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COMMUNICATING LABOUR INTERNATIONALISM

A REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE AND RESOURCES

Peter Waterman

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This paper was commissioned for a special issue of Third World Book Review on 'Labour and Development', guest-edited by Ronaldo Munck. An edited version should appear in 3WBR in 1986. The paper represents, however, also the first draft of an Introduction to Communicating Internationalism (see below). Comments and suggestions are therefore being sought from specialists on labour internationalism or on democratic communications, but also from interested people outside these fields. The author would be interested in reactions from those whose works have been reviewed. All comments will be acknowledged in any later draft. Thanks to Wim Burger and Linda McPhee for comments on this one.

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Introduction: beyond the bad news

The topic of labour and international communications is becoming a politically-relevant one due to the rapid spread of the new technology worldwide. I am here referring to automation, computerisation, satellite transmission, to such mass media as the electronically-set/transmitted/printed newspaper, to television and video. Such technologies and media have been developed by multinational companies in the core capitalist states, frequently as spin-offs from state-subsidised military research and development. There is, thus, every reason to assume that this is bad news for those at the bottom of every power hierarchy - of class, gender, race or faith - nationally or internationally. 'Informatisation' of the world economy, polity and culture affects labour internationally in at least two obvious ways.

First way: In work - or worklessness - the lightweight or invisible commodities of our 'post-industrial' or 'information' society can be produced on a global assembly line. This can have a few highly-paid white males at the clean, creative, decision-making end and a large number of low-paid, usually female, mostly Third World, largely temporary, workers at the sharp and dirty one. What makes it possible to organise, disorganise and reorganise the global, national or local assembly line is the very computers it helps to produce. Computers and communications satellites make it possible for capital to have its word-processing done in Singapore or the Bahamas, to replace factories by workshops and homeworking, to replace regular wage-employment by casual and sub-contracted labour. These processes undermine the traditional bases of unions where they have long existed and make them difficult to organise where they have not. Computerisation and automation also mean that far less human labour is going to be socially necessary in the future. But, in a situation in which organised labour is being undermined, it also means that the distribution of, and remuneration for, such labour is decreasingly under union control.

Second way: At work, at home, at school and at play labouring people can be controlled by personal information systems, spied on by video cameras, taught by conformist electronic teachers, militarised by aggressive computer games, sedated with bland and predigested information and culture.

There is an abundant literature on all this 'bad news' - what the new technology and mass media are doing to labouring people or the labour movement nationally or internationally (Glasgow University Media Group 1976, 1980; Goldhaber 1984; Briefs 1980, 1984; Gassert 1985; Grossman 1979; Reinecke 1984; Elson and Pearson 1984; Ruivenkamp 1984; MC&S 1985).

There is also, as we will see, a growing literature on 'communications and class struggle' (Mattelart and Siegelau 1979, 1983; Downing 1980; Mosco and Wasko 1983; Mosco 1984; Schiller 1984). There is a very considerable literature on international communications from a socialist or radical viewpoint (Schiller 1984 again; Hamelink 1984; NACLA 1982). And, whilst there is yet no successor to the largely-forgotten Communist work on working-class internationalism by Raji Palme Dutt (1964), there are beginning to be symposia, collections or monographs on one aspect or another of internationalism (ISER 1983; Waterman 1984a; EVS 1985; Busch 1983; van der Linden 1985). Most of this literature, however, is on the industrialised capitalist West. Little of it deals with labour resistance or labour counter-strategies. Where it handles international (i.e. comparative) experience it rarely touches on international linkages. Where it deals with international linkages it rarely mentions internationalism.

There is, in fact, no contemporary book either on internationalism in its general significance or on democratic or alternative international communications, and therefore evidently nothing on international labour communications as such. This would seem to be sufficient reason for abandoning this review article before it is written. There are, however, a number of books, periodicals, articles and papers written around, and relevant to, this area. Enough, then, of the bad news. Let's have a look at the better - at who is at least making paths to this door, even if they are not yet breaking and entering. In attempting to examine this literature, my paper will be structured around such aspects of international and internationalist labour communication as 1) theory, 2) history, 3) the contemporary problem, 4) attempted solutions and 5) some current international labour communications projects.

1. Theory: towards an electronic Solidarnosc?

There is only one starting point, Volume Two of the massive reader on communications and class struggle edited by Armand Mattelart and Seth Siegelau (1983), subtitled 'Liberation, Socialism'. For less than 20 US dollars you get not so much a book as a library of maybe 200,000 words! Here are to be found some 66 separate texts, covering popular culture and communications theory, popular communications and cultural practices (including propaganda, press, film, radio and visual arts), clandestine communication, national liberation movements, socialist communication processes, and a section on contemporary struggles covering both those within and outside the dominant economic and political structures. This book alone provides texts adequate for a whole course on radical media. Here I can only pick out some introductory elements relevant to our subject matter. Elements? Perhaps 'bases' would be a better word. The introductory matter reflects on the remarkably rich international history and contemporary experience of popular, oppositional, insurrectionary and liberatory communication practices that are presented in the rest of the book. The two introductory items (equivalent to over 100 normal book pages) are essential reading for anyone entering our area of study.

Siegelau's 'Working Notes' (1983:11-16) deal with the relationship between 'the popular', 'culture', 'communication' and 'the social and political'. He distinguishes mass culture from popular culture, arguing

that the continued existence of the latter provides a base for resistance and struggle. He shows that production of material culture has always been in the hands of the exploited, thus providing them alone with the possibility of constructing a relevant liberatory ideology. He defines communication as 'exchange' and records the generalisation of intra- and inter-class, -community and -national exchanges under capitalism. He insists on the essence of communication, however, not so much in its material or instrumental form - as a means to an undefined end - but as the formation of a certain kind of human-being. He shows that it is the increasing power and sophistication of the 'bourgeoisified' or 'de-politicised' masses internationally that requires the dominant classes to increasingly rely on the means of communication rather than those of crude armed force, for mass control. The generalisation of capitalist relations beyond the factory, the state and the nation has created an immense variety of interests contradictory to those of capital, as well as a similar variety of communications amongst the newly-politicised protagonists.

