TOWARDS A NEW WORLD INFORMATION
AND COMMUNICATION ORDER: A SYMPOSIUM

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Socialist Scholars Conference held in New York City on April 7,
1991. Speakers were Colleen Roach of Queens College and John
Buschman of Rider College. Mark Rosenzweig of PLG was the
panel's moderator.*

Mark Rosenzweig: Welcome. We've chosen to focus on issues
raised by that UNESCO initiated set of proposals called the New
World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) because
we believe that, as the bipolar Cold War framework of global
relations dissolves, the issues raised in the late 1970s and '80s by the
proponents of a more just global order in the economic sphere and
in the increasingly interrelated information sphere will gain renewed
relevance. None of the problems underlined by the advocates of
either the slightly earlier New International Economic Order or the
New World Information and Communication Order have been ef-
fectively addressed in the past decade. Even as George Bush, after
hijacking the United Nations to prosecute his war, proclaims his
"New World Order," the fact that many of the problems of global
inequality, dependency, underdevelopment and distorted develop-
ment are intensifying, even deepening, makes it all the more impor-
tant that we keep alive and extend these initiatives, which sought to
suggest new paradigms of global relations.

The UNESCO report on the NWICO, prepared by a commission
headed by the late Sean MacBride, was called *Many Voices, One
World.* In a sense, the institution of the library, at least in its ideal
self-image, represents the vision of *Many Voices, One World* in
microcosm. But even at the level of the individual library, we find
that many voices are excluded, or simply not present, and that the
"one world" is bifurcated into the information rich and access-
enabled and the information poor and access-restricted.

The Progressive Librarians Guild was founded to promote the
realization of the vision of "many voices, one world," i.e. of cultural
democracy, through radical action in the library community. We
hope that this panel we are sponsoring helps to show the connection
between the mega-issues of global communications and the issues
of access at the micro-level of libraries and their communities,

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because in a real sense the level of library development an index of the popular and democratic efficacy of communications policy.

I'd like to introduce our first panelist, Colleen Roach, from Queens College Communications Department. She worked for UNESCO in the 1970s and '80s at which time the whole discussion of the New World Information and Communication Order was going on.

Colleen Roach: Thank you, Mark. I'm going to talk about three main points related to the New World Information and Communication Order. Most of what I'm going to talk about will deal specifically with what the New Order was all about, its past and present, and the question of whether or not it has a future. Secondly, I'm going to make a few remarks connecting Mr. Bush's "New World Order" to the movement for a New World Information Order. Finally, I'll make a few comments on what I think organizations such as PLG might do to help implement this order.

The inter-governmental history of the NWICO, which up until now has been the most important part of it, had two main actors: the first was the Non-Aligned Movement and the second was UNESCO. (Unfortunately, we are missing at this conference one of the most important chroniclers of the Non-Aligned Movement, Archie Singham, who was a regular at the Socialist Scholars Conference for many years. He, with his wife Shirley Hune, wrote one of the definitive histories of the Non-Aligned Movement called *Non-Alignment in an Age of Alignment*. His was a very valiant struggle for the Third World, anti-racism and anti-imperialism. Unfortunately, he just passed away about a month ago.)

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was formed in 1955 by the heads of state mainly of Asian and African countries who came together to define a policy of non-alignment for Third World countries in order to steer a different course of action between the superpowers. After the decolonization of Asia, Africa and the Arab world in the 1950s and 1960s, the NAM became progressively more involved in questions of international equity in terms of both economics and information.

UNESCO, the second player in NWICO's history, has a rather colorful past. UNESCO was founded, like most UN agencies, after the Second World War. Its constitution specifically stated

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thatUNESCO was to be devoted to the "free flow of information" which is the official US policy on international information exchanges. It was the US, in fact, that inserted this phrase into UNESCO's constitution. In the 1970s, like many UN agencies UNESCO took a pro-Third World stance and became involved in the NWICO debate when in 1974 it elected an African Director General, Mr. M'Bow of Senegal.

