

Point 69 - "Draft declaration on fundamental principles governing the use of the mass-media in strengthening peace and international understanding and in combating war propaganda, racism and apartheid"

Intervention of Portugal (Ambassador Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo) on the 5th November, in Program Commission III.

Mr. President,

The analysis of the project of declaration as well as the report on the government experts' meetings held in Paris leave the Portuguese delegation with concern and perplexity.

Our concern is related to the obvious division (clearly shown in the report of the experts' meeting in December) between the Member-States around basic issues which have been underlined by previous speakers. We would see with great apprehension the adoption of a declaration which would not be proclaimed by the largest possible consensus. All efforts to reach that goal cannot be overruled by a hurried move which we find difficult to explain.

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No doubt that all Member-States are committed to help the mass-media to fulfil its role in the broad context of the resolution 4.III of the XVIII session of the General Conference, namely the strengthening of peace, the international understanding and the struggle against war propaganda and racism.

But - and this is our perplexity - is it possible to reach that ultimate purpose by moralistic statements as those made in the project of declaration?

This is why we feel the need for a broad context which will take into account what has happened in the last year in different regions of the world, as it was mentioned this morning by the delegate of Norway. The need for the same broad context was, in fact, underlined by the U.S.S.R. delegate when he put before



us this morning the overwhelming figures which make obvious the drastic increase in the quantity of mass-media taking place in today's world.

Now, it is my conviction that this leap in quantity raises the question of a change in quality of the way to deal with the matter at stake. Mass-media cannot be dealt with just by the cumulative effect of the number of broadcasting stations, newspapers, T.V. sets and T.V. watchers.

In fact, such a cumulative effect of the number has several consequences.

There are new ways of formation of each person's thought and opinion - "the medium is the message", as it is clearly accepted today.

There are new types of interrelations between persons and groups who are reading, listening to, watching the same events, regardless of the place in which they have happened.

There are new forms of interaction between nations with unbalance, gaps, distortions as well as proximity, interweaving and connection of otherwise apparently different events.

It is not within the time we have during this commission to deal at length with such approach. Let me, however, Mr. President, point out where the Portuguese delegation sees the heart of the matter.

The qualitative change we observe in the mass-media has been mentioned in some scientific sources as the emergency of a new power.

In a certain way, we are facing a revolution as drastic in the lives of individuals and nations as the industrial revolution begun in the last century.



The problem of the industrial revolution was formulated in terms of the role of economic power in the context of political power. It was soon seen that the manipulation of men by economy couldn't be solved by moralistic statements of good intentions. Thus, new mechanisms and sometimes totally new structures were born.

But with mass-media we are facing a power of a totally new different nature. Therefore, rules that apply to the relation between economic power and political power are not adequate to the analysis of the new power of the mass-media.

This new power permeates our daily life and shapes our own opinions. Recently an article in "Le Monde" analysing the influence of the speakers on T.V. asked that naive question: "Why do we need to watch every evening the T.V. news if we have read them before in the newspapers or have heard them on the radio?" What new myth is awakened in us by the world entering visually our living-rooms through the T.V. set?

The power of mass-media is not necessarily a centralized one. Power has many facets - and these countries who have lived recently through a revolution know the diffuse, decentralised character of power, which, in more stable periods, seems to be stuck at the top of the different pyramids of decision-making.

We know so little about this new power as a result of modern technology that I don't dare to go further. But let us not pretend that we can think without discontinuity about the changes which have occurred in the past 30 years.

The well-known anthropologist Margaret Mead goes as far as saying that all those who were born before the II World War are today immigrants in time.

As immigrants, let us not find false securities from the land (the time) we have inhabited before.



As immigrants, let us not pretend that our lives have not changed and that we have to go on with the same values and criteria.

It is, therefore, as immigrants discovering a new land that we should approach the role of mass-media and their contribution to peace.

To my knowledge, there is very little done on a broad scale and in a fully scientific manner about the analysis of this new power. There is, therefore, a whole field for research, for interdisciplinary analysis, for psycho-sociological interpretation.

This is why the Portuguese delegation asks:

- Can Unesco proclaim a declaration on the role of mass-media before such work of study and research is done?

- Can Unesco - the worldwide platform of culture, science and education - ignore the underlying complexity of the nature and role of mass-media and like a well-intentioned association of good people preach some norms of behaviour to the mass-media?

It is the deep conviction of the Portuguese delegation that Unesco should be a pioneer in undertaking such a study based on the premises I have just mentioned.

That - and only that - could be, at this moment, an activity worthy of the role Unesco has to play in dealing with key-issues of culture today.

That - and only that - could be its own specific expression to the contribution of a new international economic and social order in the field of the role of mass-media.



Meanwhile, there are steps to be taken in a pragmatic way which, in due time, will bear fruit and will make a declaration on the role of mass-media in peace, international co-operation and struggle against war and racism a document attuned to reality.

I am referring, particularly, to the draft resolutions submitted by several countries. (It is in this line that Portugal has co-sponsored the DR 19 from Tunisia, as one step on that road.)

If there would be a strong pressure on having a declaration on the role of mass-media in the near future, I would have to ask a few questions related to aspects totally absent from the present project.

Is it harmless for peace, Mr. President, to have mass-media which, in all regions of the world, give priority to the capacity to have and to possess rather than to be and to live?

Is it harmless for international understanding to have mass-media which, in a planetary era, keep a provincial, if not nationalistic approach, closing up the mentalities of the people in their own corner of the world?

Is it harmless for the struggle against war propaganda to have, from all parts of the world, T.V. movies on different wars held in the past?

Is it harmless for the eradication of racism to have mass-media which ignore the marginal people, the voiceless of their societies?

These questions are just the most obvious ones. You can see, Mr. President, and fellow-delegates, that not only are they absent from the project before us but they seem to be moralistic too... This is a clear indication that we have to take a new road to approach this matter.



So, I will end this brief interaction^{vention} as I started. The present project of declaration doesn't seem to us to fulfil the purpose for which it was prepared. The rough outline I just gave points out to the main reasons why we consider the project before us as inadequate. Therefore, we suggest the adjournment of the discussion and adoption of a declaration on the role of mass-media in the strengthening of peace and international co-operation to another session of the General Conference. But, most of all, we ask the Director-General to take measures in order to undertake a more up-to-date analysis of the role of mass-media, taking into account all substantive arguments invoked in this debate.

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