

Editorial by Bernard Margueritte

## Media: The beginning of the end?

We have just lived through another terrible year for the media. We have no reason to be surprised. How can honest and dignified reporting take place in these times of crisis, hatred and war? And yet, at the same time, curiously, a new wind of optimism is beginning to blow. Would it be possible that we are witnessing the beginning of the end of this slide by the media towards superficiality, lies and sensation, which not long ago seemed so terribly irreversible? Anyhow this hope is nowhere more perceptible than in the United States, as I have just become aware. After having led the media towards degradation, America seems, as usual, on the point of being the first to rebound and show the way to us in Europe who stick with her - whether we want to or not - often for the worse, but sometimes also for the better.

### Savage Attacks

And yet how difficult these last months have been, not only for the world in these times of war, but also for the media themselves. One cannot but notice, for example, that three of the most respected media institutions have been the objects of savage attacks. *Le Monde* has seen itself reproached in a sensational book for having covered with a modest veil of honesty a hidden political commitment. *The New York Times* has been shamed following the Jason Blair affair. Finally the BBC, condemned by the Hutton report, is in deep turmoil. What a strange coincidence! The most partisan or sensational media continue their activities unimpeded, but three of the main pillars of the dig-

nity of our profession find themselves attacked. Is this just by chance?

In any case it gives us the opportunity to remind ourselves of our solidarity with the *NYT* as well as the *Le Monde* or the BBC. The Jason Blair affair is unfortunate, but no newspaper can be responsible for each of its reporters and this regrettable situation has been blown up out of all proportion. The facts for which *Le Monde* has been reproached are not entirely without foundation, but it is still one of the best newspapers in the world. The BBC, wounded by a report, of which the lack of objectivity is recognised by the majority of the British public, remains a standard-bearer for us all.

Perhaps it would have been more worthwhile to look into the way the Fox chain, in the United States, before, during and after the war in Iraq, practised an ultra-partisan journalism. As Manny Paraschos writes in *Media Ethics*; "The war in Iraq has shaken American journalism". In short, every war, adds Peter Preston in *The Global Journalist*, the revue of The International Press Institute (IPI) "is the greatest challenge to good journalism". These troubled times have, indeed, led media people to ask themselves again a number of difficult questions. What must be the relationship between patriotism and truth, for example? The answer is not so easy, even for the noblest of minds. Was not Albert Camus, explaining his hostility to a free Algeria, already saying; "I prefer my mother to justice"?

Events have increased even further the strange distortion of the American media, especially

Bernard Margueritte  
(bottom right), President of the ICF, at the Cape Town conference in April with the conference organisers.

In the centre is South-African Stephen Wrottesley, the chief organiser, who tragically died in a road accident a few months later.

Top right is William Porter, the Founder-President of the ICF.



that of the three great TV networks, CBS, ABC & NBC, which, (according to the *American Journalism Review*) have had in 2001 92% of their interviews with Whites, 85% with men and 75% with Republicans! Fortunately, even during these last few months, many of our American colleagues, in the *New York Times* and the *New Yorker*, but not only them, have set us an example by showing us that our dignity as media people lies in being, at all costs, servants of the truth.

If therefore we are in the process of touching the bottom and rebounding, especially in the United States, it is because the crisis we have lived through has been a source of revelation in at least three spheres:

Journalists are becoming aware in a new way of their responsibilities for the public and for democracy. The growing success of organisms engaged in the defence of worthy media is a demonstration of this. This new aware-

ness among our colleagues is at the source of the constant development of associations such as the "Committee of Concerned Journalists", "The Poynter Institute", "The International Center for Journalists" and many others, including no doubt the International Communications Forum.

### Happy Catharsis

The public is showing itself increasingly concerned by world affairs and is demanding a more serious coverage of international events. Enquiries, carried out for example by the Pew Foundation, reveal that the American public is demanding from now on serious and dignified treatment. Already, incisive news programmes, such as Ted Koppel's Night Line, see their audiences growing, while more superficial programmes are in constant decline. Tom Kunkel, dean of the Philip Merrill College of Journalism at the University of Maryland and president of American

Journalism Review, gives concrete examples, showing that people are making themselves heard in the protests against the concentration of media ownerships.