So, in the history of the NWICO you have these two actors: the NAM and UNESCO. The 1960s were an era of decolonization in the Third World, particularly in Asia and Africa. (Most Latin American countries acheived political independence in the 19th century.) The 1970s were characterized by a Third World recognition that, in spite of formal political independence, these countries were still very much dependent on the West. Therefore, a number of different activities were launched within inter-governmental fora. Mark mentioned one of them, the New International Economic Order, which is also an essential part of the pre-history of the NWICO. In 1974 the NAM at the United Nations sent out a call for a New International Economic Order, basically saying that global economic relations should change because, in spite of independence, the economic situation in the Third World was getting worse. There was no doubt that, after the so-called "decades of development" of the '60s and '70s, terms of trade were grossly unbalanced and Third World debt was mounting. It was clear that a different type of economic arrangement was necessary at the international level.

When the call for a new information and communication order was launched in 1976, it made the very important link with the New International Economic Order. I think this is one of the most significant contributions of the whole debate on global information—to put information squarely in the context of economic relations. This became increasingly important as we moved into the "information society" in the 1980s.

It was in 1976 at a Non-Aligned seminar in Tunis, Tunisia that the non-aligned countries first used the term "new international order" in information relations. After this, UNESCO got so involved in communication issues that it became more closely identified with the movement than NAM. This close identification posed a particular problem for UNESCO and, in fact, accounts for the reason that the NWICO became so controversial. UNESCO, after all, had a mandate

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to defend the "free flow of information" and in the 1970s was moving away from US information policy and towards a pro-Third World perspective.

Now, what exactly was the NWICO? First of all it is important to situate it in the context of the whole movement against cultural imperialism in the 1960's and '70s. There is a being written a revisionist history of the NWICO that omits this important part of the intellectual history of the movement. But if you go back and read the literature of the Non-Aligned Movement, in particular in the 1970's, it is very clear that they were using the concepts of media and cultural imperialism. NWICO advocates were clearly using Marxist concepts. They were talking about imperialism, core/periphery analysis, etc. This was, of course, fueled by the work of many Marxist scholars, both from the Third World and from the West. The criticism of Western control of information focused mainly on four different items: news flow, television flow, advertising, and information technology.

The news flow question got the most attention. The Third World complaint was that their own information systems were dwarfed by news from the big world agencies. They provided statistics showing us how many words a day Third World countries received from AP and UPI, for example, and how little they were able to give back. The complaints had a qualitative dimension also, because people living in Third World countries were obliged to see themselves through the eyes of the West. They would learn about events happening in neighboring countries, not through their own eyes, but through the eyes of the West. And there was, of course, the "Coups and Earthquakes" syndrome, ie. Third World countries were always being portrayed as places where nothing but disasters took place.

The television flow debate dealt with the same kinds of issues, but in the context of TV programs. There were studies done in the 1970s showing how the US dominated the export market of global television. There was a famous UNESCO television study done by Varis and Nordenstreng in 1974 showing how, particularly in Latin America, but also in many other countries, the West (with the US at the top of the list) really was flooding the world market with cultural television products.

Advertising was also tied into the whole issue of the flow of information. Research was published showing how the global advertising agencies (mainly based in the US) were the mainstays of an increasingly transnationalized economy. Media industries and communication technologies also became an important part of the debate in the 1980s when questions of equity in informatics, computers, and access to satellites arose. In short, the Third World call for a NWICO was based upon a critique of the transnational control of global information flows. It was very much tied up with the work of Herbert Schiller in the US, for example and Armand Mattelart in Latin America, which focused on the way that big transnational corporations control global information. And again, it should be emphasized (because of the revisionist history of NWICO that is being written) that this movement clearly had an anti-capitalist thrust. That is a big part of the reason that the US and the West reacted to it so strongly.

The US reaction to the NWICO, from the very beginning, was extremely hostile. Why did the US react so harshly to demands for global equity in information and communications? First of all, because there was, until recently, a Socialist/Third World alliance. The Socialist countries supported Third World demands. There was also the new Cold War context of the early 1980s. The Reagan Administration characterized the NWICO as, basically, a Communist plot to shackle the "free press" because it was supported by Socialist countries with state-run media. The main argument used to attack the NWICO was the government-control-of-the-media argument. Detractors argued that since certain Third World countries promoted or had government-controlled media anything that they tried to set up along the lines of a new world information order would necessarily support government control of the media.

