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**INTERNATIONAL LABOUR COMMUNICATION
BY COMPUTER:
THE FIFTH INTERNATIONAL?**

Peter Waterman

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Abstract: The old internationalism, both provoked by and modelled on the capitalism of iron, steam and rail, is dead. An informatised and globalised capitalism provides both the provocation and the means for a more-advanced type. The old international labour and socialist movements did not understand communication or the media, seeing them primarily as a means to an organisational and institutional end. The new social movements are creating a new kind of internationalism, or 'global solidarity', this being in large part a 'communication internationalism'. Communication is increasingly understood here as both means and end. The development of international labour communication by computer results in large part from 1) an initiative by the 'alternative' international labour organisations and 2) a response from the traditional international union organisations. As these two distinct forces interact and converge, they reveal problems facing the project as a whole. The two have been able to collaborate by avoiding discussion on the major political, communications and computer issues. It will become increasingly necessary to research, theorise and strategise if the development is not to reproduce dominant international relations and communications practices - or traditional international labour ones for that matter.

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CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION:	
	Labour computer communicators of the world confer	1
2.	HISTORY (1):	
	Communications, internationalism, emancipation	5
3.	HISTORY (2):	
	The uneven and combined development of ILCC	15
4.	PRACTICE:	
	Networks, weavers and soft solutions	24
5.	THEORY AND STRATEGY:	
	A larger political consciousness; a liberated political culture	49
6.	CONCLUSION:	
	'Fish, refinery and plantation workers of the world, communicate!'	64
	ENDNOTES	68
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	74

REFERENCE STYLE

A number of references in this paper are to texts that I have received only via electronic mail. Given that e-mail is the subject of the paper, this is well and good. But it does create a problem of reference style. Most of these materials exist in separate computer files on diskettes. For some years I have tried (not always with success) to use a standardised code for these. There may be minor variations, but such items will mostly be referred to as follows:

(AMRT1220 1990)

Here the first three letters indicate the sender/receiver, the fourth whether it was sent To or received From, the following four numbers the month and day.

NOTE TO READERS

This paper really is a working paper, in the sense of having been produced as soon as possible after the event that inspired it. It is intended for discussion and commentary. Aware, as I am, of my limited technical knowledge of the field, I am also interested in possible collaboration on a later or expanded version. The paper is, in any case, not meant for a more permanent form of publication until reactions have been received. All such will be acknowledged, with gratitude, by the author.

1. INTRODUCTION: LABOUR COMPUTER COMMUNICATORS OF THE WORLD CONFER¹

This is an exploration into the contemporary relationship between the labour movement, computer communication and international solidarity. As such it serves several purposes. One is to provide what I believe to be the first-ever historically and theoretically-informed sketch of this new kind of international labour communication activity – even if the history and theory are here themselves only sketched. A second is to raise some questions about the relationship of this to ‘alternative international communication’ more generally. A third is to suggest the possibility and necessity for systematic research in this area. This essay may, indeed, even serve as an initial sketch for such a research project.

The paper has been inspired by what I also believe to be the first-ever international conference on Information Technology, Electronic Communication and the Labour Movement, held in Manchester, UK, April 14-16, 1992. It was evidently time for such an event, given that at least 164 ‘labour groups’ are now connected to international networks, with at least 25 percent in the third world and one in Eastern Europe (Jensen 1992).² The conference was preceded and followed by the provision of information and the exchange of papers on an international computer network. ‘Papers’ here is a somewhat problematic word since much of the material referred to in this paper was first posted on the electronic LabourTel Bulletin Board (to be referred to as the LTBBS, with the ‘real’ conference being referred to as the LabourTel Conference or LTC). For someone like myself, who reached maturity in the pre-McLuhan period, the disturbing/stimulating effect of the conferences results from the blurring of the distinction between medium and message. Added disturbance/stimulation follows from my simultaneous roles as an under-qualified participant in the conferences, a critical commentator on them, and a committed promoter of computers for communicating labour internationalism.³

The LTC was a new kind of international labour event in other significant ways. Whilst the assumed subject was in large part union organisations and the unionised working class, the 80 or so participants came not only from traditional national and international trade union organisations but also from labour or movement-oriented support groups (concerned with such problems as health and safety), from general information/communication services, or from ‘alternative’ computer networks. They also came from academia and from the

Manchester City Council (which is involved in community-oriented computer services). Although some 75 percent of participants were from the industrialised capitalist West, some 25 percent came from Africa, Asia and Latin America, and the latter played a significant role in not only the proceedings but also the organisation of the conference. Again, whilst the conference was not particularly marked by feminism, some 50 percent of the organisers and 25 percent of participants were women - often themselves committed to feminist principles and involved in international women's solidarity activities. And whilst, further, the conference did not concern itself with either ecology, urban communities or third-world solidarity/development issues, participants represented such concerns and often contributed relevantly to the event. The conference was also politically heterogenous, participants ranging from apolitical technocrats to libertarian socialists. In its ability to draw these diverse bodies and individuals into a new matter of common concern for the defence and empowerment of labour internationally, the conference suggested the possibility of a new kind of open, broad and diverse labour or trade union movement.⁴

This paper will have to address itself to the tensions implied by such diversity and the question of whether these represent stimuli or obstacles to the development of a new kind of labour internationalism and the communications model appropriate for such. There are several things the paper will not do. One is to pretend to cover all the applications of ILCC, or the important developments of N(ational)LCC. For this one can turn to the detailed report of Gerry Reardon (Reaf0707 1992). The other is to really explore the full range of relevant theory available. This must and will be done at a later moment but here I have neither time nor space. The literature will, however, be referred to, and it will also be listed in the bibliography.

This brings us back to the title of the paper. Although the subtitle is not meant to be taken too seriously, it does draw attention to the failure of what have become known as the First, Second, Third and Fourth Internationals, and it does open the question of the relationship between internationalist aspirations, international organisation and electronic communication. The above questions were hardly touched at the LTC, which seemed to go out of its way to avoid either 'politics', 'theory' or 'history'. My impression was that neither organisers nor participants wanted to deal with such matters, although possibly for different reasons. For the organisers it may have been the very condition that made it possible to bring such a wide and diverse group together. For the participants it may have been more

the need and desire they had for dealing with practical problems facing them in a challenging and complex field for which most of them have no formal training. So the event took on the character of a 'policy' and 'technical' conference. If the avoidance of politics, theory and history was the price paid for holding such a conference then it was a price worth paying. But there is a price of ignorance or silence here - that of repeating past failures, or of self-isolation from the full relevant context, or of lacking standards and indicators of relative success. This paper represents an attempt to put such issues on the table. In this sense it represents an invitation to the LTC and the LTBBB participants to a discussion on such matters.

In beginning this exploration, I should try to make clear my own initial positions. They may be summarised as follows:

1. The traditional labour and socialist internationals were simultaneously expressions of contradictions within industrial capitalist relations/structures and prisoners of such. They represented, similarly, both a protest against and a reproduction of the then current means and understandings of communication. They tended to be literally inter-nationalist (solidarity relations between nationals, seeking nation-state solutions). The new phase of capitalism - an information capitalism that is increasingly global - makes labour internationalism more necessary. But, since it destroys, restructures and heterogenises the world labour force, and since it simultaneously multiplies other global forms of despoliation, oppression and alienation, it requires a new kind of internationalism. In so far as this represents a response to globalisation processes and global problems, I call it 'global solidarity'. It is represented in embryo by the multifarious and multi-levelled internationalisms of the 'new social movements' (feminist, pacifist, ecological, etc);
2. The new internationalisms are 'communication internationalisms' in a number of interrelated senses: a) their privileged terrain is that of communication; b) they are concerned to create new common global understandings and communities by both the provision of otherwise repressed or unavailable information and the creation of new emancipatory meanings or understandings;

c) their internal cohesion and external influence is more a matter of communication than organisation;

3. I believe that an informatised and globalised capitalism, may, for the first time, both provoke these internationalisms and provide the means for their articulation (in the sense both of expression and of connection). A new labour and socialist internationalism will have to see itself as one part of such a complex and multifarious movement;
4. The new information technology provides appropriate means for a global solidarity movement that does not reproduce the communication practices of its enemies. But the democratic possibilities inherent in computer communications – developed by capital and state, used most effectively by imperialism, patriarchy and ideological fundamentalists – are only possibilities. Whether the international labour movement understands contemporary capitalism, whether it does or could unlock these possibilities, will be considered below.

Part 2 of this paper looks at labour internationalism and communication historically. Part 3 considers the development of international labour communication by computer (ILCC). Part 4 presents the current technology and how it is being used for international labour solidarity purposes. Part 5 suggests the necessity for research, discussion and strategising. Part 6 concludes with thoughts on communication between workers (as distinguished from labour organisations) internationally, and returns to the question of internationalism. The Bibliography includes not only references but also other relevant entries.

2. HISTORY (1): COMMUNICATION, INTERNATIONALISM, EMANCIPATION⁵

Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battles lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever expanding union of the workers. This union is helped on by the improved means of communication that are created by modern industry, and that place the workers of different localities in contact with one another...And that union, to attain which the burghers of the Middle Ages, with their miserable highways, required centuries, the modern proletarians, thanks to railways, achieve in a few years. Manifesto of the Communist Party, 1848. (Marx 1935:215)

The new telegraphic technology brought in excitement from abroad even as it increased police control at home. The network of telegraphic communications that had developed in England of the 1840s helped to assure the effective and uniform suppression of the Chartist movement, just as the railroad facilitated Napoleon's repression of Parisian unrest across the channel. (Billington 1980:316)

Socialist and other emancipatory movements and thinkers have, since the 19th century, customarily thrown themselves into communication activities, tended to use the latest means of such and - at least initially - believed that these were or could be the bearers or even the source or essence of mass enlightenment, unification, emancipation and power. They have also often been the most radical critics of such media as and when they felt or recognised them as means of disinformation, trivialisation, surveillance or control.

In the early to mid-19th there was an intimate and even symbiotic relationship between revolution, the printing press - and even the press and printing workers:

In the 1840s, the life of the editorial and typographical staff of a radical journal became a kind of model for the new society. Here truly was a sense of community, built around a journal designed for ordinary men in contemporary language. Physical and mental work existed in balance and harmony [...] Born, who was both compositor and writer for Marx's journal in Brussels, had a...vision of the collective work of producing journals as a model for future socialist enterprise. The strike of printers and compositors he led in Berlin in April 1848 was the best organised and sustained direct action taken by German workers on their own behalf during the early revolutionary days [...] Printer-artisans also played a key role in French events of 1848 [...] Here was an informal alternative both to the depersonalised new

economic system of the bourgeoisie and to the political and legal mechanisms they offered the working class. (Billington 1980:319-200)

Given the uneven European, Russian and North American spread of liberal political rights, there was an almost equally intimate relationship between the revolutionary, exile and the international (commonly also internationalist) press and other means of communication. Brussels was a major place of refuge for revolutionary agitators and publicists. It was here that Marx and Engels began the Communist Correspondence Committee in 1846 and the Deutscher Brusseler Zeitung (German Brussels Press). The use of printing and telegraph to reach a mass audience fascinated the exiled revolutionaries and, according to Billington (1980:309), there was even an attempt by Marx and Engels to penetrate the international wire agencies in Brussels, through a leftist press agency, in order to distribute their message more widely! In 1851 Brussels was to be the meeting point of the new British, German and French telegraphic news services.

This should not be taken to suggest that Marx and his successors were alternative communicators avant la lettre. The press, in any case, is not in itself an interactive medium (Plude 1989:243). Communication was here a road that led directly to organisation. As revolutionary ideologues and organisers, they saw the infant German revolutionary press not as a passive expression of mass thoughts or interests but as a way to create such, a manner of creating party spirit:

Thus in Marx's view journalism had the responsibility of creating 'party spirit', the direct ancestor of Lenin's partiinost'. For both men this desire to create party spirit preceded the firm idea of a political party. (Billington 1980:318)

As and when repression was abandoned in European countries - and sometimes even before this - the popular press moved rapidly in two quite different but equally deadly directions, both of them inevitably national. The first was, of course, the commercial, sensationalist, chauvinist or imperialist press (Billington 1980:335-40). Having access to increasingly sophisticated and expensive printing equipment, partially liberated by advertising revenue from dependence on their readers, the new media were able to address their readers as a mass of consumers rather than as the (potentially) restive people or the (potentially) socialist working class. The second were the practical and reformist publications of the

workers themselves – forebears of a tradition of narrow trade union journals that continues (despite outstanding exceptions) to this day.

The artisan production process and emancipatory medium had both been largely developed by radical or emancipatory movements and avantgarde artisans, intellectuals or artisan-intellectuals. These were then industrialised, capitalised, commercialised and turned around and against them by the dominant classes. The process was to be repeated more than once in 20th century history.

In the early part of this century the international Communist movement and the Soviet Union put their energy and faith first into the press⁶ and then – as these new forms developed – into photography, film and radio.

The attitude of the international Communist movement toward the press at this time actually combined its utopian idealism with a quite vulgar utilitarianism. Claude Cockburn (a.k.a Frank Pitcairn), one-time Communist and a unique figure in leftwing British journalism in the 1930s, makes a strong case for a kind of revolutionary journalism that is not so much economical with the truth as abundant with the lie. During the Spanish Civil War, Cockburn helped the Czech-born Jewish Communist Andre Katz (a.k.a. Andre Simone) invent a story about a revolt amongst Franco's troops in Morocco, in order to ensure that the Blum government in Paris would permit military supplies to be moved across the border to the endangered Republican regime. Cockburn, who scorned the bourgeois journalistic pretence of impartiality and service to the public, admired Katz for his frank view of 'journalism simply as a means to an end, a weapon' (Cockburn 1981:140). This is not merely an amusing anecdote of Communist adventurism in its sharpshooter days. Placed in a fuller social and historical context, it is deeply revealing. For Katz' practice was in contrast to that of Cockburn in his own weekly, the reputation of which was based on its ability to go under and beyond the bourgeois facade, and for its insight and reliability. Katz' little internationalist lies, on the other hand, later led to big nation-state ones. For Katz/Simone was judicially murdered by the Communist cause he had so effectively lied for, in the anti-semitic Prague trials of the early 1950s – and after having accused Cockburn of being the British agent who had manipulated him!⁷

Mattelart and Siegelau (1983) reveal the richness and ambiguity of Communist media practices and thinking, both with respect to the press and to other media. And I have elsewhere noted the process by which the development of industrial capitalism (e.g. sound, colour, luxurious cinemas) and statist socialism (i.e. total state monopoly of film training, production and distribution) stifled the original creative impulse, the emancipatory aspiration and the internationalist intention (Waterman 1990a). It is worth remembering how a German Communist dramatist, Bertold Brecht, responded to the radio. Brecht was writing in 1930, more or less at the peak of Communist media utopianism, at a time in which an international proletarian (i.e. Communist) radio organisation was being created. Brecht saw radio as the first medium allowing for genuine feedback and therefore dialogue between producer and audience. He believed that the model he proposed could not be achieved under capitalism, and proudly proclaimed his utopianism:

Radio could be the most wonderful public communication system imaginable, a gigantic system of channels – could be, that is, if it were capable not only of transmitting but of receiving, or making the listener not only hear but also speak, not of isolating him but of connecting him [...] If you should think this is utopian then I would ask you to consider why it is utopian [...] These proposals cannot be achieved in this social system – can be achieved in another; yet they are merely a natural consequence of technological development and of the propagation and formation of that other social system. (Brecht 1983:169–71)

But 1930 was also just three years before the Nazi takeover in Germany, and radio was a medium that was to become almost synonymous with Nazi propaganda. Once again, however, it is necessary to remember that such democratic potential within a medium has been defused not so much by state authoritarianism as by commercial opportunism. The notion of a two-way movement of information and ideas has been turned into the ‘phone-in’, customarily controlled by a few seconds of delay, and by the hand of the broadcaster on the ‘panic button’. Whilst radio and other broadcasting technology ‘allows for’ feedback possibilities, this too is essentially a linear communication form (Plude 1989:245). Large-scale broadcasting is also a ‘mass’ medium in the sense that it needs a homogenised mass to cover the heavy capital costs involved.

The experience of statist authoritarianism on the one hand and of mass-consumption capitalism on the other, has, since World War II, led many democrats and socialists to see the modern media as a part or source of the problem rather than either a part or source of the solution. Within the social-democratic labour movement of this period there has tended to be not so much pessimism as either passive resignation or even an enthusiastic endorsement of dominant media forms and practices.⁸ These attitudes can be identified also at international level. Thus the dominant discourse amongst socialist and radical intellectuals looking at the international media has been that of 'media imperialism', with this either seen as a permanent condition or to be countered by some kind of media nationalism (or a third-worldist internationalism). And, as far as the international trade union movement is concerned, the dominant note until recently has been one of complaint against international media bias along with an effort to get round international labour pegs into square international media holes (for an international union media conference see Waterman 1987).