Those responsible for the media are beginning to take into account this evolution of society. Their courage and honesty shown in the crisis have been well demonstrated by *The New York Times* and the BBC.

So new times seem to be on the way. Would the crises of these past years have acted as a happy catharsis? It is as yet only a glimmer of hope. It depends on all of us, and especially those who have got together in the International Communications Forum, to act in such a way that the media again become what they should never have ceased to be: a guarantee of democracy and an essential factor in drawing people closer together.

Bernard Margueritte

---

## The International Communications Forum in 2003

**India:** Bernard Margueritte spoke at a conference held in January on globalisation at the Panchgani Centre near Pune, organised by the Indian committee of the Caux economic sessions.

**France:** At the Chirac-Blair summit at Le Touquet on 4<sup>th</sup> February, William Porter, an honorary consular officer of the United Kingdom, was among the first to shake hands with the two leaders. Later he was interviewed by the Arab TV chain, Al Jazeera.

**Sri Lanka:** In February-March William Porter went to Colombo to lead a one-day seminar for 70 journalists and represented the Forum at a conference of the Commonwealth Press Union. He then visited Chennai (Madras) and Nagaland (North East India) for interviews with the press and politicians, and spoke to staff and students at the Asian College of Journalism.

**Lebanon:** The conference planned for March in Beirut, for which an invitation committee very representative of the Lebanese media has been formed, had to be postponed because of the war that was about to break out in Iraq. It will now take place during the first week of June 2005.

**Ireland:** William Porter spoke in June in Dublin on the theme:

"Sensationalism and the erosion of journalism" on the occasion of a Round Table at the Congress of the World Association of Newspapers (WAN). Although the main speeches were devoted to the external menaces that weigh on the press, Porter concentrated on the internal threats, those that newspapers can more directly confront.

According to an article that appeared in the *Irish Independent*, Porter stated, in part: "*Newspaper audiences do not consist of violence-loving, sex-mad, moronic idiots but of reasonable, hard-working, family-loving, decent people. It is for them that we should fill our pages.*"

**Switzerland:** As in previous years, the Communications Forum took part in the presentation of the economic session at Caux, with the theme "Globalisation as if people really mattered". A report of the dialogue between Ignacio Ramonet, of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, and José Maria Figueres, of the World Economic Forum, will be found on Page 3. Among those present were Magnus Linklater, feature writer of the *London Times*, Louise Seals, Managing Editor of *The Richmond Times Dispatch*, Professor

Stephen Ward, of the School of Journalism in the University of British Columbia, Graham Turner, feature writer of *The Daily Telegraph*, Dorina Osipov, director of the Independent Press Association of Moldova, and Danko Plevnik, columnist for the Croatian daily *Slobodna Dalmacija*.

**Austria:** At the International Press Institute's congress at Salzburg in September, Bernard Margueritte spoke at a round table on pluralism, democracy and the clash of civilisations. It was also an occasion to meet journalists and media leaders.

**Wales:** Another opportunity for Bernard Margueritte to meet British media and political leadership was at a conference in November on displaced persons at Cardiff, a city that the Welsh are proud to call "the youngest capital in Europe".

**United States:** Bernard Margueritte undertook in December a three-week tour in the United States - from New York and Washington to Miami and from Saint-Paul to Chicago - mainly to inform people of the future projects of the Communications Forum and to seek possible sources of finance for them.

# Globalisation, source of progress or of injustice ?

Ignacio Ramonet, director of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, co-founder of the World Social Forum (WSF) of Porto Alegre, Brazil, founder of ATTAC, and José María Figueres, Managing Director of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, former President of Costa Rica, engaged on 13<sup>th</sup> July at Caux, Switzerland, in a public dialogue, courteous but frank, on globalisation, organised with the help of the International Communications Forum.

The two speakers quickly reached agreement to say that poverty in the world is “immoral, unethical and unsustainable”, to quote President Figueres. Their disagreement therefore was more concerned with the means than with the ends.

