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NEW INTERNATIONAL
DIRECTIONS*A Nonaligned Viewpoint*

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The international viewpoint expressed here reflects nonaligned thinking that is to be found in Europe and in much of the Third World. My statement is deliberately provocative and is intended to cast critical light on some fashionable visions of communications in the future. I do not challenge the facts about contemporary developments in communications presented by other contributors to this volume. But beyond their statements lies a certain mystification about the future of communications that has resulted in various ill-founded conceptions which must be examined critically and thoughtfully; one might say that they should be "problematicized." Two overall stereotypes, in particular, merit special critical attention. One is conjured up by the phrase "communications age," the other by "global village," which is Marshall McLuhan's contribution to the debate.

The notion that we are entering or living in a communications age suggests that an advanced industrialism is leading essentially to an "information society" in which the dominant social and economic activities center on

the handling of information rather than materials. This view is supported by transformations in the structure of the labor force and in methods of storing and transmitting information in the service of production and management. The idea gains further credence from the pressure that developing countries have exerted in UNESCO and other political forums in demanding that all forms of communication serve their interests better. Even Marxist-Leninist positions lend support to the vision of the communications age by asserting that the struggle between ideologies intensifies under conditions of advanced capitalism and socialism.

Yet the vision is as ill-founded and misleading as Daniel Bell's theory of postindustrial society or its variant developed by Zbigniew Brzezinski, the "technetronic era." The trouble with these theories is that social development in technocratic terms concentrates on methods used in production and management, on the lifestyles of people, and on the formal aspects of running society. Absent is a truly historical dimension, which alone can yield an adequate understanding of man's emergence and the development of civilization. Even more significant is the absence of an analysis based on social classes; the class aspect is looked on as an obsolete notion abolished by the "post" stage of industrialism. A profound examination of the social foundations of the information society is very much needed.

A critical approach to these popular theories reveals that they contain more ideological manipulation than social science. One does not have to search far to expose the fallacy of the communications age. It is evident that information has had a crucial role in the history of man and his productive activities, beginning with the Stone Age. Nor are information and communication isolated social phenomena but rather integral parts of others more fundamental. Finally, communication embodies conflicting social interests with the consequence that no piece of social information can ever be completely neutral, independent, or free of the social forces that operate within and between societies.

This kind of ABC is naturally understood by those coming from developing countries in which the struggle for survival is an everyday reality. Thus it is only logical that a movement has been organized in the nonaligned countries to declare a new international information order parallel to the program for a new international economic order. This is difficult for Western thinking to grasp, although there are signs that the enthusiasm for new communications technologies is being tempered by critical reasoning. Elie Abel's chapter offers an example of this more balanced and critical ap-

proach. Douglas Cater's recent article on "the survival of human values" offers another example of reasonable Western thinking.¹ Likewise, a sensible call from France has been voiced by François Régis Hutin, who makes the point that "informatics" is "becoming the holy grail of the West . . . the panacea for unemployment and trade deficits, for melancholy and boredom." He has this advice to offer: "Stop. The bandwagon is rolling too fast. The enthusiasm is too forced, too much."²

McLuhan's vision of the global village, as recently elaborated by Ithiel de Sola Pool and others, suggests that technological development and economic integration will demolish the nation-state as a frame of social order. This is to be replaced by a more or less universal marketplace of production and consumption, facilitated by the rapid transfer of information and material goods and unimpeded by such "anachronisms" as national frontiers. The global village plus the communications age would therefore produce a paradise in which there is a free flow of information on a planetary scale.

Once again, certain aspects of contemporary development, which include increased trade and other economic exchanges between various parts of the world, more direct contacts among distant societies by mass tourism, and virtually instantaneous communication around the globe, seem to support this vision. But this is merely another false view of reality. National frontiers are not necessarily withering away, nor are societies inevitably being pushed by technology into a homogeneous "United States of the World."

There is considerable fresh evidence to the contrary, notably the revival of Islam and its emergence as a force working against the annexation of societies such as Iran by the Western way of life. The continuing strength of separatist movements, like those of the Basques and the Kurds, show how even a well-established political and military order can be shaken by new frontiers being erected inside a nation-state. A realistic appraisal of these trends indicates that the global village stereotype is merely a form of ideological manipulation meant to obscure the presence in the world of serious conflicts of interest—not to speak of the historical struggle between antagonistic classes and two social systems, capitalism and socialism.

