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**BETWEEN THE OLD INTERNATIONAL LABOUR  
COMMUNICATIONS AND THE NEW:  
THE COORDINADORA OF SPANISH DOCKWORKERS**

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**Abstract:** This is an overview of the international communications of an autonomous and worker-controlled labour organisation of the libertarian socialist tradition. The Coordinadora, which represents the overwhelming majority of Spanish dockers, has given high priority to practical grassroots internationalism, both between dockworker unions in Western Europe and in support of the anti-imperialist struggle of Nicaragua and famine victims in Ethiopia. It has given similarly high priority to communications for such ends within its monthly paper, La Estiba, and two bulletins, Comunicacion del Extranjero and News from Spain. It has even paid theoretical attention to the question of workers and informatisation. It might thus appear as a model of the 'new labour internationalism' and of 'internationalist labour communications'. Despite its formidable activity, however, the Coordinadora has booked little success in creating either continuing solidarity links or effective communications for such. This paper attempts to explain why.

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NOTES

Appreciation is expressed to the Institute of Social Studies for financially supporting the research on which this paper is based, to the Publications Committee of the ISS for its impressive speed in responding to my submission, and to the PC's reader for pertinent comments. Most of these are so pertinent as to be impossible of response within the time and space constraints of this paper. I hope to be able to do so in the longer study from which this paper is drawn.

A longer version of this paper, including 40 pages of appendices, is being submitted to the Third International Colloquium on Communication and Culture, Piran, Yugoslavia, September 22-6, 1989 and to Congress of the World Association of Christian Communication, Manila, Philippines, October 15-19, 1989.



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1. Introduction

This is a case study of democratic or alternative international communications. 'Democratic' and 'alternative' are words seen here as related to social movements and civil society. The term 'alternative international' is here identified with 'internationalism', itself understood as a relationship between progressive social forces, or to the creation of inter-state relations at the level of civil society. This is quite a different matter from any 'new international information and communication orders' (NIICOs or NWICOs), which I understand as primarily implying a new relationship between states or blocs of states (Terrel and Korner 1987).

It might be thought that any international trade-union communication would be 'alternative' in so far as unions are part of civil society and represent workers. But even where they are (and many are dubiously so) and do (which many do not), they may (and commonly do) depend on or reproduce the international communications practices of capital and state. This is the general case of what I call 'traditional' trade unions, whether of West, East or South.

Where unions, socialist organisations, or labour-support groups, are trying to put the 'movement back into the labour movement' (slogan of the radical US union monthly Labour Notes), different national and international communications practices tend to develop. Solidarnosc in Poland, COSATU in South Africa, the KMU in the Philippines, the now-repressed democratic workers' movement in China, and the tiny Transnationals Information Exchange in Amsterdam belong to different (and sometimes conflicting) traditions. They also have different functions, relations to other social movements, left parties and the state. But all have found themselves confronted by increasingly hostile states, manoeuvring in an increasingly competitive capitalist world market, itself dominated by multinational companies interlocked with powerful inter-state agencies. In confronting this Really-Existing New International Order (RENIO?) they are finding it necessary to

develop their own international communications patterns. In so far as they do develop such new models, they find themselves in parallel with the new international social movements for peace, human rights, of women and for environmental protection.

In studying an experiment by one national industrial trade union, I am thus looking not just at a case of alternative international labour communication but also of alternative international communication more generally. For, just as there exists no study of the international communication practices of the above-named organisations, so there exist none of the international communication of Greenpeace, of Amnesty, of the feminist movement, of the increasingly linked peace movements of West and East.

This, then, is an exploration of the international communications of the Coordination of Spanish Dockworkers - better known simply as the Coordinadora. The Coordinadora has been chosen for study as a national trade union organisation that has placed great emphasis on international solidarity, has attempted to create such links directly between workers at grassroots level, has made major efforts to develop communication to express and foster such internationally, and has even paid theoretical attention to the question of workers and informatisation. The Coordinadora has been involved in solidarity actions concerning Nicaragua and Ethiopian drought victims. It also provided the major stimulus to an informal network of 5-10 waterfront dockworker organisations that was active in Western Europe in the early and mid-1980s. And, in addition to producing a monthly newspaper devoting some 30 percent of its space to foreign and international material, it for some years also produced two bulletins, one in English for its foreign partners and supporters, one in Spanish on port labour developments abroad.

I first came in touch with the Coordinadora and the network at the Alternative Ports and Coasts Conference, organised by the Green Alternative List in Hamburg in 1985. After receiving the Coordinadora's publications and visiting Barcelona briefly in 1987, I spent some weeks in that city in summer 1988. For the research itself I had only two weeks, which explains why I concentrated on the production of its international communication by the Coordinadora rather than its effects on the dockworkers themselves.



The Barcelona affiliate of the Coordinadora, the Organisation of Dockworkers of the Port of Barcelona (OEPB), provides the informal headquarters for the national organisation. It also houses its Centre of Studies (CEC) and produces its monthly newspaper, La Estiba. The OEPB and Coordinadora permitted full access to files and archives. National and international activists provided time and hospitality, as did one of the part-time editors of La Estiba. This openness and generosity creates a certain obligation, which I understand in these terms: to write a constructive but critical account, relating the experience of the Coordinadora to relevant theory and experiences, using a style accessible to interested dockworker activists in Spain and internationally.