Siegelaub ends by arguing that the traditional Left, rooted in the first period of capitalist industrialisation, does not understand the fundamental changes in the nature of the working class wrought by recent developments, nor the possibilities for many-sided struggle they have opened. Nor does it understand the necessity for new forms of political leadership, organisation, intellectual and cultural activity that maximise collective self-expression at and from the base - along with the stimulation of individual creativity. Whilst Siegelaub says nothing explicit about international labour communications, or internationalism, and whilst he seems to suggest that industrial and political developments in the industrialised capitalist world give struggles here some kind of precedence, he clearly has an international vision, drawing on struggles around communication in the Communist and Third World also.

The long essay by Mattelart (1983:17-67) widens and deepens this preface and brings in issues of more direct relevance to international labour communications. This is particularly true where he deals with 'interdependency', a concept and project launched by the US state and multi-nationals, seeking a universalist term for their highly particularistic interests in the industrial and cultural penetration of every remaining corner of the contemporary world. Mattelart has few illusions about the potential of either nationalist or 'actually-existing-socialist' alternatives to this threat. But he also fails to consider either the necessity or possibility of internationalism as an alternative answer, or part of such. At a later point, when considering shortcomings in Labour's strategies, he does actually say

There is...a certain inability to re-think the communication networks of proletarian internationalism and rediscover a credible anti-imperialist strategy. (1983:62)

But this does not lead him to distinguish proletarian internationalism from anti-imperialism, nor to consider either of these in terms of communication. Nor does he consider anti-imperialist strategies except in terms of alternative Western government strategies toward the Third World. This is an apparently curious lapse on the part of a writer who shows himself eminently

aware not only of the limitations on communication after nationalist and socialist revolutions but also of both the historical and contemporary significance of labour struggles internationally for the development of popular communication practices. The lapse is, however, consistent with another shortcoming. This is Mattelart's continual search for signs of grace in the state-oriented power and communication strategies of regime types or organisations whose structural weaknesses he spells out elsewhere with considerable skill and in extensive detail.

The shortcomings here do nothing to devalue the rest of Mattelart's piece, which demonstrates a dialectical approach to both dominant and subordinate/oppositional communications structures and strategies. He is particularly strong in identifying contradictions at each end of this binary opposition. Thus, he refuses to see as sufficient alternatives to the big/centralised/non-interactive/hierarchically-managed media the small/localised/interactive/self-managed. And this because he sees both the contradictions within traditional capitalist- or state-dominated TV and the way that the 'alternative media' can be and often already have been articulated into the overall project of capital and state. Struggle must take place both within and against.

Mattelart's examination of Left communications theory and practice is - whilst directed largely to the national level - equally relevant for the international one. We need, he suggests, to develop forms of communication that produce anti-capitalist, anti-statist, anti-racist and anti-sexist people. We cannot rest with the democratisation of existing forms now that the women's movement has shown us that there are other ways of 'speaking' than the dominant ones. If, he says,

popular communication undoubtedly includes the tract, the cinema, the photograph, the book and other media, it also takes on other forms, like spontaneous forms of family and social organisation, forms of solidarity in daily life. We are even tempted to add that alternative communication networks are especially those forms which make possible the existence of other uses of writing, sounds and images. (1983:20)

One last crucial problem that Mattelart treats is that of the new communications technologies, particularly the computer. He begins early on by condemning those who believe that the 'shortest road to socialism equals the Soviets plus the computer' (1983:19) (the reference here is to Lenin's notion that Soviet power plus electrification would bring Communism). But whilst this is a salutary warning against an instrumental understanding of the new (or old) technology, the fact is that every other reference to the new technology is made in the same undialectical spirit. It is in line with the earlier-mentioned shortcomings of Mattelart that the only time computers are not so condemned is when he refers to a document of Cultural Revolution China which 'remains one of the rare attempts' (1983:38) to overcome domination by the West, the party and the intelligentsia.

The line of argument implicit in Mattelart here is made explicit by Carchedi (1984). The particular interest of this piece is that the author considers computerisation in relationship to the struggle by socialists to

find a form of organisation that does not reproduce hierarchy, oligarchy, bureaucracy, etc. If this has historically been a problem for individual socialist parties and socialist governments, it has been as much or more so for international labour and socialist organisations and movements. Carchedi's is a lengthy and complex argument, in terms of marxist theory of science. We cannot go into this here, although an adequate consideration of his position requires it. What we can and will do is consider the essence of his paper.

Carchedi begins with the position of those marxists who say that the capitalist-developed computer provides the means for surpassing capitalist organisational forms and ensuring the possibility of direct democracy - capitalism thus creating its own technological gravedigger. He rejects this position, asserting instead

the capitalist nature of the computer and computer technology and thus...their necessarily capitalist use.../C/omputer technology is functional for capitalist domination...not only in its use but also, and more importantly, in its inner nature and character. (1984:83)
(Author's stress).

The computer, he says: 1) produces only a quantifiable and technical knowledge, rather than a qualitative one based on experience of socio-political decision-making; 2) it implies a passive and individualised use of that knowledge, as opposed to an active and socialised one; 3) it offers a mechanical and formal manner of reasoning, as opposed to a holistic and dialectical one; 4) it spreads such a model of knowledge and thought throughout society. Computers can be used by workers in this society, or in a socialist one, but 'only as long as the alternative technique and machines will have been found'. And, in its longterm development, 'a socialist system will have to greatly limit the use of the computer' (1984:88).

