The Amateur Computerist

Back to Our Roots

In this issue, the *Amateur Computerist* returns a bit to its roots. This newsletter grew out of the computer programming classes at the Ford Motor Company Rouge plant in Dearborn, Michigan. These classes were part of a benefit won by the UAW during negotiations with Ford in the 1980s. The UAW members agreed not to oppose the introduction of modern technology in exchange for Ford contributing a nickel for every regular hour of work by UAW represented workers. The fairly large pool of money from the 'Nickel an Hour Fund' was earmarked for training and educational development, hence the computer programming classes.

However, without opposition from the UAW, by 1986, Ford began to eliminate the classes even though the classes were a benefit agreed to at the bargaining table. Inspired by the spirit of the Flint Sit-Down strike 50 years earlier, the students and computer instructor put up a fight to maintain the classes. When they lost that fight, some of the workers and their instructor founded this newsletter to continue their interest in computing.

Now, twenty years later, autoworkers, employed by the Delphi auto parts corporation, are fighting

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against threatened plant closures and cuts, this time of pension and healthcare benefits. They too are looking back to the spirit of the sit down strikers. The first three articles in this issue tell some of the story of Delphi's attempted cutbacks. That story includes the cooperation between Delphi and the UAW leadership to make the cuts. But also there is the fight back of the workers and the role of the mainstream U.S. press. The press is distorting the nature of what Delphi and GM are doing, suggesting somehow that these cut backs are a good thing. But as our headline says, there was "No Christmas in March".

On an encouraging notes, the article, "French Youth Up in Arms" tells of the first student and worker demonstrations on March 7, 2006 which eventually forced the government of France to rescind a new labor law. That law, if left in place, would have curtailed the labor rights of young workers and pitted young new hires against older workers. Also, the article, "First NYC Transit Strike in 25 Years", tells of the beginning of a fight that prevented the imposition of a two tiered working situation where younger NYC transit workers would have had lower benefits.

This issue also continues the story carried by the *Amateur Computerist* since the 1990s of the development of the Internet and the emergence of the netizens. In the article on the international and scientific origin of the Internet, some of the myths of the origin of the Internet are refuted. A connection is made between the vision of JCR Licklider that inspired Internet development and the social component which particularly supported netizen activity. The particular effect of the netizen movement on South Korean society is tied into the visions of Licklider and of Michael Hauben who first documented the netizen identity in the early 1990s.

We are timing this issue for early May not only because May 1 is International Workers Day, but

also because it was the date when our late editor Michael Hauben was born in 1973. To remember his contribution and honor his birthday, we include the brief sketch of Michael that appeared as part of the 250th anniversary celebration of Columbia University. It was at Columbia as an undergraduate that Michael did some of his early research and important work.

Michael's concept of netizen is having active confirmation in South Korea. We include a brief blog entry and an article describing Ohmynews, an online citizen journalist newspaper as two examples of the netizen phenomenon in Korea.

We end this issue with an article on the impact of the Internet in China. Online and netizen activity have caused a great change in the press in China. The Party or bureaucratic press is no longer the single source for news. Instead there is a contest between the old news form and what is made possible by the rapid spread of the Internet to now over 115 million people in China. Li Xiguang from Tsinghau University wrote about this effect a while ago. We reprint this summary here to share his story with a wider audience.

These are hard times, but we hope this issue will show that there is motion and resistance and even progress.

Automakers and the Voice of the UAW Worker

by Ronda Hauben

Delphi Corporation, the world's second largest auto parts manufacturer, filed for bankruptcy for its North American operations on Oct. 19, 2005. Delphi employs 185,000 workers world-wide and 33,650 hourly workers in its U.S. operations.

The company has threatened that if it doesn't get significant cuts in auto worker wages and benefits via its negotiations with the United Auto Worker (UAW) union leadership, that on March 30, 2006, it will ask the bankruptcy court to impose substantial cuts in wages and benefits on its unionized workforce in the U.S. This threat was made by the CEO of Delphi, Steve Miller. What is the significance of such a threat being made to workers of the union which helped to provide the benefits and wages that have set a standard for other workers in the U.S. and elsewhere

around the world?(1)

In 1999, the General Motors Corporation spun off its auto parts division, setting it up as the Delphi Corporation. The new company had certain obligations to supply General Motors with parts, but the workforce, which had previously worked for General Motors under their GM/UAW contract, was now working for a new company. The Delphi Corporation at the time of its creation did not have any debt.

Six years later, in October 2005, Delphi claimed that its North American operations are heavily in debt. The relief it wants from the bankruptcy court, is help to drastically slash the wages and cut back on the benefits of its unionized workforce.

Many workers at Delphi denounce the corporation's claims and actions. Some are organizing and meeting with other workers from different Delphi factories to discuss strategy to fight against what they believe is a fraudulent effort to drastically cut their wages and make draconian changes in their working conditions. They say that Delphi and General Motors would be hurt if they go on strike.

Delphi claims that it cannot function in the competitive world market if it has to pay union wages and benefits to its workforce. Wages for long time General Motors workers who were transferred to Delphi when the corporation was created are $27 an hour, or about $56,000 a year before taxes. But Delphi claims that it costs the company $140,000 a year for each of these union workers, when benefits like pension and health care costs are factored into the wage costs.

Workers explain the $27 per hour wage is barely enough for them to have a minimum standard of living, consisting of a place to live, food and some other expenses such as occasionally eating at a restaurant. With taxes taken out of their salaries, workers end up with substantially less than $50,000 a year. Given the high prices of housing and food in the U.S., this leaves little left over for other expenses. Only by working overtime, up to 12 hours a day and up to 7 days a week, do union workers at Delphi say they manage to have enough money for a vacation and education for their children.

In December 2005, several U.S. Congressmen sponsored an online Congressional hearing, "The American Automobile Industry in Crisis." (2) They invited Delphi workers and retirees to submit descriptions of the conditions of their lives and what would happen to them if they lost the retiree benefits

and union wages that Delphi said it was going to ask the Court to help it slash.

Over a thousand Delphi workers and retirees responded in writing. Their submissions are posted on a Congressional Web site maintained by the Education and the Workforce Committee of the U.S. Congress. Many of the workers responding describe the dangerous conditions they endured at their workplaces over a number of years which left them injured or sick.

Other responses from workers describe how they worked for General Motors and its parts division for 20 to 30 years with the commitment that they could retire with a certain minimum level of pension and health care benefits. Now they are told that Delphi will use a bankruptcy court to reduce the company's obligation to pay wages, pensions and health care benefits.

While Delphi has claimed its North American operations are losing money, some workers propose that this is the result of accounting practices that misrepresent what Delphi has actually spent.

For example, Randall Musielak of Frankenmuth, Michigan writes (3):

> "The large corporations such as Delphi, GM, Ford, and Chrysler which lost money according to budget and have never made profit, still hide millions in black accounts due to creative bookkeeping. For example, I worked in a trades area where we would be issued a twenty hour job that takes only two hours to complete. When finished I would be issued another job. The assembly line would be charged the full estimated twenty hours of service into hidden black accounts and would also be written off in taxes as maintenance...
>
> Delphi can show any loss it chooses and executive's bonuses surely do not justify a bankruptcy. To plan, implement, execute, and deliberately use bankruptcy as a tool in business for greater profit should be reason for investigation. The sticker price on an automobile clearly shows wages, benefits and bonuses for GM and Delphi. The bankruptcy should be thrown out of court and any company owned by another should not be allowed to use bankruptcy as a business tool; but instead have to settle thru collective bargaining.

Testimony from another worker, describes the questions the Delphi tactics are raising among workers (4):

> "My name is Patrick Mitchell and I have been employed with GM/Delphi for almost 29 years... The question that begs to be answered is: How can a corporation that was spun off from GM in 1999 with a fully funded pension, pockets full of lucrative contracts with General Motors Corp, Toyota, Nissan, Ford, and Daimler Chrysler end up going bankrupt in 6 short years and wreck so many lives? They cooked their books, took advantage of shareholders and investors and have Chief Corporate executives under investigation and they have the chutzpah to point their fingers at the hourly worker using the media to their advantage while trying to reward themselves with millions of dollars they actually stole from all who believed in them. Something is wrong in corporate America if the leadership in Washington allows this to happen... Thank you for these hearings."

Just as workers present a different view of why Delphi is declaring bankruptcy in its North American operations from what is being presented in the mainstream press in the U.S., workers also remember the hard fight it took to get GM to recognize their right to be represented by the UAW. As Lars Christensen, of Clio, Michigan writes (5):

> "I am a third generation autoworker, and am damn proud of it. My father and grandfather were both sitdowners. My grandfather used to walk from his car to the house with a baseball bat, fearful of the beating he would take had the company found him to be a part of the union."

Some militant workers are organizing at Delphi to protest the company's efforts to "break the contract", as they explain. They have begun what they call a "work to rule" (WTR) campaign. As one of the workers explains (6):

> "We should Work to Rule. We need to stay inside to preserve income, save jobs, and fight back. If we follow every rule in the book, production will slow to a crawl. We can control the flow of parts by ensuring quality and following rules. It's perfectly legitimate."

This group of dissidents call themselves "Soldiers of Solidarity." They want to recapture of the Spirit of '37, the militant spirit of the auto workers which resulted in sit down strikes and culminated in the victory of the Great Flint Sit Down Strike in 1937. (7)

These rank and file workers describe how General Motors and then Delphi had taken the profits from the work they and other workers did and invested it in other parts of the world like Mexico and China.

Essentially, the dissident workers raise the question of whether the spin off of the General Motors Parts Operations was mainly intended as a plan to force drastic cutbacks in unionized parts workers' wages and benefits. These dissident workers not only criticize General Motors and Delphi. They also are critical of the leadership of the United Auto Workers union, which includes the President of the UAW, Ronald Gettelfinger, and other union officials.

The dissident workers believe that previous concessions given by the UAW union leadership in exchange for setting up "Joint UAW-General Motors" activities and structures, were contrary to the obligation of the union to fight for the well being of the worker. The Joint UAW-GM structures and activities are aimed at making GM more competitive, rather than protecting the workers' wages and working conditions.