The option between a facile or idealistic optimism and a cynical or fatalistic pessimism with respect to new media, in emancipatory movements internationally, is not simply an effect of the historical period. Out of the worldwide movement identified with Paris 1968 there came the customary negative and positive reactions. The negative one was demonstrated during the May Events in Paris - by students who turned their backs on the mass media and produced their unique posters on artisan silkscreens.⁹ It finds further expression in an important book from the US, revealingly subtitled 'Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left' (Gitlin 1980). Gitlin refers back - somewhat nostalgically - to an earlier period of capitalist industrialisation and social protest:

The New Left of the 1960s...inhabited a cultural world vastly different from that of the populist small farmers' movement of the 1890s, with its fifteen hundred autonomous weekly newspapers, or that of the worker-based Socialist Party of the early 1900s, with its own newspapers circulating in the millions...America was now the first society in the history of the world with more college students than farmers. There was now a mass market culture industry, and opposition movements had to reckon with it...The New Left, like its Populist and Socialist Party predecessors, had its own scatter of 'underground' newspapers, with hundreds of thousands of readers, but every night some twenty million Americans watched Walter Cronkite's news...In a

floodlit society, it becomes extremely difficult, perhaps unimaginable, for an opposition movement to define itself and its world view, to build up an infrastructure of self-generated cultural institutions outside the dominant culture...Just as people as workers have no voice in what they make, how they make it, or how the product is distributed and used, so do people as producers of meaning have no voice in what the media make of what they say or do...The social meanings of intentional action have been deformed beyond recognition. (Gitlin 1980:2-3)

On the other hand, and during the same period, we can find the much-quoted article of Hans Magnus Enzensburger. It was he who recorded the behaviour of the romantic rebels in Paris,¹⁰ as well as that of the students in Berkeley, USA, for whom the computer was a favourite target of fear, wrath and violence. Enzensburger refers back to Brecht before going forward to suggest the potentially emancipatory power within the new electronic media:

The open secret of the electronic media, the decisive political factor, which has been waiting, suppressed or crippled, for its moment to come, is their mobilising power [...] When I say mobilise I mean mobilise...namely to make men more mobile than they are. As free as dancers, as aware as football players, as surprising as guerillas. (Enzensburger 1976:21-2)

Against a romantic, archaic or elitist rejection of the electronic media as somehow dirty, Enzensburger argues for engagement, because 'fear of handling shit is a luxury a sewerman cannot necessarily afford'. Although concerned with surpassing capitalism, Enzensburger does not seem to think, like Brecht, that little can be achieved before its overthrow (the result of growing disenchantment with the results of anti-capitalist revolutions?). Nor do others in the new tradition of energetic but critical and self-critical engagement. Thus, in an explicit response to Gitlin, Charlotte Ryan (1991:5, 20-21, 26-7, 227-35) proposes not only that social movements can use the mass media but even that this is where their communication energies should primarily be concentrated. John Downing, on the other hand, stresses the priority of alternative media. He notes the manner in which themes and even the typographical styles of the radical media are absorbed and exploited by the dominant one, but still argues the political significance of the former. He even seems to suggest that radical and autonomous media provide the cutting edge of emancipatory struggles today:

[T]hey are wider in scope than trade unions, and capable of being more in tune with social and cultural immediacies than most political parties of the left. I am not claiming that such media are the new red-hot hope for a confused and foundering international socialist movement, or that trade unions and political parties belong to the dustbin of history. Far from it...What I am saying is that self-managed media are capable of being responsive, of opening up the protracted debate and argument necessary to develop beyond the present impasse. They are themselves an autonomous political sphere...Autonomous media are therefore a central and continuing component in this long march. (Downing 1984:360)

This brings these reflections up to the 1980s and the response of the socialist, labour and other left or progressive movements to the electronic media in general and 'alternative computer communications' in particular. Here, again, we tend to find a reproduction of the opposed attitudes earlier identified.¹¹ The most forceful presentation of the optimistic or utopian position with respect to labour nationally and internationally is that of Michael Goldhaber (1983, 1987, discussed Waterman 1988a, 1990a). Whilst in his first piece Goldhaber argues the potential of computer networking for recreating a sense of working-class community in the USA, in his second he suggests the possibility of such networking for creating an international working-class culture across the third world. Goldhaber's piece, significantly, is not based on any experience with or even reflection on any relevant computer communication experiences. John Downing's (1989) is, which may be why it is optimistic without being utopian. Reflecting on two US projects, Peacenet and Public Data Access, he demonstrates their subversive and empowering roles, and argues that they suggest a new democratic communication or organisational model surpassing traditional Communist or Liberal ones:

In a progressive telecommunications network or in the relations between data-processing institutes and their clients, there are multiple centres of the production of information offering to pool their resources. Does this suggest the kernel of an alternative model of democratic communication...? Not that the technology itself can make such differences operational, but that these examples of its use, and its potentially de-centred but centring character, can

combine to offer new modes of political communication? (Downing 1989:156-7)

If Downing's is a note of cautious but committed optimism, that of Tom Athanasiou (1985) is one of a disillusioned but committed resignation, if not pessimism. Athanasiou writes as someone deeply involved in one of the most ambitious community computing projects in the USA - Community Memory in Berkeley, California (the anti-computer Berkeley of Enzensburger!). Community Memory was set up by a group of radical programmers and other specialists who rejected the notion of selling their energies and imaginations to capital or state. They also wanted to work in a non-hierarchical and informal structure with collective decision-making. The idea of the project was to design and operate a non-commercial, community-oriented, message and database system, with terminals available only in public places. In the practical spirit that succeeded the utopianism of the 1970s, the project was to be funded by the marketing of software through a parallel commercial company.¹² Athanasiou identifies a series of problems, relating to the organisational structure, to the commercial operation (both the South African state and US military were interested in their products) and to the attitudes of and relations between the individuals concerned. He seems to mock the illusions and even the possibility of 'high-tech alternativism' under capitalism, implying that this would only be possible in a post-capitalist society. He concludes in a mood more of grim determination than hope:

Community Memory's stated and most obvious goal is to demonstrate that computer information systems can be built that will help people to meet other people with similar interests, in effect to create an electronic public space. This modest intent is not anti-capitalist, except in the manner that all 'useful utopias' are, by invoking concrete images of alternative futures, thus making the end of this miserable world more easily imaginable. (Athanasiou 1985:50)¹³

How are we to understand the fact that the left historically has either successively swung, or been simultaneously suspended, between positive and negative poles, between utopianism and utilitarianism, on communication, including computer communication? Could it be primarily due to the ambiguous relationship of the means of communication to emancipation struggles in the past? Could it be primarily due to an undialectical approach

to the media, the left investing communication with absolute (and opposed) characteristics, dependent on time, place, experience and mood?¹⁴ Could it, finally, be primarily due to the left having had no theory of the media? This has been demonstrated for the UK by Denis MacShane (see, again, Endnote 8) providing convincing endorsement for the classical argument of Hans Magnus Enzensburger:

So far there is no Marxist theory of the media. There is therefore no strategy one can apply in this area. Uncertainty, alternations between fear and surrender, mark the attitude of the socialist left to the new productive forces of the media industry. The ambivalence of this attitude merely mirrors the ambivalence of the media themselves without mastering it. It could only be overcome by releasing the emancipatory potential which is inherent in the new productive forces... (Enzensburger 1973:21)

Could it be due to all three? What seems evident is that the left and labour movements internationally are still struggling with the legacy of early capitalism, the first industrial revolution, and with forms of social protest and socialist thinking shaped in their image.¹⁵

Marx, the 19th century labour and socialist movements, and most of their 20th century descendants, it seems to me, have tended to see the media on the model of the railways or guns - the content, use and significance of which are to be explained in terms of technological change, capital accumulation and/or class struggle. The media are seen as externally determined. They do not have their own specificity and they certainly have no determinative weight over and against the means or social relations of production. A question arises here. If the railways allowed the organisation of labour, did they not similarly restrict the thinking of socialists? Railways are physically-fixed, monopolistically or state owned, hierarchically-managed, centripetal channels. Their international connections mechanically join the separate nationally-owned and controlled systems. Did not national and international labour organisations unconsciously reproduce the pattern, organisation and control of this means of communication (see Waterman 1992a)? In so far, on the other hand, as the metaphor of the weapon is puzzled out, we can see that it belongs to an age in which revolutionary discourse and action was dominated by military metaphors and strategies, and in which the immensely complex matter of emancipatory communication was reduced to a set

of arms for achieving an end known to and determined by those who owned or controlled them.

The negative/positive, utopian/utilitarian dichotomy within the left can thus possibly be explained by the instrumental and mechanistic view of the media, with the option, or movement, between poles decided precisely by the balance of class struggle, or personal perception. Or, to put it another way (see the quotes heading this Part) by whether the proletariat are seen as catching the train/being taken for a ride, being gunned down/gunning down. On the other hand, dichotomic yes/no, good/bad, thinking may simply be a result of an inability to analyse the media, so that one can do little more than express a feeling, strike an attitude, take a position.

The significance of electronic communication for emancipatory movements may lie not so much in whether this technology is (in the argument of Carchedi 1984) capitalist-class-specific or trans-epochal-but-still-class-determined. It may lie rather in the question of whether or not it is an essentially interactive medium (to be considered later). Or in the fact that the worldwide spread, social depth, technical complexity and infinite variety of computer application have finally brought a significant number of emancipatory thinkers and movements to confront communication as central to social processes. Writing on informatics and democracy on a global scale, Majid Tehranian (1990:3) states that if Karl Marx were alive today, he would have written his major work on Die Information rather than Das Kapital.¹⁶ Given Marx's interest in new communications technologies, and alternative uses of such, as indicated earlier by Billington, we can be confident that he would have been paying attention to computers, using them - and considering their potential for communicating labour internationalism! No mean historian, he would also have been interested in how international labour communication by computer developed and evaluating the political significance of this. Let us now try to do this ourselves.

3. HISTORY (2): THE UNEVEN AND COMBINED DEVELOPMENT OF ILCC¹⁷

The IMF has a rule that all contacts between...people from more than two countries, must take place through the IMF...in... Geneva... It may take about 4-6 months before you get an answer, if at all. On the other hand, if you know the actual union reps at each plant, you can pick up a telephone and the next day you know the answer, you have the information you need. But according to the rules, that's not allowed [...] We once went through this formal procedure in relation to a strike at the Valencia plant in Spain...It took us about six months and even then we...only got...general information, not about the strike itself. The International Metalworkers' Federation only deals with Spain's social democratic union, the UGT. But most of the workers at the Valencia plant are members of the Comisiones Obreras...and it was this union that was involved in the dispute. In any case, after six months the information was not needed any more. (Cartier 1983, 1989)

Jan Cartier, shop-steward in Ford Amsterdam, active in the 'shopfloor internationalism' of motorworkers.

The traditional pyramid organisation of unions with international contacts carefully controlled and monitored at the very peak runs counter to the most useful forms of international contacts which are horizontal, between workers employed by the same company (or industry) in different countries. Fax, e-mail, and cheap travel are also enabling horizontal network building between workers in different countries which contrasts with traditional hierarchically organised trade union activity. These new developments facilitating international labour contacts will pose a challenge to existing trade union structures and internal communication links. (MacShane 1992:13-14)

Denis MacShane, Communications Officer of the IMF in Geneva (writing in his personal capacity)

Ideas about and experiences with independent international labour, trade-union, socialist or social-movement communication can - as we have seen - be traced back at least to Marx in Brussels in the first half of the C19th. By the 1950s, however, most international labour or socialist news services and networks had declined into pedestrian routine (Waerden 1960-61), or into the ideological, slow, narrow and unimaginative publications, such as those of the Western trade-union internationals in Brussels and Geneva or the Eastern ones in Prague and East Berlin (Waterman 1988a). Radical news services were, however, rejuvenated by the international and internationalist movement connected with the year 1968 (for which see Katsiaficas 1987:Ch.1). Many of the international projects (at least outside the US) were oriented towards the third world, development cooperation or solidarity projects. Many of these were financed out of development funding, coming either directly from state or inter-state agencies, or from money channelled through non-governmental development funding agencies.

As one precursor of ILCC we may identify the alternative/libertarian news service notion from the late-1960s or 1970s.¹⁸ Such services were not necessarily meant primarily for labour and not necessarily international in scope. Nor were they necessarily intended to be computerised, given the cost and complexity of computers at that time, at least in Western Europe. The best known and most internationally successful of such projects was Inter Press Service (IPS), started in Rome in 1964, with a social-Christian inspiration and an orientation toward the UN system and the third world. It became a 'third world news agency' in 1968. IPS, however, was and is very much oriented toward providing third world or pro-third world material to the dominant media (albeit the progressive part of such). It therefore opted originally for the heavy, slow and expensive telex technology used by many third world newspapers. It is identified by its output and funding more with development cooperation than social emancipation. Although IPS has sought collaboration with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the women's movement, it has never seemed to have had much interest in trade unions or the labour movement more generally (Hamelink et. al. 1989).¹⁹

Some much smaller alternative documentation services, with possibly similar origins and orientations, have, or have had, an orientation toward labour internationally. One of them is the Rome-based IDOC, which had institutional contacts with the more radical national unions in Italy, and did, in the 1980s, produce publications related to labour. Basically a documentation centre, IDOC went over from a manual to a computerised system around 1984 and has played an important role in the development of alternative international computer networking (Interdoc Resource Centre 1990). The Asia Monitor Resource Centre/Asia Labour Monitor (AMRC), in Hongkong, was started by radical church people from the USA. It developed on the basis of US computer-familiarity and ever-cheaper East-Asian computers. Originally it put out massive amounts of raw or semi-processed information about transnational company (TNC) operations in Asia. It later moved toward labour with Asia Labour Monitor - a bulletin of similarly raw information. ALM has moved from unprocessed to analytical publications, has developed much computer experience, and has come to be a major actor in ILCC. Its recruitment policy has resulted in the training of a number of third world specialists, as well as interaction and exchange between these and others from the first world. Two key early figures in the AMRC later went back to San Francisco, where they run the Third World Resources documentation centre and continue to produce high-quality resources on TNCs and labour internationally (Fenton and Heffron 1989).

The early alternative international labour publications (late-70s to early-80s) need to be mentioned only in passing since they have been dealt with elsewhere (Waterman 1988a) and were not necessarily computerised. However, as we will see, a number of them were and it was from such bodies, or individuals associated with them, that much of the energy for ILCC came. I am here thinking of bodies such as Counter Information Services (CIS) in the UK, Transnationals Information Exchange (TIE) in the Netherlands, Transnationals Information Centre London (TICL) and International Labour Reports (ILR), also in the UK.²⁰ So much for background.

In dealing with communication/documentation projects solely - or even partially - oriented to labour and unions, I want to emphasise three aspects: firstly, the different kinds of institutional actors involved; secondly, the changing relationship over time here between 'core' and 'periphery' in the international labour and socialist movement; thirdly, the way this experience connects, or fails to connect, with what we have so far seen or said about the left and the means of communication.

The significant actors seem to have been the following: 1) the traditional national and international unions of social-reformist tendency; 2) the general labour-oriented NGOs, or 'labour support groups'; 3) the specialised alternative documentation or communication groups; 4) the alternative computer groups, maintaining equipment, providing training and advice; 5) the radical intellectual specialists on labour internationalism and communications. What we initially had here, in political terms, was not five parties but two: 1) the traditional institutionalised international trade union organisations (with their own documentation and communication specialists and services, and in-house or allied academic researchers); 2-5) a loosely linked and overlapping network of radical activists, communication specialists and researchers, oriented towards the creation of some new kind of shopfloor labour internationalism and the communications necessary for such. Category 5, for example, includes not only academics, themselves often active within the activity areas 2-4, but also activists within 2-4 (often holders of lower or higher university degrees) in their more reflective moments.

The significant movement over time seems to have been primarily of an understanding and initiative of the alternative groups, later responded to by the traditional trade union

movement. This may already have been suggested by the two quotes heading this Part – and the time separating them. The first moment was one of considerable tension, in political or power terms, since the alternative groups challenged the traditional unions (though with no intention of replacing them), and the latter often either ignored them, dismissed them, criticised them or tried to isolate them from contact with workers or unions at lower levels. The second moment was one of a movement toward each other from both sides. In terms of their orientation towards the new communications media there was also a major distinction. Computers first arrived in the West European-based international union offices as a modern means to a traditional institutional end – handling finance and administration:

Immediately they were made 'confidential'. Union officers interested in using them for research and communications were kept away. Often they...were big and expensive, hopeless for doing any job like communicating, for which they were not specifically designed. Computers threatened jobs. Disputes over the introduction of new technology within union offices in some cases delayed the introduction of computerisation indefinitely. Most importantly, within many trade unions, international work is regarded as sensitive or prestigious, reserved for those in authority. For many union leaders, the prospect of staff members at all levels having equal access to international communication is simply a nightmare. (Spooner 1988:26)

The pattern of computerisation within the alternative groups was radically different, whether we are talking of the geographical site, the technology or the attitude:

Unlike unions, these groups are small, flexible, innovative and relatively unworried by new technology – particularly those in developing and newly-industrialised countries [...] Most bought machines compatible with IBM personal computers...They were using the same software, for much the same purposes (word-processing, databases, etc) and were often already involved in loose international networks for which computer-based communications were ideally suited [...] Every day there pass between them requests of information, articles for publication, drafts of documents, appeals for solidarity, etc. (Spooner 1988:26-7)

The actual historical movement was somewhat more complex. The first project for ILCC seems to have been proposed exactly 10 years ago and came, curiously, not from the labour base/periphery/alternative but from the very peak or core of the traditional labour movement, the social-reformist International Confederation of Free Trade Unions in Brussels (Graham 1982a). This project seems to have failed to take off for one or both of two reasons: 1) the ICFTU, at that time, conceived of information more as a source of membership control than of class empowerment, and 2) the project was premised on state-funding, from the new social-democratic government of Mitterand in France, finance that never materialised. Meanwhile, of course, the ICFTU and the allied but independent International Trade Secretariats (ITSS, the industry-based confederations of social-reformist orientation) computerised their administrations, developed databasing (e.g. ICEF, the International Energy and Chemical Workers Federation) and desktop publishing (e.g. ITF, the International Transport Workers Federation). But initially they had neither the urgent desire, nor the institutional structures, nor even the technical expertise, to begin international computer networking.

