MEDIA AND DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY. A SURVEY OF POST-COMMUNIST EXPERIENCE

Professor **Colin Sparks**
Centre for Communication and Information Studies
University of Westminster

Introduction

The central motivation of the majority of the internal opposition to the communist regimes in Europe was a desire to establish democratic societies. Of course, there were important differences in what was understood by 'democracy', but there was general agreement that a substantial reform of the mass media was an essential objective (Splichal, Hochheimer and Jakubowicz, 1990). The communist media were seen, quite rightly, as totalitarian. All the media, whether formally owned by the party of formally independent, were completely under the control of the party leadership. The Central Committee of the ruling party dictated their editorial policies. Proven loyalty to the party was a condition for employment, and still more for advancement. Very often, the General Secretary of the party treated the media as his private mouthpiece. Clearly, such goings on would not be tolerated in any democratic society and the media would have to change radically.

There was less agreement as to what the direction of change should be, but most people looked to a version of the media in the western countries for inspiration. Some people looked to the USA, some to Germany, and some to Sweden. Perhaps a few even looked to the UK. What they saw, or believed they saw, in all of these different countries were mass media that were autonomous and independent in their editorial policies. They saw journalists who were trained as professionals and promoted exclusively on merit. They saw newspapers and broadcasting stations that were fiercely independent of government, and not at all afraid to make harsh criticism of wrongdoing even by the most powerful. They saw editors and journalists who had the resolution and courage to defy Presidents, Prime Ministers and Parliaments, and to print or broadcast the truth regardless of consequences.

Romanian Journal of Sociology, X,1-2,Bucharest,1999

Those were democratic media and it was urgent that they be copied in the countries breaking free from the communist rule.

Ten years later, the reality is very far from those dreams. Nowhere, outside of the special case of the former German Democratic Republic, do the media correspond at all closely to the desired model of the western media. Both the press and broadcasting remain partisan, and sometimes outrageously so. In the state broadcasters, senior appointments are still seen as one of the spoils of political office, bias in news in commonplace and the attempt to emulate the western model of public service broadcasting has not been a success. Commercial broadcasting has not proved the panacea that many hoped. Winning a licence, and sometimes continuing to hold the license, has been deeply political process. Very often, holders of commercial licences have been closely allied to politicians, or have themselves harboured political ambitions (Hrvatin and Kersevan, 1999). Their programming strategies, too, have been criticised for a massive over-emphasis on imported programming and neglect of local production. The newspaper press has seen a deluge of new titles, and nearly as many closures. The old communist-era titles, often controlled by people who were senior editorial figures in the recent past, continue to have powerful positions. Readership overall has fallen dramatically and in many countries the market is dividing between serious and tabloid titles (Gulyas, 1999). Journalists still fail to operate impartially, even those younger ones trained by western experts, and sensationalised reporting is commonplace. Overall, although the picture is very different from the communist era, and on almost any measure much more open, the fact is that it is far from ideal (Sparks, 1998).

Informed observers of the region will dispute little, if any, of the above, although there would undoubtedly be difference of detail depending upon which society was being considered. The question of why such noble dreams have had such squalid outcomes is much more contentious and difficult. In this paper, I want to advance four main reasons why all of this happened. My interpretation is based upon a detailed study of only some of the countries in question (Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic), although I do have some acquaintance with the situation elsewhere. My observations are certainly open to correction by those with a more detailed knowledge of developments in the region, but I think that the main lines of my conclusions in fact apply quite widely.

Four reasons for unexpected outcomes

The reasons for the unexpected, and undesired, outcomes in the transformation process can be grouped in two main classes. One group concerns the beliefs and attitudes of the main

actors, and constitute what we might term subjective problems. The other group concerns the nature of the transformation process itself, and we may term these objective problems. We will consider each group in turn:

1. The first subjective problem was that the anti-communist opposition often held very unrealistic views about the nature of the western media. There is a very wide range of both newspapers and broadcasting institutions in the western capitalist world, and the nature of their output varies dramatically. As one might expect, some is very good, and some is not so good. What the old opposition tended to see was, quite understandably, the best about the western media. We might compress this vision into saying that what they wanted was newspapers like the *New York Times* and broadcasters like *BBC*. They wanted newspapers that were objective and impartial, that carried an enormous variety of substantial reporting and commentary on important political and economic questions, that had a wide international range, and which were fiercely independent of any political party. They wanted broadcasters whose news and current affairs programming lived up to those same high standards and was broadcast to a mass audience, who were independent of political pressure, and who, in addition, undertook the extensive and various original productions that are essential for healthy cultural life in a contemporary society.