There are many different analyses of why the "government-controlled media" aspects of the debate became so important. One can talk about the traditional American defense of the "free flow of information", the "freedom of the press", and the First Amendment. But these arguments have so many different contradictions, even if you just look at the ideological level, that I think the clearest reason for the US attack was economic interests. At the very same time the NWICO was gaining ground in the 1970s and '80s, there was another movement: a movement of capital, and a movement toward the "information society." Increasingly, it became clear in the West,

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particularly in the US that their economies were going to rely more and more on the production and export of information/media services and products.

Now, the NWICO was short on programmatic suggestions, long on rhetoric, and didn't have too many prescriptions on what the New Order would look like. Opponents of the NWICO were reasonably sure, however, of one thing: if the NWICO ever did become implemented, it would definitely mean more public or government control of the media and information. This did not square at all with the needs of the "information society", which has relied more and more (much as the literature of PLG points out) on the privatization of information. So, in my analysis, the reasons for the US attack on NWICO were not just ideological, but also, economic. The NWICO did not meet with the expanding needs of capitalism in the '70s and '80s, which was relying increasingly upon the production and circulation of information. So, throughout the '70s and '80s, there was a very strong coalition formed of the Western press, the government, the State Department, and private sector lobbies such as the Heritage Foundation and the World Press Freedom Committee (an American organization that claims to be international, but isn't, as is often the case). These groups lobbied the press, they lobbied the government, and had influential allies in the academy. As a result, the US withdrew from UNESCO in 1985—a major event in the history of international relations—and everyone knew that the main reason for this withdrawal was that the US felt very threatened by the proposal for a New World Information Order. In 1986 the United Kingdom, the US's closest ally, also withdrew.

Where does the debate stand now? Since 1985 a number of different things have happened. First of all, UNESCO has completely backtracked on the NWICO after several years of strong support. For instance, when I was working at UNESCO as a project officer, my job description said: "Work on the New World Information and Communication Order." This is what I was hired to do, but, since 1985, UNESCO has backed off of this project. You see this new position in UNESCO's general conferences, in the kinds of resolutions they've adopted, and especially in the position of the new Director General, a Spaniard named Federico Mayor. Since his election in 1987, Mayor has been going all over the world and has

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come to the US many times stating specifically that the NWICO was illegal and that it violated human rights charters.

Mayor stated in one famous interview with the *Washington Post* that "UNESCO defends the free flow of information—full stop." He was here in New York just a few months ago down at the Gannett Center attending a seminar on the New Order and again he preached the same message, trying to get the US back into UNESCO (in, I think, a rather craven fashion) by disavowing what had happened in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1989 at its last general conference, UNESCO adopted what it's calling a "new strategy" which, in the words of Leonard Sussman of Freedom House was so replete with "free flow" that "it was repeated to the point of boredom." This from a *conservative* critic.

So, UNESCO has adopted a strong anti-NWICO position now and not just a passive one—it actively tries to suppress information on the NWICO. For example, there was a book put out by the Institute for Media Analysis (they're here at this conference) called *Hope and Folly*, by Bill Preston, Herbert Schiller and Edward Herman, that had been contracted by UNESCO under M'Bow. Under Mayor, UNESCO actually tried to sue the Institute in a court of law to prevent the book (which talked about NWICO) from appearing. Finally, after the Institute smartly raised a big fuss and went public with this attempted censorship, UNESCO backed down [but insisted that a disclaimer be printed removing UNESCO's sponsorship from the book].

In another instance, I coedited an issue of an academic journal on the NWICO and UNESCO got wind of it. I heard from one of the editors that UNESCO tried to exert pressure on him not to bring out the journal. They made it very clear that they didn't want this information published.

The reason why UNESCO is taking this position against the NWICO is very clear: people are still interested in the concept and the issues that gave rise to the NWICO are very much alive. In the last few years, there have been innumerable meetings, sponsored by a variety of organizations such as the Non-Aligned Movement, the International Organization of Journalists, and the World Association of Christian Communication. Here in the United States, the Union for Democratic Communications, a group of critical communications scholars, held its annual meeting in 1990 on the theme of the

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new order, with Mustapha Masmoudi (often referred to as the "father" of the NWICO) in attendance. There have been two MacBride Round Tables on the NWICO in Harare and Prague. The third Round Table will take place in Istanbul in June of this year.