The latter existed or developed amongst the alternative groups, in Western Europe and East Asia, principally: 1) the IDOC-based Interdoc network; 2) such labour-support groups and publications as TIE, ILR, TICL and AMRC; and 3) the computer organisation known as Poptel/Soft Solution, in London, which operates the Geo2 electronic mail and bulletin board system. These bodies took the organisational form of NGOs or worker cooperatives. The 'base' for this initiative lay not so much in the European unions or even the European-based pro-labour NGOs, as in the third world. Here, it has been said, there are perhaps 2,000 NGOs on-line, whilst there are no more than 500 in Western Europe (Mather and Lowe 1990:60). The NGOs obtained their shoestring financing largely from development funds (government, European Community, church, etc), or else (in the UK) from progressive Labour-ruled municipalities such as London or Manchester. Interdoc - which was interested in alternative computer communication for development and solidarity projects in general - provided some kind of base for 1) the exchange of information and 2) the propagation of alternative international computer communication and databasing.

Both a peak and turning point of this 'NGO and thirdworldist' phase are represented by the Interdoc Conference in Epe, the Netherlands, 1990. Fifty or more people, from all over the world, took part in this conference, including representatives of other alternative

international computer systems, such as the Association of Progressive Communicators (APC) from San Francisco. Significantly present were representatives of third world labour-support groups and new labour movements (South Africa, South Korea). The conference also saw the first appearance within the network of the traditional trade union internationals, in the shape of the ICEF, one of the first such organisations to adapt the new communications technology and join the Poptel-supported Geonet 2 e-mail service. But the conference also saw a Labour Sector Meeting and a call for a conference of labour electronic mail users. That decision led to the LTC in Manchester, at which the traditional unions were present in both number and quality – something which could never have happened within the enthusiastic but disorganised atmosphere of Interdoc.

By this time, however, the traditional trade union movement was increasingly involved in computer networking, nationally and internationally. This was not necessarily because it had read the emancipatory writing on the alternative wall.²¹ An extreme – if not brutal – expression of traditional trade union attitudes was expressed by an official of the US International Brotherhood of Teamsters (before the defeat of its corrupt and authoritarian leadership in 1991). The IBT bought an expensive mainframe system, appropriately named Titan, as early as 1973:

The Head of Data Processing...speaks enthusiastically of the control exerted by head office through Titan during an industrial dispute. 'You can tell the shops here to come out, while those there can be told to stay at work. You can run a dispute across the country at the press of a few buttons'. (Mather and Lowe 1990:58)

This quotation comes from a report on Trade Unions On-Line, which both recorded the progress made, particularly in Europe, the continuing obstacles to such and the future potential. It also noted the less-extreme and certainly more common attitude amongst unions there – and provided them with a certain amount of reassurance. It identified

A political anxiety within trade unions about the use of Email by members and officers at a local level. New communications technology raises questions of communication and information flows within and between organisations; some are new questions, some are old. Some union leaders express, for example, a

concern that branch-level terminals will lead to greater pre-conference caucusing by delegates. There is a related concern that Email networking will lead to the re-emergence of a rank-and-file movement in some national unions and internationally. No evidence from around the world indicates, as yet, that Email can change the political practices of unions or unionists any more than any other communications technology, however. (ibid:10)

Before completing this account of the 10-year history of ILCC we need to consider the role of the fifth actor – or activity type – mentioned above. The political, technical and organisational developments of the late-1980s were accompanied by a certain amount of reflection on ‘the new labour internationalism’ and ‘alternative international labour communications’. Such discussion was limited in a number of ways. In the first place it hardly touched the traditional international unions. In the second place it hardly involved the Interdoc network either – even when prominent Interdoc figures were prominent contributors. The two major relevant collections of the more reflective items are the Comintercomdoc Papers (Waterman 1986b) and a special issue of the journal of the World Association for Christian Communication, Media Development (1987). The first contained pathbreaking ideas on alternative communication by a Dutch specialist, and on workers and the new technology by a dockers’ support group in Spain, as well as my own earlier-mentioned contributions. The second included an earlier-mentioned Goldhaber item and a series of articles on electronic networking by people from AMRC, as well as from communications and other NGOs in Latin America. None of these items really took account of, or issue with, each other. There has, therefore, so far been no real discussion or debate on ILCC, either amongst the alternative people or between the alternative tendency and the traditional one.

It is time to reflect on the first 10 years of ILCC.

It would have been nice if we were able to find either a simple reproduction of the traditional dichotomies earlier identified, or a clear alternative to such. If we cannot find these, then how are we to interpret the process? Let us consider it in terms of 1) the political, 2) the communications and 3) the computer practices revealed. Let us also consider this exercise as preliminary, requiring deepening when we have examined the contemporary situation and attitudes in more detail in Part 4, and when we have had recourse to relevant theory in Part 5.

Political practice. What we see above can be usefully discussed within the language of social movement theory and in terms of the distinction: old social movements/new social movements. Alberto Melucci (1989:205-6) identifies four new structural characteristics of the NSMs: 1) the centrality of information (revealing the concealed, reinterpreting what is revealed); 2) new forms of organisation (informal, democratic, self-empowering); 3) integration of the latent and the visible, the personal and the political; and 4) a new kind of global awareness - a 'planetary' consciousness. I would add to these, 5) the recognition, assertion and implementation of such characteristics as necessary to emancipatory projects in our day. Such features can be found in the alternative international labour projects mentioned above - including the implicit or explicit recognition of these as requirements for emancipatory social movements today. It may well be true, as Melucci himself admits (214), that characteristics 1-4 could be found in the labour movement. But an awareness of such, even implicitly, would be difficult to identify in the material on the traditional unions presented above. NSM theory, or experience, is also useful in understanding the coming together of the traditional and alternative tendencies in the later 1980s. The NSMs are repeatedly confronted with the dilemma of either turning their backs on or entering the old structures, with the opposed risks of marginalisation or incorporation (Evers 1985). This dilemma is institutionalised in the distinction, amongst the German Greens, between the Fundis (seen either as 'principled' or as 'utopian fundamentalists') and the Realos (seen either as 'realistic' or as 'opportunist'). We do not need to impose this schema on the process and debate that took place amongst the alternative activists in the later 1980s. For the schema suggests a binary opposition and dichotomous thinking precisely where NSMs are beginning to understand that 1) there are multiple arenas or levels of emancipatory activity (see Vargas 1991 on the 'traditional', 'popular' and 'feminist' spaces of women's movements in Peru), and 2) that there is a dialectical interpenetration rather than a binary opposition between radical and reformist activity in the contemporary world order (Waterman 1992a).

Communications practice. We may here simply record the distinction made by Stangelaar between Dominant, Non-Dominant and Alternative Communication (AC). The value of this typology is that it allows for a number of communications practices that are neither Dominant nor Alternative. One Non-Dominant form is what Stangelaar calls 'horizontal' communication, and it would seem to be relevant to the practices of the traditional international unions:

This is a form of...communication within either the dominant or subaltern classes. Horizontal communications flows are definitely a necessary condition for AC although they are not a sufficient one. AC aims at higher forms of organisation and mobilisation in order to confront the dominant political and communication project. The communication flows of AC are therefore better characterised as spiral in form. To avoid defining AC in communication terms, however, we prefer to characterise AC politically, as a communication activity aimed at the political organisation and mobilisation of subaltern class sectors by means of communications practices. (Stangelaar 1986:12)

If the earlier part of the above would seem to characterise traditional union communication practices, the later part would seem to characterise at least the intention of the new labour internationalists. Their aspiration was certainly to mobilise workers, in the way understood by Enzensburger. It is, again, unnecessary to set these categories up as a binary opposition. For, as both Stangelaar himself suggests (ibid:16-17), it is also necessary to work on a participatory communication model at national level even within existing capitalist states, and as Charlotte Ryan (1991) argues, social movements not only can get into the capitalist mass media but need to consider this communications activity as their first priority.

Computer practice. I am not sure that we yet have enough ideas on alternative computer use (or computer use tout court) for even a preliminary reflection on the first ten years of ILCC. It might be possible, in the behaviour and attitudes of institutionalised labour, to find that swing between Fear and Surrender mentioned by Enzensburger (though when we reach the Teamsters we might like to turn this into a spectrum by extending it from Surrender to Embrace). It might be similarly possible, in the behaviour and attitudes of the alternative international labour people, to set up a spectrum stretching from the computer communication Utopians, via the Optimists and the Sceptics to the Pessimists. But I do not feel that such typologies or spectra tell us much about what such people were actually doing, rather than what they might have felt about it. It is therefore time to look at what they are actually doing.

4. PRACTICE: NETWORKS, WEAVERS AND SOFT SOLUTIONS

The first benefit of electronic communication is the speed at which information can be exchanged. Since information is power, information has enabled us to be a more effective union [...] Computerisation has also helped us make our administration more effective [...] Electronic communication has also enabled us to improve industrial relations with our employer...Information sharing and joint consultation is a cornerstone of good industrial relations practices [...] The ICEF has come closer to us and there is a greater willingness to participate and support international activities [...] Computerisation has helped us to reduce manpower cost [...] An intangible benefit...is the enhancement of the image of our union. We are being seen as a modern and forward-looking union, not afraid to use modern technology for the benefit of workers. (Thomas 1992)

Contribution to the LTC by the Secretary of the Singapore Shell Employees Union.

KRIC was able to function normally for information exchange between Korean trade unions and international labour movement as an unique information broker for labour movement in South Korea... Particularly, Philippines and South Africa BBS provided good opportunity for Korean trade unions to have better understanding of labour situation in two countries [...] KRIC has been providing the information on Trade Union Rights and Human Rights in South Korea through from the beginning...So far, most of labour disputes at TNCs in South Korea were successfully introduced to international labour movement through Geonet and received effective support in launching solidarity campaigns: Pico (USA), IBM, Siemens, Motorola, Philips, Samsun and Hyundai (Korean multi-nationals). Assistance from ICEF was very effective to prepare for negotiations with Philips and AMC (USA). (Phee 1992)

Contribution to the LTC by the Representative of the Korea Research and Information Centre.

The organisations, activities or projects I propose to deal with below are: 1) the ICEF in Brussels, as a traditional international union organisation; 2) WorkNet, in Johannesburg, an electronic network servicing the new union movement in South Africa; 3) AMRC, in Hongkong, providing information and communication services to labour movements, particularly in East Asia; 4) Alternative computer services, in London and San Francisco, supporting international labour bulletin boards or conferences; 5) The Manchester Host, as a community-based but pro-labour and internationally-oriented computer service; 6) Mujer a Mujer/Woman to Woman, an Inter-American feminist network with labour linkages. This selection provides neither a comprehensive range of the previously mentioned actors, nor of regions, nor of activities. The organisations and projects are, moreover, of such differing kinds that any systematic comparative analysis is rendered difficult. The difficulty is multiplied by the limited data available - even on the selected projects - and its diverse character. Much of the material comes out of the LabourTel Conference (LTC) or LabourTel Bulletin Board (LTBBS). In many cases we are dependent on self-portraits. Such materials nonetheless permit us to glimpse the varied activities, different orientations and aspirations

of the projects - or of those involved in them. They should provide stimulating material for discussion. And this discussion will, hopefully, both link up with what has been said before and lead into the more theoretical chapter that follows.

4.1. The ICEF, Brussels, a traditional international union organisation

The International Federation of Chemical and General Workers' Unions (ICEF), based in Brussels, can trace its origins back to the 1900s. It has some 235 affiliated unions in 78 countries, representing around seven million workers in the chemical, energy and a number of other industries. Since 1984 it has been actively computerising its internal operations and international communications, now claiming to have the most effective and extensive information facilities of any international trade union body.²² I will attempt to deal with its international activities under the following heads: 1) databases; 2) e-mail; 3) bulletin boards; 4) orientation.

Databases: The ICEF began by accessing commercial databases in order to obtain industrial, company and health-and-safety (H&S) information for collective bargaining purposes. These databases provide ICEF and its affiliates with detailed and essential information previously unobtainable. There is, however, other equally essential information, on companies, collective bargaining and union organisation that can only be provided by or for the unions directly. According to ICEF, such information is now

available instantly. Many requests for information from affiliates have been answered within hours of the original question being posed...In 1991 over 1,300 requests for information were answered by the ICEF research department.
(Catterson 1992)

The ICEF has been developing databases, particularly on contracts and H&S. It is currently in negotiation with the Manchester Host (see below) and specialised union, state and inter-state agencies to collect/organise/disseminate such data more widely and more effectively. Jim Catterson, as the ICEF officer concerned, has also made a major issue of 'information brokerage' (I prefer the less-capitalist 'information weaving') for labour internationally. Both at the Epe Conference of Interdoc in 1990 and the LabourTel Conference in Manchester in 1992 it was he who raised as a major issue the role of the specialists who must mediate

between the thousands of information requests pouring in and the sources or channels that information seekers cannot practically know of or access.

E-mail: ICEF uses the Poptel/Geonet service for communication with regional officers in Tokyo, Seoul (for South-East Asia) and Moscow.²³ E-mail is also used for contact with almost half of its affiliated organisations, as well as with other ITSs, international union bodies, labour-related NGOs and the press. E-mail is routinely used for requesting/transmitting database searches, for solidarity appeals/responses during strikes and other disputes. In a hypothetical best case

the union would inform the Secretariat of the dispute via electronic mail. The message would be read within the research department within hours of being sent, possibly within minutes. Such a message could very easily, with minimal re-typing be changed into a circular letter. That circular letter, hopefully including the telefax or telex numbers of the company in key locations would be sent out immediately to all affiliates who are part of the electronic mail system. This can be done easily, cheaply and instantly through the use of mail lists. The union officer receiving the message is able to again transform the text of the ICEF circular letter into a message of protest which can be sent immediately from the union official's personal computer to the company telex and telefax numbers. A process that in the worst case scenario can take a month can be completed in minutes and routinely takes only hours. We have a number of examples where the speed of our communications has been more effective and quicker than the internal company communication system. (ibid)

Catterson's hypothetical account makes a dramatic contrast with the classical story of international labour non-communication from the Ford Amsterdam shopsteward quoted at the beginning of Part 3.

Bulletin boards (BBS): Together with the International Transportworkers Federation (ITF), ICEF established on Geo2 in London an ITS-BBS. It also regularly reads and places messages on the Labour-BBS of Geo2. These BBSs are now being forwarded to the USA, where they are placed on Geo4 and on another major international network-of-networks, the

Association of Progressive Communicators (APC). These BBS are fully open, meaning that anyone can place/read the material in them.

Orientation: As the most advanced of the traditional international union bodies involved in ILCC, the attitudes and aspirations of ICEF are of considerable importance. One important belief of the ICEF computer specialist is, clearly, that computerised communication means not only more effect but a different kind of one:

Picture the union official protesting to company management. Rather than being told the information is out of date s/he may be providing senior management of the company with details of a dispute they are not yet aware of. Such an official is obviously far more prepared to protest and take action in future requests for solidarity. They trust the information they receive from the Secretariat. [...] This means there had been a synergy in the use of electronic mail for solidarity actions. We are not simply doing the same thing we did before more quickly. The speed of information exchange means that what we are doing is different from what we were doing previously. (ibid)

Some confirmation of this statement can be found in reports from bodies with very different activities and orientations: the militant independent trade unions in South Korea and from the ICEF's extremely-moderate affiliate in Singapore (see quotes heading this Part). Related to the above ICEF position is the notion that the international solidarity of the workers ICEF represents can be forwarded by the creation or revival of World Concern Councils, that this can itself be achieved through ILCC, and that this in turn depends primarily on sufficiency of funds:

If workers are to realistically negotiate with a multinational company they must be organised at the same level as the company, i.e. internationally. This requires the establishment of some form of world company council bringing together trade union representatives and officials from throughout the operations of a multinational. [...] Attempts have been made by ITSS to develop such structures, similar attempts at rank-and-file level involving labour-related NGOs have also taken place. In my view all of these attempts have been unsuccessful. [...] The major reason for this is lack of finance.