There are three problems with this vision. In the first place, there are any number of well-documented critiques that establish that reality of both of these media organisations is rather different from their self-images. Although both are independent from organised political parties, they tend to over-represent the voices of elite groups in internal debates, they tend to be relatively uncritical of their international polities of their respective countries, and there are circumstances in which both have bowed to direct political pressure.

The second problem is that neither organisation is typical of the western media as a whole. We may conveniently contrast the US and British media to illustrate this. In the UK, the national newspaper market has two characteristics that render it quite different from the *NYT* model. Firstly, it is very stratified. While there are some newspapers, the broadsheet press, which have pretensions to being journals of record, they account for at most twenty per cent of daily circulation. The majority press is very different, being in varying degrees "tabloid" in its news values, and thus more concerned with sport and scandal than politics and economics (Rooney, 1998). Secondly, all national newspapers, broadsheet and tabloid, are regularly, unashamedly and stridently partisan in both their reporting and commentary (Sparks, 1999a). These differences are regularly noted, and lamented, by US journalists.

Broadcasting represents a different picture. While US broadcasters certainly produce some serious news and current affairs, it tends to be broadcast outside of prime time, or on channels like PBS and NPR, that reach only niche audiences (Calabrese, 2000). Culturally, too, although US broadcasters certainly produce and broadcast a vast quantity and range of original programmes, this is often sharply criticised from inside the USA as being too predictable and insufficiently challenging. If we broaden our view, we can certainly find other western countries where there are newspapers that are even more partisan, and broadcasters who are much more obviously subject to political pressures.

The final problem is that this vision ignores the social circumstances that produce particular media forms. It is simply not possible to abstract the mass media from the social relations in which they develop and to consider their internal working in isolation. On the contrary, the mass media are always and everywhere deeply embedded in the particularity of a given society. We may illustrate this very simply by trying to answer the question: why is it that the commercial press in the USA is notoriously impartial, while the commercial press in UK is notoriously partisan? A good part of the reason lies in the different economic position of newspapers in the two countries. In the USA, most newspapers enjoy local monopolies (Bagdikian). However much they might preach the virtues of the free market and of competition, they don't experience in their own businesses. Politically, the US population is divided, mostly between Republicans and Democrats. If you are the only newspaper in a particular city, you want to reach readers who adhere to both main parties. It is therefore sensible and logical to report both sides impartially and equally. To do otherwise would risk alienating the supporters of the aggrieved party, and thus reduce your potential circulation (Schiller). In the UK, the national press market is fiercely and ruthlessly competitive, and newspapers must attempt to occupy particular niches in the overall market. Politically, the UK population is divided, mostly between Conservative and New Labour. If you are one of many competing newspapers, then your political alignment is one of the features of your brand (often not the most important one), and it helps to win and secure the loyalty of a particular group of readers. From the different economic circumstances flow different journalistic practices.

A similar point can be made about the genuinely considerable independence from political parties enjoyed by the BBC. The UK is relatively rich and stable country and political divisions between the main parties, while grater than those in the USA, are relatively small compared with many other places. There is a relatively homogenous and self-confident elite whose shared values and experiences over-ride many of their merely political differences. It is

in those circumstances that it is possible for one section of the elite to control broadcasting more or less independently from that section of the elite that controls the levers of direct political power. The cultural elite is trusted to represent more or less fairly the main divisions within the political life. The limits to this independence are set by the extent to which there is a challenge from outside of this elite consensus. One recent, and ongoing, example has been the civil war in Ireland, in which the broadcasters have been neither independent nor impartial. The views of those who violently rejected their domination by the British elite were not, until very recently, at all fairly reflected in British broadcasting (XXXX). Another example is that during the rule of the Thatcher government, which did pose some challenge to the prevailing elite consensus, there were increasingly frequent political criticisms of the BBC, and repeated interventions in its running designed to pull it into the line with the government's orthodoxy (O'Malley, 1996; Barnett and Curry, 1997). In societies in which political divisions are much wider and more bitterly contested, and in which elite consensus is not the norm, then one would not expect the kind of autonomy enjoyed by the BBC to emerge or flourish.