Now, some people may say, "Well, what do all these meetings mean?" I suppose you could say that they are not necessarily important, but in a certain sense they are because they reflect a degree of public opinion in the world about the importance of information and communications equity. Most significant, however, is the new line that the most recent discussions are taking: the era of intergovernmental organization involvement in these issues is now *passé*. If there is to be a renewed movement for the New World Information Order, it's clearly in the hands of grassroots groups. This position was clearly articulated in the declaration adopted at the last MacBride Round Table, held in Prague, in September 1990, as shown in the following passage:

> *The debate on the NWICO has thus returned to where it started. It is now in the arena of professional organizations, of communications researchers and most importantly in the arena of grassroots movements, representing ordinary men, women and children who are directly affected by our current cultural and communications environment.*

The reason why people are still interested in the NWICO, as evidenced by these meetings, is because the issues have not gone away: transnational control of information is still with us and in many cases the TNCs are, in fact, increasing their hold on global information. There are some improvements, but they are just drops in the bucket. We have organizations such as IPS (Inter-Press Service). We have PeaceNet, which is giving out information on the Third World. We have CNN's *World Report*. But we still have, by and large, a huge amount of information produced by the transnational corporations.

If you look at news and television flows, advertising and information technology, the areas that the Third World complained about in the 1970s and '80s, the statistics show that things haven't really changed and in some cases have actually gotten worse. Just to give you an example of what I'm talking about: AP produces about 17 million words per day—that's what it sends out to the rest of the

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world. The Non-Aligned pool, which is supposed to promote the ideas of the NWICO, produces about 100,000 words per day. The Pan-African News Agency sends out about 20,000 words per day. (PANA was set up specifically to counter the flow of the transnational agencies).

In television flow, Aggrey Brown of the Caribbean Institute of Mass Communication in Jamaica, did a study published just last year where he looked at four countries in the Caribbean over the last decade—since the "MacBride Report" was published. He concluded that the situation has gotten much, much worse in terms of television flows. It's the worst in the world: four countries in the Caribbean import about 87% of their TV films from the West, mostly from the US.

Then, of course, you have everything that's been going on in Western Europe. I'm sure a lot of you are aware of the recent privatization of broadcasting there, which has resulted in what the *New York Times* referred to as a "real bonanza, a real gold mine for the transnational corporations now in Europe." Europeans, in fact, have even tried to take legislative action at the regional level to stem the tide. Thus, the same issues are surfacing there too. People everywhere are concerned about American culture being spread across the globe.

If indeed there is to be a new wave of support for the NWICO, I think that one should take a look at what happened in UNESCO prior to 1985 during the NWICO debates and try to do a self-critique. One important element lacking was a class analysis of information and communications issues. Such an analysis would help us particularly in understanding the role Third World national elites played in promoting the NWICO and would also help us to understand why the UN organizations flip-flop like they do—I know because I was there—as they are mainly made up of members of all countries' national elites.

I think that the need for a class analysis of elites and the NWICO is most apparent in terms of women's issues. The NWICO was notorious for ignoring women: there are all sorts of statistics showing that women were never invited to meetings; the "MacBride Report" hardly talked about women; many say that the NWICO has really been an old boys' club.

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I also think we have to go back to some of the Marxist concepts behind the NWICO. It's very clear to me that, although everyone who supported the NWICO was not a Marxist or socialist by any means, the basis of the analysis was Marxist and made use of concepts such as the core/periphery and imperialism. Certainly there are different ways we can make these arguments more sophisticated now, for example, by refining our analysis of cultural imperialism and looking more closely at the role of the national elites in the NWICO (many of whom *did* control and muzzle the press to the detriment of the New Order). But I still think the basic arguments are very valid and I still think we have to argue that, if you push things to their logical conclusion in talking about creating a New Order, you must talk about Socialism in some form, that is public control of information.