REAFFIRMING PRINCIPLES

However attractive it may be for a Western eye to perceive the world of the twenty-first century in terms of a universal technoculture, it is wishful

thinking rather than a serious prognosis. Despite communications, the world's divisions continue, not only between nation-states but often within societies.

Adequate preparation for the future cannot be based on a vision of Western life projected into the global village as a homogeneous marketplace for free enterprise—a sort of eighteenth-century dream of Adam Smith to come true in the twenty-first century. If realism suggests that we think in terms of individual societies, their historically determined formation, and their sociocultural peculiarities, then we should prepare ourselves for international cooperation in a democratic community of sovereign societies. This means more international equality and more mutual benefit instead of dependency and domination in the future family of nations.

Let us recall how the majority of today's nations see the global objectives. Here is a key statement from the final declaration of the 1979 summit meeting of nonaligned countries in Havana:

The Sixth Conference of Heads of State or Government appeals to all peoples of the world to participate in efforts to free the world from war, the policy of force, blocs and bloc politics, military bases, pacts and interlocking alliances, the policy of domination and hegemony, inequalities and oppression, injustice and poverty and to create a new order based on peaceful coexistence, mutual cooperation and friendship, an order in which each people may determine its own future, attain its political sovereignty and promote its own free economic and social development, without interference, pressures or threats of any kind.³

This means no more and no less than a reaffirmation of the ideals codified in the charter of the United Nations and in other principles laid down for healthy international relations. In other words, there are good grounds to believe that international law and order, formulated in the twentieth century, will finally be put into practice in the twenty-first century.

Although this presents no revolutionary view of the future, it does imply painful surgery in a number of sensitive areas of the western hemisphere. The future course of communications will be determined by how the objectives for a new international information order are set forth by the movement of the nonaligned countries. These objectives are based on the following tenets:

- (a) The fundamental principles of international law, notably self-determination of peoples, sovereign equality of states, and noninterference in the affairs of other states.

- (b) The right of every nation to develop its own independent information system and to protect its national sovereignty and cultural identity, in particular by regulating the activities of transnational corporations.
- (c) The right of people and individuals to acquire an objective [view] of reality by means of accurate and comprehensive information as well as to express themselves freely through various media of culture and communication.
- (d) The right of every nation to use its information to make known its interests, aspirations, and political, moral, and cultural values.
- (e) The right of every nation to participate on governmental and non-governmental levels in the international exchange of information under favorable conditions, which provide a sense of equality, justice, and mutual advantage.
- (f) The responsibility of various [participants] in the process of information to help [achieve] its truthfulness and objectivity as well as the particular social objectives to which the information activities are dedicated.⁴

These principles are endorsed by the United Nations, but they are still considered in the West to be far too radical. This was evident in the debate of the MacBride Commission Report at the General Conference of UNESCO in Belgrade in the autumn of 1980. The nonaligned proposal which contained the principles outlined above was forcefully resisted by the Western Bloc, led by the United Kingdom and the United States, with the result that the final compromise resolution was heavily watered down and flavored with "free flow" phraseology. It is to be noted, however, that the consensus reached at UNESCO does not compromise what obviously is most essential in the objectives of the new order: that it should be based on the fundamental principles of international law. I have examined the relation of these principles to journalism elsewhere.⁵

Thus the cornerstone of what is understood to be a new international information order (in short, NIIO) is the principle of national sovereignty as stated in point (a) of the above resolution. It has often been argued, especially by spokespersons for the U.S. press, that this means legitimizing authoritarian information policies, government control, and censorship of the press. Such accusations are based on ignorance of Third World objectives and the fundamentals of international law or on deliberate manipulation of public

opinion. By no means is the collaboration and establishment of NIIO intended to undermine freedom of information. On the contrary, it is a program to achieve true freedom and pluralism with all nations and shades of opinion having reasonable representation in the total flow of information circulating in the world, a flow that today is characterized by glaring imbalances. Moreover, an increasingly vital component of NIIO has been recognized as the democratization of communication, not only at the international but, above all, at the national level. To put it bluntly it is an untruth to claim that NIIO will simply replace the present international system of dominance and dependency with another system in which nations are deprived of democracy. On the other hand, it is true that the concepts of democracy and freedom involved in NIIO—as well as in many other projects promoted by the UN—do not always coincide with the particular private-enterprise version of democracy and freedom so dear to Americans.

ON THE DECK OF THE *TITANIC*

If it is naïve to believe that tomorrow will bring us a communications age in the global village, it is equally naïve to believe that a versatile and egalitarian community of nations with democratic rules of international behavior will emerge without a bitter struggle. Tomorrow will bring us difficult times that will be at least as complicated as any experienced in the late twentieth century.