Carchedi then returns to the organisation problem for socialists, suggesting that the solution is not technical but political. The error of socialists has been to think of the correct organisational form as something fixed, rather than the expression of a process. Referring to the classical workers' councils in Russia and Italy, he says what was significant about them was not only delegate democracy, circulation of tasks, etc., but that their memberships, roles and functions also evolved. He concludes:

Socialist organisations must be based not only on different organisational principles: they must be based, to begin with, on the 'disorganisational' principle that they must be flexible, malleable, even fluid; that they must be subject to change, as needs and circumstances change, because this is the only way to ensure the fullest expression of all sectors of the labouring classes, because only in this way can they ensure the expression of the labourers' spontaneous creativity in all realms of social life. (1984:91)

I am very sympathetic toward this conclusion even if it is not spelled out. But I have doubts about Carchedi's general argument. This is for the following reasons: 1) he ignores the potential of the computer to free society of all those tasks which must be dealt with in a 'mechanical and

formal manner'; 2) it is not the computer that spreads the computer model of knowledge throughout society, it is the capitalists, bureaucrats and their ideologues; 3) he fails to consider the fact that the limited and rigid computer logic nonetheless allows for unlimited information access, feedback, dialogue, and even new forms of artistic creativity; 4) he shows no awareness of the use that at least informatics workers 'in this society' are making of the computer, in struggle against capital, state and patriarchy; 5) his new 'disorganisational' principle sounds very much like that 'networking' principle (see below and Waterman 1984b) which others see as being made socially generalisable by the computer; 6) ostensibly concerned with the relationship between technology and socialist organisational forms, he considers the relationship between neither the traditional industrial technology and socialist organisation, nor current and future ones. Nonetheless, Carchedi's argument is going to oblige the pro-computer socialists to argue their case in a more sophisticated way than heretofore. And, even if he does not consistently discuss the relationship between technological development and democratic organisational forms, his paper may encourage others to do so.

A radically different orientation toward the computer is offered by Goldhaber (1983) in his contribution to a unique collection on Labour, the Working Class and the Media (Mosco and Wasko 1983). Frankly speculative, and obviously based on the experience of the USA, Goldhaber's argument cannot be ignored by those seeking to understand or to develop a new kind of labour internationalism.

Goldhaber appreciates the early forms of worker organisation and culture but recognises both the extent to which they were stimulated by a given period and type of industrialisation and their local or corporate limitations. He next shows how mass-production, mass-consumption capitalism broke up worker communities and destroyed worker cultures, whilst stimulating or allowing for powerful but narrow collective-bargaining unions incapable of developing a new worker culture. Computerisation and the 'information society' are now undermining the industrial and political bases of even this impoverished form of labour movement.

Goldhaber is well aware of the intentions and expectations of capital now: that the new technology will lead to isolated and fragmented work, to individualised workers easily supervised and spied on, to further privatisation and commodification of non-work life, with people given an illusory sense of creativity and power in front of their home-computers and other electronic gadgetry. Yet he also sees another side, with information workers (broadly defined already a majority under industrial capitalism) sharing similar work experiences, with a breakdown of the traditional capitalist division between labour and leisure, work and home. Infinitely flexible computerised communication could make it possible to deal with both the common and the differing needs of worker groups without creating separate and competing organisations. The possibility will exist for a kind of working-class solidarity which will not require the subordination of divergent or minority interests and viewpoints. The means for developing this flexible form of information exchange, consultation and bargaining is the microcomputer. These are increasingly cheap and increasingly able to compete with or replace the big and expensive mainframe computers of the

past. Microcomputers cannot only store and print out information, they can also communicate with each other cheaply via the telephone system. Microcomputers not only make it possible for small community or popular organisations to improve their typing, mailing and accounting systems. They also provide multiple possibilities for cheap electronic conferences, publishing and networking.

What Goldhaber is offering here seems to be some kind of electronic Solidarnosc. He is certainly providing a theoretical rationale for what increasing numbers of worker-support groups, community and other democratic movements internationally are already doing. He, and they, are well aware of who developed this technology and for what purposes, but they are taking toward it the same creative and assertive attitude as earlier generations of workers took toward the printing press, radio and photography. If Goldhaber does not deal explicitly with the implications of microcomputers for democratic and popular culture more generally, or the possibilities they open for international labour communication, his arguments can be extended in these directions. More serious, perhaps, is his failure to deal with the kind of issues Mattelart raises: the creation of new forms of communication (rather than the democratisation of existing ones), and the avoidance of a marginalised communication system that gives satisfaction to its creators whilst lacking transformatory capacity. It is, finally, essential in any argument for computerised communication to demonstrate its capacity for stimulating a variety of other communication forms, and for facilitating face-to-face relations between ordinary labouring people - internationally as well as nationally.

Whilst Goldhaber asserts that microcomputers are going to make a new working-class solidarity possible, Stangelaar (1982) provides us with a set of norms against which we could measure the nature of any such project (my summary is drawn from Waterman 1984b). Stangelaar is concerned neither with the working class in particular nor with the international level or arena. But in considering 'alternative' communication against a Third World background, he comes up with criteria useful for international labour communication also. Stangelaar sees the major source for alternative communication in the practical resistance to international capitalism, this implying struggle also against racism, sexism, the state and war.

Stangelaar wishes to distinguish four different types of non-dominant communication. These are: 1) marginal communication - not allied to the masses or social and political movements; 2) horizontal communication - exchange between dominated groups; 3) anti-communication - subverting the form or content of dominant communication whilst not connecting with mass struggles and 4) alternative communication. The four fundamental and interdependent characteristics of the last are: 1) a content, language, imagery and symbolism that comes direct from the people and confronts those of the oppressor; 2) an orientation toward a total social transformation; 3) a mobilising and organising role, surpassing both vertical and horizontal information flows with a 'spiral' communication model; 4) an active role in production and distribution by the relevant sector of the people and/or popular organisations. Such an active participation implies, amongst other things, 1) interaction between sender and receiver; 2) messages that further interaction of both the population and the professional communicators;

3) accessibility of both form and content to the masses, at a minimal educational level, education being part of the communication; 4) public access to both production and distribution channels; 5) participation in the communication education structures; 6) organisation of a public capable of criticising and eventually correcting the media.

