many national and transnational movements identify foreign (western) mass media that invade their lands and demean their cultures as the enemy.
- Political opportunists: Leaders in many developing countries seek to legitimate their regimes by portraying liberal values as immoral, alien, western impositions that denigrate their own civilizations.
- Consumers: Many consumers/victims of mass culture can flip from desiring access to any and all streams of culture/information to seeking oversight of mass culture, libraries, schools, publishers, etc. Understandably upset by the violence, degradation, sexist sexualization of mass culture, many of "us" find the self-presentation of conservatives as populist defenders of morality compelling when juxtaposed to the amorality of corporate CEOs and the seeming immorality of liberals who defend any and all individual freedoms without regard for collective/communal/neighborhood concerns.

Third are the groups with an interest in and (potential) vocation for democratizing the media. Currently this broad tendency is divided and coalitions will have to be constructed. Democratic movements will find it hard to forge credible strategies at either the global or national level. Transnationally communications conglomerates are well served by international organizations like the WTO, and the IMF/World Bank complex, but democratic transnational movements which can gain and retain power are a project not a reality. The difficulty in forging viable transnational movements is among the reasons that the People's Communications Charter draws on the morally compelling language of human rights, and appeals to existing international governance bodies to broaden the scope of human rights protocols to include communications and culture. Moreover, the globalization of mass culture and concentration of ownership of the means of communication means that movements within most nations (with the United States and perhaps Japan and Germany as partial exceptions) will be hard pressed to control their cultural and informational environments.

In addition, there are major fracture lines which divide potential allies from each other within nations. In the United States major fracture lines divide:

- Those who focus on Washington vs. Hollywood, i.e. those concerned with the bias in and unequal access to information and analysis necessary for people to make informed political decisions vs. those who focus on the degrading and harmful consequences of violent, sexualized, sexist and racist mass media;
- those people and organizations with a stake in bolstering alternative media, those focused on changing the content in existing mass media, and those concerned with gaining democratic control over major communications systems via anti-trust and other policy initiatives;
- Those people with liberal professional identities –e.g. librarians, teachers and scholars, publishers and editors of books and journals of opinion–vs. people who view themselves as "regular," or "ordinary" folk, with the former likely to invoke their expertise to challenge corporate power **and** democratic oversight and the latter employing a diffuse populist rhetoric that does not recognize the interests/skills that particular groups have.

Ideological priorities vary and are not always consonant with each other:

- Indigenous peoples have different concerns than individuals concerned with lack of access to information; among indigenous peoples those (men) with traditional power may be at odds with others (women and youth) who seek a more complex negotiation of tradition and change.
- Those concerned with racial/gender/sexual preference stereotyping may be at odds with civil libertarians.
- Civil libertarians worried about information systems used to undemocratically control "us" may have different priorities than those of "us" worried about the tremendous threats (irresponsible disposal of hazardous waste, transnational flows of drugs and electronic laundering of money, movement of nuclear

materials from states to criminal syndicates or terrorists) which legitimate spying, secrecy, and surveillance.

Progressive media activists are weakened by organizational fragmentation and coalition-building from the top-down.

- Organizational fragmentation and issue dispersal even among those with shared values is debilitating (even as it has allowed multicultural identities to flourish and independent local groups and hence many leaders to emerge).
- Building organizations such as the Cultural Environment Movement by getting leaders of numerous organizations to sign on as coalition members without a commitment their organizations will actively educate their members about the issues or commit their own resources to the coalition can provide short-run legitimacy, but is unlikely to contribute to long-run empowerment.

What are the implications of these many differences in priorities and values?

The main implication is that progressive media activists and scholars should not turn too quickly to formulating policy and lobbying for its adoption, but should rather commit time and resources to building a movement via mutual education, seeking bases for joint action, learning to express their critiques, concerns, values and prescriptions in popular idioms which resonate with the concerns of people's daily lives.

Yet without some credible political issue or explicit focus, there is not much basis for concerted collective action. We need a multicultural, transnational, and polyvalent approach to challenging corporate control of the media and communications systems. An attack on the overweening economic power and political clout of global corporations that disregards or suppresses different identities and interests would not only fail but be politically retrograde.

The ideological and organizational challenges progressive media activists face are similar to the challenge all progressives with broad political agendas face. They include:

- how to combine the particular and the universal, identity and interest, the libertarian and communal, the professional and the popular, the local, national and global in a vibrant and democratic movement.
- how to create contexts for open discussions across identities and interests to learn from each other and openly explore each other's priorities and values.
- how to organize membership educational programs within organizations that are at once ambitious, draw on real expertise, and are also be open to revision based on what the "teachers" learn from the "taught."
- how to take democracy seriously within our own organizations and coalitions. Currently there are numerous organizations which seek a more democratic "society," but which do not practice democracy internally or in their coalitions. For groups concerned with democratic communications an obvious place to start is with the intra- and inter-organizational communications systems.
- how groups with specific interests can teach and learn from each other about ways that corporate power has adverse affects in different arenas.
- how to develop credible, action-oriented political agendas that have a chance of being achieved without denying the radically transformative changes necessary to really realize their goals;
- how groups such as those of us meeting in Madison can act with the urgency the situation demands, but without claiming a legitimacy or representativeness they have not earned.

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