While a number of non union auto factories have been set up in the U.S. in the last few decades, the dissident Delphi workers point to how these companies often have higher levels of injuries and a greater attrition rate among the workers. A smaller percentage of workers actually get to retire from those factories when compared to the percentage that are able to retire from the unionized auto factories. Also the dissident workers point to the fact that if the unionized auto workers in the U.S. get lower wages, this will also result in lowering the wages of workers in the non union auto factories.

The dissident workers criticize the mainstream press in the U.S. for repeating General Motors or Delphi claims about the cost of employing union workers, without doing their own investigation into the reality of such claims. For example, some in the auto industry claim that it costs Delphi $140,000 a year to employ a union worker. Dissident workers ask where these figures come from. They point to the fact that this is a figure created by inaccurate accounting practices. The cost of the current union workforce is being said to include the amount of money the corporation has to pay to retirees. But retirees had pension contributions put into tax exempt funds that General Motors used for purposes other than paying for pensions.

Also dissident workers point out that there are many fewer workers currently producing the same volume of parts or even more which in the past required a larger workforce. Paying workers who have high productivity a higher wage in return for that productivity is not inappropriate, they argue.

One of the most well known of the dissident workers is Gregg Shotwell. He writes and distributes a publication called "Live Bait and Ammo." He explains that workers at Delphi have nothing to lose by fighting against union officials and management when they are trying to cut back the wages and pensions of rank and file workers. Shotwell writes (8):

"Concessions don't save jobs, improve products, or sell vehicles. If UAW members agreed to pay for their own medical insurance, GM would not reduce the price of its cars. The Board of Directors would simply reward themselves. The only legitimate solution is Universal Health Care. The UAW should take the lead and reject all concessions until All Americans have health care."

His newsletter documents an ongoing effort to expose what he believes is the fraud and lies that are being used to cut wages and benefits that rank and file auto workers have earned through many years of hard work and struggle.

If Delphi succeeds in imposing the draconian wage cuts and cutbacks in union benefits via a bankruptcy court as it is trying to do, he believes that this will send a message to other U.S. corporations that they can use the same strategy to void their collective bargaining union agreements. He writes (9):

"Delphi is a test case. If the court allows Delphi to bankrupt U.S. operations while sheltering assets overseas, other multinational will follow suit. When the smoke clears, they will return under another name."

The result will be that instead of U.S. workers helping to set a standard for a living wage, less

dangerous working conditions and better benefits that workers elsewhere can strive for, the U.S. unionized workers will be helping to lower wages, set the basis for worsening conditions for workers in other countries.

How this drama will unfold is yet to be decided. Remarkably, there is a spirited opposition movement within the UAW, at the shop floor level. Those in opposition believe that it is important that the actual conditions of the shop floor worker be known and that the workers themselves be an active part of the ongoing struggle to protect the gains won by auto workers during the past 70 years.

In his book, "The Wealth of Nations," the economist Adam Smith, describes the importance to society of good conditions for its workers. Smith writes (10):

> "No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable."

Notes

1) For background about the history of the UAW and the role it has played in the American Labor Movement, see Ronda Hauben, "Lest We Forget: In Tribute To the Pioneers of the Great Flint Sit Down Strike". http://www.ais.org/~jrh/searchlight/lest.we.forget.txt

2) http://edworkforce.house.gov/democrats/autointroduction.html

3) http://edworkforce.house.gov/democrats/autoworkers testimony2.html

4) http://edworkforce.house.gov/democrats/autoworkers testimony2.html

5) http://edworkforce.house.gov/democrats/autoworkers testimony2.html

6) Live Bait and Ammo # 54 http://www.soldiersofsolidarity.com/id260.html

7) Michael Hauben, "In Celebration: A Past to Remember, A Future to Mold. The 50th Anniversary of the Flint Sit-Down Strike." Originally published in *The Searchlight*, the newspaper of UAW Local 659, Flint, Michigan, February 11, 1987. http://www.ais.org/~ronda/new.papers/michael/flint.txt

8) Live Bait and Ammo #50 http://www.soldiersofsolidarity.com/id267.html

9) Gregg Shotwell, "The Answering Machine", 01/28/06, MR Zine. http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/shotwell280106.html

10) Quoted in Michael Hauben, "The Real Voice of Adam Smith" http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/CS/adamsmith.txt

The Constitutional Death of the UAW

by William D. Hanline and friend
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During the recent rounds of negotiations between the UAW and General Motors Corporation over healthcare and legacy cost, the UAW, International Union officers committed a betrayal of trust of their members and betrayed their oath of office to uphold the UAW Constitution. This took place all for the sake of preserving their **"Cooperation Partnership"** with General Motors Corporation. This betrayal of trust and confidence encompasses both active and retired members. This action happened when the misleaders, with forethought and collusion, agreed to reopen the 2003 UAW-GM National Agreement. Consequentially, their act resulted in a contract that is morally and with out conscience, contrary to the stated purpose in the UAW Constitution.

This newly proposed deal between the UAW and General Motors Corporation shows without question, beginning with the 2003 contract and ending with the 2005 negotiations, the extent the UAW and their cooperative partner GM will go to maximize the automaker's competitive position. How their cooperative efforts to divide, whipsaw and pit the workers and retirees against one another *(Young against the Old)* for the sole purpose of transferring wealth from those who can least afford it, the retirees, to the Stakeholders of the company.

As a matter of historical fact, Corporate Industrial Relation's fundamental initiative, whether a work force is unionized or not, is to pit the young against the old, men against the women and races against each other. The distasteful reality of this labor management relationship between the UAW and GM fully manifest itself in this latest example of cooperation.

The UAW-GM highlights recently rolled out to the active workers in GM for their vote, clearly demonstrates the main strategy of the "**Cooperation Partners."** In the highlights, they unashamedly sent a message to the active workers voting that says, **"there is no cost to the active worker."** While at the same time, they remained silent on the fact that real dollars will be taken (ROBBED) from the

retirees who are helpless to defend themselves from this pillaging by being denied a right to vote on this matter.

Though it sounds in this letter that the retirees have no VOICE, that is not absolutely true. The UAW has selected two political sycophants, outside any political process, to be the voice of the 380,000 GM retirees during the law suite the **"Cooperation Partners"** (the UAW and GM) filed. Furthermore, they kept the names of those two retirees out of the press until after the law suite was filed in Federal Court. This was supposedly done to protect all retirees but in reality, it was done to give General Motors Corporation Safe Harbor from future law suites. While at the same time binding the retirees to an illegal negotiation (read NLRA) as the UAW negotiated the new retirement package for retirees. That act can only be described as a cowardly act in itself.

Finally yet importantly, it has to be said that the evil brilliance of the UAW and GM "**Cooperation Partners"** to divide and conquer now creates a two tier social structure among the retirees! By negotiating terms that say the retirees whose monthly pensions are less than 33 dollars a month for each year of service will not have to pay any of the premiums imposed in the new agreement is simply pitting retiree against retiree! This is evil genius, for the **"Cooperation Partners"** have pitted every one in the UAW against themselves, seniority members against new hires, skilled members against production, active workers against retirees and now retirees against retirees.

So what is this really all about? We have a pretty good idea! We know General Motors needs cash. Therefore, GM's "**Cooperation Partner"** (the UAW) pursuant a partnership contract with GM better known as the Articles of Incorporation of the "Center for Human Resources" Article II, makes the UAW obligated to help GM get cash so the company will remain competitive.

Now the question becomes, where can GM get cash? The answer lies in a term and program little known by most people; **it is the "VEBA" or Voluntary Employees' Beneficiary Association**. VEBAs are IRS, CODE 501(c) None Profit trusts that are designed to allow corporations to invest money for the purpose of providing benefits to their employees. The money for various benefits plans is raised by the tax exempt interest earned from different investments (Stocks, Bonds ETC). The Employee Benefits Security Administration of the DOL (Department of Labor) has oversight of VEBAs. They are recorded annually and are made available to the public by simply calling the EBSA of the DOL in Washington, D.C. and requesting that information.

The old General Motors VEBA that was providing benefits to GM-UAW employees also covered members represented by the "IUE-CWA" "USWA" and the other three unions. Salary employees and none union hourly employees benefits are also covered by the same VEBA. When a company combines more than one benefits fund under the umbrella of one great big Master trust (or VEBA) this is known as a commingled trust. What is more, there is nothing in the law that prevents a company from using the money in the VEBA for capital expenditures. GM reported doing exactly that in the companies Proxy statement of 2001. During the year 2000, General Motors raided the VEBA for over 1 billion dollars 1) for a 500 million dollar equity purchase in Suzuki (to build a plant) and 2) for a 500 million dollar equity injection into GMAC to show a profit that year. In other words, they looted the health care trust to build a plant over seas and transfer money from our healthcare VEBA to the stockholders. All while the **"Cooperation Partner"** looked the other way!

In the beginning of year 2005, General Motors was telling Wall Street and the world they had 21 billion dollars in cash. Where was that money? You guessed it, **"in the VEBA**." In the beginning of the year General Motors decided to take 6 Billion dollars out of the VEBA to cover three consecutive quarters of one billion dollar losses. Loses that grew from poor sales, rebates, the employee discounts made available to the public and massive recalls. However, during that time nobody, neither in General Motors or their **"Cooperation Partner"** (the UAW) spoke of the VEBA.

Consequentially, General Motors and their **"Cooperation Partner"** had to come up with some kind of scheme to free up that VEBA money. Naturally, the plot was propagated in the media, newspapers across the country and in GM and Delphi plants as **"Excessive Healthcare & Legacy Cost."**

In the media, the centerpiece of the negotiations was to find a way to **HELP** UAW members, most of who never ever heard of a VEBA or knew one existed. Who on the shop floor associates Healthcare with a VEBA?

The cleverly designed scheme provides General Motors with the right to absolve its existing VEBA and replace it with a new VEBA. Clearly, new trustees, chosen from a consortium of five industrial unions that represent GM workers, will manage the new VEBA. The member's benefits of those five unions were and are covered in the old and new VEBA respectively. Interestingly enough, by transferring control of the new VEBA over to the unions, General Motors will only have to maintain enough money in the old VEBA to cover white-collar employees' benefits. Why, because all the union represented workers have been thrown out of the old VEBA and placed into the new one.

