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"The Seattle IMC and the socialist anarchist tradition"

Introduction

The confrontation that raged in Seattle on November 30, 1999 and the days following between city, state and federal law enforcement officers, and activists of many stripes contesting the World Trade Organization's power, policies, and its Council of Ministers' secretive dealings, was a pivotal transition in the growing international movement contesting global neo-liberalism (O'Brien et al. 2000; Cohen & Rai 2000). Just as Daniel Bell wrote *The End Of Ideology* (1960), his memorial to what he saw as a bygone era of political activism, shortly before the dawn of the tumultuous sixties, so Francis Fukuyama (1992) published his widely acclaimed epitaph on anti-capitalist alternatives, *The End Of History And The Last Man*, in which he argued that the collapse of the Soviet system marked the end of an era. Which indeed it did, but as opposed to Fukuyama's gloss, it was an era in which, absurdly, sovietism had been agreed by its advocates and its pro-capitalist foes as the only alternative human beings could conceivably devise to capitalism. However, "the only game in town" argument began to look distinctly chilling, indeed heartlessly arrogant, as the full harshness of Structural Adjustment Policies and the South's financial indebtedness to transnational banks laid down yet another global crisis for the enlightened capitalist economic order.[1]

In the confrontation in Seattle, the roles of radical media of many kinds were of the highest importance. They served to prepare the ground for the demonstrations months beforehand, to enable on-the-ground communication among the demonstrators at the time, to bypass corporate media in order to inform the global public of what had transpired in the confrontation and afterwards, and to facilitate international discussion of the issues thereafter. At the media heart – but not the center, for that implies a form of directive authority that was absent – of this political activity during the demonstrations and over the year following, was Seattle's Independent Media Center. In later confrontations during the World Bank meeting in Washington DC in April 2000, during the Organization of American States meeting in Windsor, Ontario, in June 2000, during the U.S. Republican and Democratic Parties' nomination conventions later that year, during the IMF and World Bank meeting in Prague in November 2000, and in still other places where the powerful foregathered to forge their policy priorities, Independent Media Centers emerged as a dynamic, original and contestatory politico-mediatic constellation.

This chapter will address the experience of the IMCs over the first year of their life, through the beginning of 2001. While it is too early and anyway implausible to predict their future trajectories, they do represent a major new phenomenon that bears both careful study and considered support.

Radical media and the build-up to Seattle

By "radical media" (Downing 2000) – or "citizens' media" (Rodríguez 2001) – I refer to those small-scale media of many technical and genre formats that have no allegiance to corporate, religious or governmental authority, but rather set out to suborn

the status quo and propose defenses and alternatives to it. Typically they operate as an alternative public sphere in close relationship to political and social movements. Currently there is evident a strongly renewed interest in their operation (cf. Linder 1999; Couldry 2000; Hamilton 2000; Atton 2001; Gumucio Dagron 2001; Fairchild 2001; Halleck 2001), even though commentators to the right or the left who are obsessed with bigness tend to note these as pathetic pinpricks if they register them at all. In fact, as I have argued at some length in the work cited above, their historical and contemporary roles within all kinds of social movements have been far greater than our static notions of mainstream media and their quantifiable "audiences" would suggest. And within the framework of communication policy debate, discussion of policies for radical media is just as significant as the more conventional focus on the big players.

In the build-up to the Seattle confrontations, radical media were tremendously important. For mainstream media, it often appeared as though the opposition movements had materialized out of nowhere. But as reporter Geov Parrish (1999a), who covered the events intensively for *The Seattle Weekly*, noted in a feature dated September 11th 2000, the preparations had begun long before with a plethora of groups, from U.S. steelworkers who had booked 1000 rooms in metro area hotels to 700 international groups who had signed on to the umbrella group Citizens' Trade Campaign, to farmers', church, environmentalist and peace organizations.[2]

Indeed it is arguable that the real turning point had emerged over two years previously when April 1998 demonstrations in Canada, fed by very active public debate for over a year beforehand in *Maclean's*, *Canadian Forum* and other media (e.g. Schofield 1997; Clarke 1998), tipped the scales and forced the Multilateral Agreement on

Investment (MAI) into cold storage (*The Economist* 3/14/98; Haedeman 1998). The MAI planning documents were a prime example of global neo-liberal policy (Davis 1998) that many Canadians as well as others around the world saw as subverting national autonomy in vital economic, cultural and political matters. Some defined MAI as "NAFTA on steroids."