This paper is part of a longer study on the Coordinadora (Waterman Forthcoming A), which will also include a content analysis of La Estiba. The longer study is itself the seventh of a series taking place within a project committed to the development of a 'new communications model for a new labour internationalism' (Waterman 1988a). As a labour organisation of the libertarian socialist tradition, the Coordinadora provides the most advanced case I have come across of such a model. The paradox is that, despite all the efforts of the Coordinadora and its foreign partners, international solidarity between dockworkers does not seem to have taken off. And, despite all its extensive and imaginative communication efforts, even a rudimentary means for the exchange of news, analysis, strategy proposals and appeals seems to be lacking. The purpose of this paper, then, is to survey the international communications experience of the Spanish dockworkers' union over a period of some 10 years, to identify the achievements and their limitations, to consider the implications of these for the Coordinadora itself and for the theory and practice of what I call 'internationalist communications'.

## 2. Alternative international labour communication

I define alternative international communication (AIC) as follows:

- 1) the creation of cross-border solidarity relations which enrich and empower popular and democratic communities or collectivities by exchanging, sharing, diversifying and synthesising their ideas, skills and arts; 2) implying a) communication that uses popular language and images confronting those of the oppressor, b) an

orientation toward a general social transformation, c) a mobilising and organising role, d) an active role by the popular sector in production and distribution (Waterman 1988e:26-30, c.f. Stangelaar 1986).

We are here, however, concerned more specifically with alternative international labour communication. Let us consider this matter historically.

There is a long and rich history of international labour and socialist communication, some of which was of an innovative nature - May Day ceremonies, international political-theoretical journals, international worker sports, photo and film movements (Waterman 1985c). The early labour press gave high importance to foreign news, views and even theory. In 1871-80, 37.2 percent of total coverage in the Danish Social-Democratic daily was foreign, more than half of this percentage being on labour specifically (Logue and Callesen 1979: Table 5.1). In 1928-9, 36 percent of total space in the Peruvian socialist monthly Labor was foreign news, literature and analyses, and at least 10 percent was specifically on labour (Waterman and Arellano 1986:27-8, Waterman Forthcoming B). By the 1950s in the Danish case, and by the 1980s in the Peruvian, the quantity of foreign coverage had shrunk dramatically, as had the labour percentage. The solidarity aim or orientation had either disappeared (Denmark) or been much more narrowly defined (Peru). Except for the sectarian left, the early tradition has today been almost forgotten. The dominant contemporary international trade-union media are commonly marked by: 1) dependence on or subordination to capital or state; 2) the privileging of leaders and organisations over members and workers; 3) domination by the printed word and 'world' languages; 4) an absence of debate; 5) hierarchical communication structures and processes (Waterman 1988a:354-7). The situation is now so serious that even major Western producers and supporters of the traditional trade-union press internationally have begun to recognise its sterility. Unfortunately, the alternative model such people tend to refer to is that of the capitalist media (Waterman 1987b:24).

In the later 1970s, along with the rise of the new social movements and the new democratic internationalism, there began to appear alternative international labour media. The sources of such included: 1) geographically-oriented solidarity groups; 2) worker, community or union service centres; 3) democratic 'single-issue' movements; 4) radical church groups; 5) radical academics; 6) new or radicalised union and socialist

organisations. The media forms included newsletters, popular research reports and periodicals, academic journals, teaching aids, books, audiovisuals, documentation and research services. These were characterised by the following: 1) autonomy from capital, state and the traditional labour organisations; 2) the rejection of statism; 3) a focus on the shopfloor and on international solidarity; 4) use of audiovisual forms; 5) their stimulus to or encouragement of debate; 6) their networking structure and processes (Waterman 1988a:357-63).

More recently we have been able to see both the new and the old forces experimenting with video and with computerised databanks and communications. There has also been some limited political debate on the necessity and possibility of creating a new and relevant international communications model, and the role of the old and new bodies in this process (NILS 1988). The international media of the traditional labour and socialist organisations tend to be hamstrung by their traditional ideologies, structures and practices. This makes it almost impossible for them to give, for example, a balanced view of their own affiliates, supporters or funders. And the alternative groups are still limited by their common failure to reflect on their own communications practices; or to consider exactly what international solidarity feelings and activities are; or how these could be communicated by or to workers. So, if an alternative international labour communications model does exist, it is still largely hidden from public view (Waterman 1988e:29).

### 3. The Coordinadora's international communications media: an overview

Let us try to consider all the international communication forms used by the Coordinadora.

1. Face-to-face. Personal travel and contact between national and international labour leaders and their opposite numbers or followers was at the origin of organised labour internationalism. In the case of the Coordinadora this has not simply been a matter of conferences at home and abroad which created and reinforced a sense of international community amongst a small number of leading activists. It is also a matter of visits to and fro by such activists, mostly in connection with protest actions, but also for vacations. We know of such frequent visits to Spain by Ib Lund,

leader of the Arhus dockworkers. He has also made a holiday visit to Las Palmas with his wife. While I was in Barcelona in the summer of 1988, a local leader and his family similarly made a trip to a dockworker friend in France. During such visits, activists may visit the port or the union office, meet groups of local leaders, address conferences and meetings. It should be noted that such foreign travel has been largely confined to a small number of leaders. It did not usually involve rank and file dockworkers. Nor, with one or two exceptions (see La Estiba, No.23, 1987) did it involve systematic study trips or exchanges during which workers could experience each other's working or living conditions.

