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## The Welfare State, the Information Society, and the Ambivalence of Social Movements

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*The fundamental impulse that sets and keeps the capitalist engine in motion comes from new consumers' goods, the new methods of production and transportation, the new markets, the new forms of industrial organization that capitalist enterprise creates . . . the same process of industrial mutation—if I may use that biological term—that incessantly revolutionizes the economic structure from within, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one. This process of Creative Destruction is the essential fact about capitalism.*

—Joseph Schumpeter

The intellectual and political assaults on the welfare state are one half of a process of what Joseph Schumpeter (1942) calls “creative destruction.” The other half is the social construction of the idea and reality of the global information society. Contrary to prevailing idealism, the main direction of the development of the global information society is not toward the establishment of a free market; rather, it is aimed mainly at the articulation and constitutionally based enforcement of rights of infrastructure and intellectual property ownership on behalf of global media and telecommunication car-

tels, and on behalf of the electronic commerce that benefits from these networks. This situation reflects what Richard Falk (1997a, 1997b) refers to as "globalization from above" and is illustrated well by the pursuit of neoliberal media policy principles on a world scale. In contrast to such principles, Falk advocates the tolerance and institutional support for transnational grassroots movements, a vision of "globalization from below."

In the midst of the powerful shift in political and economic imagination from social democratic to purportedly free market ideals, steered by the elites of many of the wealthiest states, the effort to develop a constitutional alternative promoting globalization from below is at a serious disadvantage. Optimism toward the idea of a "global civil society" has arisen to a significant degree in response to unprecedented innovation and expansion in the means of communication within and across national boundaries. After all, advances in telecommunications make it possible not only for cultural formations to sustain themselves more effectively across borders but also for political actors to use new means of communication both for internal communication among themselves and as means of generating wider, even global, publicity for the interests they represent.

For example, new means of communication are instrumental in successful efforts to bring pressure to bear on governments and corporations that violate values represented by international environmental and human rights organizations. The potential of such efforts is intensified both quantitatively and qualitatively through the availability and use of new means of communication. On the other hand, the efforts of such groups seem likely to run up increasingly against the formidable consolidation of *de facto* political and economic power manifested in regional and global trading regimes. Of course, the globalization of mass media and telecommunications are central as both cause and effect of that consolidation. Under such conditions, the possibility of a progressive politics evokes ambivalence toward the idea of a global information society.

### Rights Talk and the Rise of a Global Information Society

It would be a mistake to assume that the idea of the information society is simply a subject of fantasy among outspoken technological zealots. This discourse also preoccupies investors of large sums of capital and the attention of many heads of state. For example, in his remarks at the signing ceremony for the 1996 telecommunications legislation, U.S. president Bill Clinton announced:

This historic legislation in my way of thinking really embodies what we ought to be about as a country and what we ought to be about in this city

[Washington, D.C.]. It clearly enables the age of possibility in America to expand to include more Americans. It will create many, many high-wage jobs. It will provide for more information and more entertainment to virtually every American home. . . . Today our world is being remade yet again by an information revolution, changing the way we work, the way we live, the way we relate to each other. Already the revolution is so profound that it is changing the dominant economic model of the age. (Clinton, 1996)

Clinton's technopunditry stimulates anxieties as well as desires for security, affluence, and status in a world made so uncertain by a "revolution so profound" that we appear to be left with no choice but to embrace his antidote.

To understand the political evolution of the information society, it is helpful to look back on the evolution of rights discourse in liberal states. Writing about the relationship between social class and citizenship in the twentieth century, T. H. Marshall (1950) outlines the history of rights development in European welfare states. Marshall explains the evolution of rights in three stages, beginning with the formalization of the Lockean conception of "civil rights" in the eighteenth century. The tensions between the idea of civil society and the imperatives of the marketplace can be traced to early modern political thought.<sup>1</sup> The next "revolution" in rights was the expansion of the right to participate in political power, established widely as a principle of the modern nation state by the end of the nineteenth century and manifested first by universal male suffrage and later by the extension of suffrage to women. No longer was property ownership, or membership in the bourgeoisie, a precondition for "democratic participation." A third revolution in rights came in the twentieth century, according to Marshall, and it emerged in full force in the post-World War II era with the establishment of European welfare states.<sup>2</sup> While the late 1930s New Deal legacy of U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt certainly served as a model for many of the postwar social policies implemented in Europe, the relatively more expansive policies in some European countries have since brought them closer to an ideal-typical manifestation of "the welfare state" (Ehrenreich, 1985). Nevertheless, while free market rhetoric is more firmly embedded in American populism, few political theorists would claim that the United States is not, to some extent, a welfare state.