[...E]lectronic mail makes face-to-face meetings redundant if their only purpose is to share information. Such information exchange can be done electronically. Face-to-face meetings, with their enormous travel and interpretation costs, should only be called to deal with a particular crucial issue and to develop policy. (ibid)

ICEF appears to combine openness toward the 'alternative' or 'marginal' labour and communications groups - with a certain scepticism about their real interests and capacities. ICEF, thus, has developed a mutually-beneficial relationship with the international communications and computer groups, but evidently has doubts about the interest of others in ITS issues, or in their capacity to organise labour where the ITSs have themselves failed. ICEF, finally, demonstrates an energetic practical commitment and concern for the development of ILCC. It has addressed itself forcefully to such a major technical or policy issues as that of what I have called the information weavers - a new type of intellectual specialist and mediator likely to play a crucial role in the development of ILCC.

4.2. WorkNet, Johannesburg, servicing the new unionism in South Africa

WorkNet is a small independent electronic host, meaning that messages sent in or out of South Africa are forwarded through it with some delay rather than reaching their destination automatically. The creation of WorkNet around 1986 was a result of the visit of an interested South African intellectual to Poptel/Soft Solution, operator of Geo2 in the UK. WorkNet first developed as a service for the alternative press (Louw and Tomaselli 1992:144), during the highly-repressive period of the 1980s. It has become the low-cost NGO network in South Africa, with 10 or more labour movement users, including the Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), a major force in South Africa and a growing one internationally. Another user is the South African Labour Bulletin (SALB), which has had a growing coverage of foreign labour issues, and which has provided a platform for new international debates on labour internationalism (Mather 1992).²⁴ WorkNet thus provides us with an example of high-level cooperation between the alternative actors in the development of ILCC, with these also being closely articulated with a new, mass, militant, left-nationalist labour movement. In examining WorkNet we will consider in turn the following: 1) how it is technically linked with other organisations and networks internationally; 2) the impact of

such linkages on the local labour movement; 3) the nature of North-South aid/solidarity; 4) WorkNet's orientation toward alternative computer communication.

Links with networks internationally. Despite its heavy task in providing services to the local labour and other social and civil movements in a highly-critical period, WorkNet is intensively involved in international networking. It has computer links throughout South and Southern Africa, with Europe, the Americas, Australia and Asia. It downloads (picks up) 200 conferences from the Geomail and APC systems, and transfers over 1000 international items per month. It prioritises south to south communication, particularly within Southern Africa.

It connects up with Harare (Zimbabwe) five times a day, with networks in the UK thrice, with Canada twice, etc (Adler 1992). Through Geonet, in particular, it provides linkages between South African unions and both the traditional and alternative labour organisations and services.

Impact on the labour movement locally. Here we can only give one impression, picked up during the LTC, presented by the South African Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU), an affiliate of ICEF in Brussels. This has sought and obtained crucial information for local campaigns on disinvestment and sanctions, on H&S and environment issues:

Many bitter strikes have taken place involving multinational companies...Through ICEF accessing international data bases we were able to get up-to-date information on the companies, their financial positions, operations in other countries and proposed take-overs. Through the ICEF we were able to contact sister unions in the country of origin of the company. Pressure from these unions has assisted in many cases the struggles being fought in South Africa. (Miller 1992)

Aid/solidarity in the North-South direction. WorkNet is unusually aware (or uncommonly open) about the ambiguities of its relations with Northern supporters. Initially it received funding from the international anti-apartheid movement (including unions, human-rights and church organisations, and even some governments). Evidently dependent upon and grateful for such assistance, WorkNet is also frankly critical of its sometimes nefarious implications:

WorkNet's experience here, which has intensified as we have looked to a more sophisticated system, will form a chapter in the literature on under-development and neocolonialism. We have had to negotiate our way around donor requirements which in addition to ensuring that some of the money is tied to non-South African administrative support groups, or non-South African hardware and software suppliers, have also sometimes left us with debts incurred on the delayed and often very overdue transfer of funds. We have also had to deal with donor appointed system consultants who are both unfamiliar with the conditions I have described previously and arrogant in their refusal to accommodate them in their proposals. Such people are responsible for state of the art hardware and software languishing in offices around the country. Finally we have had to deal with the failure of foreign based consultants to honour system design and implementation programmes. This failure not only impacted on the technical capacity of WorkNet, but also on our user base who have grown quite sceptical about our ability to deliver what we promised at the time and in the form we promised it. These are the burdens and challenges of running a democratic network in a 'developing country'. (Adler 1992)

There has, in the 1990s, been an increasing change within the anti-apartheid and labour movements in South Africa, from the 'politics of protest' towards those 'either of negotiation or of socio-economic development' (ibid). This has been accompanied internationally both by the collapse of the Communist model, and by the world economic crisis. WorkNet now has to work toward financial viability, whilst increasing its services to a developing civil society within South Africa. The implications of this for relations with Northern sympathisers are not spelled out by Adler.

Orientation. As suggested just above, WorkNet seems to be moving, with the anti-apartheid and labour movement, from the politics of opposition into that of proposition. Whether this means also abandoning traditional radical-nationalist or Communist positions in favour of social-democratic or another more-original strategy is unclear. What is clear is a commitment to democracy, though such a commitment is, as we will see, not without its own problems. WorkNet is intensively engaged in the practical work of propagating

computerisation, supporting its introduction and training users. But it has also been just as intensively concerned with the major political issues of democratic management of the project as such:

Like many similar service organisations, WorkNet had to deal with the tension between democratic ideals and managing the system in a democratic manner. This has to do firstly with establishing a representative management structure in a situation where there is as yet no community of users to represent. Secondly we had to deal with the situation where in fact our users were preoccupied with their own issues and, despite our view that they should be, were not particularly interested in the nature of WorkNet's representativity. Their only interest was in getting a decent service, and [they were] not willing to put the necessary time and effort into ensuring that the service was what they wanted. This was somewhat of a system shock in a South African political environment which in the late 1980's required a mandate for everything. (Adler 1992)

The practical outcome of a three-year period of experiment and debate was the creation of an independent non-profit company, oriented to what is called the non-profit NGO community. Board members have, thus, been appointed not as representatives of particular organisations but as representative of WorkNet's ideals. They were required to demonstrate their commitment to such ideals, and to the improvement and extension of WorkNet within South Africa:

The current WorkNet board consists of activists working full time in the trade unions, church, media, housing and information processing fields. All board members are politically active at various levels within the progressive movement and some have specific technical skills related to electronic communications and information processing. Once liberated from the debate about the nature of internal democracy, WorkNet has now given its full attention to the question of democratising electronic communications in the South African context. (ibid)

There are implications here for ILCC that must be picked up in discussion later.

4.3. AMRC, Hongkong, an information and communication service to the labour movement

AMRC is a small NGO, based in Hongkong. It has been mentioned earlier in this paper for its pioneering role in international labour documentation and communication. It has also been a pioneer in the use of computers for both purposes. AMRC is sited at the centre of the new wave of industrialisation (Hongkong, South Korea, Taiwan, Shenzhen in China, Singapore) and of the Pacific Basin (North America, Australasia, East and South-East Asia). It has consequently also been at the centre of dramatic worker protest and new union organisation and militancy (China, Taiwan, Philippines, South Korea and even Hongkong itself). Whilst open to the NGO community more widely, AMRC has always concentrated on labour, and it has provided significant international publicity for and support to shopfloor worker movements and militant independent unions. Its major areas of work are research and publishing, training and information services. In research and publishing it has moved toward the production of analyses of particular countries or problems, intended to provide stimuli for solidarity work and further study (Asia Labour Monitor 1988, 1989, 1990, Dass 1991, Leung 1988). It has also - in most of these books - expressed itself very critically on the role of the traditional international unions in Asia. It has played a major international role in the development of ILCC and has done pioneering work within the region. Whilst developing and expressing its own ideas on internationalism and communication for such, AMRC plays more of a service than an organisational or ideological role. It is thus both open to and appreciated by the more progressive of the traditional international union organisations. The experience of working at AMRC has evidently been important for a number of people from such places as India, South Africa, the West Indies, the UK and elsewhere. Many of them are still active in internationalist organisation or communication, in North America, Europe or Latin America. Out of AMRC there has thus come not only experience (on which our information is limited) but ideas on alternative international communication in general. Whilst we cannot always assume that such individual ideas are those of organisations (any more than with earlier statements, even of representatives), these are evidently relevant to the present experience and future development of ILCC.²⁵ In what follows, I will concentrate on views expressed from AMRC on 1) problems seen and requirements identified for the development of ILCC, and 2) orientations toward alternative international labour communication (AIRC) more generally.

Problems of and requirements for ILCC: Derek Hall of AMRC considers e-mail to be the most significant tool for communication and organisation since the telephone. He also seems to recognise that its very existence increases the expectations of organisations. He identifies, however, a number of obstacles to the development of e-mail: it remains comparatively expensive; it requires special skills that cannot be easily learned; there is a lack of global compatibility and efficiency (compared with the phone); there is a lack even of easily-comprehensible user directories (handbooks?); no overview of relevant and available on-line databases yet exists; the screen commands (technically, the 'front-end') are not user-friendly; there is destructive competition between the alternative networks; there are, finally,

fundamental conceptual obstacles to maximising the benefits of e-mail, especially in benefitting non-users, and in making effective use of bulletin boards. (Hall 1992)

If the meaning of 'conceptual' here is obscure, we nonetheless get a sobering picture of the possibilities for developing and using e-mail not only within the third world but amongst unions and workers more generally. In terms of urgent present or future requirements, AMRC places e-mail in a broader communications and political context. Addressing the LTC in Manchester, Derek Hall called for the necessity

to look at e-mail not in the same way that we first examined talking pictures, but from the point of view of how this aspect of the new information order relates to 21st century social activism. The technology itself is very boring, but the chance to make it an incredibly effective tool for democracy is inspiring. (ibid)

Hall further hoped for the

chance to hear how different labour-related e-mail practitioners contextualise new communications technologies with respect to the so-called 'new world order', and what their feelings are about the democratisation of communications structures. (ibid)

As I have suggested in the Introduction, such issues or aspirations were not really addressed at that event – a problem to which we will return.

Orientation toward AILC: In 1990, Derek Hall, sent the Labour BBS on Geo2 a three-part paper dealing with labour and international publications (AMRC1220 1990). This, in my view, raises a series of major political or ethical issues relevant to communication in general and ILCC in particular. One is on the ‘crucial relationship between communication and power and communication and freedom’:

If hierarchical, undemocratic and biased labour publications dominate the flow of labour information, and especially if they are nationally, regionally or sectorally dominant, this will be to the great detriment of workers’ interests in particular and social development in general. (ibid)

Another was on hierarchy and accountability:

If the subjects or members of an institution, say trade union members...are accurately, broadly and comparatively informed about...what the leaders of their institution say and do, and of how others perceive and are affected by that institution, then that leadership inevitably becomes more accountable. (ibid)

A third was on the limits of what Hall calls O-B (Organisation-Based) publications. These he considers almost inevitably self-serving, manipulative and propagandistic, and obliged to treat external critics or competitors as enemies or threats – to be avoided, maligned or defeated. Thus, whilst he has respect for many International Trade Secretariat (ITS) staff and programmes, he evidently does not consider they provide the ideal base for international labour communication:

I still perceive serious weaknesses in the ITS model which rend them incapable of completely fulfilling their (expressed) aspirations as international co-ordinating bodies, especially as they attempt to cater for the interests of workers from an enormous cross-section of cultures and social systems, through institutions which perhaps are not quite as democratic as they would have us believe. It appears to be a feature of ITSs and other labour service

organisations, judging from their publications, that they are terrified that recognition of their adversaries' virtues will somehow weaken their institutional integrity. If this integrity is soundly based, they [need] have no fear; if it is somehow based in falsehoods, misrepresentation, or other corrupted mechanisms then indeed they stand to lose a great deal from any democratisation of labour communication... (ibid)²⁶

Other points implicitly or explicitly addressed a positive alternative model. This, evidently, required the overcoming of 'uni-directional hierarchical flows of labour information':

Essential voices may not be heard in a hierarchy which only pretends to acknowledge them, and such hierarchies frequently lack democratic or self-regulatory mechanisms. Although technically communications itself cannot fundamentally modify the tenor of inter-personal relationships or the substance of social life, it becomes effective it is supported by genuine social factors and, therefore, to be of value, communications must allow not only for broad degrees of representativity but also for effective horizontal channels to develop. This aspect of democratisation, like all others, is a process rather than a static phenomenon; similarly the objectives of democratisation are not rigid goals. (ibid)

This also requires a different attitude toward the putative audience:

Workers and members of labour organisations do not so much require information which encourages them and confirms their beliefs or expectations, but information which enables them to qualify, alter and balance their opinions and decisions. (ibid)

Although these comments might seem to all be addressed to the traditional sources of international labour communication, Hall's paper was primarily concerned with a critique of an alternative one - International Labour Reports! Hall is one of the few ILCC activists to have taken up such general international labour communication issues. It is clear that they connect up with earlier sections of this paper and must be returned to in later ones.

4.4. International labour conference and bulletin boards. London and San Francisco

Two rather different technical and political models exist here - the two established BBSs on Geo2 in London and the recently created LabourNet conference on APC in San Francisco. The technical difference between them is as follows. A BBS on GeoNet is an open (or password-restricted) space for information and discussion on a particular subject. Anyone can read, post or comment on anything 'pinned up'. On first checking a BBS, one customarily finds not only a list of messages currently posted but also their source and a short description, plus other useful information. A conference on APC is divided into topics, each of which may have a series of comments attached to it. As Graham Lane (1990:31) puts it:

Bulletin boards are geared towards the simple posting of information. Comments are treated as new items of information and will be seen by everyone who visits the bulletin board. Conferences, on the other hand, encourage participation and a rather more discursive style since comments are only seen by a smaller group of users.

The two key BBSs for labour on Geo2 have been mentioned earlier - one called 'Labour' and one called 'ITS'. There are other BBSs, for example on a particular geographical area (Southern Africa, Philippines) or problem (ecology) that may be of interest to labour users. It can also happen that those using one or other labour BBS will have their attention drawn to a possibly relevant BBS, such as one on the Gulf War or the global ecology conference in Rio 1992. The labour BBSs can, of course, be viewed by users from other systems. They can also be copied to others - as they are to Geo4 and to LaborNet on APC (both in San Francisco).

LaborNet describes itself as providing 'computer communications and news for the labour movement'.²⁷ A key figure here is Michael Stein, whose background is in campaigning against toxic chemicals. Another is Jagdish Parikh, currently working with NGONet in Montevideo, but with a background in labour computing in Bombay, and in AMRC in Hongkong. Based on APC in San Francisco, LaborNet represents a listing of 10 or more electronic conferences, which may themselves be carried on the different APC-affiliated networks. The listing is impressive, including a national labour announcements agenda, resources, toxics, one on LaborTech, one on Mexico, two on international labour (picked up

from Geo2) and one about LaborNet itself. LaborNet supporters include not only a number of trade union officers (not necessarily in official capacity), a person from academic labour studies, and another from a labour video and media network.

The West European versus the North American model: Evaluation of the political value of each of these networks, or of the relative value of each, is difficult, if not impossible. The Geo2 operation is much more of a trade union one, even when and where the alternative labour groups are involved. The APC operation belongs much more clearly within the alternative scene in the USA, with unions or unionists involved when and where they feel the need to open out beyond the institutionalised union movement. Disparaging remarks are likely to be made, at least in conversation, by those identified with one of the two major networks.

Criticism of the limited value of the conferences exists within each. Talking of the ITS-BBS on Geo2, the ICEF specialist has the following to say:

We are...concerned that very few users of e-mail actually read the messages. This applies to Geo2 but especially to Geo4 where the BBS is seldom read by anyone. With regard to the transfer of information to the APC system we are unable to establish whether the material is used or not. Presently we will continue to post information on these bulletin boards but unless usage increases we are unlikely to do so in the...future. I am concerned at the lack of use given that many 'unofficial' trade union groupings criticise the ITSs as remote and unapproachable. (Catterson 1992)

Problems of BBSs/conferences: Jagdish Parikh has attempted to survey labour users of both networks. He has identified both interest in international labour information and considerable dissatisfaction with information available. His latest survey, carried out primarily amongst LaborNet users, discovered the following: that use of conferences takes precedence over e-mail; that four of nine listed conferences are found useful by under 40 percent of users; that whilst international solidarity is the topic of most interest, only 20 percent found the ITS-BBS on Geo2 useful; that other topics with high priority amongst labour users include community-labour coalitions, the environment, labour organisation and campaigning (LNEF0218 1992). In an implicit response to the complaints above, in a more general paper,

he urges the necessity for attention to the kind of information posted. The problem seems to be, on the one hand, the technical self-definition of the alternative network operators and, on the other, the domination of space by particular individuals or groups. He proposes the necessity for such research as he himself does, as well as some kind of collective user control of the labour services:

Network operators generally tend to define their role as the providers of communication highways. They prefer to leave the issue of quality of information to users themselves. There are informal ways in which more active and aggressive users influence network activities by demanding the creation of certain services...The creation of some sort or organised mechanism, accessible to common users in the form of user's groups on these networks, can go a long way toward addressing some of these issues. Regular surveys by informal user's collectives could provide useful feedback on the on-line needs of users. (Parikh 1992)

In the meantime, as responses to a questionnaire at the LTC in Manchester suggest, the labour BBSs on Geonet are largely used for news and solidarity appeals. We have at present no way of measuring the effect of such appeals. One can assume that they do bring a response and that even messages of support are much appreciated by workers and unions who may be under heavy pressure locally and would otherwise feel internationally isolated.²⁸ My own attempts, over a two or three-year period, to use the Geo2 and APC conferences for discussion of labour policy and strategy, or for discussion of international solidarity and communication experiences and principles, have been so far unsuccessful. There seems here to be another self-limitation being imposed, this time by the ILC communicators. It may be that they fear that any such 'political' discussion will lead precisely to a reproduction of those violent and destructive ideological debates that so divided international labour and socialist activists in the past.