Stangelaar's distinction of alternative from other forms of non-dominant communication is crucial for our subject. Most of the new international labour media that have sprung up all over the world during the last five or ten years (and for which see below) should probably be characterised as anti- rather than alternative. This becomes even clearer when we consider the four characteristics of alternative communication. For even where such new media could claim to have a social-transformation orientation and a mobilising role, few would claim to have a popular content and form or to involve the masses or mass organisations. The existence of such a model enables us to judge present products or projects and to make explicit - where necessary - the reasons why the criteria are not met.

If none of the work so far reviewed deals directly either with labour communication or with the international level, this cannot be said of the document produced by supporters of a Spanish portworker network (Coordinadora 1985). The document comes out of a long experience of grassroots (should we not rather say 'waterfront'?) organising by Spanish portworkers, plus several years experience in attempting to create an effective international network of waterfront workers.

The new information technologies, it is suggested, represent the culmination of capitalist alienation. It is no longer a matter of simply extracting surplus value, nor of domination by coercion, but of extracting and dominating consciousness itself. Whilst this process is presented as a total and international one, the document does not succumb to fatalism or limit itself to a defensive pose: 'A problem is essentially an invitation to find a solution'. Such a solution is spelled out in terms of principles, of strategies, and then specifically for the portworkers movement nationally and internationally.

The general principles of an alternative are the following: against privatisation, socialisation; against secrecy, the diffusion of information; against the ordering and control of the external world that the computer makes possible, the cultivation of more adequate means for global communication that can create personal contacts and continually discover the new, the not-computerised, in human experience.

If the general principles appear somewhat abstract, this is not so for the strategy: laws enforcing open access to databanks by the 'informatised'; union access to data and to informatics specialists of their own; collective agreements aimed at 1) the reduction of the most alienating work, 2) the reduction of working hours, and 3) creating new activities humanising labour; 'an infrastructure of coordination services for horizontal, ascending and descending information'; the use of computers by

alternative groups and sectors to teach and control means for access to, and participation in, information.

With respect to the waterfront portworker movement, the document proposes computerised information centres, controlled by those at the base, to serve 'ports, autonomous trade union organisations, national and international coordination'. The data to be collected should cover working conditions, union struggles, mechanisation, political and enterprise structures, as well as movements and groups outside but close to the ports movement (presumably community and environmental groups, etc.). The strategy for open access, diffusion and socialisation of information at this level implies, amongst other things, the coordination of archives and studies 'by means of periodical meetings and seminars at national and international level'.

This may be the most original and radical declaration on the working-class movement and communications produced since the 1930s (for which see below). It not only picks up a number of themes raised at that period, it also adopts a similarly assertive and internationalist stance. It goes beyond that experience, however, in its absence of workerism, in its non-party-political nature and in its valuing of personal relations and creativity. It echoes numerous elements to be found in the previously-mentioned theoretical works. It is likely to become a reference point in future debate and action.

2. History: problems with the workers' eyes

There exists a long, rich and complex history of international labour communications, going back to the Communist Manifesto and earlier. It is, however, difficult to find anything on such international labour media explicitly, or on labour internationalism as a communications problem. The items below provide us with fascinating glimpses of this unexplored terrain.

Callesen and Logue (1979) examine international coverage in the Danish Social-Democratic newspaper over a period of almost 90 years (1871-1958). The decline in labour coverage is charted in an analysis of the quantity and quality of foreign news. The authors develop their own methodology for analysis of international labour coverage. This breaks down international news into Foreign, Marginal Labour, Foreign Labour and International Theory. Foreign labour news is itself broken down into Trade Union Issues, Social Democrats Abroad, Other Solidarity Expressions, Other Foreign News, Anti-Sovietism and Anti-Communism. Not only does foreign labour news drop from 10.5 percent to 2.3 percent of newspaper content over the period, but in the most recent one solidarity stories account for only two percent and anti-communism for 42 percent of this category. They further note the virtual disappearance of stories suggesting grounds for concrete international solidarity. There is also a significant change in tone of voice over time, from a highly-politicised handling of even crime, sex and disaster stories, to a neutral handling in common bourgeois press style. Assimilation to bourgeois norms was not confined to international coverage: in 1959 Social Demokraten changed its mild-enough name to the totally neutered Aktuelt.

If the above presents a familiar image of the incorporation of Social Democracy into the culture of the bourgeoisie and the politics of the capitalist nation state, what are we to make of the disappearance of those truly revolutionary attempts at an internationalist working-class culture by Communists in the 1920s and 30s? These experiments are documented, reported or analysed in contributions to Mattelart and Siegelaub, dealing with the worker press, film and photo movements in the UK, the Netherlands and Germany respectively (1983:153-7, 157-64, 174, 176-8, 179-81).

In addition to writing for the Communist press, British worker correspondents were encouraged to organise international worker correspondence between groups in the UK and those in the Soviet Union, Poland, the USA or Australia. Such letters - covering life and customs, union activities, the position of women, and even religion - were to be sent to a London office which would translate and forward where necessary. International worker correspondence was considered

one of the finest methods of creating mutual interest and fraternal relations between the workers of different countries, and so helping secure international working-class unity. (1983:157)

The worker-film movement in the Netherlands began with the illicit 'idea editing' of commercial newsreels - cutting, titling, adding and counterposing materials to make 'working-class' movies. It then developed into the production of original newsreels. In both cases the materials had significant international content and were intended to create internationalist attitudes to the Soviet Union, foreign workers and nationalist movements. The international worker-film movement was inspired by the example of Soviet cinema and attempted to organically identify the Western proletariat, national Communist Parties, the Soviet Union, internationalism, and socio-political, technical and cultural progress.