Today, we are witnessing a fourth "rights revolution" in the midst of multidirectional assaults on the welfare state and the concurrent struggle to define the meaning of the information society. The progression described by Marshall is premised on the state playing the role of guarantor of civil, political, and social rights. In contrast, the current emergence of a rights regime involves a shifting role for the state toward being a principal representative

and negotiator, venture capitalist, and corporate lawyer, in a context beyond the boundaries of the state's territorial and political sovereignty. On a global scale, neoliberal discourse about the information society is dominated by the quasi-religious belief that socially constructed property rights are "natural rights" and by the belief in "free trade" as the primary social activity from which all other social goods are derived. The degree of transnational government cooperation in the contemporary construction and enforcement of a global property rights regime is unprecedented. It poses a major innovation in commerce while simultaneously redefining the possibilities and limitations of traditional concepts of sovereignty and citizenship.

As any advocate for global "free trade" recognizes, what is required is not the elimination of regulation *per se*, but rather the marshaling of state power to strengthen and legitimate a regime that articulates and enforces the conditions of global commerce and culture and to limit those aspects of national sovereignty that pose threats to those conditions. In other words, new constitutions must be put into place at the transnational level (regionally and globally) in order to ensure that the prospects for capital accumulation are optimized beyond the boundaries of the nation-state. This process is already well under way, the testimony to which are the many regional trading blocs and the results of the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The Uruguay Round rightly can be understood as a global constitutional assembly, the purpose of which was to articulate more clearly and firmly than ever before the rights of capital accumulation, contract, and private property ownership beyond the boundaries of the state and to delegate authority to an enforcement body (the WTO). More recently, the prospect of a Multilateral Agreement on Investments (MAI) threatens to usurp a significant degree of political and economic sovereignty from states and to pose the greatest threat to the political sovereignty of poorer countries. Once enacted, the enforcement body for the MAI will be the WTO.

These significant and far-reaching historic developments clearly indicate what kind of global information society has been envisioned collectively by the wealthiest and most powerful owners of the means of communication and global production. The GATT and the MAI represent monumental movements toward the commodification and recommodification of culture and labor on a world scale, and, in the process, they produce and legitimate a global system of unaccountable private power.

Important as it is to clearly examine the rules of global trade and investment, this does not provide us with a clear enough understanding of the ideological basis for a new rights revolution. For that, we can examine futuristic prognostications by the prophets of the information society.<sup>3</sup> One document of this sort that deserves particular attention is the "Magna Carta

for the Knowledge Age," coauthored by Esther Dyson, George Gilder, George Keyworth, and Alvin Toffler (1994). Although not as binding in a legal sense as the GATT or the MAI, the "Magna Carta" gives a more direct sense of the ideological underpinnings of a global policy regime for trade, investment, and property development and of the idea and reality of the global information society. It is a self-consciously framed "constitution" of sorts, complete with a preamble, an outline of the role of government in a global information society, and a list of what are considered to be the critical rights that warrant protection. Reference is made throughout to "American" society, but it is clear that the authors see their canvas as global. Regarding the technologies of the information society, they appeal to the libertarian rhetoric of unleashing the "fast-growing telecommunications and computing industries." Most important for the purposes of the present analysis is the strong emphasis on property rights: "Defining property rights in cyberspace is perhaps the single most urgent and important task for government information policy. Doing so will be a complex task, and each key area—the electromagnetic spectrum, intellectual property, cyberspace itself (including the right to privacy)—involves unique challenges" (Dyson et al., 1994).

In essence, a neoliberal agenda for an exclusively market-driven global information society, and radically weakened national priorities toward democratic social policies in the North and South, mark a regressive moment in the evolution of democratic principles and human rights. But they do so not by denying the importance of all rights, but specifically of corporate rights. The current wave of efforts to step up the development of enforcement mechanisms for transnational trade, investment, and property regimes is evidence of the primacy given to what T. H. Marshall described as "civil rights." These new regimes do much to establish and protect a particular manifestation of "global citizenship," that is, citizenship for the wealthiest members of global society, particularly the corporate-legal person. In the eighteenth century, civil rights were guaranteed to individual property holders, not to large, limited-liability corporations. Although the guarantee of civil rights was rightly seen as progressive at a time when the European bourgeoisie was struggling for political power and attempting to displace an *ancien régime*, the championing of such rights today on a new, transnational political stage, coupled with the present lack of comparably influential efforts to recognize and guarantee human rights on a global scale, marks a backward step in social policy.

