

## Working Paper 6

# Returning A Stare: People's Struggles for Political and Social Inclusion (Social Exclusion; An International Perspective, Part 1)

Shiraz Durrani

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**“The native, the exotic, the victim, the noble savage, is looking back, returning a stare”**

-Derek Walcott (1999) *What the Twilight Says*

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### ***Abstract***

*This is the first of two linked working papers analysing social exclusion at an international level (the second being by John Pateman). It reviews struggles against exclusion and poverty in different societies, emphasising the role of information, and the potential of role of libraries. Social exclusion is described in the context of global capitalism. The process of exclusion is seen as having intensified with the rise of the ‘information age.’ The paper then looks at resistance to this exclusion. The following examples of the role of information and communications in this resistance are described: film in Chile; video activism; the Alternative Davos; various protest and campaign movements; the Adivasis in Tamil Nadu; political communications in Kenya; the Kurdish people and the Zapatistas in Mexico. Lessons for public libraries are drawn throughout. It is concluded that if libraries are to be relevant to those who are excluded, then information workers need to purposively support people’s struggles against exclusion (April, 1999).*

## **PART 1 – INTRODUCTION**

### **Scope**

This Working Paper is part of a series written on different aspects of “social exclusion” as part of the project “Public Library Policy and Social Exclusion”. The paper aims to review literature on political exclusion at an international level. Part 2 of this paper is written by John Pateman who looks at public libraries in societies which have addressed the issues of social exclusion with greater success following the liberating influences of their social revolutions.

This paper examines the way people in different societies struggle against poverty and exclusion and the means they use. Wherever possible, the central role of information in these struggles is highlighted. It is hoped that this will help in understanding the central role that public libraries *should* play if they are going to be relevant to the needs of the people.

While information about the reality of struggles of people around the world is readily available, it in no way forms the understanding of the “general public” in Britain. The screaming headlines of Western superiority and “Third world” backwardness carried in the

tabloids and the cursory reporting in radio and TV news are all that influence public opinion. The rich experiences of those in the majority world who take control of their destinies are either distorted or mostly ignored. Nor is there evidence of an intelligent understanding, let alone questioning, of world and British events in the “mainstream” media.

It is in this context that one starts understanding how limited and reactive a role public libraries and the library and information profession have chosen for themselves. Any serious study of the role of public libraries needs to question the “neutral” role that public libraries have adopted. In reality this is no neutrality - it is a limited, narrow role of disseminating information and entertainment that serves the needs of a very small section of the people. Any challenge to this role is immediately attacked by “professionals” as “political correctness” which is interpreted as something undesirable and so rejected.

It is interesting to note that while British public libraries (many initially established with Carnegie Corporation’s support) are busy judging their success in terms of number of loans of “popular fiction”, and the number of people entering libraries, the Carnegie Corporation is taking a fresh look at public libraries in Africa with a view to finding a new model of Public and Community libraries which provide access to information that is relevant to the needs of majority of people (INASP, 1999).

This paper brings together the struggles of several “excluded” peoples and looks at the methods they use to end their exclusion. The central role that education, information, and information technologies play in these struggles gives a clue to the potential role of public libraries everywhere.

### **Capitalism and Social Exclusion**

People’s struggle is primarily waged around satisfying basic material needs for survival: food, clothing, and shelter. The seriousness of exclusion facing a large part of world’s population is shown in the fact that “half the world’s people lack basic sanitation services, while more than a billion lack drinking water - and in much of the developing world these numbers are rising” (Ghazi, 1999).

Two broad characteristics in every capitalist country are a sharp social division along class lines and a class struggle with varying degree of intensity. At the economic level, these struggles can be seen as struggles for inclusion in the share of national wealth, to own land and resources, to have a decent job with a living wage. At the political level, the struggle is for inclusion in the decision making process. At the social and cultural level, the struggle is to have the right to belong to a particular nationality, to use people’s own language, and to practice one’s own culture. The rights to organise, to get relevant education and information and to benefit from technological achievements are rights for which many excluded people have often given their lives.

Public libraries have an important role to play in these worldwide struggles of the people of all nationalities and all countries. Yet as international finance consolidates its stranglehold over lives of people and countries following the end of the so-called cold war, national governments and local authorities are being forced to follow the social and economic policies laid down by international finance and its agencies, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The resources available to governments to support education, information and

knowledge through public libraries are consistently shrinking. The relentless drive towards “privatisation” results in an ever-reducing role of local authorities by decreasing the funds available to them to run social and educational services such as public libraries. While the international finance capital can tolerate Mobotus, Mois and Marcoses who drain away huge proportions of national wealth, it cannot tolerate a relevant information and education system that can liberate people from their bondage to international finance.

This does not imply that people have given up their struggle for a relevant information system. While their main struggle is at the economic level, the provision of relevant information and education is considered essential for success in people’s struggles everywhere. There is a general recognition that no liberation can be won without getting control of the means of mass communications.

A note of warning needs to be made here: when looking for relevant information systems among those struggling for liberation, we should not expect to find magnificent buildings with huge bound volumes, nor clean lines of the latest computers and networks. The resources for these have long gone to sustain fabulous lifestyles elsewhere. What we will find instead is a highly sophisticated network of information flows using whatever technologies are readily, cheaply and locally available. The lesson to be learnt is that it is not the high gloss ICT products that are needed for people to be included in the social, political and economic lives of their countries. After all, with all the wealth that USA and Britain have, they have not even begun to address the problem of social exclusion. Struggling people everywhere are taking steps to end their exclusion in a long struggle.

## **PART 2 - EXCLUSION AND GLOBALISATION**

The process of exclusion is evident in all capitalist countries. This is not accidental, as the division of society into classes implies that some people are “over-included” while others are excluded from social, political and economic life. The process of exclusion has been accelerated in the last part of this century with the collapse of the USSR. Capitalism is now free to extend and intensify its ideology of “profits before all else.” The process of globalisation of this period has created its own record of social exclusion.

Globalisation and exclusion have had a profound impact on the information field. We need to see what these terms mean and exactly what effects they have had on the information field.

### **Social exclusion**

Social exclusion is a concept proposed by the social policy think-tanks of the European Union’s Commission, and adopted by the United Nation’s International Labour Office. Castells (1998, p.73) describes social exclusion as “the process by which certain individuals and groups are systematically barred from access to positions that would enable them to an autonomous livelihood within the social standards framed by institutions and values in a given context. Social exclusion is, in fact, the process that disenfranchises a person as labour in the context of capitalism.”