The frequent inability of the practice of the western media to live up to its own self-image, and the extra-ordinary diversity of really existing forms of both newspapers and broadcasting, reflects the fact that historical and contemporary circumstances vary very widely indeed within 'the west'. One major division is that between the experience of the USA and of Europe. If we compare the some of the main axes of media systems in the two continents, and add that prevailing in most post-communist countries, then we obtain the picture represented in Figure One. In this light, the media systems that have emerged in post-communist societies appear as recognisable parts of a more general European model of media, in sharp contrast to that of the USA.

Figure One

Topology of Media Systems in Europe and the USA

System	Press	Market stratification	State TV	Commercial TV	Foreign TV ownership
United States	Monopoly	No	No	Yes	No
West European	Competition	Yes	Yes	Yes	At least partial
Post-communist	Competition	Yes	Yes	Yes	At least partial

Within itself, however, the European model is very far from uniform. We may borrow a concept from Slavko Splichal and term the post-communist version of the general European model 'Italian', albeit with some important reservation (Splichal, 1994). This model is one in which political power has a direct and acknowledged presence in the staffing and policies of the broadcasting institutions, and in which the press is centred around political manoeuvring amongst elite group. We might further note that although this is a model that we have termed 'European', its general form is a much more widespread phenomenon.

2. The second subjective problem concerns the ideas that the opposition believed would act as guide in realising this vision of autonomous media. These, again, were various, but it is not unreasonable to assert that one version or another of the theory of 'civil society' was a key element in most perspectives. In most renderings, this theory claimed that the key fault of the communist system was that it had obliterated civil society, understood as some class of non-state organisations, and that a democratic society required the reconstruction of a social space in which these could flourish. It was the empowerment of civil society with respect to the mass media that was seen as one key to democratisation.

When we come to look more closely at the content of the general theory, a pattern of four major usages emerges, which are outlined in Figure Two. In its recent usage, the theory dates from the early days of Solidarity in Poland, when it was a mass working class movement with a strong insurrectionary wing. 'Civil society' in this period had a strong, if imprecise, radical edge to it. In the plans drawn up for Solidarity, it called for the subordination of Polish Radio and Television to governing councils made of elected individuals, whose tasks would be to represent the whole of society and to ensure that broadcasters reflected the diverse experiences of the population (Goban-Klas, 1994:176). After martial law, and the subsequent retreat of the 'hot moods', this idea lost its appeal and was replaced by one of three alternatives. The first of these was a simple re-statement of the classical Hegelian notion of civil society as the realm of the pursuit of private economic interests, in contrast on the one hand to the immediate affective relations of the family, and on the other the general political interests represented by the state. This involved a simple programme for the mass media: privatise as much as possible as quickly as possible and leave it to the market to realise democratic representation (Manaev, 1993). The other two versions were less drastic in their prescriptions. Both saw civil society as being constituted out of social organisations independent of both the state and the economy. Some, very problematically, centred the concept on the family, but for many, civil society was essentially made up of voluntary

organisations in which citizens came together to pursue their various interests. For both of these versions, the programme for media reform was to ensure that the representatives of civil society controlled the main public organs (Jakubowicz, 1993). The principal difference between what I have here called the democratic and utopian versions of the theory lay in what they believed to be the content of these voluntary organisations. For democratic version, civil society was made up of all organisations, and these would act so as to establish a society in which social life was governed by established and transparent rules that would be fair to all citizens. The utopian version noticed that some voluntary organisation made no secret of the fact that they had no time for fairness and equality, and proposed only to include those organisations of whose aims and methods it approved in the happy family of civil society that would get to run the media.

