

THE DEMOCRATISATION OF COMMUNICATION

Working Title

1. Rationale

It is already clear (if it was ever in doubt) that the 'collapse of communism' and the 'end of the Cold War' will not automatically lead to new politico-economic structures that will engender global peace, stability and equality. In fact, the reverse seems likely to happen, given the number of ethno-nationalist conflicts that have erupted in the former Soviet Union and Central Europe and the lack of unanimity within, for example, the EEC itself. Now that the facade has been torn down, there is abundant evidence that Communism and the Cold War actually enabled certain countries in the Western alliance politically, economically and culturally to dominate others in the same region. It is no surprise, therefore, that these relationships are being reassessed.

This process of re-evaluation inevitably includes the North's relations with the South, particularly its trade and finance arrangements, and serious questioning of the trend towards the globalisation of communication and culture. Yet, neither international agreements such as GATT and WARC, nor the Single European Act, nor the Mercosur (the common market of South America) are likely to change for the better a relationship characterised by economic and cultural servitude.

The 'democratisation of communication' is a thread running throughout this debate, from the 1960s (the 'right to communicate'), through the 1970s and 1980s (the NIIO/NWICO), and the early 1990s (the MacBride Round Tables and the movement for democratic communication). One recent call is for an amendment to Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to *include* the 'right to communicate'. The key issue is how to democratise communication in ways that are compatible with collective (rather than national) identities, and with the aspirations of peoples of different ethnic backgrounds, cultures and faiths.

The present situation demands a radical reassessment of socio-political concepts of communication, one which moves beyond 'civil society' and the 'nation-state' to principles of social justice and equality which stress human dignity and shared humanity and which are valid for all peoples.

'What is needed is that the world community as a whole should transform radically the institutions and arrangements which arose in a different age - an age of domination, imperialism, and inequality - and which are wholly inadequate to present needs and inconsistent with the goals of democracy, equality and equity in international relations. This transformation requires the formulation of a vision of a more democratic, international structure capable of steering social, political and economic change in the interests of humanity as a whole, and the adoption of this vision through international agreement.'

(The Challenge to the South. The Report of the South Commission. 1990, p.285.)

In this context, and in the field of communications, the proposed book will seek:

* to identify the goals of democracy, equality and equity in international relations;

* to identify the ways in which systems and institutions are inadequate to the demands of a world whose socio-political structures are being overturned;

* to articulate a vision of the new democratic structures that might emerge;

* to propose the kind of international agreements necessary to genuine democratisation of communication.

Authors of chapters will be asked to take a universal approach to the theme, outlining a theoretical domain and illustrating it from their own particular experience.

2. Chapters and authors

A Preface will outline the theoretical background to the book and identify the need for practical, visionary concepts for the future.

THEORETICAL ISSUES

1. Cees J. Hamelink (Professor of Communications, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, The Netherlands).

'The State as bastion of communication freedom.'

Civilisation evolved the nation-state as a mechanism to preserve the political, economic and cultural identity of particular groups of people. Today, the nation-state is being challenged by notions which place a higher value on culturally specific identity than on collective identity (e.g. ethnicity vs. nationality), and elsewhere on collective identity rather than on national identity (e.g. Islam). How does this change the common understanding of democratic freedom and what role does communication play in this process? What are the potential conflicts facing the democratisation of communications and the democratisation of multi-ethnic, multi-cultural societies?

2. Rafael Roncagliolo (Director of the Institute for Latin America, Lima, Peru).

'The emergence of civil society as a force for democratisation.'

'Civil society' found its present-day roots in the post-dictatorship era of Latin America and the collapse of Communism in Europe. But 'civil society' is not a new phenomenon and the people who constitute it were, in a sense, there all the time. What (re-)organisation needs to take place to enable people to unite in ways which could confront oppression? What is the role of communication, particularly new technologies, in this process? What

should 'civil society' do both to consolidate its position and to focus attention on the economic, rather than political, problems which have still to be tackled?

3. Robert A. White (Professor of Communication, Gregorian University, Rome, Italy).

'The contribution of social movements to the democratisation of communication.'