4.5. The Manchester Host, a community-based, pro-labour and internationally-oriented computer service

The Manchester Host is actually a Geonet node, offering a wide range of services to small business, academia, labour and other movements and NGOs. These are oriented in the

first place to the local community, but the host also provides services nationally and internationally. The computer has been funded by the Labour-controlled Manchester City Council but is run by Soft Solution, the workers' cooperative which runs Geo2 in London. Perhaps the most interesting part of the local operation is its support to the first electronic village hall (EVH) in Britain (the idea was pioneered in rural Scandinavia). EVH's are oriented toward communities lacking information, whether these are defined in terms of location or interest (women, immigrants, disabled people, etc). The host can carry local, national or international databases, and it can also give users access to commercial databases. Amongst labour databases available on the Manchester Host are numerous health and safety (H&S) ones, several relating to companies, and a number on what is called 'labour/management relations' (Herman 1992). These include the massive bibliographical and legal databases of the International Labour Organisation (for which see also Jesse 1992), and that of the union-linked Labour Research Department. ICEF is interested in putting its toxics database on the host. A number of major political issues arise from the development of the MH, some of them identified by MH/Soft Solution staff person Clem Herman, others arising from discussion at the LTC in Manchester. Whilst some of these (e.g. the necessity for and exact role of brokers/weavers) have been mentioned earlier, we can identify one major new one - that of what might be called the institutional versus the movement orientation toward databases in particular and information in general.

An institutional versus a movement orientation: The institutional orientation was expressed by a couple of the traditional international unions at the TLC. Major reasons for their concern with confidentiality seemed to be fear of: 1) employers having access to union information; 2) competing unions having such access; 3) non-member organisations and workers having access. This does not mean that even those expressing such concerns are opposed to making certain data available. They made, furthermore, no issue of payment for such. What their attitude suggests is an understanding of information as an organisational resource. The Manchester Host seems to have more of a movement orientation towards electronic information. In the words of Clem Herman (1992):

The future of on-line information for the labour movement...lies in putting your own data on-line for others to use. Although different individuals and organisations will need access to different information sources, there are

many...that could effectively be shared and in doing so provide a strengthened sense of unity among trade unionists.

Such a general orientation does not exclude a recognition of either 1) a possible need for confidentiality or 2) the costs of database creation or the provision of brokerage/weaving services:

Clearly there are problems with relation to the needs for confidentiality and protection of data. The sharing of resources is always controversial but there are ways of making this cost-effective. If information is looked upon as a resource it can also be made to work as a source of income generation...[I]t is clear that on-line information is in many ways the same as a book or pamphlet which may contain valuable information that is sold to generate income. This alone can be seen as a valuable incentive to potential information providers.
(ibid)

The difference here implies a difference either in starting place, position or understanding of information. It does not necessarily imply an opposition or conflict. But it does raise a major issue of principle.

4.6. *Mujer a Mujer/Woman to Woman, an Inter-American pro-labour women's network*²⁹

Mujer a Mujer/Woman to Woman (MaM) is a feminist collective of women from Canada, the US, the Caribbean and Mexico, based in Mexico City itself. MaM began, around 1984, as an international solidarity project and seems to have either avoided or surpassed the traditional North-to-South aid/solidarity model. With Mexican and other Latina women growing in numbers in North America, with increasing numbers of US plants shifting there, and now with the Free Trade Area (FTA) confronting the peoples of all three (see Cavanagh et. al. 1992, Moody and McGinn 1992), MaM appears to recognise that solidarity is a multi-directional as well as a multi-faceted matter. At a certain point in its development MaM discovered it could not operate without electronic communication - and that such communication assisted in the collective nature of its work:

For our first six years, we depended upon 'border trips': every two months, two of our members would travel 24 hours by bus to a friend's house on the US side of the border, where we would take turns in a marathon of long distance calls - to organise events and keep in touch with key contacts. Now, we are in daily coordination with our key contacts throughout the region, and are able to develop conferences and regional events through a truly collective process. (Mujer a Mujer 1992)

MaM is involved with labour, community, women's, communication and computer groups in both Mexico and North America, both in international solidarity meetings and campaigns and in electronic communication activities. It was a major mover in the first Trinational Women's Conference on Free Trade and Economic Integration (henceforth: Trinational Women's Conference), held in Mexico, February 5-9, 1992. The activities of MaM reveal that labour networking is 1) not restricted to trade union networking, and 2) that it can be a result, or even an integral part, of the communications work of a new social movement - in this case a feminist one. We have a couple of documents that reveal MaM's quite distinctive political interests and orientations. We also have access to a MaM document commenting on what appears to be an APC project³⁰ for international women's computer communication (MAM0531 1992). The political orientation should throw an original light on concepts of trade union or labour internationalism. The computer communication project may be interesting not only because it is a feminist one, but as an integrated one for a whole international movement - thus contrasting dramatically with the patchwork development of ILCC.

Political orientations: An account of the Trinational Women's Conference, by a MaM activist and conference co-organiser, indicates the way this movement is broadening both beyond wage-labour and beyond the initial three countries involved:

The world is changing so quickly that even as we met the notion of 'tri-national' links was beginning to appear outdated...Maquilas [cheap-labour assembly plants] have already taken root in countries like Guatemala and El Salvador. Our analysis and solidarity must begin to weave new connections. The focus on women's labour sometimes constrained our insights. While much path-breaking solidarity has been begun through union and other networks, we

must not limit ourselves to those sectors. In Mexico, women within the urban poor movement have begun to look at issues of free trade, where it comes from and how it will change their struggles. They have already identified the need to develop an international perspective and solidarity links. (Yanz 1992:8)

MaM seems primarily oriented toward working women, and it could therefore be understood to be interested only in international solidarity of or with women as workers. This is evidently not the case, since its newsletter shows that it takes up general feminist issues, such as those of reproductive rights, violence against women, lesbianism, the position of coloured and indigenous women. Unlike most international labour networks, this one is theoretically minded. It presses for a gender perspective on all issues – such as the FTA. Some of the materials from the Trinational Conference, indeed, seem to suggest that, whilst the event presented women's demands, a feminist perspective was not yet sufficiently developed. Thus, the Canadian report concludes that:

For the future, we have more work to do to strengthen our gender analysis.
We need to be linking theory, research, education and action. (ibid)

MaM also introduces us to new ways of conceiving the 'mass', 'members', 'followers' or 'audience' addressed by the activists (whether this be workers or women), in so far as value is given to real-life diversity rather than an abstract present-day – or utopian future – unity:

The concept of 'masses' gives way to the valuing of the diversity of unique 'identities'. Each new emerging 'social actor' ('sujeto historico') claims power in areas of experience damaged or buried by domination. Women, for example, bring the intimate and domestic worlds into public view and action. Indigenous peoples confront and offer alternatives to the spread of a racist and environmentally destructive monoculture. (Correspondencia, August 1990:2)

Interestingly enough, MaM's activities have even raised major strategic issues on labour internationalism that have so far remained little-debated in the male-dominated organisations or fora – of right or left. At the Trinational Conference there was, thus, discussion on whether or not it made sense to demand that the Free Trade Area bring about an 'upward

harmonisation' of working conditions and rights, given that it was premised precisely on the difference in costs, rights and conditions:

We all spoke of the need for further research and exchange of information in order to be able to act strategically in this new world...There were those who emphasised 'upward harmonisation' as a goal for regional struggle. Others favoured demands which could be immediately achievable within the logic of the new system, in order to lay a solid foundation for future struggle. (Trinational Women's Conference 1992:14)

One does not have to have a specific position here to recognise the opportunities and dangers opened by both strategies, and therefore the importance of wide-ranging debate on the issue.

Computer aspirations: MaM favours the notion of worldwide computer networking between women for all the obvious reasons. But it favours it also for less-obvious ones:

E-networking much more important in South than North. South-South fax & phone is prohibitively expensive.³¹ (MAM0531 1992)

And because even a poverty-stricken state like Nicaragua provides a model of a 'highly electrified third world country' (ibid). Among the proposals or aspiration of MaM for networking in its region are the following: 1) that it should not be based on just one computer network (i.e. APC); that it needs to identify active women's networks and resource centres, since these are the ones most feeling the communication need; that it needs to provide access to the relevant information; that (as had been recently learned at the LTC in Manchester) regional information brokers/weavers are crucial; that an international network needs to support in-country networking, so as to avoid centralisation (e.g. in San Francisco?); that some parts of the operation need to be done in alliance with others, some by women apart:

We need to think hard regarding which pieces [of the project] should be taken on by the [electronic] node itself, & which by the women's project...[The] suggestion of having women operating their own host nodes is not very appealing to us here - we prefer to share the 'housework' of sysoping

[computer system-operating] with other groups. We feel that women connected to women's networking efforts should be trained, & employed on the node level, but don't see the advantages to having women-only parallel nodes in our context; it also being very important to us to keep gender-oriented work closely coordinated with other progressive movements (human rights, environment, labour, etc). (ibid)

On the other hand, they

feel that training needs to occur within the context of women's organising and networking, and be done by women. 'Neutered' training...has a much lower success rate than training among folks who have an organic link to each other, and in an organising context...Someone who is unfamiliar with the world of women's organising often isn't sensitive to this aspect of the dynamic. (ibid)

One might add here that separatism in this area is probably also necessary given 1) women's common lack of technical training and their anxieties faced with high technology (c.f. Brunet and Proulx 1989), and 2) common male prejudices with respect to these.

4.8. Discussion

If we are to consider these experiences in relationship with what has been earlier stated, we had better recapitulate the argument of the first three parts. In the Introduction I suggested that: the old socialist and labour internationalism was essentially limited; the present informatised and globalised capitalism provides both the provocation and the means for a more-advanced type; there is both a possibility and necessity for labour to participate in a new, multifarious and multi-levelled 'global solidarity' movement; the new social movement internationalisms contributing to this are largely 'communication internationalisms'; the movements need to release the democratic possibilities within the new information technologies. In Part 2, I argued that the left has always been marked by ambiguity towards the (new) means of communication, simultaneously or successively swinging between positive and negative, between an idealistic utopianism and a pragmatic utilitarianism. In Part 3 I did not find a simple reproduction of this pattern, but I did suggest an opposition between core and periphery in the labour movement, with the former tending toward pragmatism and

utilitarianism, the latter (itself a multifarious and contradictory complex) responsible for innovation and opening up alternative visions and utopian prospects. I here, however, denied any binary opposition, suggesting rather a dialectic between organisational core and movement periphery, both being seen as complex entities, with their inter-relationship seen as a dialectic that has brought them closer to each other. At the end of Part 3, I discussed this in terms of political, communications and computer practice (with the third being largely postponed pending more computer information and theory). Let us now attempt to discuss the material in Part 4 under the same rubrics, and still preserving the centre/periphery distinction. In so far as we find we have too little theory to discuss this matter adequately, it will have to be sought and presented in Part 5.

ILCC as political practice: Here we need to talk about the explicit political objectives, internal, national and international power relations surrounding ILCC.

Let us first consider these for the traditional international labour organisations. They are evidently more oriented toward trade union internationalism than labour internationalism, and tend to conflate the latter with the former. The objective appears largely to imply carrying out traditional trade union activities on a larger scale and more effectively. Where 'more' is taken to mean 'different', it seems to imply a development of quantity into quality: that evidence of effective solidarity by or through the internationals does or will lead affiliates to increased recognition of its importance. Where 'new' activities are proposed, these seem to be 'renewed' activities (World Concern Councils). Where there are obstacles to such, this is also for quantitative reasons (lack of finance). Where there are relations with peripheral or non-labour organisations, these seem to be largely in function of the development of the traditional ones. With respect to international capital, the underlying motivation or model appears to be that of 'countervailing power'. There seems to be no specific concern to change power relations within the internationals, or within the movement more generally: concern, rather, seems to be about a possible undermining of hierarchy or loss of central control. If this seems to suggest institutional pragmatism and self-interest, it does not necessarily imply that the traditional internationals are either enemies of or an obstacle to the advance of ILCC. Maybe 'more' does eventually imply 'different' - and 'different' imply 'better'? Maybe practical relations of technical cooperation with the alternative organisations will themselves stimulate reflection on issues of principle?

The political objectives of the marginal bodies are not made explicit here. They seem to be more concerned with labour internationalism, or general international solidarity, than with trade union internationalism alone. They would seem to have some common orientation toward 'emancipation', and the value of 'democracy' is much stressed. But what is clearer, in what they say or do, is their intention to provide services to emancipatory forces (whether understood as labour, women or some alliance or combination of such internationally). There is a concern with the inter-organisational democracy, as well as with democratic relations with the labour or social movement more generally. They are evidently sensitive about their external relations, both up the hierarchy (to possible funders/supporters) and down (to workers or others). From amongst the alternative groups (or individuals associated with them) there also come thought-provoking questions on the nature of the audience/membership/mass being addressed, and on how to recognise and negotiate differences amongst them. We should not, again, exaggerate or idealise the innovatory, democratic or emancipatory orientation and activities of the peripheral labour groups or individuals. But it would seem not unreasonable to conclude at this point that a position at the base or periphery requires or permits 1) a broader and more critical vision and 2) more freedom to experiment and innovate. And, at the same time, to recognise that this position evidently gives them also less money or power to make these effective.

In so far as we see the relations between these two as an unavoidable or even desirable tension, allowing for a creative dialogue and constructive working relationship, is there not a good prospect for moving from the old kind of labour internationalism to a new kind of labour contribution to a general global solidarity movement?

ILCC as communications practice: Here we can reconsider the relationship of ILCC to Non-Dominant and Alternative Communication (AC) as earlier defined.

In so far as they are, at least implicitly, interested in issues of information or communication principle, the traditional organisations appear primarily concerned with the creation of a parallel, horizontal and limited circuit. It is parallel in the sense of being intended to reproduce and compete with the dominant or hegemonic model. It is horizontal in so far as it neither engages intellectually with, nor poses a general communications alternative to, the communications of capital and state. It is limited in so far as it is intended to be primarily confined within existing labour institutions. This is certainly

consistent with a notion of N-DC. What is more, however, the international labour organisations seem to reproduce, with respect to computers, a traditional labour media instrumentalism or utilitarianism: computers imply for them a bigger train, a faster gun. We should, however, once again understand that this is not necessarily either a total or permanent condition. In so far as they become more deeply involved with the new means of communication, are not traditional labour organisations likely to be sensitised to communications principles and theories?

We should not over-generalise the sensitivity of the alternative bodies to such principles and theories. The marginal groups may demonstrate AC practice without being conscious or self-conscious about the matter. This seems to be largely the case here. They are involved in 'spiral flows', both within and outside the labour movement. Their channels are not intended to merely run out to, or link, the shopfloor, but also to flow up to the dominant labour organisations. They also engage with these organisations on issues of both political and communication principle. It is only from here that we hear someone suggesting that labour information needs to challenge its audience, to create a critical response. And, far from being limited to an institutionally-defined circuit, the marginal labour groups seem to be actively involved in exchange and dialogue with other democratic and internationalist social movements. This may represent their most general AC practice. In so far, moreover, as they also themselves represent the seed of an AC model, they challenge both DC content and form. We should not, as I say, exaggerate here, since I am generalising from one voice, albeit one coming out of the alternative ILCC experience. Others are evidently much more concerned with computer than communications practice. Let us now reconsider this.

ILCC as computer practice: I feel that the issues arising here actually cut across the earlier-indicated fault line. This occurs in two interesting ways. It is, it seems to me, the common interest in mastering (mistrusting?) the technology that brings them together - in all kinds of ways. And it is their failure to seriously consider the specificities of computer communication that provides their common weakness. The areas and topics of cooperation have been extensively indicated. Those of what I consider common weakness have not. I think, however, that they reveal themselves in common beliefs and expressions: that information is power and that computerised information is inevitably empowering, that computerised information not only means more but different (and that different inevitably means better), that computer networking undermines hierarchy and increases democracy

(whether this prospect is feared or welcomed), that trade union computerisation will level the playing field with capital. Such beliefs and expressions are not necessarily wrong but they are simplistic (I have used some of them in my own past writings). Do they not again reveal, however, a common lack of address to certain major issues of computerisation - issues that are crucial to the common project?

This lack of address is visible with respect to the general communications and political issues also. They will have to be confronted sooner or later. So at this point we need to grasp the nettle identified in the Introduction - the underdevelopment of theoretical, analytical and - for that matter - strategic thinking around ILCC.