The British Government’s Social Exclusion Unit uses Duffy’s definition of Social Exclusion: “an inability of individuals to participate effectively in economic, social, political and cultural life, alienation and distance from the mainstream society” (King, 1999). King

discusses the differences between the terms “poverty” and “social exclusion”. He defines poverty as a “lack of material resources” and social exclusion as a “highly dynamic and complex notion which explains not just how many poor people there are, but what poverty actually *is*, and how it fits into the larger social, economic and political makeup of a given locality.” [His emphasis].

For the purpose of this paper, the terms “poverty” and “social exclusion” will be used to indicate both aspects mentioned by King. The term “social exclusion” may be comparatively new, but the phenomenon it describes has been with us for a long time. Poverty in the South as well as in the North has existed for hundreds of years. Whatever name it has been given, the majority of population of the world has always lived an excluded life.

It is thus important to understand the conditions that give rise to a person or a group being “socially excluded”. As used in literature currently, the term needs to be understood as a particular manifestation at a particular historical stage in the development of capitalism. The globalisation context of capitalism at the end of this millennium will be examined in the next section. The process of exclusion is a dynamic one, changing over time and space affecting different groups of people in different ways. Castells (1998, p.73) explains this aspect thus: “social exclusion is a process, not a condition. Thus its boundaries shift, and who is excluded and included may vary over time, depending on education, demographic characteristics, social prejudices, business practices, and public policies.”

It is worth remembering that it is not only individuals and individual communities that are excluded from enjoying economic benefits that a society is capable of generating. Entire countries and regions are often excluded, for example Sub-Saharan Africa with its 500 million people. The reason for this exclusion can be explained in the context of the development and expansion of capitalism worldwide. Castells (1998, p.74) says that these regions are excluded because they are “non-valuable from the perspective of informational capitalism and they do not have significant political interest for the powers that be and so are bypassed by flows of wealth and information, deprived of the basic flows of wealth and information, and ultimately deprived of the basic technological infrastructure that allows us to communicate, innovate, produce, consume, and even live, in today’s world. This process induces an extremely uneven geography of social/territorial exclusion and inclusion, which disables large segments of people while linking up trans-territorially, through information technology, whatever and whoever may offer value in the global networks accumulating wealth, information, and power.”

It is thus clear that exclusion is not an isolated phenomenon, an unexplainable side effect of global development. It is in fact an essential outcome of capitalist development and is allowed to continue as a basis for the development of capitalism. A sobering fact that forms the background to our discussion is worth mentioning here: the world population is 5.9 billion. Out of this, 800 million people are hungry today - excluded from the very basic means of staying alive (Pretty, 1999). The world already produces enough food to provide everyone with a nutritious and adequate diet - on average, about 350kg of cereal per person. A clue to understanding causes of world hunger is in these facts: The poorest 60 per cent of the world’s population share just 4.5 per cent of the world’s income, and 20 per cent of the richest share 83 per cent (Brittain, 1999).

Capitalism does not distinguish between the North and South in inflicting exclusion on people. It is not only in the poorer, industrially undeveloped world that exclusion exists. In USA, for instance, “ the human rights situation is such that that the social vice whereby the rich get ever richer and the poor get ever poorer has reached its extreme; tens of millions of vagabonds, beggars, destitute, and unemployed wander on the edge of their basic right to live.” (Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, 1999). Yet USA boasts the most advanced industrial and electronic base in the world, creating unbelievable wealth for a small proportion of its population. It is not beyond the realm of possibility to eliminate exclusion if economic and political will existed. It is the financial/industrial capital which, in USA as well as internationally, opposes such elimination.

### **Globalisation**

By its very definition, capitalism divides people along class lines. Working class people as a whole are historically excluded from enjoying the social wealth created by their labour. Hence the system creates a class that is automatically excluded from wealth, power, education and information. But this process of exclusion has been intensified in recent years. There has been a qualitative change in the process of social exclusion in the last quarter of this century on a global level. Castells (1998, p. 1) explains these changes as a “technological revolution, centred around information (which) has transformed the way we think, we produce, we consume, we trade, we manage, we communicate, we live, we die, we make war, and we make love: a dynamic global economy has been constituted around the planet, linking up valuable people and activities from all over the world, while switching off from the networks of the power and wealth, people and territories dubbed as irrelevant from the perspectives of dominant interests.”

Capitalism began a new phase with the end of the international communist movement in the 1970s and 1980s and used the networking logic of the Information Age. Capital, no longer having to content with opposition from socialism was now free to roam the world wherever excessive profits were to be made. While this aggressive phase of capitalism resulted in increasing economic growth in some countries and regions, its own logic ensures that millions of people and large parts of the world remain excluded from growth. Many areas have thus experienced a decline in national product as capital moves out of less profitable countries and regions. The social and economic consequences of this global search for profit inevitably leads to marginalising and excluding millions of people around the world.

An important qualitative change brought about by globalisation is the change in the balance of power between labour and capital. Sivanandan (1999) explores the causes for the change and the shift in balance of power:

The technological revolution of the past three decades has resulted in a qualitative leap in the productive forces to the point where capital is no longer dependent on labour in the same way as before, to the same extent as before, in the same quantities as before and in the same place as before. Its assembly lines are global, its plant is movable, its workforce is flexible. It can produce ad hoc, just-in-time, and custom-build mass production, without stockpiling or wastage, laying off labour as and when

it pleases. And, instead of importing cheap labour, it can move to the labour pools of the Third World, where labour is captive and plentiful and move from one labour pool to another, extracting maximum surplus value from each, abandoning each when done.

All of which means that the relations of production between capital and labour have changed so fundamentally that labour (in the developed capitalist world) has lost a great deal of its economic clout, and, with it, its political clout. And that in turn gives a further fillip to technological innovation, and imbues capital with an arrogance of power that it has seldom enjoyed since the era of primitive accumulation.

Thus globalisation serves the interests of a minority rich elite which controls the wealth and resources of the “global world”. As Lazarus (1999, p.97) says “globalisation directly serves the interests of some people and that there is an intricate structural connection between the obscenely burgeoning prosperity of this minority and the steady immiseration of the vast majority of the world’s population.”