Now consider this, the old VEBA has 15 billion dollars in it while the new VEBA will only have 1 billion dollars. Secondly, GM reported in the news that it cost $200 millions a year to administer the old VEBA. Common sense and logic makes it difficult to understand how workers healthcare and legacy cost are better secured by 1 billion dollars, than they are by 15 billion dollars. Nevertheless, the **"Cooperation Partners"** have decided that this is what is best for the workers.

In the mean time General Motors can let the GOOD TIMES ROLL because they have found another source of income. Obviously, it is not from selling cars, but then again we know they do not make their primary income from selling cars because every year they continue loosing market share. Therefore, since there is nothing else to sell off in GM except GMAC, which they are trying to do now, they get their hands on at least 10 billion dollars in the old VEBA and they look forward to the time they sell off GMAC and maybe get another 25 billion.

Much like the automaker, the union is fast arriving at the point where the institution, the UAW International Union, can survive maybe with out any dues paying members at all. The latter is possible because the UAW has alternative sources of income as well. At present day, only one third of the UAW's annual flat line income is generated from union dues. The other sources of income are from interest earned off the strike fund, retirement trust, joint funds charge backs and service charges on those joint funds chargebacks.

General Motors on the other hand is probably walking into a $10 billion win fall they can do what they want. More importantly, GM has absolved the company of a 25 billion dollar legacy cost. It is a great deal for the **"Cooperation Partners"** but a terrible deal for the helpless masses of retirees who have been denied any democratic input, democratic voice, or democratic due process. Equally, it is a tragedy yet to happen to active workers who have been duped into believing that this negotiations is going to be NO COST to them, of course, not until such time when workers themselves become helpless retirees.

The real tragedy is the betrayal of trust of both our members and retirees and the very instrument that was written and designed to protect members from this type of tyranny, "The UAW Constitution." If you do not feel like reading the entire book may we encourage you to read the preamble? Moreover, if you have never read it before, you need to NOW!

Then again we believe the actions taken during these negotiations by the UAW International Union delivered the final blow to the Union by driving a dividing rod through its heart and sole of the union "THE UAW CONSTITUTION."

Next year members will be selecting delegates who will attend the UAW Constitutional Convention. WHY we ask? Why even hold a Constitutional Convention? The officers of the international union have proven they have no regard and have abandoned the principles set forth in the constitution and lest we forget they made a solemn pledge to uphold when they took office. Instead, the **"Cooperation Partners"** choose to do as they damn well please in spite of those beautiful words and the intent of that book.

A lawyer and friend recently asked the following question. "Will the UAW as we have known it be around in the next five years?" We concurred that it would NOT! Ironically, we did not have any idea at that moment that the end was so close at hand.

Keep in mind the **"Cooperation Partners"** will survive, but the UAW as a Trade Union is already constitutionally dead.

"I never did give anybody hell, I just told the truth and they thought it was hell." Harry S. Truman

GM Buyouts No 'Christmas in March'

Media coverage and Internet dialogue key to empowering workers

by Ronda Hauben

If one were to look at some of the headlines in the U.S. press on March 23, the day after General Motors made an announcement to offer buyouts and early retirement to its hourly workforce, it might have seemed as if U.S. auto workers had a reason to celebrate Christmas in March. Headlines like "Generous GM", "In the Giving Spirit", "Take the Money and Run" appeared in the pages of newspapers around the country.

Other articles, like one in The Washington Post, raised the spectre of the previous "good years." The article explained, "The surprise here is not that the golden era for autoworkers has come to an end but that it lasted as long as it did." (1)

"A Gleam of Hope for GM" was the headline in the Business Week article announcing the recent GM moves. "The automaker has cut a deal -- a very generous one -- with the UAW that could put it on the road for lower costs." The writer explained how GM announced an early retirement plan for its hourly workers that would let them retire, with a certain incentive payment, depending on years of service, or just take a lay off, and be paid a lump sum payment. This the article tells us, will allow GM, and the parts company, Delphi, which GM spun off as a separate company, to substantially cut their hourly work force.

An online Web site noted that Google recorded 1,325 news stories about the GM/Delphi early retirement and buyout program. Despite the large number of news organizations covering this announcement, however, there has been little serious analysis in the mainstream media of the importance of what is happening or of its implications.

While most of the mainstream press carried articles expressing relief that the GM and Delphi corporations had found a way to lower the wages they pay to workers, there is another view of what is happening that has gotten little attention in the U.S. press.

In one of the rare articles raising a different viewpoint, Robert Kuttner writes in the Boston Globe:

"Who would make the cars? A new generation of lower-paid workers. It is a mark of GM's fragility that the UAW considers this about the best deal the union can get."

Kuttner notes that, "labor costs are actually about $10 an hour higher in Germany" than in the U.S., and yet the problem that GM is having doesn't seem to be a problem for the German auto makers. He proposes that the problem isn't workers' wages, but something else. What is wrong, he writes, is "management thinking and...the official free-market ideology."

Irrespective of the buyout and early retirement plan, Delphi has set March 30 as the deadline when it must have an agreement with the UAW or it threatens that it will file a motion on March 31 to void its contract with the UAW. A press release at the Delphi Web site announced:

"Delphi will continue talks in an effort to achieve a comprehensive agreement no later than March 30, 2006. Absent agreement with all parties, Delphi will file no later than March 31, 2006 its motion under Sections 1113 and 1114 of the U.S. Bankruptcy Code to initiate the process of seeking court authorization to reject the collective bargaining agreements and terminate hourly post-retirement health plans and life insurance." (5)

Delphi is the largest auto parts company in the world. It employs 185,000 worldwide. In the U.S. it employs 50,000, with 33,650 of these employees are hourly workers. (6) In Mexico, Delphi employs over 70,000 workers.

In 1998, GM was encouraged by Wall Street analysts to take its parts operation and spin it off into a separate company. (7)

Given the size and the international scope of Delphi, there are serious questions raised about why it is declaring bankruptcy in its North American operations, but is allowed to continue its operations outside of North America without any effect of the bankruptcy declaration.

Among the workers who are affected by the Delphi bankruptcy, there is the suspicion that the bankruptcy is but a ploy to rid itself of a unionized workforce.

The response to the proposed buy out among many of the workers is confusion about whether it will benefit them to take it. Among the dissident workers, however, the issue raised is how the buyout

will affect the future of labor in the U.S. and the living standard of the workers who follow them into the factories and other large corporations.

The dissident workers don't attribute the gains made by workers at companies like GM or Delphi to the generosity of the companies. Instead, as one worker explains, "The only thing we've ever been 'given' by the corporation is what they gave up when we had one hand twisted in their collar and the other hand ready to slap them down."

The fact that there are negotiations going on even though there has not been a membership decision to reopen the union contract, strikes some workers as an ominous sign. If they take early retirement, what is to guarantee them that they will get the retirement benefits they are promised. "No amount of concessions will ever appease them," is a view that is voiced about why it is a dead end for workers to go along with the early retirement proposed packages or the contract the UAW is negotiating with Delphi. A strategy of giving concessions, some workers claim, will only lead to more and more demands by the company. "No one should be negotiating in the middle of a contract," is a feeling that is expressed.

The fact that the early retirement offer is being agreed to by the UAW without consulting the membership and having a vote by the UAW membership, is seen as a confirmation of the loss of membership control over what the union officials do. This leaves out any role for the rank and file and their concerns.

Workers at Delphi or who are supporting the dissidents in UAW to oppose the anti-democratic means that the UAW is using, are looking back at the 1936-37 sit down strike and the militant tradition of the UAW.(8) Another important aspect of UAW history which is less well known, however, is the tradition of recognizing the need for a press which allows for debate among the rank and file on the issues that affect them. One auto worker, Carl Johnson, often explained the importance of such a press in a column he wrote in his local union newspaper, "The Searchlight," which was the official union newspaper of the Chevrolet Engine Plant in Flint, Michigan. Sit down strikers like Carl Johnson, and his son Kermit Johnson, who was one of the leaders of the Plant 4 sit down, had been part of the actions of 1936-1937 which made it possible to win the UAW.

In the years following the victory of the Flint Sit Down Strike, Carl Johnson advocated the need for an uncensored press for workers, a press that would make it possible to debate the issues important to the rank and file. (9)

Johnson explained the need to welcome all from the ranks of labor to be part of the discussion. He wrote:

"But who, from the ranks of Labor? Let them all speak -- that's what Free Speech was intended for! Let them all present their view in a forum. From that the reader will have a fair chance to decide." (October 29, 1949, "The Searchlight")

Johnson felt that most of the institutions in society during this period were controlled by the large corporations and so a press that could be independent was needed. He writes:

"We must bare in mind the obvious fact that our education institutions, the schools, the Daily press, the radio, etc. are all controlled by Big Business – by that small section of the population which suffers little from the hardships of depression and war." (March 1, 1945, *The Searchlight*)

He was not proposing a press that would be dominated by officials of the international union. Instead, the involvement and participation of the rank and file were critical to the vision Johnson had for such a press if it were to help to set a basis for democratic decision-making and actions. He writes:

"The rank and file...have nothing to lose by advancing ideas and opinions which may, for the time being, be at variance with popular concepts. Moreover, a rank and filer with ideas of change which promise greatly improved conditions for him as well as for his fellow workers has therein the necessary incentive to express those ideas. It is important to understand, therefore, that the future welfare of the rank and file depends largely upon the part the ranks play in shaping that future...." (January 11, 1951, *The Searchlight*, These are excerpts are from "The Searchlight: the Voice of the Chevy Worker.")

The importance that Carl Johnson and other UAW pioneers attached to discussion and debate among the rank and file became embodied in the way they structured their local union newspapers. One such newspaper, *The Searchlight*, the local union newspaper of UAW Local 659, in Flint, Michigan, was censored by the International Union

in 1949/1950 and took up a fight against that censorship at the 1951 UAW convention. Losing their fight against the censorship, however, made it more difficult for them to carry on their program of continuing their fight for gains for labor.