President Figueres stated that “the enlightened self-interest” of business should allow them to take up “the most important challenge, that is to advance towards a world civilisation that is more jointly responsible, more inclusive and safer”. He pleaded for liberalisation, observing that each of the cows he sees as he drives to his office in Geneva benefits from \$5 a day in agricultural subsidiaries while a third of mankind lives on less than \$1 a day.

He also insisted on the fact that human development, health and education must receive as much attention as the economic factors.

In response, Mr Ramonet first underlined the fact that “the prophets of liberal globalisation” of ten years ago, people who could hardly be suspected of being leftists or enemies of the system such as George Soros, Jeffrey Sachs and Joseph Stiglitz, are now pointing out the dangers of all-out liberalisation. He quoted the fact that the 400 millionaires in the United States earn more than the combined incomes of the 166 million people in the African

states that President Bush visited in July, and that the United States was giving its cotton farmers subsidies worth more than three times its total aid budget to Africa.

Quoting the latest report of the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) he pointed out that the 54 countries, representing the poorest quarter of mankind, are poorer today than they were ten years ago.

## The focus of Capitalism has moved from the industrial to the financial sector

Not only have the UN’s development targets for the most vulnerable not been reached, but even the probable dates are continually postponed. Comparing the economic crisis in the Argentine to the fall of the Berlin Wall – symbol of the failure of state socialism – Mr Ramonet concluded that “the gospel of globalisation does not work”. A conclusion immediately contested by Mr Figueres, for whom “bad governance and the poor quality of Argentinean leadership” were more to blame than the economic forces alone.

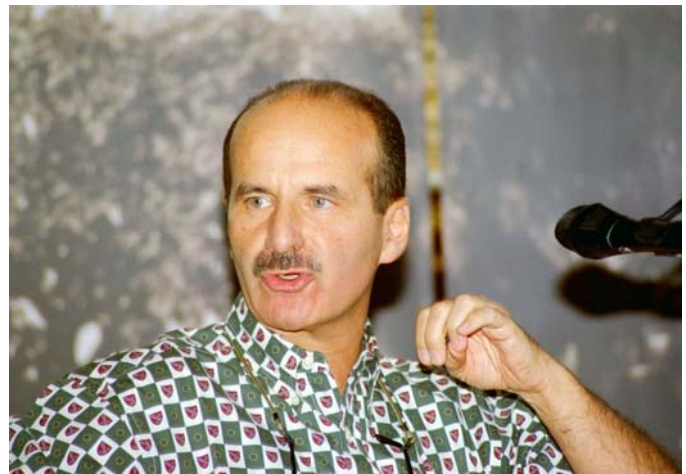
In the exchange that followed Mr Ramonet admitted that “globalisation is not responsible for the inequalities in the world, but it gives little help to their elimination”. In any case he regards as

essential the fact that the focus of capitalism has moved from industrial production to finance.

In 1950 the respective shares of these two sectors in the GNP of the industrialised countries were 95% to 5%; today they are the opposite. Similarly, the economy has supplanted religion or war as the source of power: “the market and the State are in conflict, the market wants to reduce the State to the minimum” and the politicians are impelled to govern the State as they would a business. Our contemporaries live in a state of permanent tension between individual and collective values, such as selfishness or the values of joint responsibility.

Figueres also put forward his vision of the great challenges we face today - the effects of globalisation are still unequal and those who remain outside the general economic progress are still too many, the democracies are perceived as not producing the expected results, citizens feel left out by their leaders and no one seems to take the world problems to heart, not even the international institutions.

In this context he observed the usefulness of the World Economic Forum of Davos “a forum, a platform for dialogue to look at the global challenge, to seek a broader understanding; a catalyst for action as the hub of a knowledge network”. ▶▶



Ignacio Ramonet and José María Figueres - a meeting of minds

Mr Ramonet declared that for him the alternative World Forum of Porto Alegre is “*the assembly of mankind, the United Peoples*”, in contrast to the United Nations. “*It brings together the victims of a pitiless economy. This year there were 120,000 people discussing and proposing solutions*”.

He underlined the concrete proposals made by the alternative world movement which does not intend to limit itself to contestation: the elimination

of third world debt, the suppression of tax havens - “*refuges of the corrupt*” - the institution of the Tobin tax.