The social, political and economic control over the majority world by forces of global capital has resulted in massive poverty - total “social exclusion” - for a majority of people. Sivanandan (1998, p.14) describes the reality of the new globalised world:

Today, there is not even the seedling vestige of an independent economic life. Agriculture has ceded to agribusiness, food production to the production of cash crops, staple foods like rice to cheap foreign imports like wheat. Education, the staple diet of Third World countries’ economic and social mobility, has been priced out of the reach of the poor to produce an elite which owes allegiance not to its own people but to ‘opportunities in the West’. The farmers have no land, the workers have no work, the young have no future, the people have no food. The state belongs to the rich, the rich belong to international capital, the intelligentsia aspires to both. Only rebellion offers release. Hence the insurrection when it comes is not class but mass, sometimes religious, sometimes secular, often both, but always against the state and its imperial masters.

In the meantime, Globalisation destroys workers’ rights, suppresses civil liberties and negates democracy. It dismantles the public sector; privatises the infrastructure and determines social need. It free-floats the currency and turns money itself into a commodity subject to speculation, so influencing fiscal policy. It controls inflation at the cost of employment. It creates immense prosperity at the cost of untold poverty. It violates the earth, contaminates the air and turns even water to profit (Sivanandan, 1998, p.14).

In effect globalisation has created deeply divided societies (both in the Capitalist developed countries as well as in the majority world) - what Sivanandan (1998, p.15) calls “that third of society that Information Capitalism and the market have consigned to the underclass as surplus to need” and which Hutton (1995) calls “the absolutely disadvantaged” 30 % of the “thirty, thirty, forty society”.

These developments have resulted in an increased social exclusion for an increasing number

of people. Kundnani (1999) explores the dynamics of social exclusion:

The relationship between the wealthy and the poor is changing from one of exploitation to indifference. The role of the nation is changing from that of mediator between the nation's labour and capital to establishing the right infrastructure for foreign investment. The axis of power is shifting from exploitation of poor nations by rich to the indifference of a global elite in every nation towards the increasing poverty of their own people.

Gray (1998) records the social effects of globalisation - "over a hundred million peasants becoming migrant labourers in China; the exclusion from work and participation in society of tens of millions in the advanced societies; a condition of near near-anarchy and rule by organised crime in parts of the post-communist world; further devastation of the environment".

Castells dates the forces of globalisation and informationalisation from the end of Soviet communism and the "hurried adaptation" of Chinese communism to global capitalism. Previously, the 1917 Russian Revolution and the international communist movement had been the dominant political and ideological phenomena of the twentieth century. Castells sees the end of the Soviet Union as resulting from its inability to "manage the transition to the Information Age".

Kundnani (1999, pp. 49-50) sees "the economic paradigms of the industrial age in the process of being replaced by new paradigms of the globalised, information age." He says:

Developments in information technology since 1970s have made possible new forms of economic organisation in both manufacturing and also in media industries, which have undergone substantial changes in the last twenty years. The huge growth in the spread of digital telecommunications over the last ten years has accelerated this process, leading us to the brink of a new era of capitalist development. One aspect of these new forms of economic organisation is the process of globalisation.

Elliott (1999) looks at the contradictions crated by globalisation and technological developments at the end of the second millennium:

This is the age of the Internet, yet 80 per cent of the world's population have never made a phone call. This is the age of democracy, yet the world's richest three men have assets that exceed the combined GDP of the 48 poorest nations.

Muddiman (1999) sums up the relation between capitalism and social exclusion:

The key thing is that the "Information Revolution" has actually *made things worse*. The "Information Society" is not just neutral or "up for grabs", but actually bound up with the forces that perpetuate exclusion and intensify it.

This intensification of exploitation of the majority world has created a corresponding intensification of contradiction within countries and globally. People throughout the world

are struggling against increasing exploitation and against capitalism as a whole. Thus as globalisation creates the global capitalist, so it also creates conditions on a global scale for resistance to it. It is this resistance to capitalist super-exploitation, to the total social exclusion, that we now turn to.

## **PART 3 - RESISTANCE TO EXCLUSION**

### **Resistance to the new global disorder**

Globalisation is unleashing contradictory forces that provide the dynamics of life at the end of the second millennium. The tremendous possibilities for improvements for a better life for all are reduced to the reality of marginalisation and exclusion for the majority.

On the one side, the levels and capacity of production are increasing at a tremendous pace with immense capacity to satisfy material needs of all people. There is greater scope to communicate on a global level in an increasingly efficient way. New creative and cultural activities are possible at a scale not even thought of 20 years ago. Increased productivity has the potential to transform the lifestyles of people by increasing leisure time

On the other side, is the fact that such possibilities are available to only a minority of countries, societies and individuals. As the world is dramatically divided in ever sharper class divisions, the majority of working people are excluded from all the wealth and possibilities made possible by the increased capacity to produce wealth. Castells concludes, “globalisation and informationalisation are disenfranchising societies”. With the exception of a small elite, “people all over the world are losing control over their lives, over their environment, over their jobs, over their economies, over their governments, over their countries, and over the fate of the earth” (Castells, 1997, p.69).

The resistance by those who have lost control over their lives is resolving this basic contradiction. Thus “resistance confronts domination, empowerment reacts against powerlessness, and alternative projects challenge the logic embedded in the new global order, increasingly sensed as disorder by people around the planet” (Castells, 1997, p.69).

It is however an aspect of globalisation that information about resistance itself has also been marginalised and banished from the mass media controlled by the same global controllers. Thus begins people’s resistance at the level of information and communication. The struggle then is not only to end poverty and exclusion but also to end the embargo on progressive information about the struggle of people around the world to end their exclusion.

It is obvious from the previous section that social exclusion is not an accidental outcome of some misguided policy. It is a natural outcome of capitalist development in the period of globalisation which has entered a new phase in the last quarter of this century. It affects the “developed” capitalist countries as well as the non-developing majority world. The struggle of the people around the world to be included in the distribution of products, which sustain life, is also global. It is global in two senses: One, in every country the marginalised and excluded people are struggling to be included in the economic, political and social life of their country. Secondly, the struggle is global in the sense that there is an increasing co-



operation by people in different countries to work together on joint campaigns as their struggles and causes of their exclusion are also linked.

Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, people's struggle everywhere were primarily defined by the presence of the two super powers. People's struggles were clearly a struggle for liberation from capitalist marginalisation with a hope of creating a new society based on social justice and for socialism. With the material, ideological and symbolic support of Soviet Union and Eastern Europe gone, and with China increasingly adopting capitalism, the struggles of people have undergone a qualitative change.