This episode simultaneously revealed the bombastic arrogance of global neo-liberal policy-making and the possibility of dealing it a sharp reverse as a result of collective challenge aided by the internet.[3] The lesson was not lost in the run-up to Seattle, and indeed was underscored by 1999 riots in Geneva during WTO consultations there, and further demonstrations in dozens of cities around the world to coincide with the June 1999 meetings of G8 in Köln. The London *Reclaim The Streets* confrontation in June 1999 received particularly strong global publicity as a result of extensive property damage to the city's financial district occurring toward the close of the demonstration.[4]

The internet was particularly energetically deployed for debating and organizational purposes, including preparing citizens' media coverage of the confrontation and alternative news coverage of its progress. Some of the leading radical media projects involved included the long-established Paper Tiger Television <info@papertiger.org>, Deep Dish Television <deepdish@igc.org> and Radio For Peace International <info@rfpi.org>, as well as the somewhat more recent Free Speech TV <programming@fstv.org>, Big Noise Productions <web@bignoisefilms.com>, Media Island International <mii@alywa.net>, Whispered Media <com@videoactivism.org>, and the Australian project Community Activist Technology <cat@cat.org.au>. The Minnesota-based Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy set up a press service for

international media, the organization Real Impact set up a live audio- and video-streaming operation to report inside and outside the convention center, and the organizations Public Citizen and People for Fair Trade joined forces to provide radio facilities for Pacifica Radio, for radio host Jim Hightower's syndicated program, and for National Radio Project. EarthJustice Legal Center produced a daily newspaper, the *World Trade Observer* (Parrish 1999b).

In addition to these more technologically based media, other grassroots art activists such as puppeteers, banner-designers, teeshirt designers, street theatre actors, musicians, were energetic in preparing for and contributing to the contestation of the WTO (cf. Schloss 2000). The drums that consistently reverberated from various points in the streets were equally of considerable importance in maintaining a sense of momentum, challenge and solidarity.

> "November 30 began as a sort of pageant. It was early in the morning. Thousands of people assembled. Most of them wore exotic costumes. One man was dressed as a superhero with a dollar sign across his chest and long johns under boxer shorts. Some dressed as jugglers and clowns. Others were dressed as sea turtles, butterflies and trees. The demonstrators carried colorful banners.
> They pulled parade floats with giant cartoon puppets representing caricatured aspects of corporate greed." Richmond (2000: ch.3)

To understand the roles of radical media in Seattle as elsewhere is very hard to do unless we interlink all these forms of communication and expression (cf. Mohammadi and Sreberny-Mohammadi 1994). The point is hard to overstate: a great deal of IMC activity consists of radical counter-information, which is vital, but which absolutely requires complementary aesthetic and affective communication strategies. As the Situationist slogan frames it, "All power to the imagination!": none of us is simply a brain only in need of missing rational-cognitive data.

This interlinking is true expressively, but also organizationally, which is precisely where the Seattle Indymedia Center came into play. Not that it was, as already stressed, the directing center (there was a convergence center for developing tactics and counter-tactics), nor even a directing communication center, but rather the single most significant *enabling* communication center, perhaps even more so after the event itself. It was its imaginative deployment of digital media technologies combined with its horizontal organization that in turn captured the imagination of so many activists around the USA and other nations. It was its ongoing operation after Seattle that fueled and energized many further challenges to neo-liberal globalism.

The Seattle IMC during the protest

I propose to expand on those two points, namely (1) the *horizontal* integration of multiple media and artistic communication activities, and (2) the search for "neo-anarchist" organizational models, along with the linked storage and accumulation of reflection on media-organizing experience, including the attempt to demystify needed technical information.

Media Mesh. The frequent stress in both sympathetic and unsympathetic accounts of the Seattle confrontation on what was at the time the technically fairly novel utilization of digital technology to prepare and mobilize protest, should not blind us to the extraordinary combination of the most banal forms of communication technology with whizbang hitech. For instance, both in Seattle, and later in the April 16, 2000, World Bank protests in Washington DC, the IMC organizational record (Blueprint 2000; Sand 2000) urges the irreplaceable function inside the physical IMC space for effective communication during a protest activity…of *whiteboards*! Likewise, in subsequent

discussions of the future for IMCs and the wider diffusion of their information, voices were heard calling for newsprint versions of information otherwise out of reach to people the wrong side of the digital divide (cf. Arne 2000).

However, the ability to stream audio and video brought back to the IMC site from a mass of independent media activists ranging the streets of Seattle, and to edit together this material later into documentaries,[5] was indeed a coup. Webcasting this material simultaneously with the events was equally a powerful use of digital technology to convey the reality of the protestors' challenge. But side by side, it is vital to emphasize - in order to keep our feet from sliding off into cyberspace! – the mundane materiality of the media mesh.