Today, with the Internet, there is a new form of media making it possible to discuss and debate how to respond to the actions of corporations like Delphi and GM. The discussion on some online forums, newsgroups, and web sites recognizes that the effort to understand the problem that the Delphi bankruptcy poses is not one that can be solved quickly. Its not like "instant coffee" but more like understanding the need to plant "seeds" and "nurture the fruit." (10)

NOTES

(1) "Laying to Rest a 'Generous' Way of Life" *The Washington Post* http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/03/25/AR2006032500097.html
(2) News & Features, By David Welch, *BusinessWeek* March 24, 2006 http://www.businessweek.com/autos/content/mar2006/bw20060323_907896.htm?chan=autos_autos+index+page_autos+lede
(3) From the Archives, *Auto News*, Thursday, March 23, 2006 http://www.cleveland.com/weblogs/autonews/index.ssf?/mtlogs/advance_autonews/archives/ 2006_03.html
(4) Robert Kuttner, "Making U.S. Manufacturing Work" *Boston Globe*, March 25, 2006 http://www.boston.com/business/articles/2006/03/25/making_us_manufacturing_work/
(5)Delphi Docket (PDF) http://delphidocket.com/documents/0544481/0544481060217000000000001.pdf
(6) Critical Moment, January 26, 2006, "The Worker's Docket: A Summary of Facts and Ideas from the Delphi closings by Fred David" http://criticalmoment.org/node/91/
(7) *Detroit Free Press*, "Time Line of GM and Delphi's Travails," March 23, 2006. http://www.freep.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=2006603230498
(8) Michael Hauben, "In Celebration: A Past To Remember, A Future To Mold: The 50th Anniversary Of The Flint Sit-Down Strike" http://www.ais.org/~ronda/new.papers/michael/flint.txt
(9) Ronda Hauben, "The Story of the Searchlight" http://www.ais.org/~jrh/searchlight/sl.1.txt
(10) Some online forums and Web sites include: UAW forum Delphi Bankruptcy Discussion
http://www.uawforum.com/forumdisplay.php?f=3

http://futureoftheunion.com/
Newsgroups on Usenet:
alt.society.labor-unions
soldiersofsolidarity

[Editor's note: The following article tells the story of the first protests in France which led one month later to the withdrawal of the new labor law against which the students and workers were protesting.]

French Youth Up in Arms Over New Labor Law

'First Employment Contract' gives employer right to fire indiscriminately

By Ronda Hauben

The demonstrations in Paris in May 1968 have become a symbol of the protest movement that swept the globe in the 1960s. The massive demonstrations on March 7, 2006 in 160 towns and cities in France, and the subsequent student strikes and university occupations and demonstrations, planned or in process, have raised the question as to whether these recent protests will lead to a similar social unrest as occurred in the 1960s.

On March 7, up to a million people in France demonstrated in opposition to the French government's plan to pass a new law that was then in the French Senate. The law has come to be known as CPE, the "Contrat Premiere Embauche"; in English, the "First Employment Contract." Despite the protest, the government passed the bill the next day so that it is now a law. The law was passed in a way that sidestepped the debate and discussion that is a traditional part of the legislative process in France.

This law applies to those under 26 years of age who find a new job. It gives the employer the right to terminate the new hire's employment within two years without having to give any reason. Under French law, the employer has only a month to terminate the employment of a new employee who is 26 or older without having to provide a reason. After that, French labor law provides protection for the employee so that employment isn't ended without objective cause.

Does Electoral Politics Fit Democracy?

The unemployment rate in France is an estimated 10 percent of the French workforce. This

includes an estimated 20 percent of young people who do not have jobs. There have been various proposals offered for how to lower this high rate of unemployment. One such proposal is to make it possible for those in the current workforce to retire earlier than presently possible in order to open jobs for those who are currently unemployed.

The new law, however, takes a very different approach to the high rate of youth unemployment. It is based on an initiative introduced by the French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin. It provides that those under 26 who work for companies with more than 20 employees can be dismissed from their employment in the first two years without any reason given for their termination. Students and others who oppose the law say that this treats them in a discriminatory way. Not only is it normally difficult to get a job, but under this new law, an employer will have an incentive to end a young worker's employment before the two years are up and hire another employee who is under 26. For those seeking jobs who are 26 or over, this new law provides an incentive for employers to give preference to younger workers who can be hired and then fired as a new form of temporary employment.

Last August a similar French law was put into effect by Executive Mandate that applied only to employers with fewer than 20 paid employees. Under this law, known as the CNE, (in French "Contrat Nouvelle Embauche") a small employer can hire and dismiss people before they have worked for the employer for two years without having to provide a reason for the dismissal. There are many instances of workers protesting that they lost their jobs unfairly under this law. The very competitive pressures that leads employers to desire such flexibility to fire at will, also is a pressure on the employer to terminate a new worker before the two years are up and to hire someone else who is not covered by the labor laws. The new labor law, the CPE, is modeled on the CNE, but applies to larger employers.

The French Senate passed the CPE in a hurried way and at night, on March 8 and 9, cutting short debate using a special procedure known as Article 49.3 of the French Constitution. Students, student organizations, and other young people across France were dismayed by the prospects of having to work under the conditions provided by the new law. French labor unions also oppose the new law, along with the Socialist Party and other parties, including the Green Party.

In response to the French government passing the law after the large protest demonstrations, there were student strikes and sit-ins at universities around France, including at the Sorbonne University in Paris. An estimated 600 students were part of the occupation of the Sorbonne on Friday, March 10. Other students demonstrated in the streets surrounding the Sorbonne to support the sit-in. Early Saturday morning, about 4 a.m., however, the police forcibly ejected those who were still occupying the university.

Dismay has been expressed by those who oppose the CPE that the police forcibly broke up a peaceful protest and entered a university. Students vow to continue the struggle to get the law changed. Continuing demonstrations and student strikes are planned, including a demonstration for March 16, and another one on March 18.

Press reports about the demonstrations describe how students are not only frustrated by the law, but even more so by the lack of response from the government to their protests. One student complained, "We feel we have the support of the people in the street but that the government just doesn't care."(1) Others explain that they escalated their protest to a sit-in because they were enraged that the government passed the new law disregarding the massive demonstrations against it.

Students describe how they feel they have no means to influence the decisions made by the government. At the heart of the discontent is dissatisfaction with the lack of democratic processes that made it possible for the French government to impose such an unpopular law on French citizens.

This problem of a disconnect between the citizens and their government is being expressed in other European countries, not only in France. In the recent German election, many were unhappy with the Hartz IV labor laws that the German government is instituting to take away the social benefits that German workers have felt important to maintain. Since both of the main political parties supported the Hartz IV laws, it was difficult for those opposed to them to express their dissatisfaction in the election and to find a way through the election to make a change in government policy regarding the new labor laws.

Similarly, in Great Britain, there is widespread discontent about various aspects of the British govern-

ment's programs and policies. Elections there also do not provide a means for expressing this dissatisfaction, as a recent research study published in Great Britain demonstrates.

The report, "Power: An Independent Inquiry into Britain's Democracy," (http://www.powerinquiry.org/report/index.php) was published at the end of February, 2006. It is the result of research funded by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, Ltd., which supports research "promoting democratic reform, constitutional change and social justice." The researchers explain that, "The POWER Inquiry was set up in 2004 to explore how political participation and involvement can be increased and deepened in Britain." The product of their research is a harsh critique of the failure in Great Britain of any means for citizens to participate in the decisions that affect their lives. The report suggests that elections are not playing this role. This problem is not peculiar to Great Britain, but the "majority of the established democracies are facing similar problems despite the differences in their recent political and economic histories and the variations in their constitutional arrangements," the report explains.

What the report documents is that there is widespread recognition among the citizenry that their views and desires are not part of the political processes, nor are they of interest to the politicians who make the decisions. Citizens, especially those who are better informed via the Internet, feel the need more than ever to have their views taken into consideration by the government officials who make decisions. However, these decisions are being made in ways that exclude citizens more than ever before. Essentially, citizens are being "evicted" from the political processes.

The report includes a set of recommendations about what is needed to change the situation. The researchers plan to hold a conference to discuss the report, its implications and recommendations it contains. But the significance of the report is that it documents how the discontent being expressed in the streets, and on university campuses in France in response to the new labor law, is part of a widespread failure of governments to provide for the democratic needs and desires of their citizens. The same was seen in 2003 when millions of people in the U.S. and elsewhere expressed opposition to any invasion of Iraq. The Bush regime went ahead anyway.

The government processes ongoing in France are an example of the broader problem, that the Power Commission identified, a problem that demonstrates that there is a fundamental flaw in how countries like France, Great Britain, Germany and the U.S. claim to practice democracy. The problem is decreasing means for citizens to influence the decisions that effect their lives.

In 1968, a similar problem resulted in widespread unrest and mass movements to try to correct the injustices and the lack of democratic processes available to citizens. The events unfolding in France today, reinforced by the problems described in the report published in Great Britain, demonstrate that there is a need for change in the democratic decision making practices of the countries with some of the most praised traditions of democracy. The problem of extending the democratic processes practiced by governments is a problem still to be solved. The French students and the French labor movement are actively protesting the actions of the French government and fighting for more democratic political processes.

(1) Angelique Chrisafis, French students revive spirit of 68, The Guardian, March 10, 2006.

First NYC Transit Strike in 25 Years

Workers object to lower pension benefits for new hires, despite $1 billion surplus

by Ronda Hauben

At 3:05 a.m. on Dec. 20, 2005 Roger Toussaint, the President of the New York Transit Workers Union (TWU) announced that the transit workers who operate the New York City buses and subways, were on strike. This is the first transit strike in New York City in the past 25 years. The last strike lasted 11 days and was in 1980.

Toussaint said that the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), which is in charge of the transit system, has a $1 billion surplus.(1) Yet the contract offer the MTA made provides little of a wage in-

crease and is a contractual cutback in health and pension benefits, as new hires would be required to pay more for their benefits.

An important issue that caused the strike is that the MTA contract offer would pay new hires lower pension benefits. This is a strategy to divide the union and weaken it by creating a two-tier system, with one set of workers having better benefits than another set. Also such a system provides a material incentive for management to harass older workers and to try to get rid of them, so as to replace them with lower-paid employees. A serious grievance of transit workers is that they are already subjected to unjust disciplinary actions by management. Against the more then 33,000 transit workers there are perhaps 15,000 outstanding disciplinary actions being contested by the union.