#### Social Movements, Ambivalence, and the Making of Political Space

The struggle to define what ought to be accepted as legitimately political and worthy of public concern is ongoing. Indeed, as Henri Lefebvre (1991)



notes, the legitimation of political space does not ensure its vitality as such: "What, then, of the political status of space? No sooner has space assumed a political character than its depoliticization appears on the agenda" (p. 416). In the present era, much of the concern about what is legitimately political occurs in the form of the assertion that the political-economic moorings of the nation-state, especially the welfare state, can no longer hold, and that politics at the level of the state must give way to the forces of globalization.<sup>4</sup> Despite the questionable validity of this misleading rhetoric, the idea of the decline of the state has been precipitated by rising popular awareness of the importance of political struggle at subnational and transnational levels. This awareness raises the question of what sort of politics will shape the use of state power in the future. Furthermore, what role might the means of communication play in such politics?

The global mobilization of commerce, information, and culture is now widely recognized as an accelerating trend, and the technologies and institutions of communication are rightly recognized as fundamental to those processes. Among the many questions raised by such processes is one shared increasingly across the social sciences about the need for an understanding of "society" that is not defined by the boundaries of the nation-state, but instead recognizes the increasing permeability and limited political sovereignty and cultural autonomy of the nation-state. Contemporary social movements related to human rights, the environment, and other subjects of universal importance demonstrate how communications media are used increasingly to respond to, and circumvent at times, the political limits of the nation-state.

Today, contemporary political and economic crises are evident in the relative weakening of the ability of mass political parties and unions to define social identities according to class status. Relatively autonomous political identities, but ones that intersect in a variety of ways with that of class identity, are those based on "postmaterialist" values, including peace, human rights, ecological, and feminist movements, which cut across class divisions. The type of collective political action characteristic of these movements tends to be extra-institutional and, to a certain extent, anti-institutional in comparison with the stress on labor unions and political parties. According to Claus Offe (1984), "the channels of party politics are fundamentally inappropriate forms of organization" for new social movements (p. 172). Although the logic of political parties is to maximize votes "in order to occupy positions of state power and to conduct the entire business of government" (p. 172), social movements based on "postmaterialist" values tend to focus on a single issue or set of issues and not a broad multi-interest platform of consensus. Rejecting institutionally established boundaries of what defines "the political," the actors of the "new politics" thus favor "political action within civil society" (Offe, 1987, p. 72), the

wisdom of which is reflected in the feminist phrase born in the 1970s, "the personal is political."

A key characteristic associated with these movements is that although they do not necessarily seek institutionalization, they do seek to have a radical impact on the transformation of political, economic, and cultural institutions. Although he maintains that social movements can never "exhaust themselves in representation," Alberto Melucci (1985) acknowledges that "social movements can't survive in complex societies without some forms of political representation" (p. 815). Nevertheless, he argues, the goal of a "new political space" between state and civil society should be to simultaneously enable movements to maintain their autonomy without institutionalizing themselves (for instance, into unions and political parties) and to make society "hear their messages and translate these messages into political decision making." This "enlargement of the public space" is, for Melucci, "the task for a real 'postindustrial' democracy" (pp. 815-816).

Indeed, new social movements seem able to succeed more fully in national politics insofar as they manage to bring international pressure to bear upon the state. Melucci notes, for example, that peace mobilizations have "fundamental transnational effects" (1985, p. 813). One can also see this with ecology mobilizations as transnational corporations deploy ecologically devastating operations in Third World countries, activities that are banned or severely limited in the countries in which those corporations are headquartered. Although it can be questioned whether these movements sufficiently problematize contemporary manifestations of class inequity, social movement theories nevertheless are generally socialist in their interpretive and normative approaches to public life.

Among the principal weaknesses of much of the enthusiastic writing about the emancipatory potential of social movements is that it has tended to neglect or underemphasize the class basis of "social movements in the periphery." By contrast, *Transforming the Revolution*, by Samir Amin, Giovanni Arrighi, Andre Gunder Frank, and Immanuel Wallerstein (1990), provides a significant basis for questioning the prevailing assumption that the post-cold war, post-Uruguay Round global intellectual and political climate is one that will enhance the spread of democracy. These authors emphasize the global nature of relations of exploitation, inequality, and peripheralization, and they present a strong case that effective responses cannot be limited to national politics. At the same time, the authors reject the politically expedient and simplistic conclusion that the re-negotiation of state power in the world capitalist system is evidence of the irrelevance of state structures.