Now, I'd like to make just a few comments on Mr. Bush's "New World Order" and its connection to our topic. The most flagrant aspect of Bush's call for a "New World Order" is that there's absolutely no sign of historical memory at all of the Third World call for a New Order. You read article after article in the very same newspapers that lambasted the NWICO in the 1970s and '80s and, though these papers know very well what NWICO was all about, I have yet to see an article anywhere in the mainstream press that even mentions it when talking about Bush's "New World Order." The press would just as soon forget about the Third World, just forget about what nonetheless continues to be a very important historical movement.

Of course, it's not yet fully clear what Bush's "New World Order" is all about, but people in the Third World know that the war in the Persian Gulf means more exploitation, more military incursions. It is extremely important for progressive people in the US to remain in solidarity with people in the Third World and to get out as much information as possible on popular Third World struggles. This is especially needed because the West was united against the NWICO and is now united behind Bush's "New World Order." I just returned from France and was struck by how easily Western neo-imperialist powers got off the hook in respect to their involvement in the Persian Gulf war. There's a "French connection" to the NWICO and it's not by accident that two of the main Third World spokespeople for the "New Order", Masmoudi and M'Bow were

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from Tunisia and Senegal—both former French colonies. There's a lot to be said about the effects of French colonialism in Africa.

One final point on the "New World Order." I think it's ironic that the US attacked the NWICO for promoting government control of information while it is very certain that (judging from the experience of journalists during the Gulf war) a prominent feature of Bush's "New Order" will be more control of information.

What is to be done? I think we should be hopeful here in the United States. The left has a tendency towards self-flagellation; we've seen this recently in the separatist tendencies in the anti-war movement. But I think there's a lot going on in the US and people just don't realize it. I saw Archie Singham about 6 weeks before he died. There he was, seeing the war come to fruition, even as he was dying, and yet he said he never felt more hopeful, because he saw so many people struggling for change in the United States.

I'd like to quote someone from the Progressive Librarians Guild. Henry Blanke wrote that "we must find ways to resist corporate domination of the cultural-information sphere and devise strategies to directly intervene in the development of an 'information society' in ways which would further democratic empowerment and social solidarity rather than private wealth and privilege." That's probably the best way of answering "What is to be done?"

We must promote the New World Information and Communication Order here in the United States. We can do this in part by supporting the work of organizations like Paper Tiger, the Alliance for Cultural Democracy, the Union for Democratic Communications and by constantly thinking of ways in which groups like PLG can contribute to a democratic, grassroots movement for a socialist society. Thank you.

Mark Rosenzweig: Thank you Colleen. Next we'll hear from John Buschman who's a reference librarian at Rider College in New Jersey.

John Buschman: Press coverage of Mr. Bush's splendid little war provides a broad metaphor for what has been happening to information (formerly knowledge and wisdom) since the early 1980s. Put succinctly, information about the war was centralized and controlled as a strategic economic, military, and political resource in support of the war. This happened in spite of the fact that, technically,

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coverage of the war could have been far more immediate and thorough than the coverage of the war in Vietnam. Information, in the parallel I am drawing, has become corporatized, centralized, privatized, and public outlets of information are in decline. I will move quickly through four illustrations of these points, from the broad to the specific and local manifestations of the New World Information and Communication Order.

First, and Colleen mentioned this, information and information technology are very big business. By the corporatization of information, I do not mean the former familiar scale of family publishing corporations like Knopf or Scribners. Some selected figures illustrate the new economic scale of the information industry:

The electronic information industry is projected to grow from $7.5 billion to $19 billion from 1989 to 1994.

The database industry grew from $127 million to $2.5 billion from 1982 to 1989.

Sales of computers in 1990 were expected to be $80 billion and corporate expenditures on networking alone is expected to reach $18 billion.

Citicorp spent $200 million on putting together a databank to link the names and addresses of customers to specific item purchases in supermarkets. In other words, your name enters a database along with Folgers or Maxwell House, Pampers or Huggies, Cheerios or Fruitloops, the information all gets put into a huge database and sold to various competitors. This project now covers 2 million households, but the goal is to cover 10 million.