Some of the problems faced by the Communists in creating such a worker culture are revealed in an item from the German magazine Worker Photographer in 1930. There is a specific 'worker's eye', but

this 'class eye' must be trained. Millions of proletarians do not have it...Only very few have the experience and discipline to take the eye of their class with them everywhere, all the time[...]The worst of it is that the majority of today's...proletarians...run around with a definitely petty-bourgeois eye. (1983:176)

Despite such problems, Worker Photographer claimed in 1931 a circulation of 7,000 copies. This was the public face of the worker-photographer movement and the stimulus for an international movement (with members in Europe, America and Japan), an international conference and exhibition. Willi Munzenburg, the international Communist organisational genius behind this and related communication projects, finishes a piece with the following declaration:

For the proletarian photograph, the picture taken by the class-conscious worker must contribute to the defence of socialist construction in the Soviet Union...it must spur on the workers and

peasants of the whole world to bring the capitalist system down in ruins and to build the world of the rule of the workers...(1983:181)

In discussing the demise of the Dutch worker-film movement, Bert Hogenkamp (himself a contemporary worker historian) suggests the general problems of the Communist project at this time. He refers to capitalist industrial development, which made 35mm filming a monopolised industry, broke up the relationship between the commercial/professional cinema and its illegitimate child, and turned non-industrial film production into small-gauge 'home movies'. He reveals, secondly, that where the Russian Revolution had inspired worker and internationalist communication initiatives, the Soviet state was now requiring simple and uncritical support. What, in 1931 had been the Association for Popular Culture transformed itself into the Association of Friends of the Soviet Union.

To these explanations we may add other elements revealed in the cases above. The worker cultural movement was a Communist cultural movement. By that token it was simultaneously sectarian, workerist (the proletarian as source of all virtue) and elitist (the 'class eye' evidently existed in the mind of the conceiver). However generous the internationalist impulse (many Communist and Socialist workers later laid down their lives for it in Spain), the manichean divisions and simplistic unities of Communist theory were unable to deal with the contradictions of a bourgeois culture that was far from dying, or to come to terms with what we might call 'actually-existing proletarians'. Let us not forget, finally, the dilemma of the avantguard artists (such as Dutch cineaste Joris Ivens) who frequently played a crucial role in these experiments. It was not only commodification and monopolisation that undermined their relationship with such popular cultural experiments, but also the extreme demands placed on them at the time of Spain, the Nazi-Soviet Pact, World War Two and the Cold War. If Ivens remained identified with Communism (as he has done) it was at the cost not only of a commercial film career, but of his particular skills in lyrical film (not particularly useful for Communists at this time), and of any relationship with Dutch workers.

These past attempts at communicating internationalism need, therefore, to be examined and understood as representing a particular period and type of international communication, one to be studied and learned from, not buried nor simply reproduced.

3. The contemporary problem: things which cannot be said

The manichean divisions and holy unities of Communism were not simply the fancies of revolutionary intellectuals and professional revolutionaries but also a selective interpretation of certain worker experiences and desires, as well as a reflection of an increasingly polarised world order. Whilst both this experience and that order have largely fallen apart, the international labour movement centres still seem to hold. Possessed of much armour and little brain, the dinosaurs of the international labour movement - whether of Communist, Social-Democratic or Social-Christian inspiration - are far from extinct. In the absence of studies of their media (but see, again, Waterman 1984b), we could at least briefly characterise some examples.

World Trade Union Movement is the monthly magazine of the World Federation of Trade Unions in Prague. This does reproduce the worldview of Munzenburg, but lacks his conviction, avoids his risks, and reveals none of his evident enthusiasm and imagination. It is a tedious task to read even the contents pages of this 1950s-style magazine. The rare nugget of original and relevant analysis is frequently from an American correspondent with evident labour-movement experience. Much of the content consists of documents of, or reports on, conferences - the favoured terrain of contemporary international Communist activity. Much of the content is also repetitious (evidently on the principle of a Soviet journalist colleague of mine that truth cannot be too often repeated). The tone is commonly exhortatory or inspirational. Specific analysis and relevant strategy is frequently sacrificed in favour of general declarations - on peaceful coexistence, a New International Economic Order, or whatever policy currently has top export priority in Moscow. WTUM was unable to say a word about the 15-month strike of 200,000 Bombay textile workers in 1982-83 1) because the WFTU's local friends had failed to capture it and 2) because of Moscow's intimate relationship with the government of Mrs Gandhi. Readers dependent on WTUM for an understanding of 'Events in Poland' (WTUM, No.11, 1980:5) would have been previously lulled by an assurance that the Polish government's socio-economic programme 'guarantees harmonious development of the country in the 80s' (WTUM, No.6, 1980). They would have had to wait one whole year before the first report on the 'events' (WTUM, No.6, 1981). This report managed to avoid mentioning the programme of Solidarnosc or the name of its by now internationally-famous leader, and further claimed that the official 'branch unions' were gaining mass support.

Free Labour World is the fortnightly newspaper (in its halcyon days a two-monthly magazine) of the reformist International Confederation of Free Trade Unions in Brussels. Expressing the interests of the major West European and North American trade unions, it is nonetheless much more open to world developments than WTUM. This does not mean that it is independent of traditionally dominant Western bourgeois ideas and values, such as liberal democracy, Keynesian economics, industrial peace, and the liberatory power of incremental change. These give it today, however, a quite progressive - if largely defensive - image in the face of an increasingly ruthless multinational capitalism and increasingly repressive state order. FLW gives much coverage to such real social-movement unions as those of Poland and South Africa. It was, however, also unable to report the Bombay textile strike because, in this case, the strike was directed against the Western union affiliate there and rioters were burning down the houses of two textile union leaders who had been welcome visitors to Brussels. Closer to home, FLW was also unable to give serious coverage to the historical British miners' strike of 1984-5, because of the ambiguous attitude toward it of the British Trade Union Congress. FLW, finally, gives a high proportion of its space to Third World 'development projects', here reflecting the fact (not reported in FLW) that the ICFTU is dependent for over 40 percent of its total income on West European state development funds.