Figure Two

Four Theories of Civil Society

Theory	High point	Aim	Mechanism	Outcome
Radical	Early Solidarity	Collective empowerment	Mass self-activity	Failure
Classical	Contemporary reality	Pursuit of self-interest	Selfish economic man	Success
Democratic	Just before 1989	Rule-governed society	Non-state associations	Failure
Utopian	Just before 1989	Consensual society	Decent associations	Failure

Unlike many ideas in social theory, which can go along peacefully for years without ever encountering reality, these various ideas of civil society were subjected to a thorough-going practical test. In the aftermath of 1989, people who believed in three of the versions of this theory were in a position to advance their solution to the problem of democratic media. For reasons to which we will return below, very few people held to the radical version by 1989, and that was never seriously attempted. The other versions, however, all had many powerful advocates. In practical reality, neither the democratic nor the utopian visions of civil society proved workable. The version that came closest to success was the classical one of the pursuit of private interest.

In broadcasting, there were various attempts to draw up regulations that would have ensured that the government bodies and councils had a majority of representatives from

voluntary organisations like women's groups, youth organisations, churches and so on (Hungary, 1991). Generally, as these proposals made slow progress towards becoming actual laws, they were revised to reduce the representation of civil society and to increase the power of political appointees (Hungary, 1995). We might say that there was a shift from a German to a French model of broadcasting regulation. In practice, even where civil society retained a toehold, the actual conduct of business was dominated by political agendas (Splichal, 1995). In the state broadcasters, this meant that they continued to be subject to political interference. In the private broadcasters, it meant that they both appeased the ruling political forces and defied the discredited broadcasting regulators when it suited their business needs.

The newspaper press presents a different history, albeit one that leads to the same depressing conclusions. The majority of the press was privatised. Sometimes this was the result of what amounted to theft by the editorial staff, sometimes it was through sale to a local consortium and sometimes through sale to foreign buyer (Galik and Denes, 1992). In a very short time the newspaper press was transformed into an advertising subsidised commercial model. In no cases were bodies established to represent the interests of civil society in the running of particular newspapers. The readers were transformed from the objects of political indoctrination to the objects of commercial exploitation with scarcely a pause. at no point were they invited to participate in shaping the policy of the papers they ran. The closest approximation to empowering civil society anywhere in the press was that in some cases the journalists came to run newspapers, although even there the senior journalists usually managed to secure operational control, and the logic of the market meant that they ran these newspapers in more or less the same way as any other.

In post-communist Europe, civil society has meant capitalism, red in tooth and claw. The democratic and utopian theories have proved insufficiently robust to act as a guide to practical activity, although that has not, surprisingly, discouraged their advocates. The only way in which the classical theory of civil society has not been completely vindicated is in its promise of democratically-representative media. Politicians and the state still remain powerful forces shaping media content.

3. The first of the objective problems that led to unexpected outcomes was the nature of the transition process itself. The rise and fall of Solidarity echoed throughout the entire region, and influenced the thinking of both the opposition and the ruling party. For the less radical of the oppositionists, the lesson of Solidarity was that any attempt to overthrow the regime by mass action was both dangerous and impractical. Instead, it made sense to use the immense

power of proletarian protests as a bargaining chip with the regime. For the more far-sighted of the ruling party, it demonstrated that, once Russian guarantee of military support was withdrawn, there was always the prospect of another 1956, without the promise of rescue from outside. The moderate wing of the opposition and the reform wing of the communists, in Poland and elsewhere, began a long process of negotiation that eventually, and much to the surprise of many of the participants, led to the downfall of the communist system.

The participants in these negotiations were agreed on one central thing: it was necessary to resolve the issue by negotiation, and under no circumstances were the dangerous masses to be allowed to take centre stage. In many cases, notably in Poland and Hungary, the transition therefore took place entirely as the result of round-table and parliamentary discussions in which the dismantling of communism gradually crept on the agenda. There were, of course, some exceptions to the former Yugoslavia, and what is now the Russian Federation, where there were substantial popular mobilisations motivated by sections of the old bureaucracy, or new nationalist politicians, designed to use public demonstrations as a tool for pressuring their opponents. Elsewhere, notably in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and perhaps Romania, something rather different took place. In those countries, there were few active 'reform communists': for various reasons they were either dead, in jail or exile, or in obscure provincial disgrace. The opposition had no one to negotiate with, whether it wanted to or not. In those countries, it was the masses that initiated the process of transformation, and at least in East Germany and Czechoslovakia this produce brief but interesting developments of popular power. Everywhere, however, 'order' was restored and the process was taken over by experts and politicians, meeting in the closed committee rooms of power discourse.