The theme of ambivalence applies to contemporary social movements and communication technology in cases in which a movement reflects a general inability or unwillingness to struggle on the same scale as trans-



national capital and cosmopolitan elites. At the same time that globally mobile forces may dominate or severely undermine grassroots political activity, the latter sort of activity may not be able to survive and be effective if it is not undertaken through the use of the same tools of communication as are used in posing a threat of domination in the first place. For example, although activists may be repulsed by the way in which mass media are used to promote forms and levels of consumption and waste that raise the threat of serious environmental hazards, they may in fact need to resort to similar means of communication to pose a challenge to such consumption and waste. Similarly, although global telecommunications networks enhance the mobility of capital and undermine immobile labor in relative terms,<sup>5</sup> such networks also can be and are being used by labor and other movements to forge more powerful bases of solidarity against exploitation and violations of human rights. In both instances, the cause of ambivalence is clear: movement actors must recognize that the scale of their struggles is not under their control and that innovative uses of the means of communication by mobile capital can work against such struggles. Furthermore, resistance to or incompetence in the uses of those same means of communication poses liabilities.

*Ambivalence* as it is used here is understood in terms of a link between human emancipation and the means of communication, and it has been a theme in critical theory at least since the time Walter Benjamin (1968) wrote about "mechanical reproduction" and explored the emancipatory potential in the uses of what were then new communication technologies. More recently, Jürgen Habermas (1987) has provided an extended discussion of his own notion of ambivalence with respect to social movements and the media (pp. 389–396). He claims "there is a counterweight of emancipatory potential built into communication structures themselves" (p. 390), and he explores how this potential is in evidence in the findings of media reception research and in the possibilities for "independent communication structures" to clash effectively with "system imperatives" (p. 391).<sup>6</sup>

Of course, whether ambivalence can be progressive is a subject about which writers disagree, with the principal issues centering on combined matters of intellectual rigor and political commitment. Objections to a focus on ambivalence are concerned with avoiding the treatment of nuance and complexity (and any resulting ambivalence) as a basis for paralysis or apologies (Issac, 1998).<sup>7</sup> Despite this warranted risk, I believe there is no choice but to conclude that political wisdom can grow as readily, if not more so, out of the seeds of ambivalence as from a refusal to accept the strategic usefulness of compromise. While it is not necessary to turn the concept of ambivalence into the axial principle of a theory of political communication, I have not seen the reasoning that would lead me to conclude

that the normative use of this concept is not essential in a vocabulary capable of addressing the sustainability of contemporary progressive politics.

### "Limits to the State"?

In his prison notebooks, Antonio Gramsci (1971) wrote, "The subaltern classes, by definition, are not unified and cannot unite until they are able to become a 'State': their history, therefore, is intertwined with that of civil society, and thereby with the history of States and groups of States" (p. 52). Gramsci's view on the importance of "subaltern" groups is premised on the notion that the seizure of state power should be an eventual goal. As it has been for most political theorists before and since his time, effective political struggle for Gramsci is not meaningful if it lacks the essential aim of steering the state, whereas today the "new social movements" are understood by a variety of critics as lacking precisely such a purpose (e.g., Frankel 1983; 1987). In his critique of the postmaterialist orientation toward social movements, Frankel (1987) concludes, "No social movement can hope to implement policies on unilateral nuclear disarmament, equal wages for women, stringent environmental controls and other eco-socialist policies, without organizations which affect state power" (p. 267).

Echoing Frankel and others who warn of the pitfalls of romanticizing about participatory politics in contemporary social movements, Michael Walzer (1991) cautions against the potential to regress into "anti-politics," a condition in which the state is alienated from civil society. However, Walzer is optimistic about the prospects for political participation in contemporary society. He acknowledges that in the modern context "citizenship" is understood as "mostly a passive role" played by "spectators who vote," but he is hopeful about the civil associations of which Tocqueville and modern communitarians have written: "But in the associational networks of civil society—in unions, parties, movements, interest groups, and so on—these same people make many smaller decisions and shape to some degree the more distant determinations of state and economy. And in a more densely organized, more egalitarian civil society, they might do both these things to greater effect" (Walzer, 1991, p. 299).