These struggles take place in the "developed" as well as the majority world. Sivanandan (1999, pp.15-17) examines both these struggles:

In the developed countries, political power is diffused and mediated, and dissidence centres around specific issues. Resistance, therefore, takes on the form of protests and demonstrations and direct action politics - over the opening of a motorway through the green belt, say, or the closing of a local hospital or the destruction of civic amenities by property speculators or the growing of genetically-modified crops by food speculators. Although, at the outset, such resistances tend to be ad hoc, sporadic and disconnected, they form the basis of the alliances and larger resistances that follow - as, for instance, over the poll tax when thousands of people from diverse campaigns found common cause against an unjust tax. And as transnational corporations continue to integrate vertically and horizontally into a privatised network of power, direct action campaigns are themselves integrating issues and becoming international - as, for instance, in the battle against Shell by ecological groups over the North Sea and the Ogoni people in Nigeria.

In the Third World, political power is concentrated in the hands of a few and is naked, and dissidence solidifies around basic needs. Hence, resistances take the form of spontaneous uprisings and/or mass rebellions spurred on by indigenous movements sometimes, and sometimes by peasant and worker struggles.

Resistance on a global level to forces that create social, political and economic exclusion is intensifying as we come to the end of the second millennium. The combatants are peasants, workers, intellectuals, academics, and many others. The important qualitative difference in their resistance is that they are united, articulate, organised and are able to use the latest technologies in support of their resistance. Their target is no longer just the local tyrants, dictators and financiers. They have targeted the worldwide network of transnational companies, official bodies, unfair treaties and speculators who use the neutral image of UN to hide their real motive of mega-profits.

In the following section, we look at some examples of resistance to social, political and economic exclusion by people around the world.

### **The Battle of Chile**

The control over mass media by a few transnationals has resulted in people's history either

hidden from view altogether, or distorted to such an extent that events become non-events, heroes become villains, and atrocities against people never see the light of day. But once again the courage of individuals and organisations fighting oppression and exclusion has used appropriate technologies to give people's history its rightful place - centre stage.

Patricio Guzman's documentary film, *The Battle of Chile: the fight of an unarmed people* is an "epic of reportage on the events that extinguished democracy in Chile in 1973" (Pilger, 1999). It was shown at the Human Rights International Film Festival in London in February 1999. The film is in two parts: Part One is entitled *The Insurrection of the Bourgeoisie (1975)* and Part two, *The Coup d'Etat*. Guzman and five colleagues who made the film were detained and tortured in Chile during filming (Hattenstone, 1999). Guzman made a sequel, *Chile, Obstinate Memory* which reveals that after the film was smuggled abroad, the cameraman, Jorge Muller was arrested, and taken to a torture camp, where he "disappeared" until his grave was found years later.

The film records the events in Chile from 1972 onwards - on the streets, with the student unions, and in the factories, "to document the melodramatic reality of revolution. Guzman and his crew were there to record every significant event, every tiny speech, every road block, in the last year of Allende's rule."

The reason for the banning of the film in Chile even today and the reasons behind the horrific events in Chile are revealed in the films. Pilger (1999) says that the film reveals the hidden force behind the events in Chile: "Muller's camera traces the contours of faces, revealing the freemasonry of deception, lies and false hope. Pinochet is brought into the government; in his shadow are 250 terrorist groups backed by Washington. Almost everything now is backed by Washington. The CIA finances the truck operators' strike; William Colby, the CIA director who ran the terrorism of operation Phoenix in Vietnam, pointedly refuses to deny that the invisible hand is his. A popular television channel broadcasts anti-government bile; it is run by the Ford Foundation. At sea, American warships make contact with the Chilean navy."

The films play an important role in restoring history to the people of Chile. When Guzman returned to Chile, he was shocked by the collective amnesia of his people. "If you go to a bookshop to buy history books, there are more or less 12 books about the history of Chile and you look through the chapter on Allende and there are 12 lines or 14 or 20. It is a sign of the terror Pinochet created." (Hattenstone, 1999). The historical significance of Guzman's films is obvious. The brutal regime that murdered Allende was backed by the US military-financial establishment. Both want to drown people's memory of Allende and his achievements, including popular democracy, health and education. Guzman shatters the walls of silence and distorted reality created by Allende's enemies and "celebrates the truth that the universal phenomenon of resistance continues."

The people of Chile suffered years of torture, "disappearance" and death to assert their right to shape their own destiny, to be included on the stage of history. Their sacrifice is recorded for all by Guzman and his colleagues. The next generation learns from the lessons of history, ready for new sacrifices. The struggle for social inclusion is indeed a bloody one.

### *Lessons for Public Libraries*

It is obvious that no public library will be able to document openly state oppression against its own people. Yet it is important that library workers do not use this as an excuse for not recording, preserving and making available, at a later stage, records of events taking place around them. The film crew managed to do this and there are obvious risks they faced. But if library workers are part of the people they seek to serve, they face similar risks anyway. If they cannot become activist-librarians, the least they could do is to join hands with activists to ensure that the library's functions are kept in the forefront of the struggle. Perhaps library and information workers need to study the examples of journalists who often risk their lives in the course of their professional work. The concept of risk and danger in professional work needs to be incorporated in the core values of the LIS profession if it is to be socially relevant.

### **The video activist**

The use of cameras and videos in support of struggles has a long history. Photo-documentation of events as they happen gives an instant authenticity to events. They are also more accessible to communities which may have been kept away from literacy skills. For the first time, activists themselves take control of the medium and present news from their own point of view. As *Undercurrents* (1998) says:

The video magazine is an alternative news distribution outlet that sets out to challenge mainstream definition of news. *Undercurrents* relies on volunteer video activists using domestic camcorders. Ignored but important local issues now can have an international audience.

One example of how *Undercurrents* allows free flow of alternative news was in No. 8 where the Kurdish Workers Association shows a short documentary on Leyla Zana, an MP in the Turkish Parliament. The commentary sets the scene:

Leyla Zana is the first Kurdish woman to become a member of Parliament in Turkey. In 1994, she was sentenced to 15 years in prison for supporting the rights of the Kurdish people. This film includes extracts from letters she wrote while in prison, showing her courage and determination to continue the struggle against injustice.