> "This is a fight over whether hard work will be rewarded with a decent retirement -- over the erosion or eventual elimination of health benefit coverage for working people," said Toussaint.

The President of the Transport Workers Union of American, the parent union of the TWU, is reported to have said he wasn't in support of the strike and that the union should return to the bargaining table instead of striking. Without a strike, though, workers felt there was not much of a reason for the MTA to change the hardball tactics they were using against the workers. Toussaint explained:

> "The MTA knew that reducing health and pension standards at the authority would be unacceptable to our union. They knew there was no good economic reason for their hard line on this issue - not with a billion dollar surplus. They went ahead anyway." (2)

The Mayor of New York City and the Governor of New York State have encouraged the hardline tactics of the MTA rather than supporting a serious effort to settle the contract dispute.

The Union initially asked for an 8 percent wage increase each year, but reduced that to 6%. But they were committed to maintaining the same pension benefits for new hires as for older workers.

A small wage increase of 3 percent, 4 percent and 3-1/2 percent in the three years of the contract was offered but as the new hires would have to pay more for their pensions, this would effectively give them an even lower wage than other union workers.

A rally was held on Monday in support of the transit workers. Some of the issues raised by transit workers as problems they have been faced with include the closing of toll booths and the reassignment of workers to cleaning and other chores, the large number of disciplinary actions against workers, and the proposal to eliminate the conductor on trains who is there to monitor what is happening with the train and the passengers. (3)

The sentiment among union members in the city is that they are fed up with management insisting on "givebacks" and continually cutting workers' wages and benefits. Other unions said they would do what they could to support the transit workers.

There is a law called the Taylor Law which prohibits public employees in New York State from striking. The MTA has gotten a preliminary injunction from the New York State Supreme Court that will allow it to impose large fines on the union, and fine each worker two days pay for each day they strike. Also, New York City Mayor Bloomberg has filed a lawsuit asking that the workers be fined $25,000 each day they strike.

The transit workers feel that if they don't stand up for better working conditions when there is a surplus in the budget, that they will only be agreeing to ever worsening working conditions. The transit workers are in a stronger position than other workers in the city in terms of their ability to fight for better conditions not only because of the MTA surplus but also because of the crucial role transportation plays in the life as such a big city.

If they win the strike, that is a support for other workers in their fight for higher wages and better working conditions. If the transit workers agree to accept cutbacks in their benefits and even poorer working conditions, that encourages other employers to lower wages and benefits.

The transit workers did not want to strike. They had let the deadline for the strike on Thursday pass, and continued to try to negotiate. The response of the MTA, however, was to continue to demand cutbacks from the union. The transit workers have called on all in the city to recognize their importance of the strike and "to rally in solidarity to show that the TWU doesn't stand alone."(4)

Notes:

(1) The MTA has a history of hiding their surpluses and keeping different sets of books. See for example: http://www.osc. state.ny.us/press/releases/apr03/042303.htm

(2) http://twulocal100.blogspot.com/2005/12/toussaint-twu-local-100-on-strike.html
(3) See http://nyc.indymedia.org/en/2005/12/62121 .html
(4) The web site for the union is: http://www.twulocal 100.org
The web site for the MTA is: http:// www.mta.info/

[Editor's note: The following talk was presented at the XXII International Congress of History of Science in Beijing China on July 26, 2005. The symposium it was part of was the first international symposium focusing on netizens that we have heard of.]

The International and Scientific Origins of the Internet and the Emergence of the Netizens

by Ronda Hauben
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"Netizens are Net Citizens who utilize the Net from their home, workplace, school, library, etc. These people are among those who populate the Net, and make it a resource of human beings. These netizens participate to help make the Net both an intellectual and a social resource."

from "Further Thoughts about Netizens" http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/netizens/tunis-ppf/RHauben.txt

I am happy to be here today and to be the first paper in this symposium. The symposium is titled "Computer Networks, the Internet and Netizens: Their Impact on Science and Society"

It is an honor to have this symposium in Asia, in Beijing, as new and important developments regarding the Internet are being explored by netizens in Korea, China and other countries in East Asia. Also this is a period when the future of the Internet and its development is being contested. There is a struggle ongoing between the U.S. government and a number of countries around the world who are meeting under the sponsorship of the UN's World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) to try to determine the management model that is needed for the international administration of the Internet's infrastructure. But to solve a problem like this it is useful to have some idea of how the Internet was developed and what are the salient aspects of that development.

In my talk today, I want to explore these aspects and in turn try to unravel some of the myths about the Internet and its origins that hide its actual character. I have a draft paper I have prepared where I explore the issues in greater detail that I will speak about today. http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/netizens/tunis-ppf/RHauben.txt

First, a common view of the Internet is that it was created within the U.S. by the U.S. Department of Defense as a way to have a communication system that would survive a nuclear war. This is a fallacious view of the origin of the Internet. It is inaccurate in many aspects.

Notably:

1) The Internet was created as a scientific research project by an open and international research process, not as a secret Department of Defense product oriented development.
2) The Internet is an international and not an American creation. Though many American researchers did critical work to develop the Internet, the research was part of the activity of an international research community.
3) The goal of Internet research was to create a means to make communication possible across the boundaries of different networks. During the period of the birth of the Internet (1973-1983), countries like Great Britain, France, Canada and others were either actually creating their own national or specific computer networks, or were developing plans to do so. These networks would all be different technically and would be owned and operated by different political and administrative entities. How to provide for communication across the boundaries of these diverse networks was the problem to be solved.

In my paper I go into greater detail about the process of creating the protocol TCP/IP to make it possible to communicate across the boundaries of dissimilar networks. I show a graphic of the research collaboration by Norwegian researchers connected with NORSA (NORwegian Seismic ARray). Actually the research organization was the Norwegian

Defence Research Establishment (NDRE, "Forsvarets Forskningsinstitutt"), British researchers connected with University College London, and American researchers working as part of the Information Processing Techniques Office (IPTO) at ARPA.

But for my talk today I want to focus on what I propose are some of the scientific origins of the research that have made the Internet possible. And I want to argue that it is these scientific origins, which are poorly understood and not often recognized, but that are at the essence of the nature of the Internet.

To understand these scientific origins of the Internet's development, I want to step back to the early post World War II period. During this period there was a scientific ferment to understand the science of communication. A community of scientists, mathematicians, engineers and social scientists were interested in exploring the processes of communication. One means they adopted was to participate in an interdisciplinary community of researchers who met bi-yearly or yearly. Essentially the researchers pursued different disciplines and spoke different scientific languages.

Their effort was to try to bridge the boundaries that separated their disciplines. The meetings of the group were known by different names, but during one period they were called the Josiah Macy Jr Foundation conferences on Cybernetics(also known as "feedback" or "self organizing systems").

JCR Licklider (or Lick as he asked people to call him) was a research scientist who had made certain scientific advances in communication research. His PhD thesis broke new ground by mapping where in the brain of the cat, different pitches of sound were received and how this led to the perception of different frequencies of sound.

Also Licklider had made an engineering breakthrough which is referred to as "clipped speech". He was able to identify what small part of the place on the sound wave was critical for the sound to be perceived. (This was helpful to the U.S. military during WWII in identifying how pilots could get help hearing vital sounds despite lots of background noise.)

Licklider was deeply interested in the study of communication. Though he only attended one of the 10 Macy Foundation meetings on Cybernetics, he, along with other scientists, received support from the National Science Foundation(NSF) in the U.S. to have a meeting in 1954 at MIT similar to the Macy Foundation meetings on Cybernetics that ended in 1953. The title of the conference was "Problems in Human Communication and Control". The notes of the meeting were then transcribed. Licklider edited the notes. The proceedings was published, much in the same way the Macy Conference proceedings were published.

An important interest of Licklider's was in the workings of the brain and how more advanced computer development could help the research collaboration of scientists and engineers. Of particular interest was a form of modeling. In a paper written with Robert Taylor in 1968, Licklider and Taylor wrote:

> "By far the most numerous, most sophisticated and most important models are those that reside in men's minds."

An example of how the computer could help represent models for Licklider was the program Sketchpad created by Ivan Sutherland. Describing a demonstration he had seen of Sutherland's modeling program, Warren Teitelman, then a graduate student at MIT, writes:

> "Sutherland sketched the girder of a bridge and indicated the points at which members were connected together by rivets. He drew a support at each end of the girder and a load at the center. The model showed the girder sagging under the load and a number appeared on each member showing the tensions there."

Sutherland was able to add the support needed using the modeling program. Then the bridge was, according to the computer simulation program, able to maintain its weight. This is an example of the encouraging potential that Licklider envisioned if the scientific research community could acquire the technology they needed for their modeling.

Licklider not only felt that modeling was critical for scientific research, but for society as well. Describing the modeling that Licklider believed characterized the functioning of the brain, he and Taylor write:

> "In richness, plasticity, facility and economy, the mental model has no peer, but in other respects it has shortcomings."

The primary shortcomings of such a model is that is that it is stored in the brain of only a single individual. Hence:

"It can be observed and manipulated only by one person"

In order for such models to serve a social function, there is a need, as Licklider and Taylor explain, for the models in the head of individuals to become part of a collaborative process. They explain:

"Society rightly distrusts the modeling done by a single mind."

More specifically:

"Society demands (...) [what-ed] amounts to the requirement that individual models be compared and brought into some degree of accord. The requirement for communicating which we now define concisely [as-ed] 'cooperative' modeling – [is-ed]cooperation in the construction, maintenance and use of a model"

Licklider and Taylor then explain that like the process they believe is ongoing in the brain, what is needed for such cooperative modeling is:

"a plastic or moldable medium that can be modeled, a dynamic medium in which processes will flow into consequences."

Most important for such a medium is that it supports collaborative contributions and processes - that it be:

"a common medium that can be contributed to and experimented with by all."

Licklider and Taylor envisioned that the developing online community would find the capability for such collaborative modeling as the Internet developed and that having access to this plastic collaborative environment would be a boon to the advancement of society and of science.

Along with the need for such a moldable medium for scientific collaborative development, Licklider also maintained that there would be a need for a collaborative community with the capability to support continuing network development and to intervene to help with the problems that would develop when government officials who didn't understand the nature of computer technology, would be charged with making the decisions needed for its development.