The paradox of the state-civil society relationship, according to Walzer, is that the state sets the boundaries and preconditions for other forms of association. Thus, he argues, it is imperative that we struggle for democratic states in order to maximize the potential for a democratic civil society, "for civil society, left to itself, generates radically unequal power relationships, which only state power can challenge" (1991, p. 302). Certainly that is a foremost concern among those who rightly view with fear the consolidation of unaccountable private power on a global stage and the abnegation of responsibility by powerful governments involved in orches-

trating "free trade" policies. Of course, Walzer's warning is intended to apply not only to "private" world-scale economic institutions, but also to the various forms of political association that constitute the prevailing contemporary understanding of the idea of civil society in contemporary social thought.

It is not for the lack of sound, intelligent efforts to articulate the necessary conditions for extending the franchise of "global citizenship" beyond interests of a global elite that more progressive social policy ideas about "globalization" have not come to the fore of global policymaking. Writing about the impact of neoliberal policies on the periphery, Samir Amin (1997) argues against "unifying the world system by the unilateral basis of the market" (p. 22). Like others who can see clearly that the "limits of the state" push us toward trans-state solutions to social ills, he advocates the pursuit of constitutional principles to develop a democratic agenda for global social and cultural policies that would parallel the already well developed efforts to constitutionalize global market principles:

As far as action to be taken at the level of international organization of general interdependence is concerned, this strategy aims at encouraging the development, in an embryonic form, of a "democratic world government" (as opposed to domination by the Group of 7) as illustrated by the introduction of a world tax earmarked for ecological operations, for instance. In addition, it proposes to reduce the tensions that have arisen due to the massive stocking of weapons, notably by the superpowers. Finally, its ambition is to give a new lease on life to the democratic institutionalizing of world control by reviving interest in the United Nations. (Amin 1997, p. 23)

Reflecting a similar aim in advocating greater progress in the development of global democracy, David Held (1995) calls for a new "Bretton Woods" agreement—"an agreement which would tie investment, production and trade to the conditions and processes of democracy" (p. 256). Held considers the concept of citizenship to be linked inextricably to the nation-state, thus causing serious deficiencies in defining rights in terms of citizenship. The consequences of this, he explains, are to overlook the trends toward globalization and the need to focus not simply on belonging to a nation state to which one's rights are tied but to enjoy "empowering rights" that transcend the nation state. He notes that the nation state is no longer able to guarantee these rights, given the fact that "many types of citizenship rights have become progressively universalized in the wake of the nation-state" (p. 223). The result, he concludes is that "there is a fundamental question about whether the rights embodied in citizenship rights can any longer be sustained simply within the framework that brought them into

being" (p. 223). By contrast, he advocates a "cosmopolitan model of democracy" in which "people can enjoy membership in the diverse communities which significantly affect them and, accordingly, access to a variety of forms of political participation. Citizenship would be extended, in principle, to membership in all cross-cutting political communities, from the local to the global" (Held, 1995, p. 272).

Of course, this raises the question of whether in fact Held actually wants to dispense with the concept of citizenship or if, instead, he simply wishes to articulate the requirements and develop the enforcement mechanisms to secure it transnationally. Either way, the point is not which term we choose but rather the substance of the rights claims being made and the means being sought to secure them. In that respect, the most viable institutional solution Held sees to the deficit in rights protections produced by globalization and its challenges to sovereignty and the declining welfare state is, quite reasonably, to transfer the enforcement of "empowering rights" to international treaties, regional agreements, and international law.

Similar to Held and Amin, Richard Falk (1991) calls for "global constitutionalism as a vehicle for transnational democracy" (p. 7) with the aims of (1) strengthening a global institutional network of international institutions, which (referring particularly to the UN Charter) currently are ineffectual in carrying out their mission; (2) developing stronger procedures to interpret and enforce existing international law, including mechanisms for dealing with noncompliance and "greater connection with and accountability to the constituting energies of democratic forces" (p. 12); and (3) recognizing and respecting the value, as well as the precarious strength, of the existing "transnational groundwork for global civil society" (pp. 12–13). Like Held and Amin, Falk gives recognition to the importance (or at least potential) of the means of communication in reinforcing, if not establishing, notions of democratic "global citizenship."