5. THEORY AND STRATEGY: A LARGER POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS. A LIBERATED POLITICAL CULTURE

In the industrialising countries of the early modern period, while workers were losing an autonomous culture in the factory, they tended to share life and experience outside the factory...It was possible for them to create their own music, associations, politics and even language [...] Industries are now spread over the whole world, with no one industry likely to remain in one place even for one worker's lifetime, still less for several generations. A truly autonomous workers' culture would now have to be international [...] In this context, even a fairly small number of microcomputers, somehow linked, might make a sizable difference, if they are available to workers [...] The common languages shared by computer users, even though limited in subject matter, together with the graphical and expressive possibilities of computers...are among the ways that computer links could help forge cultural unities between workers in different countries. (Goldhaber 1987:10-11)

Michael Goldhaber, 'Creating a Worker's Culture in the Third World', in 'Media Development', 1987

Unilever covered a vast spread of product lines, and employed workers on everything from soap-making, edible oil refining, farming, plantations, to transport and food production...[M]any Unilever workers were unaware they were employed by a giant TNC [...] The unions concerned (particularly the International Union of Foodworkers and its affiliates) faced the need for high-grade intelligence of Unilever management strategies, primarily to assist local bargaining, and to strengthen their arguments over trans-border negotiating structures [...] There was therefore little perceived need for the development of workplace to workplace electronic links [...T]elecommunication strategies developed by different trade unions have to reflect the very different collective bargaining strategies within which they operate. (Spooner 1992)

Dave Spooner, 'Trade Union Telematics for International Collective Bargaining', LabourTel Conference, Manchester, 1992.

If this study is to be a long paper rather than a short book, it will be impossible to do justice to all the theoretical and strategic issues raised in the preceding parts. What I propose to do, therefore, is to limit myself primarily to one recent attempt to theorise/strategise the interlocked issues of labour internationalism, international labour communication and ILCC. I have already suggested that, due to their increasing collaboration, major issues of computer practice here cut across the dominant/alternative faultline. I think, on reflection, that this may be becoming so more generally, i.e. also with respect to the meaning of international labour communication and labour internationalism. Both quotations above, for example, come from people in the alternative circuit, yet they seem to reproduce the classical labour movement opposition on the media that we have earlier identified. Not only do they reproduce, respectively, the idealistic/utopian and pragmatic/utilitarian traditions, but they do not take account of each other, and therefore do not contribute toward some more advanced synthesis. I consider it essential that we ensure

that this kind of tension does not operate as a binary opposition (with the customary posing of positive versus negative, revolutionaries versus reformers, comrades versus renegades, friends versus enemies). It should rather be understood as the kind of potentially creative tension which is in any case inevitable in trying to develop emancipatory alternatives, nationally and internationally, amongst and between subaltern classes, categories and identities.

To advance such a pluralistic alternative, however, requires more than collaboration on technical and policy questions. It also requires systematic data-collection, analysis, theorising, strategising and - above all - dialogue. The whole paper represents both a provocation and contribution to such. This particular chapter is an attempt at a much more specific dialogue. It is addressed to one particular paper and person. But it is also an attempt to identify for myself and others possible sources or resources for systematic thinking on our subject. Developing such a dialogue here, however, is far from easy, as the following section should make clear.

5.1. Who's afraid of the big bad intellectual?³²

Perhaps the closest we have ever come to a debate, even within the alternative circuit, is a single response to items by two leading figures in the new labour internationalism and communication, John Humphrey (1988a,b) and Dave Spooner (1988). The two items, published simultaneously in ILR in the later-1980s, apparently represented some kind of re-appraisal of over-ambitious aspirations amongst the new labour internationalists. Talking of the new shopfloor internationalism, Humphrey, an academic labour specialist and Editorial Board Member of ILR argued that

The advantage of rank and file networks over official union organisations is that they can more easily establish direct contacts and provide more flexible links between workers, particularly within the same company. But it would be foolish to suggest that they [could] ever replace the valuable activities of official union international bodies. (Humphrey 1988b:29)

Writing on ILCC, Dave Spooner, a founding editor of ILR, then working at AMRC in Hongkong, argued that:

Despite the early enthusiasm for a self-regulating computer network of networks, without hierarchy of access or central organisation, it is becoming clear that there will be no libertarian utopia of global worker communication. The 'new communications media for new worker internationalism',³³ as it has been termed, is still going to have to be organised, funded, and regulated. Nor will it be able to sidestep the established trade union structures and ideologies. (Spooner 1988:27)

I did not accept the image thereby created of the alternative project, nor the unproblematised presentation of the traditional trade unions. To talk, as in the first passage, of the 'valuable activities' of the dominant organisations, seems inadequate in the light of earlier-cited criticism - some of which comes from within their own ranks. And, even in so far as the criticism in the second passage might be directed to someone like Goldhaber, it does not come to terms with the major issues and possibilities to which he draws our attention. I considered - and consider - the 'new realism' amongst the activists as due precisely to the absence amongst them of theory, breadth of view, and dialogue about both issues. My own concern, at that time, was to preserve the specificity of the alternative labour internationalism. I argued as follows:

We need a realistic recognition of the influence, financial resources and representativity of the traditional trade union internationals. We should...dialogue with them...But we also need to carefully preserve our own meagre but specific resources: our institutional autonomy, our political integrity and our theoretical/ideological originality. Progressive forces within the traditional trade unions may value these even more than we tend to! (Waterman 1988b:26)

There was no further response to this, any more than there was to the e-mail analyses and the earlier-quoted arguments of AMRC's Derek Hall.

I made a number of attempts, both before and after this, to either provoke discussion or even to create an electronic space for such. These efforts included: the placing of individual items (of my own or others) on the labour BBSs of Geonet and APC; the placing of similar items on the LTBBS before the Manchester LTC; the proposal of a new BBS or

Conference under some such title as 'New Ideas on Labour and Society'. I also put drafts of this present paper on the LTBBBS, inviting collaboration, contributions or criticism. The customary response was a resounding silence (although a dozen or so users seemed to have looked at various drafts of the present paper). The most negative response was to an item on the new labour internationalism I put up on the labour BBSs of Geonet in 1990. This ran as follows:

Comrade Waterman shouldn't be surprised that no-one has replied to his paper. The people who are actually involved in international solidarity work have little time for this sort of overblown, academic drivel. One of the first criteria for any labour internationalism should be the ability to write clearly in short sentences with ordinary words. It's not that workers can't understand this sort of overlong, pretentious professorspeak but that they can't be bothered to. Another academic once said that anything worth saying can be said plainly. In the meantime, the development of internationalism between workers will remain the practical task of workers themselves. They are doing it already, and I'm sure PW will be welcomed to the fold when he has something useful to say. (ITFF0230 1990)

The message which caused this reaction was later published, within a much longer article, by the South African Labour Bulletin - hardly a journal partial to overblown academic drivel. One can therefore only assume that the reaction was due to either a) what was being said, which was certainly critical of traditional trade union internationalism, b) its style, which might have been considered rhetorical, or c) a hostility to ideas on the part of organisers/activists, who may see themselves as the real or sole voice of workers internationally, and their activity as the real or sole form of labour internationalism/ILCC, thus casting reflection, strategy, discussion and theory into the purgatory of OAD.³⁴

Why this resistance to dialogue not only with but between the alternative internationalists? There is a long tradition of anti-intellectualism in the trade-union movement - and amongst socialist intellectuals. I believe that George DeMartino (of whom more anon) brings us close to where this particular leftwing bone is buried. He identifies a

bias against abstract theoretical debate on the grounds that it is of little use to the real needs of people engaged in practical struggle. Self-critical abstract theory is seen to be counterproductive to the primary task of organising. It is a conceit of ivory-tower intellectuals [...] This aversion to theory matters, and it matters deeply. In the absence of self-critical attention to its own practice, the Left's understanding of trade unionism, of the relationship of unionism to other movements for social change, and consequently, of the Left's role vis-a-vis trade unions, has attained the status of an orthodoxy or a catechism that is beyond debate. Debate is constrained by this orthodoxy. (DeMartino 1991:30-31)

This particular syndrome may, however, be part of a more general problem of professionalisation and specialisation amongst labour organisers, whether of the alternative or traditional tendency. This is suggested by George Katsiaficas, reflecting on the outcome of the post-1968 movements in the USA:

The alternative movement is progressive insofar as it: provides some activists with non-alienating jobs; creates non-hierarchical institutions; and provides a sense of community rooted in friendship as opposed to the depersonalised mode of life in the corporate world. On the other hand, the alternative institutions serve as mechanisms of integration because they can lead to the commercialisation of previously uncommercialised needs, fulfil unmet needs within an oppressive system and thereby help to fine-tune and mitigate the worst excesses of the system; and provide the system with a pool of highly skilled but low-paid social workers within 'alternative' institutions. If there are connections to a larger political consciousness, however, they may serve as structures of dual power...If they work within a context of international solidarity and participatory democracy, co-ops and collectives could be concrete embodiments of a liberated political culture. (Katsiaficas 1987:196)

Enough said. The rest of Part 5 is, in any case, concerned with Katsiaficas' larger political consciousness and liberated internationalist political culture. Whilst it considers that the privileged position from which to initiate these is that of the alternative international labour

organisers and communicators, it also considers that there are multiple terrains of struggle – at the base of labour movements, at their periphery, at the core and peak of the organisations, within academia, and within the multiple spaces of national and international civil society and state more generally.

5.2. The first theoretically-informed ILCC research project?

Dave Spooner's paper to the LTC is apparently intended to be a sketch for a full-scale research project. I believe it is the first such one of somebody associated with ILCC. It nicely combines the inter-related issues of labour internationalism, communication and computerisation. I further believe that it raises or reveals many of the problems identified earlier. I will here attempt to identify these, whilst at least drawing attention to some of the most relevant writings (others are listed in the extended bibliography).

Although the point is not explicitly made, Spooner's paper is on a specific use of ILCC, namely for international collective bargaining, and an equally specific actor, namely the trade unions. The paper concerns itself in turn with 1) the industrial context for international bargaining, 2) technical constraints on the development of computer communication, 3) the political constraints on this, and 4) elements of a computer communication strategy. I will concentrate on points 1, 3 and 4.

By industrial context Spooner means the significant differences between types of transnational company or industry, different consequent international union needs, and the implications for electronic information types and communication forms. He contrasts the structure of the Unilever and Ford companies and the international transportation industry. He refers to the bargaining strategies of the IUF and the motor unions. He mentions the information and computer needs of each the three. Thus, faced with its dispersed company holdings, the unions have little ability to influence Unilever's global behaviour by local actions, but have considerable potential for 'corporate campaigning', such as ethical investment or disinvestment strategies. The IUF and its affiliates thus had a need

to pool, analyse and disseminate intelligence about the company at corporate level. This could have been greatly assisted by the development of networks between national and international union researchers and negotiators, access to

commercial databases...database brokers...databases of trade union research materials, etc. (Spooner 1992)

In facing the highly uniform and integrated Ford operation, however, the unions are able to affect the whole by local union action, coordinated by such bodies as international company councils. In this case, there was less to be gained from commercial databases than from the unionists on the shopfloor. Therefore

The greatest need was for an international co-ordination of information, strategies, experiences and policies between union negotiators and representatives, and for that to be collated, analysed and fed into union policy-making at international level. This would generate a need for communications tools and networks (whether through e-mail, fax, telex or face-to-face meetings), overcoming problems of language difference, cost, etc., rather than for purely informational tools... (ibid)

Whilst he goes into no detail on his third case, Spooner does refer to the special character of the international transportation industry and the consequently 'unique nature' of the ITF's telematics development.³⁵

Following this analysis, Spooner predicts a 'complex and shifting web of communications networks and information sources', including: strong vertical lines within the international unions; horizontal networks between national unions, research departments, workplaces, and between NGOs and unions; and ephemeral structures to deal with specific events or campaigns that cross all these paths. 'Ironically', he concludes, this

is almost a mirror image of the strategies adopted by many employers, as they get to grip with the full potential of telematics for international production and management. (ibid)

In dealing with political constraints on the development of such a model Spooner refers to: political rivalries (reduced with the fading of Communism but not yet gone); to the reluctance of national unions to cede power (either up to the union internationals or down to the shopfloor); the related reluctance of unions to pool or share information with other

unions, higher bodies or the shopfloor. Spooner shows understanding for this reticence, recognising that unions are 'inevitably competitive', yet considers openness and sharing essential if meaningful transnational collective bargaining is to be established.

Many of Spooner's strategy elements relate to more technical issues. But they include the necessity: 1) for a variety of trade union communications technologies and strategies; 2) that communications cease to be the poor relation of union computer applications; 3) of international financial assistance both to the poorer national union movements and for both South-South and South-North communications; for ensuring translation and transfer (to non-computer media) so as to reach the non-computerised; and international action within the relevant interstate fora, in partnership with other international social movements, for the right to information. He concludes:

Unions, despite popular mythology, are not monolithic hierarchies which can dictate change at will. They are complex and uniquely democratic institutions, which do not adapt to new technologies quickly. Nevertheless, it can be argued that telematics technology has inherently democratic features that, if harnessed, adapted and extended by the international union movement, could revolutionise its ability to effect social change. (ibid)

In commenting on this paper I would like to raise questions concerning: 1) its political model of labour internationalism; 2) its general computer communication model; 3) its specific international union computer model; 4) an alternative international labour communications and culture model more generally.

The political model of union internationalism: This is not dealt with explicitly. Implicitly (by its theoretical references), or simply by its silences, it places itself within the general discourse of 'collective bargaining', and a more specific one of 'countervailing power'. The first term is used by Spooner, the second is not. But it underlies most collective bargaining theory and activity. The idea, which comes from liberal political theory of the 1950s, suggests that liberal democratic states provide a neutral or, in any case, unavoidable terrain for competing collective interest groups – those of capital and labour amongst them. In so far as the terrain advantages capital, labour (or other disadvantaged interests) need to 'level the playing field'. More specifically, in the classical text of former ICFE General

Secretary, Charles Levinson (1972), the idea was that the internationalisation of capital provided a necessary, sufficient and even privileged basis for the internationalism of labour. It was largely Levinson's arguments that inspired the union-based World Concern Councils (e.g. Ford, Unilever) and, later, the shopsteward-based 'shopfloor internationalism' of TNC workers. Both the 'traditional' and the 'alternative' strategies have been severely criticised since 1983 by Nigel Haworth and Harvie Ramsay (1984, 1986). I will not repeat their criticism here since it has been made widely available in various forms since it was first written, and I have discussed it elsewhere (Waterman 1988a). A key part of their argument is that there is an essential asymmetry in the labour/capital relationship, with worker identity and power concentrated in the workplace, community and nation, whilst capital is increasingly international and financial. For this reason, the base of worker organisation can never parallel that of TNC decision-making processes. The asymmetry is increased when we take into account the significant role of women in the changing international division of labour, since women's labour is organised on bases intended to obstruct collective bargaining. Haworth and Ramsay conclude that it is essential to consider the strengths and weaknesses of labour, understood beyond the point of production, outside the factory gates or the union office.

There has, to my knowledge, never been any response to this argument from the alternative movement, any more than there has been to the later one of Haworth and Ramsay (1986), in which they use management literature to suggest to workers and unions the specific vulnerabilities of TNCs. Spooner may not believe either in theories of countervailing power, or, necessarily, in WCCs and TNC shopfloor internationalism. But in so far as he fails to explicitly respond to such challenges I fear that he will remain limited by the old theory and strategies.

Dave Spooner does make passing reference to 'corporate campaigning', a strategy that seems to do precisely what Haworth and Ramsay suggest, by combining labour protest with that of other popular and democratic communities - whether these are defined geographically or as communities of interest. The labour-community alliance (for which see Brecher and Costello 1990) has its own Achilles' heel. There are, moreover, millions of workers affected by globalisation, who are not employed by TNCs. This is, for example, customarily the case of dockers, frequently employed by the national or local state (municipalities) or, increasingly, by national or even local capitalists. Some might be employed by transnational shipping

companies. Any attempt to organise them on the basis of 'their' TNC might result in dividing rather than uniting workers locally. Any political model, even for securely-employed and nationally-unionised workers within major TNCs or TNC-dominated industries, has surely to take all this into account.

This leads us on to the implicit assumption that the unions as actors, and collective bargaining as a form or terrain of struggle, must be seen as the centre or core of international labour movement strategy. This is an assumption common to the dominant and alternative circuits, as in the anti-TNC strategies mentioned above. The left version of this kind of argument has been seriously challenged by George DeMartino. Although he is referring to the very specific union and collective bargaining practices of the USA, it is remarkable to what extent he throws light on similar practices either in other countries or at the global level. DeMartino considers that the privileging of trade unionism in the general struggle for emancipation can only be defended on economic grounds. He himself rather assumes that society is a

constellation of countless sites (of which the union is one) where people create and/or challenge relationships of exploitation and domination. it understands the union to be interpenetrated by the contradictory effects of all others. These shape its practices, structures, and ideologies, as well as constituting the very subject 'worker/union member' on whom the Left places its radical hopes. (DeMartino 1991:30)

Whilst by no means rejecting 'collective bargaining' - which he understands as encompassing an immense diversity of union and worker practices - DeMartino argues that a collective-bargaining unionism, as general in the USA, 'creates and solidifies material divisions among workers' (34), turns unions into quasi-business enterprises, selling services to workers, puts unions in competition with each other, and...isolates workers from communities! We have here, I think, a theoretical understanding for the union secrecy and competition that Dave Spooner recognises and regrets. More seriously, we have a theoretical question raised about the capacity of collective bargaining unionism to enter into principled and lasting coalitions with other social movements:

[M]ass mobilisation that unites trade unions with other movements has as its primary goal the securing of a relationship with an employer that necessarily re-establishes the basis of trade union isolation. Once achieved, the collective bargaining agreement draws union activists in body and mind back into the workplace and away from the broader community. (ibid: 36)

Whilst we cannot assume that all union collective bargaining activity at international level reproduces such shortcomings, nor that international union alliances with other social movements necessarily instrumentalise the latter, it is necessary to demonstrate where, how and why they do not – or will not.