Licklider was part of a community of scientists who had seen poor technical and political decisions made by governments. (For example the bombing of civilians during WWII by the Allies). At a series of talks held to celebrate the 100th anniversary of MIT, the British scientist, civil servant, and writer, CP

Snow, was invited to give a talk on "Scientists and Decision Making."

During his talk, Snow described the gap that would exist between understanding the nature of the new computer technology that was being developed and the understanding of government officials who would have the responsibility for the decisions about how to support the development of computer technology. Snow explained how such a problem required a situation similar to a phenomenon that in physics is called Brownian Motion. Referring to what happened in Great Britain after World War II when the whole society began discussing the need for national health care, Snow outlines this phenomenon:

"I believe that the healthiest decisions of society occur by something more like Brownian movement. All kinds of people all over the place suddenly get smitten with the same sort of desire, with the same sort of interest at the same time. This forms a concentration of pressure and of direction. These concentrations of pressure gradually filter their way through to the people whose nominal responsibility it is to put the legislation into a written form."

You may notice, perhaps, that this description by C.P. Snow of a form of Brownian Motion for society, sounds similar in some ways to the concept of the 'public sphere' that the German philosopher Jurgen Habermas explores in his writing.

Shortly after the talks for the MIT centennial, Licklider was invited to join the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) to set up an office for research in computer science and an office for research in behavioral science. The office for research in computer science he called the Information Processing Techniques Office (IPTO). (1962-1986). Licklider was its first director and he was followed by Ivan Sutherland. There were several subsequent directors, and then in 1974, Licklider was invited to return as director.

In his writing and talks after he left the IPTO in 1975, Licklider describes the problems he encountered to get support for basic research in computer science within the U.S. Department of Defense and the need for citizens who will actively take up the effort to deal with the problems when they develop.

Licklider is not asking for citizens to vote on every issue. Instead he outlines how voting is insuffi-

cient as a way to work to promote the public interest. He writes:

> "(V)oting in the absence of understanding defines only the public attitude, not the public interest. It means that many public spirited individuals must study, model, analyze, argue, write, criticize, and work out each issue and each problem until they reach consensus or determine that none can be reached – at which point there may be occasion for voting."

> (Licklider, 1979, p. 126)

Licklider describes the need for citizen involvement in government decisions to help determine how to support the continuing development of computer technology. More significantly, Licklider proposes that people will not be interested in government processes until they have a means to participate in those processes. He foresees how computer developments will provide that means. He writes:

> "Computer power to the people is essential to the realization of a future in which most citizens are informed about, and interested in, the process of government."

> (Licklider, 1979, p. 126)

The process for citizen involvement in the development of computer technology that Licklider outlines is a process that characterizes the kind of discussion that I found on some of the earliest mailing lists and Usenet newsgroups that developed in the early 1980s. This process functioned for needed technical discussion, such as with the ARPANET TCP/IP Digest when the cutover to TCP/IP was carried out. (See Ronda Hauben, "A Study of the ARPANET TCP/IP Digest and of the Role of Online Communication in the Transition from the ARPANET to the Internet", http://umcc.ais.org/~ronda/new.papers/tcpdraft.txt)

Such discussion also helped to develop and spread the vision for ubiquitous computer networking that was discussed on the Human Nets mailing list and other mailing lists and Usenet newsgroups during the early 1980s. But more fundamentally, the emergence of a public spirited online citizenry that Licklider believed so important to the continued support and development of computer and networking technology was identified through the research done by a college student in the early 1990s.

In 1992-3, as part of research done for a college assignment, the student, Michael Hauben, posted a series of questions and some preliminary research about the developing network on Usenet newsgroups. (Usenet is a worldwide discussion forum.) He also posted his questions on a few Internet mailing lists. Michael was surprised as replies to his questions began to arrive in his mailbox. Through subsequent posts, and analyzing the replies he received, he recognized that a new form of consciousness, a new identity was being acquired by many of those who wrote to him. In my paper, I describe how a number of the replies Michael received indicated how people online were not only interested in how the developing Net was contributing to their own lives, but also many were seeking to spread access to the Internet to others.

Michael had seen the word 'net.citizen' referred to online. Thinking about the social concern and consciousness he had found among those who wrote to him, and about the non-geographical character of a net based form of citizenship, he contracted 'net.citizen' into the word 'netizen'. Netizen has come to reflect the online social identity Michael discovered doing his research.

Michael wrote a paper he titled, "The Net and Netizens: The Impact the Net has on People's Lives" describing the research he had done and the contributions he received from many parts of the world. Michael's research was done in 1992-1993 just at the time that the Internet was spreading to countries and networks around the world which were becoming connected to the Internet. He posted his paper on Usenet and several Internet mailing lists on July 6, 1993 in 4 parts under the title "Common Sense: The Net and Netizens: the Impact the Net is having on people's lives". People around the world wrote Michael that they found his paper of interest and the term netizen quickly spread, not only in the online world, but soon began appearing in newspapers and other publications offline.

Michael continued to do research into the history and impact of the Internet, and to post his articles online. During this period I collaborated with Michael, also doing research and writing that was posted online. People who found our writing of interest suggested we gather them into a book. We collected our papers into an online book title "Netizens and the Wonderful World of the Net" which was put online in January 1994.

Netizens, as Michael wrote, are those who embodied the social conscious and public purpose

similar to that which Lickldier had considered important for the continued development of computer technology and of the public policy to support that development.

Michael was invited to speak at a conference in Beppu Bay in Japan in November 1995. In his speech he explained why he felt it was important to distinguish between the more general usage the media has promoted, that anyone online is a netizen, and the usage that the he had introduced, reserving the title 'netizen' for the online user who actively participates to make the net and the world it is part of a better place. He explained:

> "Netizens...are people who understand it takes effort and action on each and everyone's part to make the Net a regenerative and vibrant community and resource. Netizens are people who decide to devote time and effort into making the Net, this new part of our world, a better place."
>
> Michael Hauben, talk given on November 24, 1995 at the Hypernetwork '95, Beppu Bay Conference in Beppu, Japan. The theme of the conference was "The Netizen Revolution and the Regional Information Infrastructure."

Individuals from around the world adopted and helped to spread the consciousness and identity of the netizen. A specially interesting development at the present time are the netizens of South Korea.

South Korea is one of the most wired nations in the world. Over 70% of the population has access to high speed Internet. Along with the spread of high speed Internet access in Korea is the development of netizenship among the Korean population. I document some of the significant aspects of this development in my conference paper.

In a way that is similar to how Michael described the interactive, collaborative online processes that he and those who wrote him in the early 1990s, researchers in South Korea are documenting similar processes and the impact of netizens on Korean society. One particularly interesting aspect of these developments is that online processes are being adopted by formerly offline institutions and that online clubs have developed offline organizational forms as well.

Also these researchers document how online collaborative discussion processes among Korean netizens are creating the kinds of collaborative social models that Licklider believed were needed for scientific and social advancement.

Implications and Research Questions Raised

The online plastic collaborion which makes possible interactive modeling that Licklider and Taylor describe in their 1968 paper is a helpful analogy through which to view the online world that has evolved as the Internet has developed and spread around the world. The social consciousness of users as online citizens, as netizens has also evolved and spread.

In this symposium today we will hear other talks which will explore or differ with the framework I am proposing.

I want to argue for the need for specific studies, whether historical or contemporaneous, of how the interactive collaborative modeling that licklider proposed as essential to further social and scientific development of technology is being explored via the Internet. Also I want to propose the need to bring this area of study into the public policy activities of those who are trying to contribute to the continued development of the Internet and the management of its infrastructure. For example, the WSIS meetings being held in conjunction with the UN demonstrate the need for an appropriate model for the management of the Internet's infrastructure. But outdated models that developed prior to the Internet are dominating the discourse among those involved in the WSIS process.

There are a number of other research questions that arise from my paper and study. I hope those interested in these issues will find a way to continue the discussion begun in this symposium after the Congress as well.

Michael Hauben: Sketch for 250th Birthday of Columbia University

Michael F. Hauben (1973-2001)
Internet Pioneer, Author
Columbia College 1995,
Teachers College 1997

"I like to think of you as a netizen."

While the prevalence and universality of the Internet today may lead some to take it for granted, Michael Hauben did not. A pioneer in the study of the Internet's impact on society, Hauben helped identify the collaborative nature of the Internet and its effects on the global community. Credited with coining and popularizing the term netizen (net + citizen), Hauben, with his mother, Ronda, cowrote the seminal *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet* (IEEE Computer Society Press, 1997), which outlined the growth and role of the medium in the world and was published in both English and Japanese.

Born on May 1, 1973, in Boston, Michael Hauben was an early participant in electronic bulletin boards. He graduated from Columbia University in 1995 with a bachelor's degree in computer science; following that, he entered the program Communication, Computing and Technology at Teacher's College and received a master's degree in 1997. Of particular interest to Hauben was understanding the democratization of the Internet and the participation of netizens in the global community to build the Net. He viewed the Internet as a reflection of democracy at work. An editor of the online newsletter "The *Amateur Computerist*," Hauben gave talks on the Internet in locales ranging from Beppu, Japan, to Corfu, Greece, to Montreal, Canada, to the Catskills region in New York. After sustaining injuries resulting from an accident in December 1999, when he was hit by a cab, Hauben died in June 2001. A champion of the Internet, he truly was a netizen.

http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/netbook/
http://www.edu-cyberpg.com/IEC/pioneers.html

Misunderstanding about 'Netizen' 05/08/10 00:02

The concept 'netizen' is very frequently used especially in Korea. Most people, however, use the word just based on their common idea rather than quote the concept accurately. I think people misunderstand this important concept. The Korean word 'nurikun(????),' which is an equivalent for the 'netizen,' proves that people don't understand the meaning of netizen and don't use the concept properly. Because the word 'nurikun' means 'general internet users' or 'general users on the web.'
Does it have something to do with the original meaning of netizen? Absolutely not.