Thus, having enough toner, having enough copiers to handle overload breakdown and more than one fax machine, finding the best rates on cell-phone hires, negotiating a DSL line in sufficient time to have it up and running, having a space that worked sound-wise for recording purposes, having walkie-talkies sufficiently close to the protest zone to function, printing a well-designed card to distribute to demonstrators to let them know of the IMC's function and location, having people experienced in logging audio and video files, the evergreen dynamism of still photos, having enough network cards: such factors were found to be vital in Seattle, Washington DC, and elsewhere. This cook-book list (far from complete) is included here in order to ram home the point that a media mesh is indeed essential. The walkie-talkie and sound recording problem examples also illustrate a point that will be more obvious still when we come to questions of organization below, namely that questions of space and place are absolutely not ironed out by digital communication technology. For some this is very stale news, but not yet for enough.

The impact was extraordinary in the coverage of the Seattle confrontation of having a hundred or more videographers on the streets and *inside* the action,[6] as opposed to another very large number from mainstream media safely ensconced behind police lines and with their agenda largely pre-set by their employers and their typical routines.[7] The striking difference in costs of the reporting work of the activists (compared to the paid professional teams), combined with the advantage of physical vantage-point, enabled their pictures, sound and written reportage to dispute the mainstream media characterization of the demonstrators as violent, disruptive, uninformed, and to give neoliberalism's global opponents considerable heart and energy.

Organization: the deepest yawn of all? The organizational dimension of IMCs may seem the least seductive of all possible topics, but are arguably a make-or-break issue. One of the intriguing and indeed one of the most promising features of the growth of IMCs has been their degree of attention to precisely this humdrum matter.

Let me clarify: the twentieth century was dominated by a single model of organizing for radical political change, with its two rivals largely sidelined. The hegemonic model was the leninist one, a highly hierarchical and quasi-militaristic form of organization forged originally in the fire of opposition to the Russian Tsars and their secret police, and the consequent need for clandestinity and discipline in the interests of survival. Its adoption by the victorious Bolsheviks as the model for all political organizing and for media effectively stamped it internationally as the winning recipe, despite the fact that it then permitted the indescribable mass repression of the Stalin era. But for many - during and after the first half of the century, of world wars, the worldwide 1930s Depression, fascism and nazism and the Holocaust, the rape of Nanjing, the

nuclear devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki -the notion that constructive social change was actually feasible and was taking place in a real country, was exceptionally attractive. The alternative seemed to be that there was no way out from the world's disorder. Most people want to feel that something is practically realizable before they will sacrifice for it, so Soviet Russia, China, Cuba, became for many collectively (and then competitively) the "proof" that capitalism had a workable alternative. For many in the final decades of the twentieth century, the vision of a thoroughgoing Islamic order, where corruption and exploitation would not be hegemonic but would be subject to proper punishment, led to a similar idealization of Iran under the late ayatollah Khomeini's tutelage.

The two other alternatives that had some play in the twentieth century were socialist anarchism and Gandhian non-violence. The former, however, was largely pushed off the stage after 1917 through the initial success of the Bolshevik revolution, which appeared to prove that the marxists had won the long battle between them and the anarchists about the state (even though in Spain, Mexico and some other countries socialist anarchism continued to have a presence). Gandhian non-violence was mostly restricted to political movements in two countries, namely the Quit India movement and the Civil Rights movement in the USA, though it was never undisputed in either among those fighting for the same causes.

But then came 1989-91, including the June 1989 events in Beijing, and suddenly there really was no magic place where things worked differently. The most deeply rooted ostrich could see that, a number of whom went into terminal political depression. So, as Fukuyama and many others concluded, that appeared to be that.

Except that it was actually, arguably, the crucible – *at last!* - of fresh thinking, deprived of what had turned out to be the deadening prop of a fairyland far far away. This thinking could draw upon both socialist anarchist traditions and Gandhian traditions without necessarily being in hock to either, and could seek to respond flexibly and imaginatively to new trends and movements. In an era of triumphant transnational corporate neo-liberal policies, such thinking was more urgently needed than ever, and could proceed without the ethical hypocrisy of defending the indefensible in Russia, China, or anywhere else.

This, precisely, is the historical point of intersection between the organizational practice and debates within the IMCs over the year 2000 and since, and the onward march of neo-liberalism. This is why attention to those debates and that experience is so important, and why the conscious accumulation by IMC activists of a reservoir of organizing experience, both logistical and political, is such a significant step. Their focus is a combined political and mediatic one, although in practice the balance between those foci both varies and is disputed terrain. For some, the primary goal is grassroots political activism, and for others, radical journalism.[8] The two trajectories do not automatically dovetail, and their confluence in the IMCs seemed likely to continue to be one of the issues facing these projects (though not necessarily in a threatening fashion).

The organizational watchword over the first year was "consensus decision-making," a notion that many dismiss out of hand as unrealizable and that others love for its ideals while also sporting scars from attempting to make it work! The reason for its being the watchword was twofold, political and practical.