2. Print media. Print media may have less intense impact than face-to-face meetings but they have been the major means for spreading internationalist ideas and information amongst workers historically (for a relevant case study see, again, Logue and Callesen 1979). Because of their importance for the Coordinadora, and because of the comparative ease with which printed media can be analysed, they will be looked at in more detail below.

3. 'Public relations'. I put this term in quotes because what 'public' really means is a mass created and defined by the dominant media of capital and state, and the 'relations' primarily depend on commercial techniques or styles. Whilst such methods are increasingly used by trade unions in the West (see Douglas 1986 for a US case study), I have no evidence for their systematic use by the Coordinadora either in Spain or abroad. The dominant media were certainly approached on occasion, since the sending of messages to the foreign press was evidently part of the armoury of the international dockworker network. If an important delegation or visitor came to Barcelona or Las Palmas, or if an international conference was organised, then a statement might be made or a press conference called. But the matter does not seem to have gone further than this. Unlike the international organisation Greenpeace, the Coordinadora does not seem to have tried to 'manipulate the mass media manipulators' in its own particular way and with its own particular message.

4. 'Movement relations'. By this term I mean the provision of information to friendly foreign publications and journalists. This is not simply a matter of providing these with free copies of Coordinadora publications.

It also means welcoming foreign visitors, permitting them to attend meetings, taking them on visits of port facilities, providing interviews and hospitality. I have been able to identify 23-4 items on the Coordinadora published in foreign socialist or labour publications in the years since 1984-5 (see bibliography for examples). These items appeared in the UK, Portugal, the USA, Germany, Denmark and Italy, as well - no doubt - as in other countries involved in the international network. Whilst much of this material might have been simple translation of documents or publications received from the Coordinadora, much was based on, or stimulated by, visits to Spain and interviews with activists. The problem is that most of them were published by just two or three people in the UK and USA and published or re-published in just two or three publications. The main authors were the US activist writers/editors, Stan Weir and Don Fitz, and their British opposite number, Mick Parkin. The main publishers have been Fitz' Workers' Democracy and Parkin's Sinews. There lies here a further problem. These periodicals are, respectively, a small magazine and an irregular bulletin, both belonging to an anarcho-syndicalist tradition that is far more marginal in the US and UK than it is in Spain itself. Neither of these publications would even claim to reach out to or significantly influence dockworkers in their respective countries. Other publishers, such as Discordia in Portugal and the deliberately mysterious BM/BLOB in the UK are just as marginal and do not appear to have played any continuing role. Only in one or two cases have articles appeared in what might be called 'broad' or 'alternative' left labour publications, such as the US Labour Notes (Fitz 1988a, Weir 1985b), the German Express (see La Estiba, No.14, 1986) or the British International Labour Reports (see Fitz 1988b). And only the last of these is an international, as distinguished from a foreign, publication. If it were not for the interest, commitment and hard work of such people as Weir, Fitz and Parkin, the Coordinadora would not be known at all in the English-speaking world. And, despite their efforts, it is still barely known to dockworkers in the UK and USA and probably unknown to any in the Communist or Third World.

5. Research services and reports. The Coordinadora has a Centre of Studies at the OEPB office in Barcelona. This receives, files and indexes many foreign (non-Spanish) trade and socialist publications. It was on the basis of such resources that the three part-time researchers at the centre

were able to produce a 53-page report on Capitalist Strategy and Workers' Resistance in the Ports of the Western Mediterranean (Coordinadora 1988). Although probably intended to raise the consciousness of Spanish dockworker activists, the report was published in a traditional academic or scientific form rather than a popular one. In the summer of 1988 it was possible to find a pile of undistributed copies in the Centre of Studies. There was no thought of getting it published more widely, or in another form, within Spain or abroad. The translation into English of an edited version, by Mick Parkin (Forthcoming) was the result of a personal initiative from abroad, not of action by the Coordinadora itself. Finally, it should be noted that this publication was Part One, dealing with capitalist strategies. There is as yet no sign of Part Two, dealing with the worker response. This would be the more original, interesting and action-oriented part. It is also the more difficult one since it probably requires original field research.

6. PTT communications. By this term I mean the use of post, telephone and telegraph services. These are, of course, traditional means of communication familiar to individual dockworkers as well as their leaders. They are also customarily used within the international network, particularly during disputes, as a report on the Alternative Ports and Coasts Conference of 1985 suggests:

The companero from Spain...just picks up the phone, calls his mate in Arhus, Denmark, and says 'You want boycott: OK, is good, we boycott'. (Waterman 1985a)

The Coordinadora also uses the new PTT technique, telefax, for communication within Spain, but it has not used it internationally. This technique is being so used by the traditional trade unions. In addition to permitting communication with each other, telefax also allows rapid communication with the national and international mass media. An officer of the International Metalworkers Federation reports that 40 of its affiliates have them, and that they find these easier to use than computerised communication (MacShane 1989). Computerised communication is not used by the Coordinadora, even though it has an ancient IBM office computer in its Centre of Studies, and even though computerised communication is being increasingly used by new social movements internationally (Media Development 1987, Downing Forthcoming).