This leads me to a second example. Very closely related to the large scale corporatization of information is centralization of ownership and distribution. Read Ben Bagdikian's watershed article in the June 12, 1989 *Nation*. He names five "planetary corporations" which own, control, or distribute a disproportionate amount of the world's information resources. For instance, one advertising agency, Saatchi & Saatchi, brokers 20% of the world's broadcast commercials. Time-Warner owns companies on five continents and claims 120 million worldwide magazine readers, four publishing houses, the second largest cable system, and Warner Brothers pictures. All of these five planetary corporations, as well as those aspiring corporations a rung or two down the ladder, are controlled by the developed

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First World. Elsewhere, two-thirds of the world's computers are made by IBM, and four companies control almost all of the market for workstations. Lastly, by 1986 ten firms controlled 75% of the college textbook market and eight firms controlled 53% of the elementary and secondary textbook market. The scale of the corporatized information economy is very much linked to the move toward centralized corporate control.

Another closely related development is the privatization of US government information. The Reagan Administration's "war on waste" resulted in the Office of Management and Budget's Circular A-130 in 1985. This circular limited the government's efforts to collect and disseminate information and called for a "maximum feasible reliance on the private sector for dissemination." Government information, collected at taxpayers expense, is becoming less accessible in both the physical and economic senses: 25% of the government's publications have been eliminated; by the middle-1980s, there was an 83% growth in the monetary amount of government contracts to privately distribute government data, but by the late 1980s, there was no budget savings from these moves; costs of government information distributed privately have risen —an agriculture database went from $42 per hour to use to an $1,800 per year subscription from Martin Marietta, and a House committee concluded that the Patent Office allowed contractors to reap a $3.2 million windfall at the cost of public access to patent data.

Growth in the database industry has been fueled by turning over cheap government information to be repackaged and sold privately as the sole outlet. The responsibility to make all government information available at an affordable price and reasonably accessible is not transferred with the data. The result is that the information industry skims only the marketable information to sell, leaving the more expensive areas to the government. Not surprisingly, the subject of most of this data has been in the areas of business and economics.

Borrowing a nice phrase from Mark Rosenzweig, I consider the character of library culture to be the critical measure of freedom of information in American society. Libraries are the places where private information is mediated and the public is given access in something approaching an equitable manner. This ideal makes libraries, to use Henry Giroux's words, critical democratic public

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spheres. When I look at the library profession, however, I find this sometimes-reached, sometimes-not ideal in decline. The vast majority of librarians accept the hype of the "Information Society" and the assumptions that follow. Only a very small amount of the professional library literature critically questions technology, or the role it has come to play. Instead, librarians have been relatively easy to co-opt since the new glamorous technology promises higher status to library work after years of undervalued work. Librarians have rushed wholesale into investing in libraries as "information centers" to ensure a niche in the coming information economy. I would characterize my own profession as "happy technologists" who insist that information technology will transform libraries and librarians for the better.

Within the context of buying into information technology public and institutional support for libraries has either slipped or stagnated in recent years. Libraries have, in turn, increasingly stepped up private fundraising and entrepreneurial management techniques, offering fee-based services to area businesses, for example. A recent nationwide study of public libraries found that 77% of those doing fundraising contacted local businesses, and 53% who raised money used it for "equipment." Within library budgets, which are shrinking, expenditures on technology are growing 25-30% per year, and libraries are still major customers of databases, despite 12% per year inflation. All of this translates into spending less on print sources in order to support the relatively new high tech habit of libraries. "Visionary" library administrators are, to put it bluntly, nearly tech-nopornographic in their lavish descriptions of future "libraries." Further, entrepreneurial management and private funding will further tie libraries to the agendas of those who donate money. It is not a leap of imagination to state that, as libraries become more dependent on philanthropy, they will need to be more responsive to the wishes of that constituency and less responsive to the abstract ideal of the democratic public sphere. Finally, the library profession has not, in any serious way, assessed the inherent bias of all of the published and electronic information that is purchased. The fact that 17 out of 25 subject areas in DIALOG's 1990 database catalog are exclusively or primarily related to business and economics is not a matter of wide reflection. Nor is the central ownership and distribution of books and journals a matter of much concern. Librarians are far too busy eagerly buying or anticipating the next software release

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or new database to question the larger context from which they purchase and pass on information.