Politically, many individuals were influenced by one or other version of socialist anarchist thought, in some cases by earlier activists such as Emma Goldman[9] or by the Spanish anarchist movement of the 1930s, in others by the more recent argument for Temporary Autonomous Zones advanced by Hakim Bey (1985). The influence of the nonviolence strategies of Gandhi and of Dr Martin Luther King was also in evidence. Negatively, past direct experience of trotskyist and other leninist political organizing styles may also have played a role in encouraging a different approach.

Practically, the Seattle demonstrators did represent a hugely varied set of interests and constituencies, and any attempt to germinate a directing center would have been laughable. In the same way, ordering the hundred or more videographers, photographers and audio-recordists who served to document the demonstrations, to hew to a single line would have been equally implausible. The point is the outgrowth of consensus decision-making from the immediate realities of the situation as well as from political principle.

A number of those most intimately involved were convinced that not only did consensual decision-making represent good political sense, but in fact the only practical sense, as the documents archived under "blueprints" in the Seattle *indymedia.org* site attest. Indeed a document of fourteen single-spaced pages, entitled *On Conflict And Consensus* (Consensus 2000), was available on the site, and spelled out in considerable detail a series of procedures for consensual decision-making, explicitly referring to its objective as providing an alternative to the parliamentary procedure bible, *Roberts' Rules Of Order*. Given the conventional image of the far Left as organizationally a shambles – "couldn't organize a piss-up in a brewery" was a favorite self-incrimination among the

British far Left at one time – the detailed specification of procedures in this fashion initially appears somewhere between surprising and quixotic.

The fact remains that organization is a ventricle of effective political as well as mediatic action, an issue frequently underscored by the case studies in the 1984 edition of my *Radical Media*, and by the longer case-studies in the 2000 edition. In many instances of radical media, the project could be seen to suffer, sometimes severely, from naïve views of democratic organization. A justly famous article by Jo Freeman entitled "The tyranny of structurelessness" was based upon some of the negatives issuing from such naïveté. Additionally in those cases the continuing influence was evident of unacknowledged factors such as sexism, or the elitist definition of reporting as prestigious but administrative work as fit only for drones whose political input was irrelevant.

Certainly when one considers the massive resources devoted by corporations and states to honing organizational strategies and procedures, it would be senseless and virtually suicidal for the Left to avoid putting its intellectual energies into developing its own organizational procedures and objectives. One of the most interesting points made in the Indymedia site discussion of this topic was that using well-thought-out consensual decision-making procedures would reduce the impact of undercover police *agents provocateurs* sowing internal division and alienation by seemingly radical and insistent interventions which short-circuited the scrutiny of the consensus-building process.[10]

At the same time, this document evinced a vagueness on certain issues that would surely need addressing more effectively. One was on the actual powers of the meetings facilitator, a role that has recently come quite quickly to have importance in a number of

settings, not only radical media ones. There are points in the document at which the

facilitator seems on the edge of being ascribed almost demiurgic powers, or of being

defined as a residual solution for knotty interaction problems. Similarly, there are

problems with the document's identification of likely snags in consensus-building:

> "…using Formal Consensus might not be easy at first. Unresolved conflict
> from previous experiences could come rushing forth and make the process
> difficult, if not impossible. Practice and discipline, however, will smooth
> the process" (Consensus 2000: 1).

It has to be said that while there is certainly realism here, there also seems to be a strong

dose of pollyanna-ism in the confident assertion that practice and discipline, united, will

never be defeated, and that misbehavior is essentially only a product of bad political

upbringing.

The document is on the humorless side (as, to be fair, is *Roberts' Rules*), but there

is little doubt that consensual decision-making in practice will benefit considerably from

the ability of those involved to laugh at themselves. Which comes out as having been

very evident in practice from the retrospective accounts of the IMC at A16, the World

Bank demonstration in Washington DC in April 2000 which Sand describes as

> "a fun, productive time in which organizers who arrived early were able to
> develop close bonds with each other…an exciting, invigorating place to
> be…What future IMCs should not do is anything that would suck the life
> out of their media effort. Sometimes a little chaos and excitement is good
> for an organization…Future IMCs should always keep their sense of
> humor. No matter how chaotic and frustrating DC was at times, people
> had FUN there, met people and had a chance to be part of a tremendous,
> growing movement. That's why people are going to keep coming back for
> more" (Sand 2000).

Finally, the considerable effort evident in Indymedia circles to be both lucid and

highly specific about technical issues evinced a very welcome degree of organizational

precision as well as a fine missionary spirit of demystifying digital dark places.