With respect to the means of communication, most writers (including the ones mentioned here) recognize their potential, but their treatment of communication is primarily as epiphenomena of political-economic change. This is reflected by inadequate attention to understanding media institutions as political institutions that actually contribute significantly to the shaping of global political developments. For example, CNN's reporting on the Persian Gulf war was fundamental to the reshaping of Pentagon public relations strategies, both for foreign and domestic effect. In the sphere of popular entertainment, MTV has not only managed to stimulate and increase consolidation in global demand for U.S. music industry products, but it has also been elemental in the development of an increasingly uniform pattern of global "youth culture" consumption (Nikes, baseball caps, skateboards, grunge, etc.). Held (like many theorists of globalization) gives short shrift to the extent to which existing political institutions are ac-

tually displaced by or heavily dependent upon the media in terms of the formation of political influence and political representation. Overall, the potential to develop alternative political-economic structures for governing the uses of the means of communication in ways that would advance the prospects for global democracy remains an underdeveloped theme in political thought.

Whether or not we call it "citizenship," the recognition of rights, particularly communication rights, requires that governance of the means of communication be treated as central to, rather than an afterthought of, efforts to articulate global constitutional principles. The tendency toward neglecting or underestimating the place of media and telecommunications in much of globalization theory is regrettable, because there is much to be gained by strengthening the interdisciplinary links between the study of politics and the study of communication with respect to visions of "global civil society."

The irony of Amin's, Held's, and Falk's prescriptions is that a call for a more global constitutionalism in which communication is explicitly recognized was well under way many years before the Uruguay Round, the G-7, and various regional trading blocs put the idea of the information society on their agendas. One of the many ways in which the importance of the role of communications media in sustaining contemporary movements has been recognized is through the legacy, however flawed, of the ad hoc International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, which was commissioned in the late 1970s by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to report on the state of world communication issues. The legacy of the commission is often associated with the name of the man who presided over it, the late Nobel laureate Sean MacBride.

### The MacBride Legacy

The MacBride Report to UNESCO, and the call for a "new world information and communication order" (NWICO) that followed, precipitated the decision by the U.S. government to withdraw its membership from UNESCO. In a letter dated December 28, 1983 from Reagan administration secretary of state George Schultz to UNESCO director-general Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, the reasons for the U.S. withdrawal were given. Equal emphasis was given to issues of mismanagement and "the injection of political goals beyond the scope of the cooperative enterprise" (Schultz, 1984, p. 84); what was clear throughout, however, was that the decision was made on behalf of big mass media and telecommunications industry interests in the United States. Stating that the U.S. government, "along with the American people generally" (p. 82), believe in UNESCO's constitution,

Schultz noted that "We plan to use the resources we presently devote to UNESCO to support such other means of cooperation" (p. 84).<sup>8</sup> Schultz may not have anticipated the exact ways in which "other means of cooperation" would be sought, but the development of a U.S. foreign policy in mass media and telecommunications since that time indicates that trade and investment have been highest on the agenda (Calabrese, 1995; Calabrese and Redal, 1997).

Despite the symbolic and economic blow dealt to UNESCO by the U.S. withdrawal, efforts to pursue many of the ideals described in the MacBride Report have continued. In 1989, the first "MacBride Roundtable" met in Harare, Zimbabwe, "to assess the state of global communication ten years after the publication of the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems" ("Harare Statement," 1989). Since that time, there have been a total of eight other roundtables, in Prague (1990), Istanbul (1991), São Paulo (1992), Dublin (1993), Honolulu (1994), Tunis (1995), Seoul (1996), and Boulder, Colorado (1997).<sup>9</sup>

Each meeting of the Roundtable has attempted to articulate a range of issues and positions regarding what have been seen as the necessary conditions for the use of media and communication for purposes of democratization and empowerment. Since the time of the original MacBride Report, there has been a shift in emphasis away from a preoccupation with the institutionalization of a global social and cultural policy regime in communication, and toward grassroots efforts and nongovernmental action. Hamid Mowlana and Colleen Roach (1992) note the progressive shift within the NWICO legacy from a heavy emphasis on national and international governmental organizations at the initial phase (particularly evident in the initial "MacBride Report") toward the ongoing emphasis on non-governmental and professional organizations. For example, in the second MacBride Roundtable, held in Prague in September 1990, there was no governmental participation, "which reinforced the efforts of some NWICO backers to steer the movement in a 'grassroots,' 'people's' direction" (Mowlana & Roach, 1992, p. 11).