Times are getting worse and will continue to do so unless a key problem facing humankind is solved: How to put an end to preparation for a nuclear holocaust and the use of military force to solve international conflicts. The arms race, especially in strategic nuclear weapons, constitutes a global problem of such dimensions that it supersedes all other questions of life and death facing humankind today. Take the hunger and disease that face two-thirds of the world's people: Is this not a paradox in a world in which all development and emergency aid represents only 5 percent of the combined expenditures for armament? The stark fact is that we—or rather the militaristic forces dominating policies in our countries—are 95 percent more interested in destroying life on this planet than in safeguarding the preconditions of human survival. Indeed the North-South problem actually proves to contain much of the East-West problem. There is a growing realization

that no real progress toward a solution of the global problems can be made unless a determined end is put to the arms race and disarmament is gradually achieved. That this has received recognition in contemporary Western thinking is outstandingly indicated by the report of the Brandt Commission.⁶

One might ask what such an alarming global perspective has to do with communications in the twenty-first century. A general answer to this question can be extracted from what has just been said. Communications cannot be separated from the rest of the socioeconomic-political issues: the more crucial these issues, the greater their relevance to the field of communications. But there are further reasons why the arms race and disarmament are especially pertinent to the considerations of this book.

First, in the West the mechanism of the arms race includes the mobilization of public opinion in support of increased defense spending. The mass media are crucial instruments in this process of manipulation. Developments in the United States provide a cardinal example of how the "free" media are becoming increasingly controlled by the militaristic orientation of the government. I do not mean to suggest that U.S. journalists are deliberately serving as agents of the Pentagon. They are almost invariably honest people devoted to their profession and with no strings attached. Nor are most of the media led around by the Pentagon. The relationship is a more subtle one. It is based on shared values and on uncritically (even unconsciously) accepted practices that lead to a symbiotic relationship with the government—or rather with the military-industrial complex behind the Pentagon.

The selling of the Pentagon, as the phrase has it, has proceeded effectively with the acquiescence of the media. I cite a recent editorial in the *Columbia Journalism Review* that criticizes the handling by the press of Presidential Directive 59 on limited nuclear warfare issued by the Carter Administration. The editors endorse the view of Fred Kaplan, author of the lead article in that issue, that "in the process of becoming explicators of Pentagon strategy, [reporters] seem to forget about the 'real world of nuclear warfare—its messy uncertainties, things going wrong, tens of millions of people dying, whole societies obliterated.'"⁷

What I ask is a review of the historically significant defense spending that took place in the United States and in the North American Treaty Organization countries. Where was the press as the fourth branch of government? Where was the adversary role of the press? Where was the civil disobedience that Elie Abel so elegantly describes?

Second, the industries that produce and maintain the communications

infrastructures of the electronic age have merged with what former President Eisenhower called the military-industrial complex. Thus the contents of the mass media are conditioned to start with military interests. Further, the technology—and in many cases also the management of the communications industries—must depend increasingly on what is good for "defense." In other words, to unmask the real purpose, for destroying life and killing people.

Consequently, to speak about the neutron bomb or the SALT treaty in the context of communications in the twenty-first century is not only relevant but essential. We must be concerned not only morally but intellectually, and we must be seriously concerned because the situation is alarming. The *Titanic* of today's international community is sailing in dangerous waters; there may not be much time left to alter the course away from confrontation and toward peaceful cooperation and global solidarity. To do otherwise amounts to playing electronic games on the deck of the *Titanic*.

If such a viewpoint appears to be even remotely "political," this only proves how pervasive and dangerous is the dominant thinking of the West and how urgent is the task of adopting a more critical and realistic perspective.

Notes

1. Douglas Cater, "The Survival of Human Values," *The Journal of Communication* (Winter 1981).
2. François Régis Hutin, *Inter-Media* (January 1981).
3. Sixth Conference of Heads of State or Government of Nonaligned Countries, Havana, September 3–9, 1979; Final declaration, political part, paragraph 9 published, e.g., in *Review of International Affairs*, Belgrade, **30**, (707) 19 (September 20, 1979).
4. Fourth Meeting of the Intergovernmental Coordinating Council for Information of the Nonaligned Countries, Baghdad, June 5–7, 1980; Special Resolution on the New International Information Order, from Part I published, e.g., in *Communication in the Eighties, A Reader on the "MacBride Report,"* Cees Hamelink, Ed., IDOC International, Rome, 1980, pp. 31–32.
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