Year 2000: IMCs proliferate and face new issues

As of the end of 2000 there had been a dizzy expansion of Independent Media Centers. They were operating in Australia (Melbourne and Sydney), Belgium, Canada (Calgary, Guelph, Hamilton, Montréal, Vancouver, Waterloo, Windsor), Colombia, Congo, the Czech Republic, France, India, Israel, Italy, Mexico and the UK, and within the USA in Arizona, Atlanta, Austin, Boston, Buffalo, Chicago, Cleveland, Los Angeles, Madison, Minneapolis, New York City, the Ohio Valley in Kentucky, Philadelphia, Portland, Richmond, the Rocky Mountain region, San Francisco, Seattle, upstate New York and Washington DC. Not all of these by any means were at the same phase of development, but still others were in the process of formation, for example in Brazil, Finland and Hong Kong.

The Seattle site also offered its news items translated into five major European languages (French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish). While this excluded Arabic, Hindi, Russian and Mandarin, it is also true to say that at the present time those individuals in other nations who are web-users are most likely to have access as well to one of the six European languages in question. Thus this multilingual aspect of the site was a major contribution toward providing a news service that could week by week and day by day communicate the latest challenges across the planet to free-market fundamentalism. As of December 16th, 2000, the Seattle site was logging 16,652 successful requests for pages per day, constituting 746,520 megabytes, serving 18,866 hosts, and its usage rate was steadily increasing (Logs 2000).

This expansion predictably raised a variety of policy issues of which the following will be briefly surveyed here: (1) appropriate links between IMCs and the

possibilities for coordinated action; (2) questions of free speech and editorial control; (3) the relation between media activism and state repression.

Inevitably, within the rapid process of expansion of IMCs inside and outside the USA, and given the planetarily interconnected strategies of neo-liberal globalism and transnational corporations, the pressure quickly mounted for some form of interconnection on the left between IMCs for certain campaigns and confrontations. This was a rather new development, in that solidarity campaigns had long been a feature of leftist political movements, but not necessarily globally coordinated action against major international institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO. It posed a challenge to traditional anarchism too, which has always sought to celebrate the local and has been particularly distrustful of large entities. There did not, surprisingly, appear to be included a discussion of the role of labor unions in this kind of international communication, which despite their sometimes ossified and even corrupt leadership nonetheless potentially constitute a major forum for action (Ashwin 2000; ; Munck 2000; O'Brien et al. 2000: 67-108).

However, there did emerge a major public discussion in the latter part of 2000 about the feasibility of having a (none too elegantly termed) Indymedia Global Spokescouncil to make it possible to "balance both the absolute need for IMCs to make decisions in real life, face-to-face meetings, and…to have a mechanism through which [to] make international decisions" (Spokescouncil 2000). The writer of this proposal began to set out how active IMCs might delegate individuals "empowered to make decisions that affect the whole Indymedia network…via IRC…in very well-facilitated meetings," and how to try to cater for multi-lingual participation in IRC (computer

chatroom) debates. An instance of collective action forged this way would be a project for a photo-essay covering the international anti-globalization protests of the previous year. The writer sketched out how the proposal could be drafted with international participation, sent out for review and comments from all IMCs, and then finally voted endorsement by such a Council. The writer was candid in commenting that he did not "know of any other organization that uses a similar process that combines real life organizing and virtual communication, but that's because Indymedia is a pretty unique happening."

There were also discussions concerning the role of the Seattle IMC in relation to the others. As of the end of 2000, the Seattle IMC – far and away the largest, at that point, with a core of around 15 activists – had effectively asserted its right to accreditate new IMCs (cf. So You Want To Be An IMC? 2000). While it was clearly desirable to try to avoid the pollution of the name by political police or neo-nazi subversion, this in turn raised some issues about authority and centralization which sparked active discussions on the IMC websites.

Indeed this takes us straight to our second point, the question of censorship and editorial control. No less here than elsewhere is this a hotly contested zone of debate, not least when it comes to the expression of racist or neo-nazi views (Downing 1999). The debate within Indymedia circles to the end of 2000 veered between dismissal of free speech as a bourgeois slogan associated with philosopher John Locke, the conventional defense of free speech as a gain for the political Left that has so often historically been denied the right to circulate its perspectives, and the assertion that a commitment to free speech did not entail offering up the indymedia sites to racists or other rightist voices,

given that they had more than enough space in the public sphere as it is (see Rabble 2000 and the associated hyperlinks).[11] Another contributor argued that Indymedia should only censor "outright calls for violence and hate speech [and that]…All censored materials should also remain accessible to anyone that wishes to see them, and there should always be an explanation as to why something was censored and maybe even who censored it" (Marquis 2000).