This is not to say that grassroots efforts and non-governmental organizations were neglected at the start. Recommendations in the original MacBride Report explicitly included a focus on women, children, ethnic and religious minorities, movements for peace and disarmament, and human rights. Nevertheless, the main publicity and controversy over the MacBride Report centered on its implications for the potential establishment of a set of national and global governmental policies that would threaten U.S. cultural, technological, and economic hegemony in the media and communication industries. Rather than continue to support the existence of an organization (UNESCO) that threatened the future growth and global dominance of some of the most lucrative and successful exporting



industries of the U.S., the instrumentally rational choice was made by the U.S. government to support its domestic industries by withdrawing and pursuing "other means of cooperation." Of course, the primary purpose of withdrawal was to suppress progress in the articulation and development of precisely the sort of democratic principles advocated by Amin, Held, and Falk.

Roach (1997) relates the discourses on the NWICO and the global information society by taking note that the hegemonic thinking about the latter clarifies the foundations from which the efforts to destroy the former have arisen. Indeed, Thérèse Paquet-Sévigny, UN under-secretary-general for information in 1990, clearly articulated this (anti-NWICO) position: "Over many years, the international debate on information and communication did not result in agreement on a common approach. I wish only to refer to some of the discussions, for instance, on concepts of a new world information order, which in the eyes of many actors in the field of communication have harmed international efforts to construct a world-wide information society" (Paquet-Sévigny, quoted in Roach, 1997, p. 116).

Despite its quasi-governmental status, UNESCO is hardly a powerful institution in global policymaking. However, by virtue of its broad intellectual mission and its connection to the United Nations, it does have some significance in terms of the moral authority and legitimating force it can wield, which the U.S. government implicitly recognized at the time of its decision to withdraw. To reclaim its influence, UNESCO seems to have moved to a more status quo, pro-WTO ideological framework as far as the idea of the information society is concerned. Thus, it is important to distinguish the NWICO-MacBride legacy, which gained its initial momentum from UNESCO sponsorship, from the current prevailing positions in UNESCO leadership regarding the idea of a global information society.

The MacBride legacy has been to stimulate support for a new global constitutionalism aimed at establishing global social and cultural policies that would parallel the already well-developed efforts to constitutionalize global market principles. It would be inaccurate to suggest that the MacBride legacy has come to an end, but it is true that the effort to develop a progressive global cultural agenda poses little threat to the "trade and investment" orientation of global policymaking in media and communication. The long-term stability of the newly emerging global market system is unclear. Nevertheless, given the current pattern of development, it is entirely possible, if not probable, that issues of the democratic control over the uses of modern means of communication will become a more central concern to the reemergence of social and political movements worldwide in the coming years. Certainly it is a discussion kept alive in some forums, such as the MacBride Roundtables on democratic communication, and through the "cultural environment movement" with which it is associated.

## Conclusion

Naïve optimism about what democratic achievements might arise through grassroots uses of the media is to be avoided. But rhetoric that categorically dismisses such optimism is itself lacking in historical grounding and therefore is equally suspect. Despite human arrogance, our ability to predict and control individual and collective wills is limited by a certain degree of unpredictability and boundlessness in politics.

Social movements, even those we may favor, are rarely universally appealing. Otherwise, they would have no purpose for existing, because social movements tend to define themselves in oppositional terms. More to the point, they are not necessarily equally defensible on moral grounds, and some are less democratic (if not outright antidemocratic) than others. All of this is true, and it provides grounds for valid and harsh criticism of an uncritical and romantic optimism about social movements as universally liberating forces. Neo-Nazis, paramilitary forces, street gangs, and armed drug traders all represent "social movements" that threaten democratic ideals. Nevertheless, to ignore the role of social movements in the shaping of political life, in ostrich-like fashion, or to wish them away with dismissals based on rational ideals set within the comforting confines of established bases of power can be an elegant exercise in irrelevance. Social movements often defy dominant terms of political legitimation, and they can be very effective in realizing their aims. Among the most effective tools of movement actors are the means of communication, used to create new political spaces.