Mrs. and Mr. Hauben had visited Seoul, and they flied back to the U.S. yesterday. I met and talked with them at a coffee shop near Yonsei University on August 5. Their son, Michael Hauben coined the word netizen. (His work was already quoted several times by Korean researchers, as you know.) Nowadays Mrs. and Mr. Hauben is doing the netizen research after their son. They told me that almost all Korean people identified themselves as the netizens. "Yes, I'm a netizen...!" I agree with them. Netizens are everywhere here in Korea! (How could it be!)

Netizen is not the word that point any casual internet users. "They are people who understand it takes effort and action on each and everyone's part to make the Net a regenerative and vibrant community and resource. Netizens are people who decide to devote time and effort into making the Net, this new part of our world, a better place." (by Michael Hauben, 1995) This is a sophisticated concept. If you have the consciousness of social/political participation and take action, you can be a netizen. If you just

enjoy web surfing, it's very hard to say that you are a netizen although you spend great time for the internet.

Still many people including journalists use the word netizen carelessly. Also, 'nurikun' cannot show the original meaning, it's not the equivalent but just a new word. There are interesting cases that actualize the power of netizens in Korea, but because of this, the concept seems to be used excessively. You can find more about the netizen in the book: [*Netizens : On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*] <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/08 18677066/qid=1123592989/sr=1-1/ref=sr_1_1/104- 2090333-9880743?v=glance&s=books>.
You can read the full text here: Netizens: On the History and Impact of the Net <http://www.columbia.edu/~hauben/netbook/>.

Advancing "News guerrillas"
OhmyNews and 21st Century Journalism

by Ronda Hauben

In his autobiography, Oh Yeon Ho, the founder and chief executive of the Korean newspaper OhmyNews, describes how an Internet craze gripped South Korea in 1999 when he was launching [extern] OhmyNews. "We were late to industrialization, but let's lead in digitalization" was one of the slogans of the government and media at the time. "We shall lead Korea to become an information superpower," was another phrase repeated during this period. This translated into web editions of the major Korean print newspapers. "So the closed and elitist journalistic culture was transferred intact to the Internet," Oh observes.

With regard to his Internet background, Oh was then "a country bumkin." At the time, "I wasn't very used to technology," he admits. He had spent the previous 10 years, since 1989, as a journalist for the Korean publication, the monthly Mahl, owned by the civic group, the Citizens' Coalition for Democratic Media. As a journalist, he gave lectures to university students about how to become a reporter. Oh titled his lecture, "Every citizen is a reporter."

He was particularly concerned with the imbalance of power in the media environment in South Korea. There were eight conservative media organizations and only two that were progressive, the monthly Mahl and the Hankyoreh. He noticed how the conservative media companies in South Korea would determine what was considered news. If a story was published in the monthly Mahl it would get little attention by other media. If one was published by one of the conservative media organizations, however, it would be considered news.

OhmyNews and the '386'

Hoping to make the South Korean media landscape more progressively balanced, he put some of the money he obtained from selling his home into capital to support the creation of the first South Korean Internet newspaper which he decided to call "OhmyNews. "Five '386' generation businessmen who sympathized with the aims of OhmyNews also invested seed money. (The '386' generation is a term used to describe the generation that participated in the student movement of the 1980s that helped to topple the military dictatorship in South Korea).

These five and Oh were the first stockholders of OhmyNews. Oh asked web designers he knew to write a program. By the end of 1999, he was beta testing a new online form of newspaper. The first edition of OhmyNews was December 21, 1999. At the time OhmyNews had a staff of four and received twenty articles from citizen reporters. By the official launch date, February 22, 2002 at 2:22 p.m., when the incorporation papers were signed, there were 727 citizen reporters.

His goal, Oh explains, was to create a media culture where "the quality of news determined whether it won or lost" not the power and prestige of the media organization that printed the article. Fortunately, Oh was embarking on an undertaking that would depend upon the nature of the Internet, which provides an online environment created to be plastic, malleable, interactive, general purpose, and which supports collaborative efforts (see "Dawn of the Internet and Netizen"). http://english.ohmynews .com/ArticleView/article_view.asp?menu=A11100 &no=242311&rel_no=1&back_url=

Every citizen is a reporter

These qualities of the Internet would help him to

create an online publication which three years later, in October 2003, would be ranked 6th in a survey of Korea's Most Influential Media by Sisa Journal and Media Research. OhmyNews turned a profit for the first time three years after its birth, in 2003. Jean Min, the Director of the International Division of OhmyNews, explains that today 70% of the funding for OhmyNews comes from advertisements, and 30% comes from news content sales and other sources. OhmyNews hopes this will change to a 50-50 mix to provide more stability.

The current personnel structure of OhmyNews is made up of full time staff. There are also columnists, international correspondents, and citizen reporters, who are not part of the paid full time staff. According to Oh, there are currently 75 paid staff, which includes 45 reporters. Among the reporters, 12 are editors for the submissions received from citizen reporters. Min estimates that there are currently 39,000 citizen reporters. Describing the thinking which led him to the concept of the citizen reporter, Oh writes:

> Every citizen is a reporter. Journalists aren't some exotic species, they're everyone who seeks to take new developments, put them into writing, and share them with others. This common truth has been trampled on in a culture where being a reporter is seen as something of a privilege to be enjoyed. Privileged reporters who come together to form massive news media wielded power over the whole process of news production, distribution, and consumption. The seriousness of the problem is that the massive media power is the final gutter of Korean capitalist society. There is a lot about those media that is dirty, and yet they have packaged themselves as clean and acted self-righteously towards the rest of society. We therefore stand up to them raising high the flag of guerrilla warfare. Our weapon is the proposition that 'Every citizen is a reporter.' We intend to achieve a'News alliance of the news guerrillas'.

"The Revolt of 727 News Guerrillas: A Revolution in News Production and Consumption".

Explaining what he means by guerrilla warfare, Oh elaborates:

> "The dictionary definition of guerrilla is 'a member of small non-regular armed forces who disrupt the rear positions of the enemy.' Citizen reporters can be called guerrillas because they are not professional and regulars and they post news from perspectives uniquely their own, not those of the conservative establishment."

Some citizen reporters write only occasionally, but others submit articles regularly. Each day between 200 and 250 articles are submitted to the newspaper. Oh explains that about 70% of these will be published. The website is changed daily, and sometimes several times a day. The staff decides on the placement of the articles, whether they are to appear on the front page, or in one of the sections. Articles that appear on the main page of the website, or that are listed in the index of new articles on the front page, are likely to get more public attention than articles that are in the sections. Also a list of the most frequently read articles from the previous week appears each week. These articles continue to get attention for an additional week. A print edition is published once a week containing some of the articles that appeared online during the week.

Creating a better world

If a citizen reporter's article is used, the citizen reporter earns W2000 (W1000 = approx .80 euro), W10,000, or W20,000. Articles that appear on the main page earn W20,000, those that appear at the top of one of the sections, earn W10,000, and those that appear somewhere else in the online publication earn W2,000. OhmyNews reports that when citizen reporters are asked why they submit their articles to OhmyNews even though they are paid so little, they respond that they want to contribute to creating a better world.

Explaining the criteria used by the editors to choose which of the articles submitted by citizen reporters will appear in OhmyNews, Oh writes, "Beginning with current events, how much sympathy the articles will arouse, how lively they are and how much social impact they will have." A graduate student studying blogs reports that bloggers feel that blogs are less influential in South Korea because many potential bloggers prefer to be citizen reporters for OhmyNews.

OhmyNews celebrated its 5th birthday on February 22, 2005. Oh describes the first 5 years of OhmyNews as the first stage of the young newspa-

per's development. An objective during this stage was to gain a standing as a serious newspaper in South Korea. This was achieved by critiquing the activities of the big conglomerates and the big media. Coverage was given to important Korean progressive events like the campaign to win the Presidency of South Korea for Roh Moo-Hyun, or the campaign to turn back his impeachment. Oh also describes how articles about those with little power were written and published in OhmyNews. Another goal during the first stage of OhmyNews's development was to spread the OhmyNews model to the world.

English Edition of Ohmy News

The newspaper has been written up in major newspapers around the world. This has brought inquiries from people in a number of countries asking for advice about how to create a similar newspaper. To respond to these requests, an English edition of OhmyNews was created on May 27, 2004, and publishes regularly. Articles are from citizen reporters around the world, from columnists or from the staff who work on the OhmyNews International (OMNI) edition.

Oh explains that OhmyNews has now entered its second stage. The objective of this stage is to "go beyond criticism of the existing social establishment to propose alternatives for a new society." To achieve this goal, OhmyNews will rely on staff reporters. Recognizing the influence a newspaper can have, Oh stresses the need for such influence to be used in a responsible way. Another objective in this second stage is to develop multimedia further, to aim to set up an Internet TV program, for example. This, however, takes money to fund, so it may not be a goal achieved very soon. With respect to the international edition, Oh doesn't foresee developing it as a competitor to current international newspapers like the New York Times or the Washington Post.

Instead, he hopes to spread the model, concept and vision of OhmyNews in order to help interested people in other countries to create their own national versions of OhmyNews. "In each country there are many specific, unique conditions to succeed," he explains, "If there are enough OhmyNews models in other countries, we can make an alliance to exchange articles and to help each other."

There are online users who are working to extend democracy in South Korea and who consider them-selves 'netizens'. Many 'netizens' have contributed to OhmyNews and it, in turn, has helped them to achieve important accomplishments in the current democratization of South Korea. For example, within two months of the birth of OhmyNews, four reporters were sent to cover the Blacklist campaign to prevent corrupt or incompetent politicians from being reelected in the April 2000 election.

Even more significant was the campaign waged by 'netizens' to help Roh Moo-Hyun, a politician not in the mainstream of Korean politics, win the Presidency of South Korea in December 2002. OhmyNews also played an important role in this campaign. In the Spring of 2004, 'netizens' and OhmyNews challenged the impeachment of Roh by organizing and reporting on the massive candlelight demonstrations in which many thousands of people participated.

More than a mere dream

Among the problems facing OhmyNews is the frustration of some citizen reporters with the difficulty of communication they have with the staff. Oh has a plan to try to improve such communication. In addition, some international citizen reporters have complained about the difficulty of getting the payments they are due for their articles.