#### 4. The Coordinadora's print media in detail

The three major printed publications that the Coordinadora has used for its international, or internationalist, purposes are the monthly newspaper, La Estiba, and the two bulletins, Comunicacion del Extranjero (CdE, 'News from Abroad') and Report from Spain (RfS).

##### 1. 'La Estiba'

No.1 of La Estiba (Stowage) was produced in December 1979 as an A4 (quarto) bulletin, typed on a mechanical or electric typewriter and then duplicated or offset. These issues look like many other bulletins of trade unions, social movements or campaign committees - crudely produced but full of vigour and humour. The early issues were also marked by a considerable foreign or international (F/I) component that has been one of the paper's hallmarks. La Estiba was produced, as it is today, by the OEPB, the Barcelona affiliate of the Coordinadora. Until May 1985 it was produced in several different sizes and formats. At some point between January 1983 and October 1984 it began a New Series. Several issues appeared in an improved format before the professional-style, eight-page tabloid printed paper began with No.8 in July-August 1985.

The new style paper - which has continued unchanged to the present day - appears to have been designed by a professional, with an attractive title line, photos, boxes, white-on-black rubric heads ('Social Alternatives', 'Documentation/Analyses/Debates', etc.) and other stylish typographical elements. A note in No.8 announced that the paper would henceforth appear monthly, and that it required supporting subscriptions from every port. Notes in succeeding numbers reveal that the paper was based on the Centre of Studies of the Coordinadora - although the origin and precise nature of the latter is not made clear to the reader.

As I found out in summer 1988, the CEC was staffed by three part-timers, sharing the equivalent of one docker's monthly wage. This money was itself raised by a lottery organised amongst the dockers - with a SEAT car, or Ptas 900,000 (\$7,300 at 1988 rates), as the prize for the lucky winner (La Estiba, No.8, 1985). The major task of the trio was to ensure that La Estiba did appear regularly and properly edited. In keeping with the

Coordinadora's tradition of not turning dockers into paid officers, the three CEC staff were all non-dockers. Two were ex-workers, one of them being a veteran anarcho-syndicalist and editor of the libertarian bulletin Etcetera. Another was an unemployed history graduate with a working-class background. He spoke a serviceable English. One of the others was teaching himself German. Between them they could also manage with French, Italian and Portuguese material. These three figures remained almost invisible on the pages of the paper until they were retired in 1989. Only at this point was it announced (on the front page of No.46, April 1989) that they had done the job for four years.

Previous to this there had been a front-page warning in No. 37, 1988, of pending changes. This statement revealed the concern of the editors that although they had managed to produce the paper on a regular basis, they had not managed to really involve the ordinary dockers in its production. Yet, it was said, it was precisely such an involvement of the different ports and workers, in reporting and debating the issues that concerned them, that was necessary. The second statement (No.46, April 1989), concerned with the handover to a team of ordinary workers, reveals further characteristics of La Estiba.

One such feature is the apparent understanding of collectivity as anonymity. We are told nothing about the past or future of the three old editors except their first names. And we do not even know how many there are in the new team. This anonymity is uncommon in either conventional or radical labour publications, at least in capitalist democracies, except for the clandestine or semi-clandestine left. Radical labour publications are often at pains to make clear to readers exactly who is responsible for the publication and for particular contributions. (Compare the US monthly Labour Notes, or the British-based International Labour Reports). In reading La Estiba it is often difficult to make out from where exactly an editorial comment or introduction is coming. Is the comment or analysis some kind of collective position (of the paper or the organisation)? Or is it simply intended as an individual attitude or orientation of one of the team?

Another characteristic revealed in the later announcement is the openness towards outside contributors, although the nature or nationality of these often remains unspecified. In both its national and international



coverage La Estiba has a considerable amount of non-portworker and even non-labour material. This seems, however, to be chosen quite eclectically, although preference is apparently for items from or about the anarcho-syndicalist left, libertarians and the new social movements (ecology, peace, human rights).

Whilst a fuller account of the nature of La Estiba depends on completion of my study, it is possible to give some initial impressions, aided by examination of one sample issue. This sample issue, No. 10, October 1985, has been chosen precisely for its high proportion and wide spread of foreign and international coverage (see again Appendices A and D1).

A major front-page article attacks the expulsion of the West Saharan liberation movement, Polisario, from Spain. A full-page article argues the class basis of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. Another item criticises the Spanish government's equation of terrorism with breaches of human rights. These are three items, thus, dealing with major international issues unrelated to ports and dockworkers. Two shorter items, one on anarcho-syndicalists in the USA, one on radical mineworkers in the UK, show the Coordinadora's interest in libertarian socialism and grassroots worker movements abroad. There is a two-page analysis, translated from an Italian Marxist newspaper, on the development of the cargo-handling industry in Europe. Such lengthy and detailed analyses are a recurring feature in La Estiba. Finally, we have two items concerned with practical and concrete solidarity action. The first is the demand of the OEPB in Barcelona for the immediate departure of a South African ship. The second is a letter from a Liverpool dockworkers' leader pointing out the similarity of British and Spanish dockworker problems.