However the question of editorial control also produced some interesting contributions. One proposal was for a moderating system for entries based on how highly readers rank them, thereby opening up the evaluation process beyond the decision of an editorial board. In fact a 1-5 reader-ranking procedure was available for postings at the Seattle site and some others. The same contributor added the following remarks as well, which provide a usefully concentrated summary of many of the issues being hashed out in this initial period:

> "So. We've stated that we are going to do some editing. Why not do some serious, heavy editing? I feel like it's a bit of a slippery slope: if we agree we'll remove the nazi posts, why not correct every spelling of America with three Ks [i.e. Amerikkka]? I find them equally offensive. I also think that some of our mannerisms—the KKKs, the substitution of "pigs" for "cops," etc—detracts from our credibility. (I am not going to say we should strive for objectivity; we've been through this before, and we've agreed that accuracy is what we should strive for because objectivity is bunk.) My take on it is that the average person, on seeing such heavily weighted words, is likely to presume that we will also lie about cops to prove our point. Then the icing on our cake: I'm sure most of us would agree that simple proofreading and fact-checking are a good idea (though if we have limited human resources, why bother to make a big deal out of picky details?)." (IMC 2000)

As an overall comment on this debate about procedure, of which I have here excerpted only some occasional moments, I would wish to observe that tedious as its detailed discussion may become, it really is a fundamental issue. In the previous century

the far Left either ignored it or - by accepting typical Communist Party practices - sold itself down the river. How to operate an electronic democracy using digital technologies is a topic on which commentators have spent tons of toner, but usually at a level of generality of little applicable use. Easy as it may be to poke holes in bits of the formulations above, the debate is a crucial one, and the indymedia public sphere was a particularly important one for such debate.

The final question is on violence and state repression of protests: in which directions should radical media policy be framed within the USA? For the Seattle IMC and for others (Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Prague), as for the video documentaries compiled from the work of media activists, a primary strategy has been to document police violence against peaceful demonstrators, inverting the law-and-order frame of mainstream media and showing the in-shadow side of the moon. It has not been the only strand in the representation. There are plenty of analyses of the WTO and other global economic policy bodies as well. But state violence against the defenseless played a major role in the demonstration coverage and the features. The question is, should indymedia and radical media coverage of state repression aim to do more than document it and denounce it as anti-democratic?

To answer that requires bearing in mind a five-vector relationship between (i) corporate policies and interests, (ii) social movement challenges, (iii) their state repression (police surveillance, arrests, assault, fines, jail

sentences), and the roles of both (iv) radical and (v) mainstream media in framing the repression, its context and its causes. Radical media need to produce their own accounts from inside the movement, to respond critically to mainstream media versions, and especially in the US context, to challenge the overwhelming hegemony of the law-and-order frame. What follows represents a rapid sketch of some key dimensions of this vector-pentagon.

The immediate causes of violence at street protests vary. They include the following. (i) Instructions to the police to be harsh (for example, in Seattle, to arrest any individual with a gas mask). (ii) Refusal to give the police strict orders to use repression technology[12] with full caution to avoid serious harm or death. (iii) The police unambiguously go on a rampage. (iv) Police *agents provocateurs* pose as super-militants and deliberately generate confrontations to dishearten peaceful demonstrators and give the protest a media aura of mayhem. (v) In a tense atmosphere, unfounded rumors fly of police brutality. (vi) Tiny leftist groups carry out violent action at whichever point they themselves, within their own splendidly enlightened ranks, deem worthy. But these are precipitating moments. Behind them, it would be cloud-cuckoo-land to suppose that transnational corporations and their elite policy-makers will smile upon civil disobedience as a happy expression of the public's democratic rights.

In some countries, indeed, the repression will be on a far more vicious level than in Seattle (in Washington DC, during the April 2000 World Bank protests, it was actually less harsh than Seattle). For instance a Turkish student who watched with me the film *This Is Democracy In Action*, where some Seattle protestors were filmed celebrating their arrests as a sign of their own and others' political determination, found the protestors' and the film makers' assumptions quite amazing in their confidence that they would find at worst minor harassment once in prison, and would have access to lawyers and fairly speedy release on bail. Elsewhere in the world people do not necessarily reappear from prison, or if they do, they may well have suffered grave human rights abuse while inside. The 1996 hanging of Nigerian environmental activist and writer Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight of his fellow-activists, with Shell Oil piously protesting its impotence and innocence, is only one of many cases in point.

In the USA, by contrast, widespread White experience of *any* form of jailing had been absent since the Civil Rights era and the protests against the war in South East Asia that came to a close in 1975. In that context, Seattle marked the baptism of a new political generation – but one that was largely White, and typically not very alert to the already momentous level of incarceration and abusive jail treatment of African Americans and Latinos.