In the context of the South's struggle against cultural and intellectual dependency on the North, social movements have arisen which attempt to discover points of access to the dominant cultures and power structures of different societies. This has often involved modes of subversion or appropriation, particularly in the field of communication and cultural production. What is the role of social movements and, therefore, popular culture in this revaluation of cultural processes? What potential for resistance and transformation, and what possibilities of mutual learning, lie in a concept of communication that asserts self-recognition in contrast to collective, national identity?

4. Pradip Thomas (World Association for Christian Communication, London, United Kingdom).

'Traditional and indigenous patterns of communication as models for democratisation.'

The common assumption is that Western forms of mass media, including the new technologies they use, are the most suitable for modern societies. However, there is increasing evidence that they promote social and cultural schism rather than a sense of community and human dignity. What potential do traditional, indigenous modes of communication offer for an increasingly fragmented Western society?

PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

5. George Gerbner (Professor of Communication, The Annenberg School, University of Pennsylvania, USA).

'The globalisation of culture as an obstacle to democratisation.'

It is arguable that the phenomenon of culture is based on ethnicity and nationalism. However, in the 20th century the mass media have created a global cultural environment which has usurped the traditional role of communities in providing social and cultural identity. How is it possible to reclaim the right to basic principles of liberal education and self-government in a democracy in a mediated world whose media are not free and fair?

6. Kaarle Nordenstreng (Professor of Journalism, University of Tampere, Tampere, Finland).

'Reforming the principles and practices of international journalism.'

The two key areas in the democratisation of communication are culture and journalism. News values, news sources, and the treatment of news and information in the mass media have been the focus of considerable attention from international bodies of journalists, the MacBride Commission and radical politicians. Yet news and information are still fairly strictly controlled by

governments and institutions, particularly for political and economic advantage. How is it possible to democratise the practices of journalism, providing genuinely free access to information about issues of public concern, and at the same time satisfy notions of national and individual security and privacy?

7. Colleen Roach (Professor of Communications, Queens College, New York).
'Communication, women and patriarchy.'

Women constitute half the world's population but until recently have been virtually invisible in terms of communication freedoms and public media coverage. In what ways can women's media networks, both those that supply news about women's activities and concerns to the mass media, and those that use alternative media channels to reach women with vital information that will support them in community activities, be democratized? In a patriarchal world, how is it possible to bring women's values to the fore in matters of communication?

8. Ned Thomas (Professor of Communication, University of Wales, Cardiff.)
'Minority languages and the media.'

A discussion of the important issues relating to literacy, social cohesion, access to the media and cultural imperialism in the context of European linguistic minorities and in comparison, by analogy, with some situations in developing countries.

MORAL ARGUMENTS

9. Clifford G. Christians (Professor of Communications, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, USA).
'Communication ethics as the basis of genuine democracy.'

Communication underlies all human actions, which themselves are governed by differing moral values. In order to establish tolerance, respect and a sense of common purpose (peace, education, equity) universal principles such as truth-telling, human dignity and solidarity must underlie communication. What are the ethical arguments for communication that is genuinely democratic? How can those arguments be turned into practice?

10. Stewart M. Hoover (Professor of Communications, University of Colorado, Boulder, USA).
'Mass media and religious pluralism.'

Today's mass media have to reflect a world which is multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious. How are they succeeding or failing in doing this? What is the relationship between religion and the media? What are the conflicts between 'secular' media and religious issues? In what ways could a more democratic approach to mass media contribute to greater tolerance of other peoples, cultures and religions?

11. Majid Tehranian (Professor of Communications, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, USA).

'The spiritual heritage of the world as the communications philosophy of a new age.'

The people of the world share a common humanity. Despite social, cultural and religious differences, in order to survive they must discover and promote that sense of oneness. A new solidarity, a new spirituality based on the totality of human heritage, could be the basis for future peace and stability. What role can public communication play in creating this new world? What steps can be taken in a mass mediated environment to ensure that individual cultures are not stamped out and that peoples and societies are not alienated? How can we celebrate multi-culturalism and a revitalisation of humanity by means of communication?