I state in Waterman (Forthcoming A), that we can identify three styles in the history of the European labour and socialist press: the Rhetorical/Denunciatory, the Agitational/Persuasive and the Analytical/Informational (c.f. Logue and Callesen 1979:27-31). I argue that the right tone for a contemporary labour paper is not one or the other but a combination of these, with an emphasis on the third. Whether one agrees with this argument or not, one can find such a combination in this sample issue.

I am further concerned in my forthcoming study to identify the ideology of the Coordinadora, as expressed in its paper. Whilst we could loosely

characterise the ideology in the sample issue as 'Marxist' or 'radical socialist', I am looking for something more specific. One such ideology is the Anarcho-Syndicalist (with the ideal of a world of stateless societies based on workers' councils). This note can be identified in these texts. But so can a more amorphous one, 'Resistance Politics' (Naves 1988). This is an attitude of militant mass-based opposition, but without an understanding of the contemporary capitalist project and without an alternative to such. La Estiba can hardly be accused of lack of attention to the international capitalist project for cargo-handling. But neither in this issue nor in any other do we find similar attention either to labour-movement strategies or to alternative social projects - either for society as a whole or the cargo-handling industry alone.

What the above criticisms suggest is that there has been no systematic thinking within the Coordinadora, or the CEC, about the precise character of La Estiba, no knowledge of classical socialist texts on the press, no comparison with contemporary radical media (for which see, respectively, Mattelart and Siegelaub 1983, Downing 1984). This is hardly surprising. The paper, is one of many activities carried out by the Coordinadora on its shoestring budget. Apart from the layout, the paper reveals little knowledge of journalistic practices - conventional or alternative. By the same tokens, however, La Estiba is possibly a less mediated expression of the organisation than it would otherwise be.

2. 'Comunicacion del Extranjero'. This is an occasional typed and xeroxed bulletin of F/I news and documents, of which I was only able to find 11 copies in the archive of the Coordinadora's Centre of Studies. Since Nos.48-59 are dated August 1985-March 1986, we may hazard the guess that it had appeared for the previous 3-4 years also. No.59, however, was the last issue. The editor of this bulletin - which had no editorial address or name on it - was actually the jurist Enrique Gonzalez, of the Jusocan social-legal advice centre, working with the dockworkers of Las Palmas in the Canary Islands. The one- to three-page bulletin consists to a large extent of translations of letters and documents, a number of which later appeared in La Estiba. CdE, however, was clearly meant to supplement the paper. And one can assume that it was sent not only to Barcelona but also to the other ports. In addition to the translations, there are occasional calls to

action. The news items and letters are primarily from or about the international dockworker network and the anarcho-syndicalist or libertarian fringe of the labour movement. We can here list the titles or contents in a few of the available issues:

No.50, November 22, 1955

1. Rotterdam: phone call from Jim Stavinga on a local strike.
2. Germany: summary of items from Hamburg dockworker bulletin, Alternative.
3. USA: latest issue of Stan Weir's Random Lengths.
4. Italy: invitation to CGIL dockworker conference in Genoa, to which the French CGT dockworker union is also invited, and where it is hoped to create solidarity 'from Algeciras to Greece'.

No.51, December 1, 1985

1. Circular letter from the Industrial Workers of the World: two-page invitation to Mayday 100th Anniversary Conference in USA.

No.53, January 23, 1986

1. CGT holds parallel Mediterranean meeting in Marseilles, including CC00 of Barcelona and other (Communist?) unions, during the CGIL meeting in Genoa: a non-confrontational approach to the CGT is suggested.

No.56, February 28, 1986

1. Telegram of solidarity with Coordinadora from Scandinavia.
2. Phone call seeking information about Spanish dock strike.
3. Forthcoming marriage of Ib Lund in Aarhus, giving address for congratulations.

This improvised and informal bulletin conveys much of the spirit of the international dockworker network. It also reveals - even exaggerates - the international orientation of the Coordinadora towards the anarcho-syndicalist fringe of the labour movement. The bulletin seems quite unselective in its offerings, possibly reproducing any and every letter or phone call received. Cessation of production, shortly followed by that of NfS, was said by Gonzalez to have been due to pressure of local work (phone interview, July 1988). We can, however, also take it as a sign of the disappointment of the Coordinadora with the results of its international efforts.

3. 'Report from Spain'. This is an even more remarkable product than CdE. Coming, again, from the hands of Enrique Gonzalez in Las Palmas, it

ran for seven years or so, from 1979 to 1987. Since it also ran for 64 issues, this means an average of nine or ten per year. The bulletin was initially produced as one or two pages of typewritten material. From No.43, 1985, onwards it came out in more original form. It was produced on a personal or micro-computer, printed in tiny 15-point typescript on a standard airletter form. The form was then sealed, addressed with a printed sticker and (sometimes with an additional personal scribble from the editor) dispatched to readers worldwide. A total of some 100 pages of material was translated, printed and sent out during the seven years. As a cheap, fast and effective form of specialised alternative international printed communication this can hardly be bettered.