The visual images, the commentary and the voice of Leyla bring to life a situation that Western business interests and the mass media which supports it would rather suppress. As Tony Benn says (*Undercurrents* 8), "I think *Undercurrents* is doing a marvellous job because you're providing [news that you do not see] in the media and with that little box of tricks you can beat Rupert Murdoch and John Birt and CNN and NBC and you've got to do it." It is an alternative voice and image that needs to be heard and seen.

### *Lessons for Public Libraries*

Libraries need to pay more attention to forms other than printed book: sound recordings, photographs, video filming, recording and preserving oral histories should become important forms that they actively collect and promote.

## **The Alternative Davos**

The Alternative Davos was set up by Ahmed Ben Bella, the former President of Algeria and is supported by some of the best organised mass movements in the majority world - such as the landless of Brazil (MST), led by Mario Luis Lill; the organisations of the Indian farmers; the National Federation of Peasant Organisations (Fenop) in Burkina Faso, as well as the substantial social movements in Europe, especially in France.

The Alternative Davos got together to challenge the meeting of the global financial elite as they met in Davos. "It was the first time that the world's economic and political powers had had to confront the intellectual challenge to their fundamental premises on their own doorstep." (Brittain, 1999).

Prof. Riccardo Petrella explains the agenda of the Alternative Davos:

What is at stake is the right to life - the right to water, housing, food, that is what the battle over international financial institutions is all about. We need a new social contract which rejects the poverty created by the existing system.

The privation of education, the concentration of information systems, the control of intellectual property rights - all of these threaten a world in which the dominant powers control even how we conceive our world. (Brittain, 1999).

The Alternative Davos attacked the power of the transnational companies, the Bretton Woods institutions, and the speculators. It called for the imposition of a tax on capital movements; the cancellation of all majority world debts, the replacement of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank with a democratic UN body. No longer are the financial controllers of the world able to sit in isolated splendour planning world plunder. Resistance has reached their doorstep.

## **Protest and campaign movements**

Various protest and campaign groups have now started using both, the over-ground and underground, alternative press to mobilise their supporters and disseminate their information. The availability of relatively cheap and easy means of communication that the Web and e-communications allows has revolutionised the way protest and social justice movements can be active. This has given new power to united and organised forces of those struggling against transnational companies and their Western financial supporters. Vidal (1999b) gives some examples of how the protest and campaign movements use the electronic media:

- Twelve environmental justice protesters and a video activist walked into Shell UK's London HQ and occupied three offices on January 11, 1999. Almost the first thing that the *Undercurrents* reporter did was to set up his small digital camera and link it to a palm-top computer and a mobile phone. Despite Shell turning off the electricity and cutting the phone lines, within minutes he was broadcasting the protest live on the Internet, and e-mailing to the mainstream press.
- The campaign to stop the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) depended on the Web and spread like wildfire. The MAI was being debated in secret by OECD countries

and would have been nodded by Western parliaments, giving massive legal and economic advantage to transnational corporations around the world. Once a French NGO exposed what was going on, more than 600 citizens' groups, including unions, workers parties, consumer organisations, development and environmental groups in dozens of countries were exchanging information, co-ordinating opposition and alerting politicians, the media and civil servants. In the end MAI had to be abandoned.

Thus the Web technology which is being used by speculators to acquire massive profits by "whizzing trillions of dollars around the world every day" has now become the most potent weapon in the toolbox of resistance to globalisation and the rampant free market. It has given instant information to activists around the world. "Small" events in one part of the world get immediate worldwide exposure, which leads to massive global campaigns within days or even minutes. The days when information was controlled by a few who disseminated only those aspects considered "safe" are over.

### *Lessons for Public Libraries*

Public Libraries need to pay attention to underground and alternative material which are becoming the main communication media for people struggling for change. The possibilities of cheap and easy means of communication that the Web and e-communications allow need to be harnessed by libraries to acquire, store and disseminate information that the struggling people consider relevant. Those who are active in the struggle have already adopted these technologies as tools for their struggles. If libraries are to be considered partners in the people's struggles, they will need to accept the new media, not to satisfy the business and other needs of the "already rich", but for the needs of the socially excluded.

### **The Adivasis and Social Exclusion**

It is instructive to see social exclusion from the point of view of the Adivasi of the Nilgiri Mountains in Tamil Nadu. They struggle against transnational companies such as Unilever which evicts them from land they have lived and worked on for generations. Marcel-Thekaekara (1999) compares the Adivasi experience with the struggle against social exclusion in a number of other countries:

- The experience of those struggling against social exclusion among the housing estates in the inner cities of England and Scotland. In Easterhouse housing estate in Glasgow considered "Europe's worst slum", the reality of poverty included the fact that "most of the men in Easterhouse hadn't had a job in 20 years; they were dispirited, depressed, often alcoholic. Emotionally and mentally they were far worse off than where we worked in India; [we saw] underdeveloped Scottish children - a whole generation were growing up a head shorter, smaller than their parents and grandparents. Malnutrition in Britain!"
- The struggle of the Aboriginal Australians: "Our people in Tamil Nadu were shocked beyond words by the Australians' stories of children wrenched from their families, of the treatment meted out to them by the white Australians. For months afterwards the Adivasis talked about the Aboriginal Australians' visit: "Poor people, how they've suffered" they said. "Our problems are nothing compared to what they've been through." The Adivasis visited the "super-developed Germany" but they were not impressed. They did not hanker after German consumer goods, and were speechless when they saw an old people's home,

saying, “we must ensure that such things never happen in our society”. They were shocked at the spectre of unemployment that haunted the society. Yet they admired the fact that everyone treated them with respect and dignity, as equals.

For those struggling against social exclusion, satisfying basic material needs is obviously an important concern. But for many, the notions of wealth do not equal possession of money. Wealth to the Adivasis is “our community, our children, our unity, our culture, the forest.” Marcel-Thekaekara (1999) comments, “We realised that the Adivasis didn’t see themselves as poor. They saw themselves as people without money.”

Their contacts with other struggles around the world provided a new source of strength, which is a result - an unplanned one, no doubt - of globalisation: solidarity of people struggling against exclusion, exploitation and oppression in different parts of the world. Marcel-Thekaekara (1999) quotes Bomman’s speech in the village square after his overseas visit:

Unilever is very powerful. But the days when Adivasis were totally powerless are over. We now have friends in Germany and UK. If we tell them what Unilever is doing here they will start a campaign to inform all the people of Europe to stop buying Unilever tea. They will fight on our side. We are not alone.”