Given that everywhere the end of communism was a process that was dominated by officials and politicians rather than ordinary people, it is not surprising that almost everywhere the institutions and even many of the supporters of the old regimes survived unscathed. In country after country, the civil service, the education system and the media display a marked continuity from the past (Bayliss, 1994). The communist general, superintendent, functionary, professor and broadcaster of yesterday are the today capitalist general, superintendent, functionary, professor and broadcaster. In very many cases also, the old communist factory manager is the new capitalist entrepreneur. Almost everywhere, the successor parties to the hated and discredited communists form a major political force and have often been elected to government. The only real exception to this general rule is the former German Republic. There, there have indeed been big changes. The ready-made political, economic and bureaucratic apparatuses of the continent's largest and most powerful state have been

transplanted wholesale, in the media as much as elsewhere (Boyle, 1994). Elsewhere, where that option was not available, social continuity has been one of the key features of the epoch. There were real revolutions in 1989. One system replaced another. But this was a political revolution, that changed the way that society was governed, not a social revolution that changed the way it lived.

Given that social continuity, it is not surprising that many of the bad habits have survived, as much in the mass media as in the rest of society. After a brief golden age of freedom during the death of the old and the birth of the new, journalists and other media workers have returned to the iron cage of bureaucracy. True, their masters change more often now, but they still have masters, and they still have to please those masters in order to keep their jobs.

4. The second objective obstacle to the realisation of the idealised model of the western media follows directly from the negotiated character of the transition. The political revolution meant that new people were running the government, but social continuity meant that many positions of social power were still in the same hands as before. What was more, there was no active popular movement demanding that the government carry through a dramatic transformation. On the contrary, the new governments soon found themselves, whether they wanted to or not, confronting the need to take decisions that would lead to a rapid fall in the living standards of the mass of the population. None of the groups that wielded power had any interest in further democratisation, and certainly non of the western government that were so free with advice were going to push for any such thing.

None of the social groups that found themselves in power after 1989 had any pressing interest in radical democratisation. The politicians in government wished to hold on to power, and they saw control of the mass media as one potential tool in that struggle. Opposition politicians wished to gain power, and they took exactly the same view of the mass media. For their part, the survivors of the old regime saw the new circumstances as an opportunity to transform themselves from bureaucratic managers into real live capitalists, and were interested in making sure that debates about economic decisions were undertaken on grounds that favoured their interests.

The general outcome of the interplay of these social forces has been what is sometimes termed 'political capitalism'. By this is meant a form of social domination in which there are close alliances and mutual support between the holders of political power and the holders of economic power. This concept remains very much to be developed, although its accuracy as a

first description of elite behaviour in the former communist countries is very striking. Elsewhere in this volume, Professor Splichal has argued that the concept is one that can be appropriately applied to the transition from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft*, which is the way in which he understands post-communist societies. I am uncertain about that particular formulation, but it is certainly the case that this kind of inter-relationship between politics and economics is much more widespread than simply post-communist societies, and may indeed be a more general form of capitalism than theoretical abstraction from the UK in the Nineteenth Century, or USA toddy, suggests.

However that may be, it is clear that the transition from state ownership to private ownership of productive property could not, in the absence of a radical upheaval, be achieved in any other way. It was political will that was needed to privatised vast chunks of the economy, and political choice that dictated who was to benefit from that process. Politicians, their families, friends and associates, could broker political power for economic advantage, and businessmen could broker economic advantage for favourable political treatment.

There are, of course, numerous well-known examples of exactly such processes taking place in the mass media in the region. Those in the former Soviet Union are the most spectacular and shameless, but these are sometimes attributed to peculiarly primitive Russian conditions. In the much more 'advanced' western post-communist countries, however, there are also clear examples of exactly the same thing. One example is the career of the most successful of local media moguls, Vladimir Zelezny in the Czech Republic. A close associate of one of the leaders of the first post-communist government, he and four colleagues were awarded a television licence. They 'cashed' this in alliance with a survivor bank and a US political businessman, producing in TV Nova the region's first legal commercial broadcaster. Zelezny was attacked by the dominant forces in the second post-communist government, and responded by reaching a political rapprochement with the Prime Minister. He used this political influence to force changes to the broadcasting law in the interests of his company, and he himself expressed political ambitions. In 1999, he brought off the bold stroke of breaking with US backer and seizing control of the now very successful and profitable station. So far, at least, political allies have ensured that the outraged Americans cannot get back what they see as their rights (Sparks, 1999b).