RfS gives a blow by blow account of the Spanish dockworkers' struggles over the period. It was, of course, primarily concerned to inform the Coordinadora's foreign friends of its own policies and activities, and to seek their support during disputes. No.1 (1979), begins with what seems like a general introduction to the situation of dockworkers and their organisation in Spain. No.64 (March 18, 1987) completes the publication by dealing with the settlement of the bitter dispute with the Contenemar company. A striking example (in more senses than one) of use during disputes is provided by the following extract from No.6 (January, 1980). It refers to the Spanish and international response to the use of strikebreakers in the Canary Islands port of Tenerife. The text is in the original English, uncorrected:

Harbours in Spain were advised through the Coordinadora. The ships had serious difficulties at their arrival. Vigo, that had not struck during the appointed days (27 and 28), blockaded at all the ships coming from Tenerife that had been loaded with strikebreakers, then, they were threatened and they replied with a general strike in the harbour. Two ships leaving for England were blockaded at their arrival. The 'Daikotu Maru 31' in Liverpool, and the 'Black Watch' in London. The ships owner were in disposition to settle an arrangement with the dockers in Tenerife, by the employers suffered pressure from the employers union. On Thursday, 2nd January, the employers Union in Liverpool menaced to lock the Harbour. That should manage to a general strike in the British harbours, and there on to every European harbours. The employers union in Tenerife is seated today, 3rd, to make up a decision. At 13'00 o'clock was announced the decision of FRUCASA ship agent of one of the ships, to accept conditions and settle the dockers claim. The ship blockaded in Liverpool, will be released. At seven p.m. the other employer agreed the Tenerife claim and settled. As soon as the news were known in

England, the blockaged cargos were realased. The terms of claim and settlement was:

1.- A written signed by the employer by which he apologises the International Comitee, and engages not to act in that wrong way any more. (We sent copy of that estatment).

2.- Payment of wages lost by the Teneriffe dockers concerning the job made by non registered workers.

3.- Payment of a fine each employer of 1.000 US dollars (in spanish currency value), to a Charity institution (Children Hospital).

We thank international solidarity, and congratulate on what unity is able to do. We would appreciate to receive from abroad any press report or comentary on the spanish harbour strike. We would like also have copy of rules or laws regulating the strike in each country, and experiencies in international solidarity fights, in order to improve our estrategy and possibilities. Thanks every body once more.

The reports on and appeals for solidarity with Spain merged with those on international coordination and action more generally. Here it becomes clear that RfS is much more than an information bulletin. It is an instrument of agitation for international solidarity, conveying a considerable sense of immediacy and urgency. Increasingly, however, the struggle in Spain itself began to dominate the pages of RfS. This is particularly clear in 1986. All three Coordinadora serials had been paying attention to the 100th May Day Anniversary Conference planned by the IWW in the USA. One of the few international items in RfS during this period reads as follows (No.53, May 1, 1986):

Chicago International Conference.- We sorry not to be able to atend that conferece as desired, because of our trouble. We wish the greates success, and be able reinforce and encourage international coordination and solidarity through mail. JUST TODAY WE COMMEMORATE THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE HAYMARKET EVENTS. International solidarity is the way for workers liberation.

Gonzalez added by hand to my own copy:

I did'nt go to Chicago. I continue working for wider direct communication. Do you know dockers grass movement in third world?

As RfS began to run out of energy, No.63 (October 16, 1986) gave but four lines to the coming international conference in Barcelona. There was a four-month delay till No.64. RfS then went out of existence with as little fanfare or explanation as it had come into existence seven years earlier.

We do not know how many copies of RfS were sent out, to whom, and with what possible effect. We know only that it was used, appreciated and publicised by the Coordinadora's libertarian labour journalist supporters, Stan Weir (Random Lengths, USA), Don Fitz (Workers' Democracy, USA) and Mick Parkin (Sinews, UK). We can surmise that it played a crucial role in the international network during the peak period of its activities. Its eventual collapse should not conceal its achievements at that time or its value as a model now. I have already suggested that it provided a cheap, fast and effective form of specialised international communication. I would like to stress the value of its personal authorship (although the editor did not personalise the material). We should further note the way Gonzalez overcame the language barrier, revealing it not as an insuperable obstacle but simply as a practical problem. RfS was, of course, produced by one of the Coordinadora's few intellectuals, rather than by a dockworker leader. But it comes over as a voice of the dockworkers, with little or no intrusion from the editor. It would seem to provide a useful model for unions, workers and resource groups motivated to carry out small-scale, low-cost networking internationally.

##### 5. A Coordinadora information theory?

If the Coordinadora had its own information theory, why put it at the end of this account rather than at the beginning? This is because, despite its address to alternative communication strategies and even to international communication, the strategy itself remains an addendum to the international communication activity of the Coordinadora, and even to the work of the Coordinadora more generally. The theory amounts to one unsigned document, nonetheless traceable back to Jusocan, a legal and social advice centre, in Las Palmas and then to the ubiquitous Enrique Gonzalez. 'Information and the Construction of Socialism' should really be entitled 'Workers and Information' because that is what it is about. It was originally submitted to the Alternative Ports and Coasts Conference in Hamburg, 1985, where it seems to have had little or no effect on the discussions about computerisation. Originally written in Spanish, it was translated into German for the conference. It was later translated and published in English, and produced in a manuscript version in French

(Coordinadora 1985a-d, Jusocan 1985). It was also published in Spanish in La Estiba (No.12, December 1985). This is by any measure both a unique document and a remarkable one. There follows a summary and commentary.

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

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

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

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

studies 'by means of periodical meetings and seminars at national and international level'.

