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LECTURE NOTE
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Topic: Issues in International Communication: The NWICO Debate

NWICO, an abbreviation for New World Information and Communication Order is traced to the beginning of flag independence obtained in the 1940s- 1970s by some countries in Africa and Latin America. Shortly after independence, the third world countries started agitating for economic equality (New International Economic Order) at a meeting held in Algeria in 1973. In 1976, these Non-Aligned nations also met in Colombia where they abandoned NIEO and developed New International Information Order (NIIO). But what could be the reasons for the agitation?

Reasons for NIIO Agitation

1. The leaders of the Third World Countries felt that he who controls communication also controls the economy.
2. These countries saw as unacceptable the idea of all news coming from the West.
3. These Third World leaders felt that quantitatively and qualitatively they were being underreported.

Funny enough, while the Third World countries were having their meeting, the First World countries felt that these leaders were crying in vain. In 1978, UNESCO set up a commission

headed by Sean MacBride during its 19th conference in Nairobi. The commission in carrying out its task was forced to ask five important questions:

- What do the Third world leaders mean by free flow of information?
- What do the Third world leaders mean by New World Information Order and what is the relationship between it and New World Economic Order (NEO)
- How may the right to communicate with all its legal and ethical implication be achieved as a new line of thought in the whole communication field?
- How can objectivity and independence of the media be assured and protected?
- How can we communicate freely and still be guided by ethics?

The commission had sixteen communication experts from different parts of the world. The committee submitted its report in 1980 under the title, “Many Voices One World: Communication and Society Today and Tomorrow”. The Third World leaders at first praised the report only for them to disagree shortly after. Meanwhile, the commission submitted an interim report in 1978 and rephrased the word “free flow” with “free and balanced flow”. This rephrasing generated a lot of controversy.

Aftermath of the NWICO Debate

After UNESCO received an interim report from MacBride commission in 1978, the stage was set for a new war between the developing and developed countries. The report was formally received in Paris. During the Paris meeting, the term free flow was replaced by free and balanced flow of information. It was also agreed in the meeting by all members that the effort will now be called a quest for a new more just and more efficient world information order i.e. New World Information Order for short. Shortly after the rephrasing, scholars from Third world countries led by Cees

Hamelink argued that the Western powers played a fast one on the developing nations and encouraged the Third World to dissociate from such membership. According to Hamelink, there is no such thing as 'one world' or a 'global village'. He further argued that instead of the Third world countries to remain in the global village, they should leave for there is nothing to gain from the circle. Another vocal scholar in favour of Hamelink's principle of dissociation is known as Kaale Nordenstreng who argued that the rephrasing from new international information order to new world information and communication order is no longer convenient for the Third world nations. In the real sense, information and communication are not the same because the latter needs a feedback while the former does not

Secondly, the qualifiers such as free, just and efficient were seen as booby trap to allow journalists move freely within the borders of the Third world nations.

Thirdly, the leaders of the Third world also argued that nations are independent and the territory of such nations must be respected in any reportage.

Fourthly, the report of the Sean MacBride commission favored the principle of Integration which was opposed to the principle of dissociation

Dramatically and laughable as well, while the leaders of the Third nations were trying to convince the whole world that the West was trying to set a booby trap for them to fall, the same Western nations gathered in Tallories France to argue that the MacBride report was a booby trap set for them too. During the meeting in France, they rejected the provision of MacBride report. According to the leader of the group, Cushrow Irani, who was also the Chairman of the International Press Institute and publisher of the Statesman of Calcutta, MacBride had the intention of regulating the world press. All the twenty four nations that attended the meeting in France totally rejected the report on the ground that it was going to muzzle the world press. The argument was

based on the fact that journalists will get license to operate in any country of their choice. This was what the Westerners saw as a way of censoring the press. Again, some provisions in the MacBride report also suggested the control of news content. The Western nation feared that Russia must have influenced the report just the way the third World nations believed USA must have influenced the report. This might explain why USA under the leadership of President Regan withdrew total support for UNESCO. But in view of many scholars, MacBride and his men did a good job whether the two sides accepted it or not.

Finally, we can say; without colonialism, there won't be independence and without independence, there won't be NIEO and without NIEO, there won't be NIIO and without NIIO, there won't be anything like Nwico, and without NWICO, there won't be a need for this course.