The dialogue’s moderator, the former Canadian ambassador, Kimon Valaskakis, president of the Club of Athens for the good governance of the world, noticed with surprise – and satisfaction – the numerous points of similarity in the two speakers’ analyses. However both agree that the necessary conditions are not yet in place

to authorise a direct dialogue between the forums of Davos and Porto Alegre.

Yet the personal contact between them seemed excellent, and at the end of this long debate, carried on in English by one and in French by the other, they had a relaxed conversation in Spanish. The dialogue of 13<sup>th</sup> July may therefore not remain without a sequel.

*Antoine Jaulmes*

---

## The World Summit on the Information Society

In the same way that, under the auspices of the United Nations, several significant summits have been held (environment, development, social rights), it was questions connected with the information society which were the objective last December of a large world assembly in Geneva.

The first thing to be done – a colossal enterprise! – was to make a diagnosis of the problems, dangers and possibilities produced by the world’s entry into the age of communication technologies. Since no international text had so far targeted the questions to be discussed, the identification of these questions at stake was a tricky exercise for the players. Such an approach naturally came up against serious obstacles: the yawning gap between developed countries and the third world in the use of these techniques – what is called the digital divide, the holding of almost all the patents and therefore the provision of services by the multinationals, who see in information a product like others as the source of substantial profits; the confusion of the States faced by the tentacular expansion of these advanced techniques, particularly disturbing for authoritarian governments; and finally the considerable financing of any measures to be taken.

People also feared, in the preparatory phase, especially in view of the pilot role assumed by the International Telecommunications Union, that greater attention would be given to the technological problems at the expense of the social or human dimension. This fear, fortunately, proved unfounded.

What are the forward steps that have been taken – or at least glimpsed –

during the Geneva deliberations? Let us first record the part played by the civil society, which was for the first time associated with the nation states and the private sector in the preparations of a world summit. With very little organisation up to now, the players in the civil society in a way discovered each other in the process. Secondly, the adoption of a declaration of principles very idealistic in tone, and of a plan of action for the next two years, with, in particular, in the declaration, the recognition, extracted almost at the last minute, of the freedom of the press, whereas the defenders of this freedom had been apprehensive previously of it being omitted at this summit. Finally, the mandate given to the General Secretary of the United Nations to set up a working party on the governance of the Internet, as thorny a subject as you could wish.

### Will we share our know-how?

But the conference left some real questions unanswered. Will the Western states and the big operators be ready to share their know-how with the rest of the world? Can China, even if she sometimes hid her reticence during the working sessions, allow the freedom of her media and internauts? Will Tunisia, chosen from the beginning as host for the second phase of the summit in 2005 follow the path of a liberalisation that will allow her to give a worthy welcome in Tunis to the rough and ultra-liberal world of communications? Incidentally, no budget has so far been allocated for this next stage.

In trying to make a list of all the sectors that might be concerned

(cybergovernment, electronic commerce, distance learning, distant healthcare, cyberwork, cyberagriculture, cyberscience.....), is the work of the conference in danger of becoming too diffuse? Finally, who will take on raising the funds needed for a process which will cover the next twenty, perhaps 50 years? The cities of Geneva, Lyon and Turin have taken on a move to create a Digital Solidarity Fund, but for the present it is only a gesture.

On the positive side, the faultless organisation of the summit by Switzerland and the Canton of Geneva must be acknowledged. Looking after the welcome and security of many Heads of State and of 12,000 delegates – of whom only 3,000 had access to the meeting hall – arranging for more than 200 discussion meetings and events, welcoming the same number of stands of all kinds, and finally providing the logistical support as the framework of thinking and initiatives that enabled the discussions to proceed smoothly, that was Switzerland’s contribution. It is perhaps one of the elements which gives confidence for the future of this immense undertaking.

#### International Communications Forum

24 Greencoat Place  
London SW1P 1RD

Tel: +44 (0)20 7798 6010  
Fax: +44 (0)20 7798 6001  
[www.icforum.org](http://www.icforum.org)  
e-mail: [icforum@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:icforum@yahoo.co.uk)

This report has been produced  
by J.-J. Odier.

Translation from French: Robin Evans  
Photos: B. Cummock, J. Leggat.