Social movement actors are faced both with the opportunity to operate transnationally in order to circumvent local and national limits on their ability to communicate and exercise power effectively and with the countervailing power of newly institutionalizing liberal trade and investment regimes. Increasingly, such regimes are cultivating the ability to enforce property claims, to regulate the conditions for transnational investments, and to otherwise structure the conditions for the production and flow of goods and services. Thus, despite the existence of material grounds for optimism by theorists of contemporary social movements about their transcendence of national limitations, there also are grounds for viewing their new "empowerment" as being limited by the consolidation and formalization of power over the means by which transnational communication takes place. The disquieting condition of ambivalence about the prospects for democracy and democratic communication in a world governed by capitalist cartels should be accepted as a steady-state. However, ambivalence is more satisfying than resignation, because the ambivalent view holds open the door to opportunity to benefit from new forms of democratic expression, whereas a resigned view may offer little more than eloquent epitaphs over the grave of democracy.

## Notes

I am grateful to Vincent Mosco for comments on an earlier draft of this paper and to Claudia Maximino for research assistance.

1. John Locke argued in 1690 that the fundamental organizing principle of government should be the protection of private property in civil society, understood primarily in terms of the ownership of land and capital: "The great and chief end, therefore, of men uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government, is the preservation of their property; to which in the state of Nature there are many things wanting" (Locke, 1924, p. 180). Perhaps the most original and influential critique of the centrality of property to the enlightenment concept of civil society came from Marx and is summarized briefly in the introduction to this volume.
2. At the Twelfth Colloquium of the European Institute for Communication and Culture (EURICOM), held on October 2-5, 1997, at the University of Colorado at Boulder, Toby Miller (who has a contribution in this volume) usefully noted the tendency for unexamined nostrums about citizenship to rely on Marshall's ideas. I agree, although I accept the accuracy of the historical progression Marshall has described about citizenship in general terms while also recognizing the limited applicability of his categories beyond the nation state. Furthermore, Marshall's views on citizenship offer a limited understanding of politics outside of the boundaries of institutional politics, as Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon (1992) point out.
3. Jennifer Slack's writing about the ideology of the information age provides a useful basis for these reflections on the political influence of popular discourse about the information society (Slack, 1984; Slack and Fejes, 1987; see also Frankel, 1987).
4. The rhetoric of the political irrelevance of the state is a powerful means to legitimate neoliberal economic policies. According to this slight of hand, the state is too interventionist as a means of sustaining domestic social welfare policies while it is absolutely essential as an instrument to create and sustain transnational regimes of trade, investment, and property relations. Neoliberal practice requires state violence and means of coercion to realize neoliberal ideals. The highly interventionist quest for harsh state-imposed sanctions and enforcement mechanisms against violators of the principles of the proposed Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) represents how low the bottom line of neoliberal practice can sink. Readers searching for a clear illustration of the implosion of meaning and the unsustainable incivility that foreshadow the crisis of neoliberalism should consult Peter Huber's (1996) vision of a global information society. With simple elegance and an appeal to populist sentiments, Huber has painted an abstract ideal of friction-free capitalism in the age of cybernetic fantasy, albeit one that requires ample state terrorism to realize.
5. See the introduction to this volume for further discussion of the issue of capital mobility and labor immobility.
6. Although he does not mention Habermas in his discussion of ambivalence about the connection between technology and political struggle, Andrew

- Feenberg (1991) reflects a similar view in the manner in which he derives from Marxism a "theory of ambivalence" that is "not apologetic but strategic and consists in guiding the evolution of institutions, equipment and techniques developed under capitalism toward new socialist forms" (p. 44).
7. In a response published along with Jeffrey Issac's (1998) essay, Mitchell Cohen expresses concern about an "ideology of ambivalence," thus raising the issue of what actually constitutes a commitment to progressive democratic politics. Cohen's response usefully defines some of the risks of a political theory of ambivalence, but it is trivializing and dismissive. Despite his criticism that Issac draws a straw-man distinction between "Left" and "ambivalent," Cohen rests his own argument on the same foundation. Cohen's reply illustrates the original meaning of the term political correctness, which once was used as a playful barb within the American Left to criticize overly zealous attempts to define what it means to be "Left," i.e., attempts that protest too much. Of course, that meaning has been elided in contemporary usage with the generalized assaults on affirmative action, university speech codes, academic "multiculturalism," and so on. (Calabrese and Lenart, 1992).
  8. The most enlightening historical explanations of the MacBride Report and its aftermath in the "NWICO debates," particularly with respect to a critique of the U.S. position, have been produced by Colleen Roach (e.g., Roach, 1987; 1990; 1997; Mowlana & Roach, 1992).
  9. Further information about the MacBride Roundtables can be retrieved from the MBRT website at <<http://tdg.uoguelph.ca/~dritchard/macbride>>.

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