It was always idle to suppose that, in circumstances such as these, the media would develop towards the kinds of content that are believed to be characteristic of the western press and broadcasting. On the contrary, with so much personal and economic capital at stake, control of the symbolic environment was perceived as at least as important to politicians and

businessmen in the new order as it had been in the old. Bias, distortion, downright fabrication and brutal character assassination were bound to be central to a media system that was at once one of the levers and one of the stakes in a bitter struggle for personal enrichment and political influence.

Taken together, these four factors meant that the outcomes for the post-communist media never had any chance of approximating to the dreams of the opposition. The realities of the transition meant that it was always unlikely that the social conditions required for either a BBC or a *New York Times* to flourish in any country in the region would be present. Elite empowerment, and the subsequent bitter internal struggle to become the masters of the new order, meant that there would always be pressures towards a subservient, commercialised and politicised media. The fact that the opposition had an unrealistic notion of the realities of the media organisations they thought it would be desirable to emulate meant that even the best of them lacked clear guides as to what might be effective in their own circumstances. Those who adhered to the democratic and utopian versions of civil society were particularly ill equipped to confront the realities of power and money that dominated the social scene and swept away any hope of the enshrining the power of voluntary associations in the running of the media. The people who had the most vulgar and stunted vision, and believed that civil society could be summed up in the pursuit of private economic interest, had at least the satisfaction of seeing that interest over-run wide areas of the media. Where they were disappointed was that this triumphant capitalism did not lead to free and democratic media that pursued the public good as a condition for prosperity. No one had any programme of action that was clear enough and effective enough to make a difference to the force of circumstances that led to the universal squalor of the present.

What of the future?

No social scientist can claim a crystal ball, or at least those who say they have are charlatans. The best that we cad do is to extrapolate from existing trends and make provisional claims about what might be the case providing there are no intervening variables of which we have been unable to take account. In this case, there are so many different variable at play that even that sort of tentative projection is fraught with difficulties, and there are three different versions of the future of the mass media in the region that command some degree of credibility.

The first is what we might term the optimist projection. On this account, things will slowly get better. Politicians will learn the rules of democratic life and cease to try to bend the

reported world to their own particular interests. The stresses of privatisation will be overcome. Tame bureaucratic businessmen, who will conduct their affairs in an orderly fashion, will follow the wild entrepreneurs who run things today. A new generation of journalists, trained to the best western standards by visiting US J-School educators, will replace the corrupt and cynical timeservers of today an journalism will be transformed in to a respectable and truthful enterprise. Journalists will no longer be subservient hacks but ethical and independent professionals. Proponents of this view differ in their assessment of the likely timescale, but they are agreed that there is a teleological drive in the capitalist media and the capitalist state that make it certain eventually to happen (Gross, 1996).

The second is what we might term the pessimistic projection. This detects no immanent drive towards free and independent media, and claims that internationally a close relationship between the holders of political and of media power is by far the most common situation. On this account, while the tides of political intervention and opportunistic alignment might ebb and flow, there will be no transition to a qualitatively better state. They note that the desire to manipulate the mass media in their favour is a common feature of politicians of all political persuasions, even in rich and stable democracies. They say that very legitimate western businessmen, like Silvio Berlusconi and Rupert Murdoch, understand very well the interpenetration of politics ant the media ownership, and that Zelezny and his ilk are more likely to mature into local versions of that particular social type than transform themselves into paragons of editorial non-intervention (Downing, 1996). They are much more sceptical about the independence and integrity of journalists, even those who graduate from best US J-Schools, and believe that even the best of intentions can be over-ridden by the pressure of everyday life. While there might be room to fight for this or that improvement, the pessimists believe that it is idle to hope for any genuinely democratic media, in the east or in the west.

