

MICHAEL (MIKE) TRABER

IN MEMORIAM

When democratisation of the media and communication became ardent matters in scholarly debates as the first signs of significant changes in the former communist countries appeared on the horizon during the late 1980s, Michael Traber's passionate commitment to human and communication rights characterised his intellectual engagement in the International Association for Mass Communication Research.

The depth of his understanding, but also his fear and trepidation regarding the prospects of freedom in emerging democracies are revealed in his suggestion that "All genuine revolutions are fundamentally communication revolutions, or they are none at all. ... When communication is suppressed or if it requires self-censorship, the revolution as an extension of human rights has ended. That is the real counter-revolution." These words became a warning to the new power elites in the 1990s, when the extension of human rights faltered as communication suffered its first defeats, confirming that the revolution was not a simple process of enabling the marginalised and underprivileged to participate in social communication. In fact, his powerful prison allegory summarises his feelings about the complexity of human alienation in a media dominated world. He concludes it by saying, "This world view from prison is a metaphor of our news culture. We see and hear very little of what is really going on in the world, and what we see and hear are unconnected fragments of an often distorted reality. ... Fortunately, there are people and groups, who, from time to time, are determined to break out of this prison; they start digging tunnels so that they can escape their prison."

Michael Traber was one of the founders of the European Institute for Communication and Culture, whose goal remains the organisation and consolidation of intellectual efforts aimed at media democratisation. His ideas regarding the role of communication in defence of democracy were recalled in 2005, when the MacBride Commission report, *Many Voices, One World*, was revisited on the occasion of its 25th anniversary at a colloquium in Slovenia.

Mike Traber was a fighter for human dignity, freedom of the press, and for peace and justice, and recognised as an expert on the relationship between communication, religion, and the politics of development. His latest publication, *Communication in Theological Education* (Delhi, 2005) stresses that individuals are no longer primarily to be seen as sinners or rational beings but mainly as beings in relations to others and as communicators.

He died last month. We will miss a wise and gentle colleague.

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