On a recent visit to Seoul, I asked people I met whether they knew of and read OhmyNews. Many responded that they knew of OhmyNews, while several said they read it. In talking with people in South Korea about OhmyNews, some felt it was biased toward the current President, Roh Moo-Hyun, who it had helped to put into office. Others praised it as one of the few progressive publications in South Korea.

Just this past June, OhmyNews had an international forum in Seoul, inviting citizen reporters from around the world, and from all parts of South Korea to take part. The event was a significant gathering to sponsor and to fund for a young media organization that is but five years old. The daily Korean online publication and the English edition are a continuing demonstration that Oh's commitment to contributing to the creation of a 21st century journalism as an interactive and participatory journalism is more than a mere dream.

How the development and spread of the Internet will affect the future of journalism is still to be

determined. In South Korea, OhmyNews and netizens have demonstrated that there is a different form of journalism vying to become the journalism of the future. Also they are demonstrating that the impact this new form of journalism will have on politics is not to be underestimated.

[Editor's note: The following is a paper read at the 'Computer Networks, the Internet and Netizens: Their Impact of Science and Society' symposium on July 26, 2005 as part of the XXII International Congress of History of Science in Beijing. It was followed by an interesting discussion. A slightly different version of this paper was previously presented in November, 2001 at the Asia-Pacific Journalist Meeting in Tokyo, Japan by Li Xiguang. The numbers are 4 years old but the general picture it paints helps understand some of the press situation in China today.]

The Impact of New Communication Technologies on Chinese Press Politics

by Li Xiguang*, Guo Xiaoke, and Xu Yong

Abstract: The function and role of the Chinese press have changed dramatically from the days when it functioned strictly as an ideological Party mouthpiece and government cheerleader. Foremost among the drivers of change for China's media is the Internet which has weakened the government control of press and information.

The Internet means different things to different people in different societies. To some, it provides an opportunity to make money, to others, it means freedom from press controls. For still others, the Internet is a public forum in which citizens of a closed society can discuss politics. In the past six years the Internet has developed rapidly in China, as it has in the rest of the world. This poses new challenges to the country's press system and media policy.

With the flourishing of satellite TV, cable TV, and the Internet, a new media environment has taken shape in China. Official news outlets are being outnumbered by their nongovernmental, commercial, and overseas counterparts. The Internet is becoming a public medium for people with different ideas and viewpoints.

For decades Chinese media consisted of newspapers, magazines, publishing houses, broadcasting stations, and TV stations under the control of propaganda authorities at all levels. Today, besides more than 2,000 daily newspapers, 900 TV stations, and over 90 million cable TV users, there are now probably more than 300,000 websites. These include news websites, professional information sites, corporate sites, institutional sites, and personal homepages. The recent figure could be more than 30 million Chinese Internet users, operating about 11 million computers, spending at least one hour a day at web pages. Nearly 64% use the Internet to read news. Some 24% of adult users and 40% of young users visit overseas websites, including those based in Taiwan and the United States. These news outlets do not need to be approved by the Communist Party's propaganda departments.

In the past the government easily controlled and even manipulated popular opinion by limiting the public to only official information source. Watching the 7 p.m. evening news ("Xinwen Lianbo") on state-run CCTV, the China Central Television, had been a national ritual at the family dinner table. Besides daily news coverage, the party and government depended on the program to put across their major propaganda campaigns and political mobilizations. But today the program is losing audience share dramatically, particularly among young viewers who spend most of their time on the Web, watching VCDs and cable TV.

In the days of the single-source news, people had no way to verify the information they received. For a long time the propaganda authorities effectively controlled the flow of information, news sources, and information outlets. But in the age of the Internet, this media system is facing the challenge of news from multiple sources. Members of the public no longer rely on official information sources to form their opinions. Instead, when a big news event happens, people compare, analyze, and balance the information they get from different sources. They form their own viewpoints after discounting what they consider biased information.

The Internet is developing with unprecedented

speed. Its advance in China can be compared with the invention of paper by the Chinese 1,000 years ago. The Internet has brought the country into the age of global communications as well as the global village. Until a few years ago Chinese authorities controlled the flow of news and information by jamming shortwave radio broadcasts and banning any individual from installing a satellite TV antenna. Anyone who wanted to own a fax machine had to register with the Telecommunications Ministry. Today the rule about registering fax machines with a local government office is still there. But with the advent of the Internet, the Telecommunications Ministry has found its fax machine controls outdated. The government strictly controls the radio broadcast through a frequency licensing system. But today people can start a website station or directly listen to webcasts via the Internet instead of on air frequencies.

The Internet has technically eliminated the last obstruction to a free flow of information. To stop the circulation of information on the Net is as futile as a child trying to block bursting Yangtze River dam with his fingers. The great wall that has blocked the free flow of news and information is now collapsing as more and more Chinese families get access to the Internet. In today's China the most effective way to staunch information flow would be to assign a policeman to every computer in the country.

Newspapers, radio, and TV are converging in the Internet world. How will this convergence and the growing number of Internet users affect traditional Chinese media concepts and official media policy?

Propaganda officials and media policy-makers in China could hardly imagine that mass media would develop at such a fast pace. Only two years ago, when a journalism school graduate chose an occupation, the options were simple: newspaper, magazine, radio, or TV. But today newspapers, radio, and TV have become one on the Internet and multimedia platforms. The demarcation lines have disappeared. Readers of the Internet edition of the People's Daily can download audiovisual material. So in this sense, newspapers have entered the broadcast market. If you visit the homepage of CCTV, you will find that it provides detailed text news and material for readers. So TV stations have also entered the newspaper market.

Under current policies, Chinese newspapers, TV stations, radio, and news agencies must operate separately and under the control of various party and government organizations. The People's Daily, for example, cannot own a radio station, while a news agency like Xinhua is not allowed to own a TV station. Under this policy, the country has only one wire service-Xinhua. But tens of thousands of news websites are operating like mini-Xinhuas. They post a wide variety of stories, either gathered by their own Internet reporters or based on clippings from Chinese and foreign media (even though the government bans the use of Western wire stories on the Web). Popular portals such sina.com, yahoo.com, eastday.com, and so on are functioning like quasi news agencies.

Traditional media (newspapers, magazines, radio, and television) in China are characterized by the following features:
* They are restricted by geographic region;
* Restricted by audience numbers;
* Restricted by licensing system;
* Restricted by the high costs of entering the market;
* Restricted by high delivery costs as well as the unreliability of newspaper and magazine mailing;
* Restricted to one-way communication in which audiences are completely passive.

But the World Wide Web has brought to China sharply contrasting conditions:
* Unlimited audience numbers;
* No need for licenses to launch electronic publications;
* Low costs to enter the Internet: a computer, a modem and a phone line;
* Not restricted to a single region or country, news and information on the Internet travel to all users worldwide at the same speed;
* The Internet has opened a system of two-way communication -- in stark contrast with China's long-standing, indoctrination-oriented propaganda system.

For decades, both for political and technological reasons, the Chinese media have never been a forum for public discussion and debate. But the advent of chatrooms via Internet technology has provided the Chinese people with a channel for the free flow of information. Its chief characteristics:
1) People can provide information anonymously;
2) An equal opportunity for participants to speak their minds;
3) Topics for discussion are unlimited and cannot be preset;

4) Internet users are both readers and publishers;
5) An ability to give readers what they want instead of what the government thinks they want;
6) The airing of information that traditional media dare not publish;
7) Censors' inability to keep pace with the online media.

As a result,
* Chatrooms in China have aired ideas and debates that simply aren't accessible through traditional media;
* The reader-interest-based content makes the agenda-setting function more consumer-driven than government-driven;
* People's attitudes are being shaped by information from chatrooms rather than from the official media.

For Chinese, the Internet has opened the door to a free flow of information. Internet chatrooms have provided Chinese with an unlimited space to exchange information freely and anonymously. They have been described as electronic versions of the big-character posters that were the most efficient means of mobilizing public opinion during the Cultural Revolution.

As a popular part of Chinese online media, chatrooms are posing a big threat to the government-controlled press by revising and reconstructing its agenda. Agenda-setting theory holds that the mass media determine what is important by leading newscasts with a particular story or printing it on page one. When news gatekeepers no longer consider an item of importance, they allow it to slip off the public agenda. For decades, China's mass media effectively set agendas for propaganda purposes. But with so many news outlets in the age of globalization, people's media behavior is influenced by the so-called selective processes. People have developed many ways of revising and reconstructing the agenda set by the official press.

For example, the People's Daily launched the "Strong Nation Forum" chatroom to give its readers a chance to react to the news and vent their emotions. But most Chinese have used this system not only to discuss the news but also to post news stories unreported in the official media. Such media behavior has made audiences pay attention to issues ignored by the official press, making hidden agendas transparent.

As a result, the list of issues for discussion and debate in cyberspace are reconstructed topics selected from both the Chinese and the Western media.

During the recent U.S.-China plane-collision incident, our research found how Chinese public opinion is shaped in the Internet Age. Our study analyzed all related news reports, editorials and other articles that appeared in the People's Daily between April 2 and April 30.

Chatrooms have changed the fundamental movement of news in China. The official press has always wanted the Chinese people to have the "right" information and perspective. But the authorities are losing the battle to control information and free expression on the Internet. Chinese websites have displayed a liveliness not found in the traditional media. The Internet is changing China, throwing the country open to ideas and debates that simply are not accessible through traditional media. But in their eagerness to develop the Net, China's top leaders appear willing to tolerate a certain amount of frankness that would otherwise be stamped out. The Internet has become a powerful and popular channel for both the government and ordinary Chinese to hear and to be heard.

If the people of one country do not trust their own national media, they will turn to the international press, including that of the country which is in conflict with theirs. Setting the agenda for another nation through media and the Internet has become a "soft power" in international politics. The global media and foreign media could influence any country's agenda-setting. The more trust the press gains with users, the more effectively it will set agendas. China's official press cannot expect that its chosen topics will become the chief public concerns. In the age of globalization, if the Chinese do not start press reform soon, the Western media will eventually set the public agenda for China.

The people and public opinion are important elements in a society and in a political system. For decades popular opinion in China has been under the strict control of the party and the government. But today agendas are being set through the Internet. The Net is transferring the national concerns of the Chinese to a global level. That makes China part of a globalized community, whose agenda has been under the control and manipulation of the global media.

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