Libraries as market-neutral public spheres for information are declining. The longstanding commitment to print literacy in the profession has quickly taken a back seat to keeping up with technological-economic developments. At the same time, what has happened to the economics, ownership, and distribution of global and government information has made basic freedom of information something of a joke. Libraries, like schools, are becoming linked to specific business and economic issues. Those issues will come to dominate the purchasing and administrative actions of libraries in order to fulfill the economic agenda now set for them. Perhaps most disturbing, most of this has begun unquestioned. We must assess our basic commitment to print literacy, and the relationship of that specific kind of literacy to a democratic society. There is much more at stake in the transformation of libraries into "information centers" than replacing card catalogs with terminals. Libraries as mediators of private information are still functioning, but I believe my profession should act to preserve and increase its role as a critical public sphere rather than sell it out for a niche in the "information economy."

DISCUSSION

MR: You suggest, Colleen, that the NWICO deserves a thorough going critique at this point and I couldn't agree more. But there's one element of the critique which I think might be in order that you didn't mention. And it's suggested by Gabrial Garcia Marquez and Juan Somovia in the appendix to the "MacBride Report":

There's a tendency in different parts of the report to glorify technological solutions to the contemporary communications problems. We want to emphasize that the techological promise is neither neutral nor value-free. Decisions in this field have enormous political and social implications. Each society has to develop the necessary instruments to make an evaluation of alternative choices and their impacts. The insistence on the need to develop communications infrastructures in the Third World should not be overstated. It's not possible to solve contemporary communications problems through money and training alone. The idea of a "Marshall Plan" for the development of Third World com-

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munications is inappropriate and will tend to reproduce Western values in Third World societies. Actions in this field should be carefully selected so as not to reinforce minority power structures within Third World countries or serve as a vehicle for cultural domination.

Now, I think that what they've put their finger on is a tendency in the "Report" to take a very uncritical approach to information technologies, in terms of their own intrinsic qualities, and not to see them as shaping in very powerful ways, by their very nature, whole sets of ideas, attitudes, priorities and political decisions.

Along with John Buschman, I see that librarians on a small scale are acting as pimps for the information industry when we propose that what's really in order for library development is simply the extension of information technology. And, through the United States Information Agency in particular, librarians are becoming international spokesmen for the spreading around of the same sort of technology as a panacea. We must also consider the way they can reinforce existing social relations and promote acceptance of the global order to which their production and control are linked. I think it is a weakness in the "MacBride Report" that it sees merely a kind of redistributive side to this whole thing without any kind of internal critique of the technology itself. What do you think?

CR: I share your concerns about information technology, but within the Third World countries there are a whole range of different positions and part of the problem is that very often the national elites in the Third World want the technology. There's no question that they want a "Marshall Plan", because they view it as in their national interest and they're tied in very often to the interests of transnational corporations. Within the field of critical communications there is a range of positions. I recently had occasion to look at this. There's one school, say of Dallas Smythe, who's considered the grandfather of critical communications research, and Herbert Schiller. They're very skeptical of communications technology and advocate a "go slow" policy at the very least. They suggest that Third World countries look more at the implications of these technologies.

Then there are other less skeptical people. Personally, I used to be much more anti-technology until I got a computer. I was hooked up on PeaceNet recently. Maybe it's just a phase I'm going through, but it's really been very useful. Now I can send FAXes and all of

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that. Sometimes I think it's a generational question, with people like Schiller and Smythe and this older generation being more critical of technology. There are some younger people like Vinnie Mosco in Canada. He has a whole list of suggestions for a democratic information policy. What he tries to stress is technological literacy. We're not going to be able to get rid of the technology, it's here. We should try to distribute it more equitably and improve access to it.

Comment: I think that we really have to put the technology to work for us. There's no way to say that we're going to get rid of it. It can be used very positively. Someone from New York On-line, which is an alternative news service, went down to El Salvador and worked for the guerillas and set up communications for them so that they could publish their own journals, so that they could communicate in the jungles, etc. He also went down to Namibia and set up a desk-top publishing system for the ANC. So it can be used very positively. I'm working with New York On-line now to help expand it so that there can be better communications over the whole country for grassroots activist groups. And also to make print copies of this available because although more and more people have computers, it's still a very elitist thing to expect people to have computers and modems. So we feel that we should make a lot of this information available by printing it out. One way to do this—PeaceNet tried this—is to use camera-ready copy that can be downloaded onto things like the Alternative News Service. Also, each grassroots group, in whatever area, in or out of the country, can use this to compile their own periodical or whatever they want to produce and add their own things. This is something that we're working on now.