CLAT-Nederland is the Dutch affiliate of the Caracas-based Central Latin Americano de Trabajadores, an organisation itself affiliated to the Social-Christian-inspired World Confederation of Labour. CLAT-Nederland functions in practice as a support-group for CLAT and has for 10 or 15 years presented

CLAT to the Dutch public as a social-movement union independent of the power-holders in Latin America, independent of West and East, and aimed at creating a pluralist and labour self-managed society in Latin America. On this basis it has been able to collect very considerable sums of Dutch development funds, union development funds (same source) and individual donations. This has gone to CLAT in Caracas, a top-heavy, top-down and opportunistic bureaucracy deeply compromised with ruling and opposition elites in Latin America, and almost totally dependent on foreign finance (Waterman 1984c). A detailed analysis of CLAT-Nederland (SIO 1984) deals specifically with the strategy it followed in informing the Dutch public about Latin America, its unions and popular struggles. CLAT-Nederland was dependent for most of its information (also about individual countries) on CLAT-Caracas. Despite its claim to provide readers with information they could themselves interpret, and to separate facts and opinions, CLAT-Nederland's publications were highly tendentious. CLAT-Caracas and its local affiliates were customarily presented as squeezed between Right and Left, with the Left characteristically labeled as Communist, Marxist-Leninist, anti-democratic, or even simply 'intellectual' (254). It was not until solidarity committees with various Latin American countries were created in the Netherlands in the 1970s that CLAT-Nederland's quasi-monopoly on information on Latin American unions and workers was broken. The SIO group argues (258) that the existence of alternative information and analysis not only forced CLAT-Nederland to make its position explicit but also to distinguish itself from the radical Dutch solidarity groups by a clear shift to the right. This is but one element in what is the most-detailed and most-convincing study of trade union relations on the North-South axis to have yet appeared. It should be translated into English and Spanish and thus made available to labour and solidarity movements internationally.

Whilst we have no way of knowing whether the communication practices of the new solidarity committees are any different in principle from those of CLAT-Nederland, the SIO study clearly exposes CLAT as an alternative that wasn't. CLAT-Nederland reproduced the practices of the ICFTU and WFTU, thus joining an international labour communications oligopoly, exploiting the ignorance of its Dutch followers, and encouraging them in a passive loyalty rather than stimulating an active and critical response to the material published.

4. Attempted solutions: creating an autonomous international sphere

There is yet no adequate analysis of the new media of international labour communications that have been appearing on or from all three major world areas over the last five or ten years (but see, again, Waterman 1984b). There is, however, one work on radical media that is relevant for those concerned with our area. John Downing (1984) concerns himself neither with the Third World nor with international communication, but he does busy himself with radical media internationally and clearly considers labour media an important part of this. Downing's book consists basically of analyses of particular experiences of self-managed media in the USA, Western Europe (Portugal, Italy), Eastern Europe (Czechoslovakia, Poland). There is even one Third World case, from Puerto Rico, included in the American section. The book begins by criticising existing media models and seeking alternative principles from the writings and practice of anarchist,

socialist-feminist and critical Marxist writers. His argument here is compatible with that of others we have already considered and need not detain us here. He gives lengthy and useful introductions to each of his socio-geographical sections. The core of the book, however, is the case studies of newspapers and magazines, film groups and radio stations. Usually he gives a history, deals with the current activities in terms of both content and form, as well as with both internal organisation (self-management, role of women, role of audiences) and relations externally with the ruling power and the traditional Left.

Downing presents, in each of his three main areas, cases that are concerned centrally with labour, such as the now-deceased Union Wage, a feminist publication on wage-earning women, and California Newsreel, with films on multinationals and de-industrialisation. The Portuguese media, after the 1974 Revolution, and the Italian after the 'hot autumn' of 1969 were - naturally - much more deeply involved with the mass worker and popular struggles occurring in those countries. The Italian papers and radio stations, in particular, seem to have been concerned with language and style, apparently struggling simultaneously to develop a popular idiom and break with the sensation and syrup of the dominant media. Efforts were also made to avoid the authoritarian, dogmatic and cliché-ridden style of the traditional Left. Anyone else trying to square the circle should be helped by study of these experiments! The Polish case will be of particular interest to those attempting to develop autonomous labour-oriented media under conditions of repression anywhere in the world. Here the underground media developed in dialectical inter-relation with the workers' movement that eventually flowered into Solidarnosc. The underground press even developed cheap and decentralised printing and distribution methods which were intended - and succeeded for some years - in minimising discovery and destruction.

Downing concludes his book by considering the alternative media in the light of the communications theories of traditional and unorthodox marxism (items by Fogarasi and Enzensburger, both to be found in Mattelart and Siegelau 1983). He comes to the following conclusions: 1) the new self-managed media are flowering internationally, the hostility and repression directed against them belying their marginality; 2) whilst their shoestring financial operations do them credit, radical media commonly undervalue financial organisation and founder on this rock; 3) frequently forced to use the crudest layouts, the alternative media have occasionally pioneered techniques later adopted by the dominant media; 4) aesthetics are crucial to radical media, particularly when faced with the slickness of dominant media, and during periods of low public excitement; 5) there can be a fruitful symbiosis between those involved in the alternative media and those involved in struggles within or against the dominant media; 6) whilst an abstract insistence on ultra-democratic structures can be self-destructive, a variety of forms of media self-management do work in practice; 7) radical media work requires both a defensive strategy (to reduce political atomisation by creating horizontal linkages within and between oppressed groups) and an offensive one (to expand the social space for political autonomy). The aim of contemporary social struggles is, for Downing, not the capture of state power but the expansion of 'self-government, self-determination, self-management' (1984:359). He concludes:

Autonomous media are peculiarly important in this process...[T]hey are wider in scope than trade unions, and capable of being more in tune with social and cultural immediacies than most political parties of the left. I am not claiming that such media are the new red-hot hope for a confused and floundering international social movement, or that trade unions and political parties belong to the dustbin of history. Far from it...What I am saying is that...[t]hey are themselves an autonomous political sphere, but are also almost constitutionally propelled to expand that sphere to embrace more people, to create a wider public realm in opposition to the hegemony of the existing order. (1984:360)

It is regrettable that Downing does not consider either international communication or internationalism as significant features of, or aims for, radical media. The information he gives reveals that they are implicitly so. But, as far as the media in the industrialised capitalist world is concerned, this has primarily been a matter of anti-imperialism, inevitably implying in practice the one-way solidarity of Western socialists with their Southern brethren - or sistren. Thus, when I visited the remarkable Radio Proletaria in Rome in 1984, it had in its tape collection many items from or on human rights and national-revolutionary movements in the Third World, and was even giving financial and technical support to Radio Farabundo Marti of El Salvador. But it had no contact with or knowledge of Radio WBAI's worker programmes in New York, or the union-controlled radio of the Siglo Veinte tinmine in Bolivia. The reason for his shortcoming lies, evidently, in the novelty of the phenomenon in question. As international labour communication develops in practice it will nonetheless find Downing's book a major source of experience to draw on and of ideas to debate.