As Marcel-Thekaekara (1999) says, “The global links between people usually considered poor, and therefore powerless, had made a difference.” Thus globalisation which brought poverty and powerless to every doorstep in the world, also brought the means of overcoming the very poverty and powerlessness on which capitalism thrives. New battles lines are drawn. Combatants of a new generation take on the new struggles.

### *Lessons for Public Libraries*

Public Libraries in Britain and other “developed” countries need to examine their work practices, outlook, mission statements with a view to making them less Euro/USA-centric. There is an assumption in the profession that the “Western” model of public libraries is the best. This model has failed to stop the exclusion of perhaps a third or more of our populations from the informational world. It is time we asked for some technical expertise from those Majority World countries which have had more success than ourselves in providing a relevant educational and information service.

We need to question and challenge the static role that public libraries have acquired in Britain. The class bias in public libraries is analysed by Pateman (1999) who says, “There is plenty of evidence to suggest that, while public libraries are used by all social classes, they are a predominantly middle class institutions...; the service is managed and operated by middle class people who share their middle class values with middle class library users.”

LIS is a sanitised profession that wants to keep away from getting involved in people’s struggles, that wants to remain “neutral” while those with power and wealth gobble up an ever-increasing proportion of library budgets. Again a comparison with another profession may help to understand our real situation: NHS doctors insist on the best medicine for their patients irrespective of their financial or social standing. What matters is the needs of the patients. The library profession needs to come up with a similar “needs-led” approach to

satisfying information needs of people.

### **Glimpses from Kenyan struggle for political communication**

The Kenyan people's struggle for political freedom and independence had been fought at various levels: political, economic, military, educational and communications. Before the majority of peasants and workers could be included as the mainstream of the society, they had to struggle with all means at their disposal. The battles at communications level were central to their winning the war for political independence. The lessons from this struggle add to the wealth of experiences in how to eliminate social exclusion.

Some examples of how political communications was used in Kenya as part of the people's struggle against exclusion are given below:

#### *The Kimaathi tradition*

Kimaathi led the Kenyan forces in the political as well as military fronts. He was elected to lead the Kenya Parliament founded as an alternative state in the liberated areas; he also led the Kenya Land and Freedom Army on the battlefield. Because of these roles he had of necessity to be involved in the communication strategy of Mau Mau. He helped to plan an elaborate underground library network in the liberated forest areas; he ensured that Mau Mau reports and documents were well looked after and preserved (it was the British forces which destroyed or hid, even to this day, much of this valuable resource); he supported the work of underground and overground press controlled by Mau Mau; he actively distributed Mau Mau newspapers, carrying them in baskets and travelled around the country in buses and Matatus. Kimaathi is a good role model of a library/information worker in tune with his people's needs and struggles.

#### *The handbill tradition*

In the 1930s, one of the first acts of the East African Trade Union was to purchase a typewriter and a rotary cyclostyle machine. Thus began a new phase in Kenyan publishing. Previously, publishing was beyond the reach of most nationals, particularly the working class, because of the exorbitant charges for printing. The costs were high not only because machinery had to be imported from Britain, but also the charges were kept high to discourage Kenyan publishing. Colonial settlers owned most presses and the few controlled by Kenyans could not meet the needs of all.

Thus the decision of the Union to use cheap cyclostyling was significant as it brought relevant technology within their reach. The Union developed the use of handbills which could be produced cheaply and distributed easily without colonial censorship, formal or informal. These handbills contained information of relevance to workers about their rights, and also about union matters and activities. In addition, they carried news items of interest to workers, since not many newspapers catered for the needs of workers. The Union produced its handbills in the major worker languages such as Kiswahili, Gikuyu, Gujarati, Hindi, and Punjabi, as well as English. The easy availability of relevant news in a form and language that made it easily accessible played an important part in raising class consciousness of Kenyan workers and helped to strengthen their organisations.

A whole new set of worker activities developed around the production and distribution of these

handbills. These experiences proved crucial in producing a trained cadre for carrying on trade union and political work, at the same time winning mass support for the liberation movement.

### *Use of orature*

The use of oral communication systems was well established before the colonial government declared a State of Emergency in 1952 to fight the armed Mau Mau. Kubai (1983, p. 98) explains how this developed:

In November 1951 the colonialists and white settlers' newspapers stopped covering KAU [Kenya African Union] public meetings. The militants started mouth to mouth bush-radio information service. Songs were composed carrying revolutionary and 'subversive' messages and were sung by both young and old. Kinuthia Mugia of Olenguroine became champion in the composition of new Kikuyu songs. J. J. Gakara, among others, printed the songs into 'hymn books'. Kikuyu and Kiswahili newspapers and pamphlets were started.

The need at the early stages of struggle against colonialism was to organise secretly. This was reflected in the early means of communication developed by people. The colonialist regime had kept Kenyan nationalities in isolation from each other by banning Kenya-wide nationalist movements. Thus one of the first tasks of the now developing revolutionary movement was to develop new communication links with all Kenyan people, and to do it secretly.

The Mau Mau High Command, using its organisational network at Mathare Valley in Nairobi resolved this problem. Since the largest concentration of workers was in Nairobi, a new communication network was organised from here. Workers of various nationalities were recruited in Nairobi. One aspect of their work was to act as links with their nationality areas. Thus the worker-organised Mau Mau movement established deep roots among peasantry, without which the whole movement could have been crushed by imperialism within a short time.

### *Lessons for Public Libraries*

Public Libraries need to see themselves as part of the society as a whole. People's struggles for social justice and economic liberation are waged at various levels: political, economic, social, cultural and educational. Communications can be at the heart of these struggles, linking all the different struggles and providing a basic support mechanism. Any search for relevance will need to explore this dynamic role of libraries.

Library workers will need to become activists in the various struggles of the people, in the Kimaathi tradition. Only thus will they become relevant to the people they serve and avoid the one dimensional approach that is the rule today. There needs to be a new debate about what being a "professional" means.

No public library collects underground and alternative material from the people's struggles. Many important documents may already have been lost already as no organisation in Kenya dare openly collect it. It is not certain if any outside institution, with the possible exception of CIA, has collected such material (Durrani, 1997). In order to avoid losing the experiences of people's struggle, public libraries need to have an active collection policy, possibly in conjunction with international bodies such as UNESCO.