The general computerisation model: Spooner's metaphor of a 'complex and shifting web' is attractive in so far as it clearly opens out beyond the vertical, top-down and rigid models of the traditional international union organisations. It also makes room for what is evidently occurring in the world of ILCC. But it is only a metaphor. And, in so far as it provides a 'mirror image' of the computer practices of advanced capitalists, this would seem to be not so much ironic as troubling. The problem underlying Spooner's argument is that of the 'commonsense' of those involved in ILCC – a set of common assumptions that I have myself shared but that have little more power than the metaphor above. To challenge but two of these beliefs: information is not necessarily power; networks are not essentially democratic, open and flexible. This is brought out in the study of Geof Mulgan, who argues that

New technologies have served to highlight the extent to which control is never simple or one-dimensional. Just as more information can often mean less knowledge...more control can also often mean less. (Mulgan 1991:4)

And:

Openness is generally held to be a good thing, a guarantee of liberty and the free flow of ideas, of competition and efficiency in the economy and of transparency in the network. It appears to bring liberty and creativity. The argument developed [in his book], however, suggests that openness in systems is not inherently superior to closure, but rather that they evolve in tandem.

The human tendency to close, to create including and excluding groups, is paralleled in...technology where trends towards openness meet equally strong trends towards limiting it. Closure in its many forms is a necessary defence against uncertainty, danger and chaos. (5)

These are just initial ideas from a book which is evidently essential reading for anyone interested in the relation of computers to mass empowerment.

The international union computerisation model: I think Spooner here identifies a real problem of considerable importance to both research and strategy. This is not only because of the limited information we have about the different ILCC experiences. It is also because we cannot be satisfied with a computer utopianism that may suggest an alternative future, or alternative present principles and possibilities, but which does not address itself to the ways unions and workers are networking (being liberated/controlled?) internationally. On the other hand, however, I wonder whether such research can draw primarily on political-economic, labour or union theory.³⁶ Perhaps it can, but then this would have to be argued for, and one would then have to recognise that one was doing a primarily political-economy, labour or union rather than a primarily communications or computer one. Alternative theoretical frames are available, even if not specifically addressed to the labour movement. One would be that of networking theory, whether of the electronic (Mulgan 1991) or the social movement kind (Diani 1992). Another is provided by the computers-and-democracy debate. The work of Vinnie Mosco (1989) is largely one of critique of the dominant model, but that of others similarly associated with the Union for Democratic Communications in North America, explores positive alternatives also (Bruck and Raboy 1989). An addition or alternative to these, which begins with a global perspective on information and democracy, would be the work of Tehranian (1990). Whilst this does not look at what I have called alternative international communication, it does survey experiences in 'teledemocracy', and it addresses itself to both core and periphery in the world capitalist system. Tehranian also does us the service of surveying and comparing numerous different theoretical approaches and debates, and presenting them with clarity. At a more complex and abstract - but also more challenging - theoretical level we have the work of Mark Poster, suggesting that the 'mode of information' is now as, or more central, to social processes than the 'mode of production' (Poster 1984, 1990).³⁷ Poster argues that one can no longer, as Marx did, assume that people working on things is the 'basic paradigm of practice' (1984:53). He further suggests that in

the age of information capitalism, historical materialism 'finds its premise in power that is the effect of discourse/practice' (54). He goes further, reminding us of that stimulation/confusion I mentioned in the Introduction:

Like mechanical machines, the computer shapes the mind of its user; unlike older contrivances, it engages the user's consciousness. Its powers seem to enchant users who become absorbed by the capabilities it offers. The line dividing subject and object is blurred, far more than it was in Marx's analysis of labour. Which has the capacity to generate knowledge, has greater mental powers? Whence comes the fascination users seem to derive from conversations with unknown partners through the mediation of computers? (167)

Whilst Poster would here seem to be replacing 'the mode of production' with the 'mode of information', this is not his purpose, any more than he is suggesting that the mode of information be the sole or primary concern of critical social science. He does, however, question traditional 19th century metatheories of emancipation, including that of the working class, and implies that the increasing social dominance of information draws attention to

new questions that the old ones subordinate, forget or repress, new questions that open political initiatives that may not easily fit into the cultural frame of liberal and socialist images of freedom and that may move to the 'margins', to the new movements of the 1970s and 1980s. (1990:19).

If the reader's mind here boggles, then s/he might wish to consider another major research issue (on which I have no immediate ideas, know of no existing literature) about what exactly one would examine, measure, compare, and how exactly one would do this. This ocean is wide, deep...and currently almost empty. Research with more modest bases, aims and instruments, will therefore also evidently be of value.

An alternative international communications and culture model: This is something absent in the Spooner paper, present in those of Goldhaber (1983, 1987) and, at least implicitly, I hope, in my own writing here and elsewhere. My argument is that in so far as Spooner is dealing with a very specific part of a more general problem or project, this must either be situated in relationship to such or at least implicitly exclude it. In my vision,

'international trade union computer communications' no more exhausts the subject/project of 'international labour communication and culture' than does 'international union collective bargaining with TNCs' that of 'internationalism' – or even 'labour internationalism'. We need an alternative international communications and cultural model so that we can give a positive answer to the rhetorical question posed by Dave Spooner (it is not his question, but it is the kind that a computerised international trade union collective bargainer might ask):

what would a fish factory worker in north east England have to talk about with a Dutch worker in an oil refinery, or a West African plantation worker?
(Spooner 1992)

Following this logic we are obliged to ask about the mutual interest in – or value of – a discussion between: a European and an African; a man and a woman; a straight worker and a gay worker; the victim of a nuclear disaster and one suffering repetitive strain injury; a pale male Northern Volkswagen worker (with a Volkswagen and a family) and a black female Southern casualised Volkswagen worker (without a bicycle or a father for her kids). The logic of the question is a quite literally capitalist one – or at least one that can assume no alternative to a capitalist culture, an identity given by occupation, industry or employer, and an ethic of narrow self-interest. There are models of an alternative civilisation and culture – models based on an understanding that workers are also blacks, women, gays, consumers, residents, that they need peace, security, feelings of self-worth, and a clean environment. There are, indeed, a number of such models around, particularly in the ecological and feminist movements. I will mention just two, of rather different kinds. One is that of the British sociologist, Anthony Giddens. He has his own understanding of globalisation, which certainly includes industrialisation, TNCs and wage labour, but which does not prioritise these above such things as statism and militarism, seeing them as all part of an intimately interlinked process. By the same token, he recognises, but does not prioritise, the labour movement, placing it alongside democratic, peace and ecological ones. He sees these as together engaged in potential struggle for a 'realistic utopia' in which there would be a socialised economy, a coordinated global order, the transcendence of war and a system of planetary care (Giddens 1990:166). The other is an Australian social scientist and socialist activist, John Mathews (1989). He talks about a 'provisional utopia' and of a post-liberal 'associative' democracy, but concentrates on the nation-state level and the immediate present. Here he argues for a fundamentally new strategic alliance, between social democratic labour

movements on the one hand and the new social movements on the other. In his model, the transformatory role belongs not to the social-democratic or labour parties but to 'autonomous organisations or associations of citizens and workers' (155). We cannot explore such models here. We just need to recognise the role they can play in suggesting an alternative culture to which our more specific concerns can relate.

We do not have ourselves to 'know' what fish, refinery and plantation workers 'could' or 'should' talk about. But we could (in so far as we, from our own positions, experiences, beliefs and hopes), are interested to do so, ask them. Or we could set up an experiment to see what they might wish to talk about. Or we could set up a dialogue with them, in which we even played the role of initiator or animator. Many such things have been done by people involved in global solidarity and alternative international communication movements, including the labour ones. The major question that remains is whether computerisation does or can enable a move from internationalist labour communication to an internationalist worker and democratic culture. Because all that we (with the exception of the Goldhabers of this world) have been so far been actually talking about is ILCC between the international labour communicators, whether of the trade unions or the networks!

6. CONCLUSION: 'FISH, REFINERY AND PLANTATION WORKERS OF THE WORLD, COMMUNICATE!'

This paper is an unfinished one. It has just opened up the subject. But I feel an obligation to say at least a last few words on 1) workers and international electronic communication, and 2) the now possibly-forgotten Fifth International.

What about the workers? Ken Murphy, a shopsteward at a General Motors plant in the UK, does us all a favour by talking about the fears, difficulties and disappointments faced by rank-and-file union activists 'using e-mail on the shopfloor' (Murphy 1992). He also reveals the self-confidence gained by them in thus becoming independent of the company's office equipment. But the point is that we are here talking about workers in an increasingly automated industry, in a country that has one of the highest penetration rates of computers into the home. The problem is that in so far as British (and many other) workers come into contact with computers, this is likely to be either as means of increased production pressure, or of surveillance, or of consumption and amusement. Several speakers at the LTC, and other users and commentators, have pointed out the obstacles to be overcome before computer communication becomes as easy as that of the telephone. These have to do with expense, complexity, dependence on the quality of the national telephone system, different languages and even alphabets.

For all the above reasons, it is essential to look at ILCC in relationship to alternative international labour communications, and to an alternative international culture more generally. Cultural globalisation and homogenisation is not simply a matter of loss (except for cultural traditionalists, separatists or elitists), nor simply a matter of domination (except for believers in simplistic cultural imperialism theories). It merely creates another terrain of cultural contestation. Thus Coca-colonisation (bane of my Communist youth) and MacDonaldisation (bane of my Alternative grandfatherhood?) does not only mean the destruction of local drinks and foods, and inclusion into a US-dominated junk-food market that is harmful to labour, to the world ecology and human health. It also means the possibility of contributing to a global movement of protest against such, a global search for alternatives to it. The same is true of MacTV - of Cable News Network, in the USA, presenting a bloody imperialist war as a feat of hi-tech surgery, via a series of photo-opportunities and one-liners, delivered by (or with the permission of) a US Surgeon-in-Chief. Globalised TV has also permitted a series

of increasingly-political concerts, peaking with one in which Nelson Mandela made a speech to millions of people worldwide. Folk, jazz, pop and rock music have increasingly become media of intercultural exchange, and worldwide languages of resistance, protest and cultural counter-assertion (Garofalo 1992a, b). If the charity, aid and human rights movements are present on this terrain, and the labour (or women's movements) are not, that is a problem of the latter. 'Alternative' global conferences and demonstrations, both ride on and dispute such events as the International Women's Decade or the 1992 Rio Conference on the environment. These are cultural and communication activities that involve, speak to - and potentially influence - more than the professional or semi-professional communicators themselves.

There is, moreover, a rich history of international and internationalist labour culture, including Mayday itself, songs, symbols, the photo, film, sports and tourism movements (Waterman 1990a). These cannot be reproduced, because today labour is neither the primary terrain of human alienation nor the privileged base for international solidarity. But labour history provides a major source of inspiration, ideas and experiences, from which both labour and other international movements could draw. Without connection or reference to such an alternative international culture, a 'collective bargaining internationalism' is going to amount to little more than enlightened self-interest on a world scale. It is not going to have a multiplier effect, and it is not going to have the kind of bedrock that is necessary for periods or situations in which the collective bargaining internationalism breaks down. Thinking about and working toward some kind of new international labour and democratic culture has to therefore take place alongside development of an international-collective-bargaining one. Otherwise, it seems to me, the best we can hope for is precisely ILCC between the labour communicators, and for collective bargainers.

Again the Fifth International? In the past the left treated communication primarily as a means to organisation. International working-class communication and culture were seen as a means to create some kind of international army that, by token of its mass composition and global spread, would defeat the inevitably competing capitals and armies of the bourgeoisie. The place for irony is here. Capitals still compete and so do national armies. But capitalists internationally have demonstrated their common interest and their capacity for cooperation, and liberal nation states are demonstrating their capacity to collaborate and reproduce themselves. There is no international capitalist class to be confronted and defeated, any more than there is an international state. There are, certainly, dramatic developments of

the world capitalist market, of inter-state agencies, and of ideologies of competition, racism, patriarchy and statism. These, however, do not concentrate themselves at one visible or crucial point - national or international - to be defeated by the concentrated blows of proletarian hammers, the broad swathes of peasant sickles. The most energetic effort to create a unified and disciplined international proletarian army, the Third International, turned into its opposite within one decade. The combination of economic determinism and political voluntarism was deadly.

We do not have to speculate about the future shape of international labour solidarity - although some imaginative speculation would be preferable to the repetition of ancient formulae (or the embarrassed silence of most of the left). All we need to do is to take a serious look at what I have called the new global solidarity movements. Some of these have been remarkably successful in catching the public imagination and impacting on national governments and inter-state agencies. They occupy the moral highground internationally, where TNCs and statesmen stand up to their knees in the swamp. The models of the global women's movement and the global ecological movement are simultaneously complex, puzzling and instructive. As far as I can see, they have no international headquarters, they have no organisation, they have no obvious terrain of battle. Alternatively, one could say that they have many headquarters, many organisations - and many terrains, forms and levels of struggle. These exist not only within national and international civil society (or in the struggles to create and broaden such) but also within the organs of state, and - dare one say it? - even within TNCs and the World Bank. What is it that the international women's and ecological movements have that labour doesn't? I suggest that, among other things, it is an instinctive understanding of the increasing centrality of information, ideas, ethics and culture to social life. Added to this is another understanding, less instinctive (meaning more written about and reflected on), of the value of alliance and coalition. These international movements consist of organisations, but their public face and impact comes in the form of images (often complex or conflicting) in the mass media, of their public international political acts (often oriented toward such media), and of their major international declarations and documents (which also often conflict, but which provide the basis for debate within the movement and beyond). In these movements, I would again like to suggest, organisation matters in so far as it is functional to communication: they are largely communication internationalisms.

And what about the role of computers in the creation of such communication internationalisms? Evidently they are both cause and effect of globalised information capitalism. But, it further occurs to me, the computer is also the first means of communication created directly by and for modern industrial capitalism and the modern nation state/military. Previous means of communication were invented and developed by artisans, artists and dissident intellectuals, who invested them with the power of universal enlightenment and emancipation. These means were then taken over, industrialised, commercialised, licensed and controlled, by capital and state. Although the computer has, of course, its own individual inventors, and spawned its own short-lived left-utopian wave, it has impacted on the world as the child of big capital, big industry, big state and big military. This is a capitalist and statist technology, not one that has been captured by them. It has to be liberated. An 'international communication liberation movement' has already begun (as usual, with protest against rather than alternatives for). I suggest that the connection between such a process and global solidarity movements will be intimate. And that labour also will thus rediscover that communication is the nervous system of internationalism and solidarity.³⁸

ENDNOTES

1. This paper took first shape as a lecture within my course on Alternative Communication at the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague. It represents the first half of a longer essay. My gratitude must be expressed to my colleagues for agreeing to such an exotic course, and to its participants for listening to this exotic subject. Acknowledgements are also due to the Research Programme of the Institute for (at least so far) funding research activities which have nothing to do with 'third world development' as understood within the ISS but something to do with 'global emancipatory struggles' as understood by me. Acknowledgements are also due to Dennis MacShane, indefatigable journalist, unionist, specialist on labour communications and union internationalism and - most importantly for me - correspondent. Also to the following: Gerry Reardon in London for showing me that e-mail lives and that alternative international communicators can also sometimes remember to communicate with each other; Ken Post in The Hague, for carefully reading and extensively commenting on a draft; Cees Hamelink, Amsterdam/The Hague, for reading the draft fast and commenting relevantly. In so far as this draft has not been able to benefit from such work or comments, I hope later ones will.
2. Mike Jensen's list, compiled from the user lists of the two major networks, was already challenged as incomplete when presented to the LTC. It does not, for example, show a major Hongkong group, Asia Monitor Resource Centre. It lists, furthermore numerous organisations that may never use electronic mail for international purposes. Finally, we have no idea of how much any of these organisations actually use e-mail even nationally. On the other hand, it is useful in suggesting those third world labour movements most heavily involved in electronic communication, these being Brazil (14 groups) and South Africa (11). It can hardly be a coincidence that these are also the sites of major new labour movements with internationalist orientations.
3. Given that I am an interested and involved party, and a subject in this paper, it may be necessary for the reader to know of my involvement in each of these three roles. Qualifications: I learned about computerised databasing at IDOC, Rome, 1984, have experimented with it over the years but only began systematically using CDS-ISIS in 1991; I first started wordprocessing whilst researching international labour communication in Lima 1986; I began to use an international electronic communication service, Geonet, around 1988-9. Commentator: This began with treatment of computers within more general studies on alternative international labour communication around 1984-5, in papers referred to elsewhere in this present one. I began to consider research specifically on ILCC in 1985, but the present paper is my first addressed solely to the subject. Promoter: This began with ideas about international networking amongst radical specialists on labour, in the Newsletter of International Labour Studies (1978-90). It was also in NILS that I wrote my first item specifically on alternative ILCC (Waterman 1984). In 1985 I organised what may have been the first-ever international workshop on computers and international labour solidarity (Waterman 1986b), which also produced what I believe to have been the first international declaration on this topic.
4. For my position on the necessity and possibility of such a development, see Waterman 1991a.
5. This section is based on limited and sometimes fortuitous knowledge. It is thus inevitably biased toward Western Europe and North America - in that order. It will serve its purpose if it provokes more serious research and analysis.
6. For Lenin's writings on the press, see Mattelart and Siegelau (1983:123-5, 190-91, 243-8). A less well-known but quite typical figure of this period is the Peruvian Jose Carlos Mariategui. He was not only a prolific journalist and the founder of two significant Communist newspapers with much international coverage, Amauta (Quechua for 'teacher!') and Labor (Labour). He is also the only classical Communist figure I have found to make so much as a passing remark on the relation of communication to internationalism, stating that 'Communication is the nervous system of internationalism and solidarity' (see Waterman 1986c).