This may be the most original and radical declaration on the working-class movement and communications produced since the 1930s (for which see Waterman 1985c). It not only picks up a number of themes raised at that period, it also adopts a similarly assertive and internationalist stance. It goes beyond that experience, however, in its absence of workerism, in its non-party-political nature and in its valuing of personal relations and creativity. It echoes numerous elements to be found in contemporary theoretical works (see, again, Waterman 1985c). It ought to become a reference point for future debate and action. The major problem with this remarkable document is that it had no organic relationship with the international communications or even the demands strategy of the Coordinadora. This is not because it was produced by Gonzalez. He was quite capable of speaking the language of the activists, and he was rather well integrated with them, locally, nationally and internationally.

The problem seems rather to have been the distance between the level of this document and that of the industry, of the workers and of the Coordinadora itself. Although informatisation was creeping into Spanish ports during the 1980s, it was not yet confronting them or transforming the labour process in the way it was in the North European ports. As for the workers, they had undergone a transformation from manual labourers into semi-skilled or skilled machine operators, but not yet into computer operators. Whilst, furthermore, computers were by this period becoming an item of mass consumption in countries like the UK and France, this was not the case for Spain. As for the Coordinadora itself, it is, in many ways, a traditional worker organisation. This is not a matter of ideology, since its anarcho-syndicalism is less a matter of doctrine than of working style. This tradition, moreover, keeps it open and sensitive to new democratic social movements and demands from which others might be cut off. The problem is more a matter of an artisan labour movement culture. If the word 'artisan' evokes mechanical skill, self-education, corporate identity and solidarity, a radical-democratic temper and a scepticism with respect to intellectuals, then this is precisely what I wish to evoke. The positive implications of this culture have been rejoiced by labour historians. The implications for the communications and international work of the



Coordinadora are its do-it-yourself nature. This style is demonstrated as much in the publications produced by the intellectual Gonzalez as it is in the worker-edited La Estiba. From the evidence of RfS, Gonzalez was acutely aware of the necessity of international communication for international solidarity. But there seems to have been no attempt to bridge the gap between his radical and sophisticated information theory and his simple and practical international communications work.

## 6. Reflections

My reflections already begin above, since what I have to say there evidently has general implications for the international communications work of the Coordinadora. But I wish here to return to the more general question implied by the introduction to this paper: how alternative was the international communications practice of the Coordinadora? In considering the first question, we need to return to the definition of AIC above. This definition does not distinguish between ends and means. But the first part does lean towards the political-cultural values and aims of alternative international communication. And the second part does stress forms and means. Let us consider the international communications of the Coordinadora in this order.

1. Political-cultural values and aims. We must immediately recognise that we do not have even enough indirect information to answer this question with respect to the 'community or collectivity' of the dockers concerned. We do not know how Spanish dockers felt about others, how they understood internationalism, what their sense of an international community of dockworkers was. To find out would require a survey (of rather more sophistication than the exploratory one in Waterman and Arellano 1985). What we can surmise from the decline of solidarity activity is that any sense of international identity there might have been amongst Spanish dockers at the peak of activity was not strong enough to persist in the face of its absence elsewhere. Or that a consciousness of common international problems and interests was over-ridden by the specificity and intensity of a struggle with the Spanish state and 'capital in Spain' - whether national or transnational (for which see Waterman Forthcoming A). This is, however, not the end of the matter. We also have to consider the activists within the

dockworker community, and even the tiny group of international activists amongst these. In both cases we also have a problem of lack of evidence. But it would be safe to assume that some dozens of Spanish dockworker leaders were and are reached by the international media of the Coordinadora, and have been sensitised by them to the international nature of their situation and the necessity of internationalism for dealing with it. We are then left with the dozen or so involved in the international communications work itself. That this is a tiny group does not make them insignificant. Most of them are working dockers. And the one or two intellectuals amongst these have intimate relations with dockers. They are also highly oriented towards the workers on the waterfront. Indeed, they address themselves to no one else. It is evident from their activities that these were and to some extent still are involved in 'exchanging, sharing diversifying and synthesising' at least their ideas and skills with their opposite numbers internationally. What they have not (yet?) proven capable of doing is 1) coming to terms with the leaden weight of nation-state specificity and identity in Spain or abroad, and/or 2) communicating their own sense of international identity to the rank and file dockers.

2. Forms and means. The definition here was broken down into four distinct but reinforcing elements.

The first was that of the use of popular language and images that simultaneously confront those of the oppressor. The language of CdE and RfS was popular, far removed from either the specialised technical language of experts or the specialised political jargon of ideologues. It was also confrontational, here being far removed from the consensus terminology of social democracy and industrial relations. In another sense the language was not popular. In so far as the internationally-oriented publications of the Coordinadora were in English they were not immediately accessible even to many internationalist activists in non-English-speaking countries. The language problem in this sense persists. As for 'popular images' (distinct from figures of speech) these were or so little significance in the Spanish case that I have not even mentioned them above. Posters, videos, photos and music cassettes have been produced and circulated within the international network - some of them quite effectively - but these were not from Spain. Some dockers in Barcelona were talking of making a video of their struggles

when I was there in 1988, but the Coordinadora is evidently far less advanced here than labour movements in some Third World countries (see Festa and Santoro 1987).