## **Kurdish resistance**

*"No friends but mountains"* goes a Kurdish song. That indeed seems to be borne out by the plight of the Kurds people this century. Together with the Palestinians, the Kurds, as a nationality, are among the most excluded people in the world today. Both suffered at the hands of the post-First World War carve-up of their territories by Britain and France.

The Kurdish people number between 25-40 millions according to different sources. They are divided over 5 main countries: Turkey (13 million); Iran (4.8 million); Iraq (4.3 million) ; Syria (1 million); Germany (0.5 million); Russian Federation (0.3 million); Armenia (0.1 million). They are also spread in Lebanon and Syria as well as in most European countries in varying numbers. Yet they have no state they can call their own. Kemal Attaturk "tore up the 1820 Treaty of Sevres which had envisaged an independent area for the Kurds in Eastern Turkey and cancelled their right to be seen as a people separate from the rest of the Turkish nation." (Butt, 1999). He also "swept aside their freedom of language and culture that had been written into the Treaty of Lausanne." (Black, 1999). As Butt (1999) says, "The Kurds were doubly cheated after the First World War. Not only did they fail to get a state of their own, but they found their mountainous territory chopped up by the new borders of Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey".

Until recently Turkey had maintained that the Kurdish nationality is "Mountain Turks", denying them their identity as Kurdish people. Until 1991 Kurds in Turkey were forbidden to speak their own language which is made of the Sorani, the Kurmanji and other related dialects. "If people heard you talking Kurdish in the village," Griffiths (1999) quotes Sevan Sen a London factory worker, "you would be reported and the next day in school the teachers would make you stand on one leg for half an hour or beat you." But the use of Kurdish in education, broadcasting and publishing is still prohibited. Pinter (1999) says, "Anyone publishing, or attempting to publish an objective historical analysis of the Kurdish situation is subject to prosecution and imprisonment. Torture is commonplace, particularly in police stations."

In Turkey, the Kurds were forced to change their names and had to call their villages and towns by Turkish names. They are "politically and economically marginalised in each of the five main countries they live." (Black, 1999). According to the Turkish Parliament's own investigation, in 15 years 4,000 Kurdish villages have been destroyed by Turkish security forces, leaving 30,000 dead, and 3 million driven from their homes (Steel, 1999). Thus their social, political, economic and cultural exclusion seems total.

Veysi Aydin sums up the plight of the Kurdish people: "The Kurdish people feel trapped. We are surrounded by fire and nobody is listening to us." (quoted in Gillan, 1999). Even when over 30,000 people have lost their lives - most at the hands of the Turkish military - there is no urgency in the power capitals of the world to find a solution to the struggle of a people without nation.

The need to communicate among the Kurdish communities spread all over Europe becomes an important matter for the survival of their culture and social life - indeed their very identity. A strong sense of organisation is one way in which the Kurdish people have overcome their lack of territorial control. Wherever they live, they tend to be highly politicised and

organised. Just as the Zapatistas (*see next section*), they make extensive use of orature, so that news spreads fast between isolated community members within each country as well as between different countries.

However, the Kurdish community also uses modern means of communications to carry news about their struggles, their culture and their language. Publishing is an important aspect of their struggle for survival. Publications in Kurdish language are important, as it has been suppressed over the years. New publishing houses in Kurdish language material have sprung up in France as well as other European countries. These serve the needs of the Kurdish people throughout Europe.

In addition, the community runs the Med TV, a satellite television station based in London. Med TV has become the “Kurdish voice, not only in Turkey, but throughout Europe” as Estella Schmid, the co-ordinator of the Kurdistan Solidarity Committee says (Black, 1999). Med TV played a crucial role in keeping the Kurdish communities throughout Europe informed about developments surrounding the arrest earlier this year of Abdullah Ocalan, the leader of the Kurdish Workers Party. Its communications work was perhaps responsible for ensuring that there was widespread protest in more than 20 cities in Europe when Ocalan was arrested.

Pinter (1999) highlights a sad fact about the flow of information about the Kurdish struggle in Britain, with all the freedom of press it boasts. The Today programme on Radio 4 interviews Professor Norman Stone who describes Ocalan as a “thug”. Pinter continues, “The appalling repression of the Kurdish people in Turkey is generally unreported in the British media and virtually ignored at Government level...the issue is not simply of what is happening to the Kurds but also what is happening to freedom of expression and independent thought. Something has been occurring beneath our very noses in Turkey for years: many thousands of people confront substantial and persistent persecution and yet we read little about it in the press and our government is silent while trade with Turkey flourishes - Turkey provides rich business opportunities for all Western ‘democracies’”.

Meanwhile the struggle of the Kurdish communities continues...

### *Lessons for Public Libraries*

Public Libraries need to become friends to all those who have *No friends but mountains*. This can happen only when they establish active relationships and communications links with people’s struggles. The real solution would be to recruit people from these struggles as librarians and information workers. Perhaps then we can start making links at national and international level with struggles of different people. Perhaps then we can start breaking down the “what’s it got to do with me” mentality among a large number of middle class library professionals.

### **The Zapatistas and the electronic struggle**

The Zapatistas came to the attention of the world on January 1, 1994 when about 3000 armed men and women took control of several municipalities in Chiapas in Southern Mexico. They were the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional. They are Mexican patriots “up in arms

against new forms of foreign domination by American imperialism” (Castells, 1997, p.78). The Zapatistas staged an armed uprising on behalf of Indian rights and fought the Mexican army for 10 days before a cease-fire was declared and negotiations began.

They thus launched what has come to be known as the first “cyber” or “Net” war. “Even as the government mobilised its army to occupy the state of Chiapas and tried to deny the revolutionaries access to the mass media,” says Vidal (1999a) “they and their supporters were mobilising words and images to disseminate ideas electronically.”

The Zapatistas’ struggle is at two levels: “they fight against the exclusionary consequences of economic modernisation; they also challenge the inevitability of a new geopolitical order under which capitalism becomes universally accepted” (Castells, 1997, p.77). Although the struggle of the Zapatistas is restricted to a relatively small region of Mexico, the geographic and political reach of their struggle covers not only the whole of Mexico, but also the whole world. This has been achieved through a clever and sophisticated use of various aspects of electronic technology. Not only have they used computer communications; they have also proved adept “at the speedy production and circulation of videos, the genesis and compilation of pro-Zapatista interviews and music on audio tapes and CD ROM and the use of radio (both legal and pirate) and community access TV to outflank scanty and biased coverage by the mainstream media” (Cleaver, 1997, p.22).