Thus within the USA, there were three gaps in consciousness on the subject of state repression and violence, gaps that radical media and IMCs needed to fill. One, the direct experience of repression in large-scale street protests within the USA, is partly in the process of being filled as contestatory political movements become active again. The second was the overvaluation of state repression of protest within the USA, compared to levels of repression in many countries, not least by close US allies such as Turkey, the Israeli occupation of Palestine, Saudi Arabia. The third is the failure to register either the sheer magnitude of racist prisonization in the USA or its position within the standard vise of global neo-liberal priorities.[13]

And this leads us directly to the reigning law-and-order mentality and the responsibilities of IMCs and other radical media to attack its hegemony. This public mentality permits the framing of protests like Seattle as a disruption of order, rather than as a protest against the massive disruption of lives on a g,lobal scale by free-market fundamentalism. This mentality has not created, but it has permitted, along with the continuing force of white racism, the accumulation of a vast prison population, overwhelmingly Black and Latino, as well as the arming of the police with potentially lethal riot control technology to repress protests. The blurring of functions between police and military visible in Seattle and at other US protests as well as

along the US-Mexico border (Richmond 2000: ch.4; Dunn 1996), is perhaps a point of future convergence between the experience of the Turkish student referred to above, the explosion of the prison population, and the control of street dissent within the USA.

The massive incarceration of minority-ethnic Americans may be segregated in American minds from the repression of protest against neo-liberal policies, but that mental divorce is dangerous. People fearful of fascism often look for it to resurface in a Nazi or neo-nazi format, but it needs to be a prime policy of radical media to encourage a far more alert posture to the real trends in state repression and their longer-term causes. Neo-liberalism is not just economics and it is not just at work outside the USA: it is constituted by repressive power and mediatic power as well, and it is *comprehensively* global. Neo-liberal policy-makers and corporate elites seem pretty well at ease discounting and extruding whole populations of people, using force and prisonization, arming civil wars in Africa and elsewhere, permitting avoidable agricultural disasters, with the banks meanwhile gorging themselves on gouging debt repayments.

Let us pursue the mainstream media law-and-order frame a little further, because radical media critique of it demands more careful analysis than is often offered. US journalistic accounts strongly tended to define the

Seattle confrontation in terms of law enforcement and the specifics of physical damage, and thus often seemed to have an uncanny symbiosis with the constricted definition of the issues by…law enforcement personnel.[14] This is not to say that the Seattle police were uniformly happy with their coverage in the confrontation – quite the opposite was the case - but this anger may, realistically, have had much more to do with the frequent cultivation of a barracks mentality within police forces than with a sober assessment of their overall media representation. The ongoing relations between media and law enforcement agencies have been studied from a variety of angles in a variety of countries (e.g. Chibnall 1977; Ericson et al., 1989: 91-171, and 1991; Schlesinger & Tumber 1994; Fox & Van Sickel 2000; Entman and Rojecki 2000: 78-93). They are complex, and I am definitely not proposing here an explicit or agreed convergence of perspectives between the different institutions.

At the same time, it is important to single out the various strands within this simultaneous convergence and conflict between the two institutions. (1) The law-and-order perspective has legitimacy and is dominant within both mainstream media and, predictably, law enforcement institutions. (2) Nonetheless there is police resentment as law-enforcement labor at quite often being kept without rest or refreshment, at times under

verbal abuse and taunting, in some instances in physical danger, for spells of eighteen hours or even more during protests, a resentment which some will explode on to demonstrators in a way not open to them vis-á-vis their superior officers. (3) There is a conservative and mistrustful political subculture normal in police precincts, nurtured by their professional training, working conditions and suburban home locations. (4) The police frequently assume that news media should be on their side in very direct ways, not least given the copy the police feed journalists that their editors, readers and viewers appear to lap up and that thus helps to keep many mainstream media in business. (5) There are various, sometimes mutually mistrustful branches of police and law enforcement (FBI, DEA, ATF, CIA, as well as state and local police). A radical media analysis that avoids all these dimensions, micro- as well as macro-political, and contents itself with talking about "the pigs" offers an inverse ratio of self-satisfaction to actual illumination of the issues.

Conclusions

Sober recognition of harsh corporate priorities, the multiple dimensions of repression of protest and populations within the USA and globally, and the consequent policy responsibilities of radical media, are vital. The indymedia phenomenon is not the only public sphere where this analysis and debate can take place but, based on its first year of growth, its constructive global potential is very promising. The linkages

established between the specific, the organizational, the technical, the procedural, the local, the global, and the nurturing of radical media policies – *our* policy-making process, not 'theirs' - are a very important step.