We have space to mention (in terms as impressionistic as with the traditional media) only a few examples of the new. Given the delicate political and financial conditions under which these are produced, the cases mentioned cannot be guaranteed to be in existence at the time this item appears but they nonetheless give a little idea of what is going on on a much wider scale internationally.

KMU International Bulletin is the English-language magazine of the May First Movement in the Philippines. This is the grassroots-oriented, militant and nationalist union organisation that has mushroomed there since 1980, increasingly forcing the ICFTU to distance itself from its pro-Marcos affiliate. The bulletin issue of November 1984 reports on a growing solidarity campaign, involving visits by KMU activists to Europe and of foreign visitors to the Philippines. Innovative neither in style nor organisation (it is simply a KMU organ), its content marks it off from the traditional labour media by 1) its very existence as a national and Third-World-based union publication directly expressing and stimulating international solidarity; 2) its relations with foreign worker-support groups, not solely with unions; 3) its overt and forceful anti-imperialism (contrast ICFTU); 4) its intimate relationships with local and international church groups (contrast WFTU); 4) its interest in grassroots solidarity and face-to-face worker relations internationally (contrast CLAT-Nederland).

The International Labour Research and Information Group is a South African organisation that produces pamphlets and audiovisuals on labour internationally for local workers. These innovate in form, content and orientation. The form is that of the heavily-illustrated booklet, using evocative non-naturalistic graphics as well as photos, cartoons and collages. The English is intended to be comprehensible to the primary-educated worker. African-language editions also exist. The pamphlets have covered Botswana, Brazil, and international union organisations. In the Brazilian case there is a linking of history and analysis with a real-life 'Worker's Story'. The orientation of the pamphlets seems to be away from dependence on state, capital and traditional labour organisations or ideologies, in favour of shopfloor organisation, worker-controlled unions, social-movement unionism, and grassroots internationalism. Solidarity of Labour: The Story of International Worker Organisations would be a remarkable production wherever it came from. It includes pictures of Marx, Samuel Gompers, Lenin, George Meaney, Allende, the Spanish Civil War and Ford Amsterdam! It ends with the story of how South African worker activity forced the Western-dominated and ICFTU-alligned International Metalworkers Federation to support the independent black workers' movement in South Africa. This pamphlet is the richest, most-radical and most-relevant pamphlet on trade-union internationalism to have been produced anywhere in the world during the last decades. The one on Brazil was even requested for translation and reproduction in Brazil itself. ILRIG has been selling 1-2,000 of its pamphlets in South Africa. Radicals in the Third World, the industrialised West - and in the East, too, for that matter - could well learn from it.

International Labour Reports (with which, I should warn, I am editorially associated), is a bi-monthly illustrated magazine that has come, since its appearance in January 1984, to act as a focus for the growing internationalist activity in the UK. In format similar to WTUM and the old FLW, it is marked off from them by its content and orientation. This is clearly revealed in its stress on shopfloor initiatives, on women's, environmental, community and other democratic issues. No.10 (July-August 1985) gives 10 pages to women workers. It gives three (including a back-cover appeal from a union group in India) to Bhopal. It gives four to worker or activist visits to Brazil and the Philippines. In each case it reports international solidarity activity and gives resources for further information and action. ILR avoids the Third-Worldism common to some such publications by its extensive coverage of Western (particularly American) national and international struggles, and by its (so far limited) coverage of workers and labour protest in Communist countries. Whilst ILR clearly has an orientation alternative to that of the traditional international union organisations, it has so far avoided a confrontational approach to them. It appears anxious to establish credentials as an essential addition to existing publications rather than as a competitor to, or opponent of, them. It has had some success here, with financial support having been won from development-oriented foundations in the UK and a few bulk orders from British trade unions. Whilst oriented primarily toward British labour and Third-World solidarity activists, ILR serves as some kind of international organ for the new labour internationalism.

5. A non-conclusion: international labour communication projects

In place of a conclusion, I would like to mention some action or re-search projects in or around this area.

The first are clearly both first in terms of time and around in the sense of being focussed on women, not labour. It should not be surprising that the women's movement leads the labour movement in alternative international communications. The reasons are 1) that the women's movement developed in an institutional and communications vacuum, this both requiring and permitting the creation of such linkages; 2) that the movement consists primarily of educated women both conscious of the need for international linkages and qualified (language skills, travel possibilities) to create them; 3) that by incorporating - though frequently surpassing - liberal-democratic demands, they have often been recipients of considerable amounts of state and inter-governmental funds. None of this discredits the achievements which, on the contrary, often provide models that the new international labour movement could fruitfully reproduce.

At the national level, but providing an international service, we can consider the Directory of Womens' Media (Allen 1983), an annual index from the US covering women's periodicals, radio, TV, video, music groups, and women involved with the media (453 entries alone!). It also contains a re-search programme and a declaration on principles of feminist journalism. Although naturally dominated by national material, the directory has extensive coverage of persons and resources from, or working on, other capitalist, Third World and even Communist countries. An index item on 'Communication Networks' mentions efforts to create a Women's International Media Network. The principles expressed in the Directory may sound somewhat naive in their distinction between 'facts' and 'opinions'. Yet, in an international labour world dominated by such traditional media as have been mentioned above, the application of liberal and humanist principles would evidently imply considerable progress. Giving the credo of the periodical Media Report to Women, the Directory declares:

Priority is given to facts over opinion...Although entitled to express our opinions, even without giving the facts on which we based them, we believe that all people must find, as we do, that others' conclusions are nearly useless without their facts to enable us to judge the opinion's merit...Conclusions without facts keep us apathetic, powerless to act, and dependent upon the decision-making of others.