The third position we may term the realistic. To coin a phrase, it combines pessimism of the intellect with optimism of the will. It shares with the pessimistic school much of the analysis of the current situation, and accepts its claim that there is no natural process that will produce democratic media. On the other hand, it does not see this as a more or less inevitable outcome of the current situation, and thus retains a share of optimism. A continuation of the current situation is one possible, even perhaps probable, outcome. Certainly, it is unlikely that in the short term there will arise circumstances that can transform the mass media. That does not mean, however, that such circumstances can never occur.

What might these circumstances be? In order to answer that question, we need to consider who might have any interest in democratic media. Clearly, neither the politicians nor

the businessmen who do well out of the current situation are likely to provide a focus for the kind of social movement that could transform the mass media. On the other hand, while the achievement of political liberty was the great achievement of the overthrow of communism, economic and social tyranny remains unchallenged. It is, I think, with the social life that any hope of democratisation in general, and democratisation of the media in particular, lies. These are the only people who have an interest in ending the current situation.

This prospect is not some alien importation into the politics of the region. We can recall the first, radical, meaning of 'civil society'. That was a concept that called, however confusedly, for something rather more than just political democracy. The implication of the radical version of civil society is that social and economic tyranny is as inimical to human freedom as is political tyranny. Clearly, none of the forces that hold power in the former communist countries, or in the long-established capitalist countries for that matter, have any interest in pursuing that kind of radical democratisation. The only people who have interest, actual or potential, in such sweeping changes are the people who provided the driving forces for Solidarity in its great days and who were excluded from the transition negotiations in the interest of an amicable settlement. It is with those people that the hope for a radical version of civil society, and for genuinely democratic media, can find home. Perhaps the idea of civil society, even in its radical form, is not a clear enough guide as to how one might achieve that great objective, but it provides one possible starting point for any movement that seeks to change the current lamentable state of the mass media.

References

1. Barnett, S. and Curry, J. (1997) *The Battle for the BBC*, London.
2. Bayliss, T. (1994) Transformation and continuity amongst East European elites. *Communist and Post-communist Studies*, vol. 27, no. 3. 315-328.
3. Boyle, M. (1994) Building communicative democracy: The birth and death of citizen politics in East Germany. *Media, Culture and Society*, vol. 16, no. 2. 183-215.
4. Downing, J. (1996) *Internationalising Media Theory: Transition, Power, Culture*, London: Sage Publications.
5. Galik, M. and Denes, F. (1992) *From Command Media to Media Market: The Role of Foreign Capital in the Transition of the Hungarian Media*, Budapest: Budapest University of Economics, department of Business Economics.
6. Goban-Klas, Y. (1994) *The Orchestration of the Media: The Politics of Mass Communication in Communist Poland and its Aftermath*, Boulder, Co.: Westview.
7. Gross, P. (1996) *Mass Media in Revolution and National Development: The Romanian Laboratory*, Ames: Iowa State University Press.
8. Gulyas, A. (1999) Print Media Markets of Post-Communist Markets. *Javnost/The Public*,.
9. Hrvatin, S. and Kersevan, T. (1999) Border of Media Capitalism in Slovenia. *Javnost/The Public*, vol. VI, no. 2. 61-74.
10. Hungary (1991) *Draft Broadcasting Bill*. October 1991.
11. Hungary (1995) *Radio and Television Services Act*. December 1995.
12. Jakubowicz, K. (1993) Stuck in a groove: Why the 1960s approach to communication democracy will no longer do. Splichal, S. and Wasko, J. (eds.) *Communication and Democracy*, Norwood, NJ: Ablex. 33-54.
13. Manaev, O. (1993) Mass Media in the political and economic system of transition society. Manaev, O. and Pryliuk, Y. (eds.) *Media in Transition: From Totalitarism to Democracy*, Kiev: Abris.
14. Rooney, D. (1998) Dynamics of the British Tabloid Press. *Javnost/The Public*, vol. 5, no. 3. 95-108.
15. Sparks, C. (1999a) The Press. Stokes, J. and Reading, A. (eds.) *The Media in Britain: current debates and developments*, Basingstoke, Hants: Macmillan. 41-60.
16. Sparks, C. (1999b) CME in the Former Communist Countries. *Javnost/The Public*, vol. VI, no. 2. 25-44.