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[1] This is not an implicit lament for the former Soviet Union, whose structures and policies probably did more to delay the development of constructive alternatives to capitalism than any other twentieth century phenomenon, precisely because it claimed to be and was widely taken to be, "the" alternative. An alternative that relied on a police state, a centralized command economy, and had no qualms about invading and colonizing its neighbors (in East-Central Europe, in the Balkans, Afghanistan), was scarcely a trump card in contesting global capitalism…

[2] It is important to note, although these two topics are beyond the scope of this chapter, that social justice activists in India and elsewhere were very leery of lining up behind some of the demands for fair working standards aired by many Seattle demonstrators, on the ground that they could be used in the short term to deprive 'Third world' working families of any source of income at all (Shapiro 1999); and that some ultra-rightists obsessed with threats to US sovereignty also constituted an element, albeit a fringe element, in the Seattle protests (Berger 2000).

[3] As one critic of the critics notes (Kobrin 1998): "…there are no controls on the Net over who can "publish" or what they can say. Although some of the arguments - the Preamble Collaborative's, for example - are balanced and reasoned, most of the rest are neither. The MAI deals with difficult and often technical issues, and considerable disagreement remains among the parties to the treaty. The Internet is a medium where the most extreme statements attract attention; where an argument scrolling down a computer screen may gamer authority it does not deserve."

[4] It seems that for corporate media, only damage to property makes a challenge truly newsworthy, a very significant commentary on their scale of values, which incidentally are also evinced by their frequent moral equation of property damage with violence against human beings. In turn, corporate media usually define police or army violence against unarmed and peaceful demonstrators as somewhere between praiseworthy and regrettably necessary, finding it exceptionally unappetizing to name police riots as such. Radical media do not appear to suffer from this ethical miasma.

[5] Such as *Showdown In Seattle* (Indymedia, 2000) and *This Is What Democracy Looks Like* (Big Noise Productions, 2000), which traveled the length and breadth of the USA and Canada, and quite widely in other European and anglophone countries. *Breaking The Bank*, a Paper Tiger TV documentary on Washington DC protest of April 2000, and *The Autumn of Praha*, the Belgian IMC documentary on the Prague confrontation, were two further examples.

[6] Leo Hurwitz, one of the leading Nykino activists in the 1930s (Alexander 1981), recalled in a seminar at the New York City University Graduate School in 1981, how distinctive and vital this location *among* the protestors had been during the Unemployed Workers marches and demonstrations in the 1930s.

[7] This is intended as a comment on the employers and the routines, not a personal attack on mainstream journalists, a number of whom, such as Lisa Cohen of King Five in Seattle, while probably not in particular

sympathy with the general viewpoint of my analysis here, nonetheless worked very hard to review and reflect upon the failings of Seattle's mainstream media coverage of the events.

[8] The Seattle Indymedia site "masthead" states: "Indymedia is a collective of independent media organizations and hundreds of journalists offering grassroots, non-corporate coverage. Indymedia is a democratic outlet for the creation of radical, accurate and passionate tellings of truth."

[9] Emma Goldman defined anarchist organization as "based, primarily, on freedom…a natural and voluntary grouping of energies to secure results beneficial to humanity" (Goldman 1969: 35).

[10] Reportedly, in October 1968 the British political police scored one of their all-time coups by having one of their number, posing as a fire-breathing Maoist, elected by spontaneous consent – and probably to his considerable astonishment - to chair the organizing committee for Britain's most significant demonstration against the Vietnam War…

[11] Over Fall 2000, a considerable volume of neo-nazi "spam" had been posted to the Seattle website.

[12] Blandly defined these days by government and the manufacturers' sources as "non-lethal" – pepper spray, rubber bullets, CS gas – but a better description would be "less lethal." Rubber bullets, the rubber often being a micro-layer over steel, have killed and seriously maimed many protestors and non-protestors in Northern Ireland, Palestine and elsewhere; the effects of pepper spray, CS gas and other devices are equally very dangerous used intensively at close quarters, which is how a number of police and military actually use them.

[13] Magnitude: the US jail population grew five times from 1973-97, and is 6-10 times higher than the percentages in prison in European Union nations; 50 million criminal files exist on 30 million individuals, or one third of the adult male population; a Black male has a 1 in 3 chanceof spending a year in jail, a Latino male a 1 in 6 chance, and a White male a 1 in 23 chance (Wacquant 1998). The essence of the matter consists of racism and the criminalization of poverty (Wacquant 1998; Parenti 1999; Western & Beckett 1999).

[14] See for example the Philadelphia police document (Affidavit of probable cause in support, Search and Seizure Warrant #97382), originating from the run-up to the demonstrations against the summer 2000 Republican Party convention, reproduced by the Philadelphia IMC:
http://www.phillyimc.org/articles/00/09/10/2324206.shtml. The same critique precisely was made of Czech reporting of the Prague contestation of the IMF and World Bank meeting there in September 2000 (Allnutt 2000; Breyerova 2000), but then with the exception of the Prague Spring of 1968, media and police traditions in the Czech Republic from 1938-89 might serve as some explanation. US mainstream media have no such excuse.