The second element is the orientation toward a general social transformation. With the exception of the document on 'Information and Socialism' (which evidently was not popular in any of the above senses), I do not think that this ideal or spirit was conveyed by the international media of the Coordinadora, which thus remained within the framework of a 'politics of resistance' which it shares with militant workers and unions of other traditions internationally. To be both revolutionary and popular in a non-revolutionary situation and with a non-revolutionary community is, of course, something that makes squaring the circle infant's play. It requires a tapping at the roots of popular dreams and desires which are concealed or repressed in everyday life and struggle. It may require artistic forms and skills, and the contribution of skilled artists. These skills and such persons can be found in and around the international network - for example in Arhus, where activist Ib Lund practices both music and video-making, and where a professional artist, Hans Oldau Krull, has produced posters for the dockers (and miners) internationally. But even there they have not been used to express or stimulate feelings or ideas of a transformation, even of cargo-handling labour.

The third element is the mobilising and organising role. This role was evidently the primary one for the Coordinadora's international media and - within a limited circle - it carried this out effectively. The problem here is the limits of the circle. The limits within Spain were those of the industry, since even La Estiba did not aim beyond this. The limits internationally were those of the network and its foreign friends. Now, I have suggested that RfS was an appropriate means for small-scale international networking. Reaching wider would not necessarily have implied a more professional production. It would have meant simply...reaching wider. Occasional gestures were made in such a direction but La Estiba shows no interest in dockers in East Europe and the Third World, although relevant news and analysis is available internationally. And, in interviews, international activists of the Coordinadora expressed opposition to any proseletysing role. Yet it would seem to me that the effort necessary to 'create a need' for communication amongst dockworkers in other countries and

world areas might have paid off in several ways. The first is evidently in broadening the Coordinadora's internationalism, which - as far as dockworkers was concerned - was effectively limited to Western Europe. The second is in energising the Spanish organisation and the European network with dockworker struggles of a more dramatic nature, possibly themselves raising the more universal questions about human rights, state power, ownership and control (I am thinking of Poland, South Africa, the Philippines, Nicaragua). The third is in allying industrial worker internationalism with that of the democratic internationalisms in Spain (human rights, Third-World solidarity, etc). The last is in overcoming a certain 'division of internationalist attention', in which the Coordinadora's internationalism is addressed, in the First World, primarily to ports and dockworkers and, in the Third World, primarily to human rights (including independence, democracy, food, etc).

The fourth element is the active role of the popular sector concerned in the production and distribution of the messages. Here I think the Coordinadora has so far seriously failed (we don't know what will happen under the new editorial group). The media were produced by four or five specialists, largely by one man himself. Even where these specialists were workers they were not dockworkers, nor had they ever been. And even had they been dockers, this is not the point. The point is that the dockers more generally should have been participating actively in the production of these media. They did so in no way. Nor were they really involved in their distribution.

In considering production and distribution of the media for international communication, we tend to think of communication as a technical instrument or channel, and then to consider how to involve people in these processes. In the case of international communication there then appear all the additional problems related to distance and language. We should not, however, forget face-to-face communication. In this case the 'medium' (a member of one community relating directly to one of another) is quite literally the 'message' (directly transmitting or receiving sensual experience). It was primarily leaders who travelled and these did so primarily for meetings. We may, however, surmise that numerous North European dockers would have gone to Spain within the framework of commoditised mass vacations. It is not utopian (in the customary negative

sense of this regrettably misused word) to propose that dockworkers could have met each other on vacation, or should have worked with each other on an exchange basis. 'Social tourism' was a 19th century labour movement invention. And there is no reason in principle why - particularly for Spain and even more particularly for the Canary Islands - it could not have been revived, taking advantage of the rights and resources of contemporary West European workers, and the means provided by capitalist tourism. As we have seen, such 'individual social tourism' did take place, but only for the leaders. As for 'international work experience' this is a practice which goes back to the journeymen, a self-organised community of travelling craftsman, representing the human basis for early labour internationalism (Logue 1980, Logue and Callesen 1989). With capitalist industrialisation, this practice seems to have been taken over and adapted by capitalists, who sometimes organise work exchanges for apprentices and, more often, for technical and managerial personnel. In the labour movement the practice was articulated with solidarity activity by the Communists, when they recruited skilled foreign socialist workers to build up the new Soviet industry in the 1930s (Rutgers and Trinchler 1974). More recently the practice has been revived, within the framework of the new democratic internationalism. This is in the shape, for example, of the internacionalistas (internationalists) who have been streaming into Nicaragua since the revolution (Burbach and Nunez 1987:83).

To mention all the restrictions and shortcomings of the Coordinadora's international communications efforts is not to discredit or even criticise it. It is to register the extent and limitations of a unique and remarkable experience. It is to suggest possible ways forward for the Coordinadora, and to indicate lessons to be drawn for the development of alternative international labour communication more generally. As to the question of how alternative this international communication was, this is not really a matter of quantification, since we have no appropriate indicators. I think it is more a matter of recognising that this represented an energetic effort in a novel, radical and democratic direction and spirit. It is also one that can hardly be interpreted and certainly cannot be advanced within a traditional model of international labour communication. The experience of the Coordinadora demands an alternative framework of understanding. It also potentially contributes to the construction of such a framework. This is

not a contribution likely to have been in the minds of the Coordinadora's activists, even those most heavily engaged in international communications work. It is nonetheless a socially significant contribution, and one that could feed back into the practice of internationalist communication more generally.

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