7. This anecdote is, moreover, confirmed by my own experience as an international Communist journalist in East Europe in the 1955-8. My first report for the Communist World Student News, of which I was shortly to become Chief Sub-Editor, was sub-edited out of recognition - and in complete ignorance of the event reported. When I was working on a World Youth Festival newspaper in Moscow, 1957, I was asked to write an account of the International Student Day five days before it occurred. 'But what,' I asked with naive concern for petty-bourgeois facticity, 'if it rains?'. 'If it doesn't rain in the newspaper,' I was cheerfully informed, 'It didn't rain'.
8. For a detailed, devastating - and depressing - account of the relationship of the British Labour Party and trade unions to the media, read Denis MacShane (1987). Talking primarily of Labour's national media policy (actually a non-policy), MacShane gives a multiplicity of reasons for its impotence. I think, however, he comes closest to where the bone is buried when he places the media alongside women, migrants and a number of other major contemporary questions, seeing these as
- modern problems in the sense that there is no theoretical guidance of historical administrative experience to steer by...modern problems in that they posit most sharply the conflict between advocates of socialism from above and fighters for socialism from below [...T]he media, like other modern problems, demand offensive, innovative solutions rather than the preservation of past gains. They are about breaking and reforging the consensus rather than returning to a milder version of it. (231)
9. This attitude is revealed in the USA at the same period, in a key document of the 'Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention', held in Philadelphia, September 1970. Its 'Workshop on Internationalism and Relations with Liberation Struggles Around the World' produced a declaration that looks, in many ways, as radical and relevant to the 1990s as to the 1970s. Yet its only references to the mass media are condemnatory or oppositional. Its only section on communication deals with 'Revolutionary Art', is limited to a couple of paragraphs, and is no more than declaratory (Katsiaficas 1987:265-79).
10. The romantic rejection of technology - and the positive option for artisan methods and popular traditions - are not to be dismissed. The posters of Paris 1968 travelled the world, have often been adopted or adapted for local use (e.g. during the Bombay textile workers' strike of the early 1980s), and no one who has seen them will ever forget the silkscreened Cuban posters of the 1970s. The English socialist, William Morris, the 'romantic revolutionary' (Thompson 1977) was an artist, a designer, a writer of revolutionary songs and the author of a utopian socialist novel. Such valuing or revaluing of past or pre-industrial culture, or techniques, reminds us of the necessity of placing electronic communication technology within a context of culture, and of seeing contemporary industrial and commercialised culture as one moment within history. The promotion of folk art and folk music by communist movements in the post-World War II period may actually have been one of their lasting successes. In the West this effort often took off and fed into exciting syntheses of folk and rock. The secret of a genuine and continuing cultural revolution internationally may lie precisely in the blending of 'high' and 'low' cultures, of the local and the international, of the most modern with the traditional. We will return to this theme later.
11. There are exceptions, represented by a document of the International Metalworkers Federation, on the 'Communication of Ideas and the Mass Media' (International Metalworkers Federation 1985). Whilst condemning increasing capitalist and state control and use of the new media, it evidently considers this a contestable terrain. It further declares the necessity for the metalworkers to develop their own communications resources for the purpose of strengthening mutual solidarity. And it even recognises the possibility and necessity of collaborating with pro-labour communicators, academics and intellectuals:

in order to challenge the reactionary concepts of current political culture, and involve researchers, thinkers and writers in the shaping of tomorrow's ideas so that needs of working

people are maintained as a subject of contemporary and future academic research. (3)

Whether this declaration has been of more than symbolic value is a matter that could itself be investigated by a pro-labour researcher.

12. Community Memory would certainly have benefitted from reading a fascinating book on the failure of radical British projects by Landry et. al. (1985). The first of a new series on 'Organisations and Democracy', this examines the organisational and financial problems of such projects. The aspirations, achievements and frustrations of CM would have been familiar to the writers of that book, who devote their major case study to a communications project - an alternative British magazine of the 1970s, The Leveller (14-27).
13. As a committed but inexperienced alternative computer optimist, I visited Community Memory - the Mecca of left computer utopianism, in the mid-1980s. I was impressed by the decision of CM to place terminals only in public spaces, so as to prevent them becoming just another tool or plaything for the computer-literate and information-rich of Berkeley. But I was also somewhat disappointed at the paucity of community or political material being carried at that time - and the absence of response to the one or two messages I put onto the computer. It occurs to me that the pessimism of Athanasiou may be due more to the setting than the technology. CM was more a product of computer radicalism amongst intellectuals than community activity amongst workers, tenants, women or ethnic minorities. The test of this hypothesis may be the experience of the Manchester Host in the UK in the 1990s, for which see Part 4 below.
14. The optimistic/pessimistic dichotomy has been identified also with for Marxist theories of trade unionism (Hyman 1972).
15. Revealed, ironically, by a collection on Marx and Engels on the Means of Communication (The Movement of Commodities, People, Information and Capital) (Haye 1980). The author/editor has only managed to find some 100 pages of more-or-less relevant material, most of which refers to the movements of commodities, people and capital rather than information. So concerned is he to assert the 'materialist position on the "communication question"' (11) that he has even missed the politically-significant quotation from the Communist Manifesto with which this section begins!
16. He borrows the idea from Ploman (1983).
17. My account is again limited to personal experience and knowledge, and therefore biased toward Western Europe and North America. As with the topic of the previous section, this one is in need of systematic international research.
18. See the numerous references to the Liberation News Service or Pacific News Service in Armstrong (1984). In Barcelona, one such service was still functioning in the late-80s, and providing national and international news items to La Estiba, the monthly of the national dockworkers' organisation (Waterman 1991b:62).
19. An analysis of the actors mentioned in IPS English-language output reveals 56.7 percent for the 'Political Power' and 19.7 percent for the 'Third System' (workers, peasants, NGOs, etc.). The lack of attention to labour issues as a whole is suggested by the miserable 6.2 percent coverage of 'Economic Power' actors (including TNCs and landowners!) and the 4.9 percent of trade union actors (Hamelink et.al. 1989:Table 12, p.41).
20. I do not give too much importance to my own Newsletter of International Labour Studies (NILS), produced in The Hague, 1978-90. Although this, and the related International Labour Education and Research Foundation (ILERI), paid considerable attention to alternative computer use, they never themselves got much closer to computers than the use of word processing and computer addressing. They remained largely 'print, paste and post' operations.

21. Or had it? The 15th Congress of the ICFTU, held in Caracas, just before the 'Earth Summit' in Rio, decided to

set up its own 'Green Line' - an electronic information network designed to provide rapid contact between its affiliates and the international trade secretariats (ITS) so that trade union organisations all over the world can swap information on the various initiatives being undertaken. (Free Labour World, No.5, 1992:2)

Research is needed here to discover why it should be the ecological issue - rather than those of labour generally - that has finally attracted the ICFTU to international computer communication. Could it be due to the greening of ICFTU officers? To pressure of the greener national unions affiliated to the ICFTU? To external state funding possibilities for ecological activities? And why is this project not even mentioned in a report, appearing at almost the same time, about ICFTU computer activities (Adaba 1992)? Whatever the case, we still have to see whether this welcome project will take off, and then lead the ICFTU to involve itself in ILCC more generally. If it does then we would have another case in which union recognition of the new social movements leads to more radical and democratic activity within the movement itself.

22. Denis MacShane draws our attention to additional reasons and implications of the ICEF's extensive computerisation:

Its General Secretary, Michael Boggs, lives in the USA and thus the ICEF has, a) to be a team operation, unlike most ITSs, which are very much dominated by the Gen. Sec., b) to develop effective internal communication so that Boggs can remain in touch with his organisation. He is. Messages sent to Brussels reach him very quickly and get sent back quickly. This also calls into question the institutional commitment to buildings, officers, secretaries, etc, of ITSs, which are still very Eurocentred... (Letter, July 14, 1992)

23. There is a certain history of alternative computer activity in Poland, during the Second Coming of Solidarnosc in the late 1980s (Bloombecker 1987). But the development of ILCC in the ex-Communist world is so recent and so limited that it appears more as an effect of Western activity than a source of independent initiative and ideas. No doubt it will develop. In the meantime, one can consult the draft report on the Manchester LTC by Gerry Reardon (Reaf0707 1992) and the conference paper of Corbett and Walker (1992).
24. It is no coincidence that a major contributor to this aspect of SALB's work was Celia Mather, a former editor of ILR and leading figure in the development of ILCC.
25. My knowledge of AMRC is based on long familiarity with its work, and a short visit in late-1989. The two documents here drawn on were both written by Derek Hall, a New Zealander who is Director of the organisation at time of writing. In the 1992 document cited below, he was speaking as representative of AMRC. In the 1990 one he was evidently speaking in a personal capacity, although his thinking was just as evidently a result of his AMRC experience.
26. This kind of critique is not confined to those in the marginal labour organisations. It can also come from experience within the traditional ones. This has already been shown in the quotation from Denis MacShane at the beginning of Part 3. In more positive vein, he continues that the new electronic media at the same time:

open immense possibilities for labour to regain power and influence. Unions could ride the globalisation process by becoming repositories of information about international developments as they emerge from, or impact on, the workplace. This international knowledge...can reposition unions in the vanguard of international development...instead of trailing behind, or being seen as irrelevant. (MacShane 1992:13-14. Stress added)

This should not be taken to imply that MacShane's own organisation is either trailing or irrelevant. During 1992, the International Metalworkers Federation was involved in two major international worker and union rights campaigns, one against a Swiss-based capitalist denying union rights in the USA, the other against the government of Malaysia for its refusal of union rights to 130,000 electronics workers. International union communication by fax, and effective address to national and international media, were vital to both campaigns (IMF News 8/92, AFL-CIO News, July 7, 1992).

27. A note on the US context might be useful here. One listing identifies 5-10 union BBSs in the USA, most of them 'union affiliated', many of them oriented to a particular geographical area, and most of them unconnected with each other (White 1991). The traditional national union confederation, the AFL-CIO has its own Labour Line, and even an associated Union PC Users Group Newsletter. Increasing interest in electronic mail seems to be developing amongst the labour left in the USA, as indicated by items in the monthly, Labour Notes (which is itself on-line and has exchanged material electronically with ILR in the UK and SALB in South Africa). A new annual conference appears to be establishing itself, under the name of LaborTech, with a first one in Vancouver, Canada, in 1991 and a second in San Francisco, late-1992. Since this conference covers all new communications technologies, it cannot give too much attention to our problem area. But there are overlaps between this event and LaborNet.
28. On the other hand, Derek Hall of AMRC ran a mischievous experiment in early 1991 to check the relative user interest in a message calling for solidarity with a new autonomous Indonesian union and a 'Rewarding Academic Job Opportunity' (AMRF0109 1991). That the response was (as he had expected) more intensive for the latter than the former does not, in my view, demonstrate the careerism of the readers (who may read and respond to dozens of solidarity appeals each year, but only see a good job offer once in a lifetime). What it does is to draw attention to is the crucial mediating role - and particular interest and self-interest - of the communicators themselves.
29. MaM needs to be placed into a broader context of 'international feminist computer communication' that it may not even be aware of. ISIS, the Women's International Information and Communication Service, for many years shared offices with IDOC in Rome. It computerised its thousands of addresses, as well as its documentation service, in the mid-80s. ISIS has produced numerous resources on and for third world women workers. And it has played a major role in debates on and training for alternative computer use in the international women's movement and more widely (for the development of ISIS, see Cottingham 1990). There are numerous international feminist journals, newspapers and bulletins, many of which give considerable attention to women workers, working women, women and work. Alternative communication amongst women is well developed in Latin America (Santa Cruz 1990), as is computer documentation and communication, again giving attention to labour. Additionally, there have been at least two ambitious international computer projects, one for a database (Capek 1990), one for a press service (Kassel and Kaufman 1990). Neither of these makes special reference to labour but each has aspects relevant to the creation of independent international labour projects. Thus the database project has required its authors to develop a relevant thesaurus (a dictionary of keywords), i.e. one that is not only non-sexist but also pro-woman. And the press service project was involved in difficult negotiations with the 'alternative' but apparently still male-oriented IPS, before deciding it had to operate independently.
30. From other evidence this appears to have been proposed by APC activist Jill Small.
31. The telegraphic style here reminds us that this document, although made widely available electronically, was originally intended as a comment on a proposal from APC for international networking.
32. This section carries a Non-Government Health Warning! Because here, more than elsewhere in this paper, I am a subject and protagonist. Being marginal (as I am) within the alternative is a position with its own possible advantages and disadvantages. The marginal vision can be both sharper and more partial (in the sense being both one-sided and self-serving). Forewarned, readers can make their own judgment.

33. The reference is evidently to my own 1984 paper entitled, 'Needed: A New Communications Model for a New Working-Class Internationalism' (published as Waterman 1988a). It is true that this paper showed no interest in the democratisation of the dominant international union media, since I thought - and think - that the privileged position from which to achieve this is either at the base or the periphery of the movement. I do not think, however, that my paper can be accused of libertarian utopianism, since it subjected the alternative organisations, media and theories to a manifold critique. This critique extended, in a 1985 paper (published as Waterman 1990b), to Michael Goldhaber, someone I much respect, and who would probably wear the label with pride.
34. Interestingly enough, the most substantial response I have received to my writings on labour internationalism, and communication for such, has come not from the alternative circuit but from an international union officer - and one who doesn't have (or worship at the shrine of) e-mail! My long and patient efforts to promote research on ILCC were finally rewarded at the LTC in Manchester, with a last-day, 30-minute workshop, attended by just 5-10 out of the 100 or so people still present.
35. It is not clear to what Spooner is referring here. It may be specifically to the shipping industry. Although seafarers represent only 10-20% of ITF membership, they play an inordinate role in the work of the organisation. This may be because of the particularly severe problems of seafarers, requiring 50 ITF inspectors in ports all over the world. It may also be because the ITF acts as a seafarers' union for those who do not have a national one. It also administers, in agreement with shipowners, some kind of international welfare or compensation funds. The ITF is highly computerised, being the second most-important user of the commercial Seadata database. It hopes in the future to be able to give all its inspectors access to its own database. It is committed to putting employees of the same international companies in contact with each other (Flint 1992). The history of the ITF, and the quality of ITF internationalism with respect to dockers, is critically commented on in Waterman 1991:27-33).
36. The only actual academic research project I have seen on alternative international electronic communication is that of Francois Fortier (1992). The axis proposed for study is a North-South one, as is the direction. The concern seems to be with the impact of electronic networking for grassroots-based economic development in the South. The megatheoretical underpinning for this project is also not a communications one but that of neo-Marxist political economy. Although the author clearly recognises the necessity for theory on computer networking and self-empowerment, I wonder whether his general frame is not going to foreclose on his investigation. In so far as he is interested in epistemology (theory of knowledge) - as he is - he might like to ask himself whether his subject and framework do not reproduce traditional eurocentric assumptions about both 'development' and 'solidarity'.
37. The reason for consulting theoretical work of this generality is so as to go beyond either dominant theories or commonsense assumptions. The dangers are revealed by a useful and important work on the public relations of US unions which seems to share, with the involved unions, the bizarre - or is it merely naive? - notion that unions could and should reproduce the publicity strategies customary to US capital and state (Douglas 1986).
38. See, again, Endnote 6.

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NB. This slightly extended bibliography is drawn from a personal database on CDS-ISIS which contains over 2,000 items relating to labour and social movements, globalisation and internationalism, to alternative communication nationally and internationally. The data (much of which was transferred from a wordprocessing programme, still needs editing. The database programme also needs development, particularly in the transforming of data into bibliographical form on the wordprocessor - as below. I am interested in improving, extending, pooling and making available this material, and can be approached at the addresses at the end of this paper. PW.

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