The struggles of the Zapatistas could not have been waged successfully if they had not broken out of the information embargo imposed by the state. They have used electronic networks in conjunction with solidarity networks throughout the world to ensure that their voice is heard. An important reason for their success is the development of their own forms of self-organisation which enables not only the use of computer systems but provides social cohesion and unity.

According to Castells (1997, p.79), “the success of the Zapatistas was largely due to their communication strategy, to the point that they can be called the *first informational guerrilla movement*.” [His emphasis]. Castells quotes Subcomandante Marcos, the Zapatista spokesperson: “We must say our word and be heard. If we do not do it now, others will take our voice and lies will come out from our mouth without us wanting it. Look for a way to speak our word to those who would like to listen.” It was this appropriate communications policy which enabled Zapatistas to reach the people of Mexico and gave strength to their struggle.

Vidal (1999a) quotes Henry Cleaver in how the Zapatistas used the net and combined its use with “conventional” means of communications: “Information was downloaded on to the Net, gathered from other sources and transformed into flyers, pamphlets, newsletters, articles and books detailing the torture, rape, executions and other violence being perpetrated by the police, military and the hired goons of the big ranchers. The material fuelled marches and vigils around the world.” The Zapatistas have extended the usage of the Net with their analysis of poverty, human and land rights, justice, exploitation which have now become part of the “vocabulary of new democracy movements in many countries.”

But the Zapatistas have shown that they are equally effective even when they are denied the

use of mass means of communication, such as the radio and television. The struggle in Mexico has taken a new perspective with a series of “unofficial plebiscite” conducted by the Zapatistas. The first one was conducted in 1995, and the second one in 1999. Up to three million Mexicans, aged 12 and above “gave an overwhelming support to the Zapatista rebel group” on indigenous rights (McCaughan, 1999). This massive turnout was achieved without the use of radio or television coverage; nor were there posters and other advertising materials. The main method that the Zapatistas used was word of mouth and “vigorous campaigning conducted by the visiting rebel delegates.” McCaughan explains how the campaigning took place:

Five thousand Zapatistas left their homes in Chiapas a fortnight ago, visiting factories, schools, and universities, playing football, chatting to tourists, and holding a meeting on the United States border.

It seems that it is the creativity and commitment of the oppressed people that creates conditions for their liberation from exclusion.

#### *Lessons for Public Libraries*

The Zapatista’s ability to grasp with enthusiasm new communications technologies and use them actively for their struggles holds a lesson for libraries.

## **PART 4 – LESSONS OF PEOPLE’S STRUGGLES**

Social exclusion is an essential part of capitalism and so long as capitalism survives, social exclusion, social oppression and economic exploitation will also remain. Nor can such exclusion be totally eradicated as long as the prevailing free market system ensures that economic activity satisfies the profit greed of a few rather than the satisfaction of material, educational and cultural needs of the majority of people.

Social exclusion can be eliminated on the basis of people’s determination to be included in the processes that control their own lives. Experiences from around the world indicate that excluded people everywhere struggle to include themselves in deciding their future as individuals, nationalities, communities and countries. The level of exploitation and exclusion they face decides the strength of their determination to struggle against their exclusion. They thus create the conditions for their own inclusion. They do not need to depend on outside agents to “include” them in the share of power, which belongs to them by right. Their success in the process of self-inclusion is determined by a number of factors: their class consciousness; their understanding of the causes of their exclusion and knowledge about the struggle waged by other people (hence the importance of relevant education, information and knowledge); the organisations they create as part of their struggle; their control over appropriate technologies; the availability of a correct ideology which can guide them and, perhaps the most important factor, what actions they take in ending their exclusion.

In this paper we have seen the forces that have changed the playing field on which Libraries are set; we also examined some struggles waged by people from different societies to participate fully in moulding their own lives and to take control over their destinies. The lesson from this is that the struggle for social inclusion is in essence the struggle for

*economic, political and social* inclusion. And that is where the difficulty arises, as they come into direct conflict with the forces of international finance capital. The economic interests of finance capital are in direct conflict with the interests of the people struggling for inclusion.

History records that finance capital will go to any length in order to ensure that it continues to maintain its hold over labour and resources. It even uses the state power of powerful nations such as the USA to ensure its control over lives and resources of entire countries. Examples of Chile, Congo and Cuba immediately come to mind. The extent to which the USA has gone to suppress people's actions to eliminate exclusion is revealed in recently published documents and in President Clinton's apology to the people of Guatemala (Kettle, and Lennard, 1999):

The findings of the independent Historical Clarification Commission concluded that the US was responsible for most of the human rights abuses committed during the 36-year war in which 200,000 people died.

Thus people's struggles for inclusion are not waged in a vacuum. They are waged against powerful economic and political interests which seek to appropriate the wealth of the whole world - no less. In this struggle, public libraries need to decide whether they support the interests of finance capital or those of the people struggling against exclusion. One reason why libraries have failed in the past to play an active part in people's struggles against exclusion is perhaps because they have avoided this decision and have thus quietly provided support to those opposed to people's struggles. Muddiman (1999) gives what is probably the real reason for their failure when he says that "libraries have usually existed as part of the apparatus of a capitalist state and hence, by and large, embodied the values of that state - i.e. acquisitive individualism."

Given this, what role can there be for public libraries? Some lessons for public libraries are suggested in the above section. In general, the examples of struggles examined in this paper show that if libraries are to be relevant to the needs of the people, they need to make a conscious decision to side with the people in the on-going struggle. The challenge to information workers is to raise their heads and be counted among people's forces seeking to end exclusion. A new breed of activist librarians can possibly save the profession from becoming totally irrelevant to those who have been "socially excluded."

Liberation movements everywhere have had to create new information services to serve their own needs. People's struggles against exclusion will continue - with or without public library services. Official public libraries can fulfil a new role as information providers to people's forces in their search for inclusion, provided there is a conscious decision on the part of information workers and decision-makers in local and central governments to support people's liberation struggles. A cultural revolution is needed for this to happen. How to become involved on the side of the people's struggle is the real challenge to information workers and local and central governments throughout the world.

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