Al Kagan: I'd like to get back to the UNESCO question and what our relationship should be towards it. Some of us have been working, trying to get the US to go back to UNESCO, because it has done some very important work in the past and is suffering now for lack of resources. I'm still trying to figure out what our strategy should be. Should we be working very hard to get the US back into UNESCO? Under what conditions? And how would that effect what we've been talking about, given the fact that the US has succeeded in undermining NWICO?

CR: I've switched my positions on this issue. A while back I was thinking: well. . .who are the "we" that are going back in? I don't know if you know how the US delegation works, but it's made up of

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State Department people, representatives of corporations and mainstream, establishment academics, most of whom are consultants to these corporations. One position is that we should try to get back in, but try to exert pressure to get Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) status for progressive groups like the Union for Democratic Communications and PLG and form ourselves into a group so that whenever the US speaks at UNESCO the only spokesmen won't be from corporate sectors.

JB: Getting back to the issue of information technology, I have a fundamental question as to whether or not these technologies can really be used to support print culture. Here's an analogy: the values of print journalism were projected onto television when TV news began to grow. Someone who lived during that time, who was politically aware, told me he was overjoyed at this development because he thought that politicians could no longer accuse newspapers of misquoting them and, because their actual speech or comments would be on videotape, with their lips moving, politicians would become more publicly accountable to the agenda that they projected. Well, this hasn't happened. Television has its own agenda and that's advertising.

Joseph Reilly: What was said about PeaceNet, about setting up desktop publishing for the ANC, the idea of setting up some friendly software moving in positive directions—for example, Ralph McGehee now has a database where you can study the CIA, or I can FAX things instantly to a COSATU office in South Africa, or Palestinians can send things to each other—this is all well and good, a useful aspect of some of these technologies. But for me this is a separate issue in NWICO from satellite communications, from larger issues of dataflow, of technology transfer, of capital transfer, wholesale stealing of raw data out of a country. The important issues that I get out of NWICO are dealing with the limited number of "parking" slots in the atmosphere for satellites. I understand what we are saying about useful aspects of technology, but I see NWICO's propositions as being a bit different than this.

CR: You can use the technology for good things in progressive movements, but the larger issue in the NWICO debate has been the global inequity in satellites, computers, the use of satellites by the US to spread its culture.

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Comment: There seems to be some confusion over the products of the technology compared to the technology itself. Anybody who thinks that print medium is not going to be available on-line in the future is kidding themselves. It's going to happen. The whole issue should be how we are going to get it to people, making sure that people get access and that all information gets included.

Bill Stack: I agree. I don't think it's a question of whether we're going to have print culture or electronic culture. It's a red herring, like painters getting together and quibbling over whether painting is dead. It seems like we could break this into a smaller discussion of whether or not we have preserved the beautiful domain of books. It reminds me of *Fahrenheit 451* when the characters say, "remember books?" I think we're forgetting that we're dealing with a flow of information that's as egalitarian as possible.

JB: I would disagree. There's more than just a "flow of information" going on. There is a rational element, a line of logic, a permanence. There are a number of things inherent in print culture that mean it is not just a matter of transferring information. A recent study demonstrates that computerized information is often given a higher status. The value of computer printouts seems higher. But there is a world of difference, and we've got to be aware of it. Scholars and faculty come to me all the time and say: "librarians don't understand what they gave up when they gave up the card catalog." They were a pain, took up a lot of room, but the fact is that the card catalog cannot be replicated in an electronic form.

MR: I agree with Buschman. I think part of the problem is the nature of the computer industry. For instance, the databases have private commercial interests determining their content. And that content is not something in which, for instance, librarians have any input. On another level, Third World countries have no input as to what goes into these databases. So when they buy into these systems, under the present circumstances they're getting information which does not reflect the needs of the Third World, of their own scholarship. They're getting strictly material which has been pre-determined for them and this has important consequences.

—transcript by Joseph Reilly