Isis International Women's Information and Communication Service is a Rome-based and mainly Third-World-oriented resource centre. Isis employs five or six women in Rome, and two or three in Santiago, Chile. It runs a documentation centre (being computerised), and publishes a quarterly journal. It has also produced resource guides on women and development and audiovisuals for women. Whilst obliged to cover women's issues generally, it possibly represents the best international centre on women and work, having in the past years published several issues or resource listings on women workers generally, women and land, migrant women, women and the new technology, women and multinationals, Asian women industrial workers, etc. Given that Isis International has operated as an international feminist communications centre for many years, it is regrettable that it has apparently

never theorised, or even publicly reflected on, women's internationalism or international feminist communications. It nonetheless remains a model which those involved in international labour communications can only envy.

The Unite Project (Graham 1982a,b) was the first attempt to create a systematic international information and communications network for labour. It was to have been a computerised database, supported collectively by the Western trade unions, and taking advantage of the World Centre for Microcomputer Science and Human Resources that the new Socialist government of Mitterand was creating in France. It proved impossible to use the French state facilities, so the project sponsor, computer specialist Kristen Nygaard, then attempted to establish it within the Norwegian unions. His efforts seem to have not yet been successful. We can at present only speculate on the difficulties of getting such a project off the ground. But, given what one knows of Western unions, one can imagine their lack of enthusiasm to have been due to one or more of the following: 1) ignorance of, or hostility to, the new technology; 2) organisational conservatism; 3) a conscious or unconscious strategy of informational deprivation or limitation as a membership-control device. One hopes that the project will eventually be supported, as an open-access system, with the full resources of the Western national and international trade union movements, since it could put them in the forefront of the struggle for the democratisation of international labour communications. One cannot, evidently, depend on them to do this.

The Velletri Agreement is included amongst other interesting materials on the use of the new technology by grassroots-oriented documentation and support centres (IDOC Bulletin 1984). The materials come out of a conference at Velletri, Italy, organised by the International Documentation and Communication Centre. This is a Rome-based body with which Isis International is connected, and which seems to be becoming some kind of coordinating centre for democratic international communications initiatives. The Agreement reveals that Third World documentation centres often have more advanced equipment than those in the North, and it proposes the development of international computerised networking to share experience and ideas, for campaigning and solidarity purposes, and for exchange of information on the use of the new technology itself. For the period 1985-6 the newly-created Interdoc Network should assist information exchange and technical education, produce a newsletter, and carry out a

pilot project for regional and inter-regional electronic mail networking via modems and/or telex between those centres able to do so.
(1984:20)

Oriented primarily toward the Third World and to non-governmental development organisations (NGDOs), the network is evidently open to international labour-support groups, a number of which were present at the conference.

More directly oriented toward social movements, yet open to both NGOs and possible commercial users, the Poptel Project is based in London. It is trying to develop a set of seven computerised information retrieval, storage or dissemination services, including an international electronic

mail/bulletin-board service, a host database for others, electronic publishing, education and consultancy. It is currently exploring the creation of a 'Ford Workers International Computer-Based Information Network', using terminals costing £250-1,000, annual subscriptions at £300, and international messages at about 20p per thousand for transmission and one-month storage.

It is not so long ago that international communications specialist Cees Hamelink (1983:10) asked 'Why has the left got no answer to the computer society?', and followed this up with a call for 'a new Luddism'. He did not actually propose machine breaking but stated that

In progressive political circles and in the unions (or in the last instance underground) there must be mobilised a productive resistance to computer technology. (1983:11)

Whilst his critique of the Left's defensive or defeatist attitudes to the computer society was largely justified, it is evident that some part of the international Left was developing its answers whilst Hamelink was writing. The projects outlined above, moreover, go further than Hamelink proposed in at least two ways. In the first place, whilst Hamelink proposed activity primarily in the traditional industrial enterprise (a social site of diminishing importance), these projects are proposed on the terrain of communication (a site of growing importance). In the second place, whilst the alternatives Hamelink reports or proposes exist primarily within the confines of the nation state, those above are aimed - explicitly - at the international level. They are also evidently inspired by internationalist values.

It remains true that, as Hamelink notes of the one or two alternative computer or documentation groups he mentions, their efforts are marginal in comparison with the massive changes being wrought by international capital, and their small still voice can hardly be heard against the trumpets sounded by the utopian capitalist computer ideologues. But the alternatives do exist and they are spreading. What is necessary for them to become a more significant force internationally is at least the following: 1) to develop international communication and coordination amongst them, 2) to issue some kind of declaration or discussion document in order to stimulate further thought and action on the Left - Old, New or Alternative - about this area, 3) to carry out some kind of synthesis of the experiences and develop some appropriate theory on international labour communication. A new kind of labour internationalism and a democratisation of international labour communications are clearly on the political agenda. We could, however, still do with some books directly on these subjects.

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- International Labour Research and Information Group (ILRIG). Produces booklets, audiovisuals, etc., on international labour. Address: ILRIG, Box 213, Salt River 7925, South Africa, or c/o Department of Sociology, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7700, South Africa.
- Isis International Women's Information and Communication Service. Publishes Isis International Women's Journal and Isis International Women's Journal Supplement (each twice yearly) plus resource books, etc. Address: via S. Maria dell'Anima 30, 00186 Rome, Italy. Tel: 06-6565842. Subscription (4 issues, individual, airmail): \$20.
- Poptel Project. Electronic information retrieval, storage, dissemination, training and consultancy, oriented to social movements and community organisations. Address: c/o Soft Solution, 10a Bradbury St., London N16 8JN, UK. Tel: 01-249 9374.
- Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press. Publishes annual Directory of Women's Media (\$8), the bimonthly Media Report to Women (\$20 per year), sourcebooks on women in the media, teaching syllabi, indices, etc. Address: 3306 Ross Place, N.W., Washington, DC 20008. Tel: (202) 966-7783

