1st Continental Trade Union Conference on Communications

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ROAD MAP

FOR THE STRENGTHENING OF TRADE UNION COMMUNICATION IN THE AMERICAS

> 2021 - 2025 <

CSA TUCA

ITUC CSI IGB

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1.

Presentation

Strengthening the communication of trade union organizations in the region is one of the cross-cutting issues on the agenda of the **Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA)**. For that matter, TUCA is presenting the lines of action it prepared on the basis of the preparatory debate of the **First Continental Conference on Trade Union Communication.** Before the debates a conference background paper was forwarded to all TUCA affilates. The subsequent debates counted with the participation of almost 900 people from the region, who took part in three subregional meetings (the first in the Southern Cone, followed by the meeting of affiliates and fraternal organizations of the Andean region and, finally, Central America). The subregional meetings were complemented by meetings of working women, organized in the Working Women´s Committee of the Americas (CMTA), and young workers joining together in the Young Workers´ Committee of the Americas (CJTA).

This process aims at encouraging and coordinating communication as a strategic tool of the labor movement, which is aware of the crucial role the media play in the formation of public opinion and the contests between ideas. ***"TUCA guides a trade union policy in the Americas that upholds its traditional banners, helps fight the push for backtracking and anti-democratic attacks, and offers a platform for socio-political action with increasingly representative, inclusive, and democratic unions representing today's working class"*** (Resolution of the 4th TUCA Congress, 2021).

Recovering and strengthening the identity of the working class is of crucial importance. The answer must be accompanied by efforts to enhance and transform the labor movement in the region on the basis of a training program that is current and stands on a comprehensive and receptive communication strategy, putting all its tools and structures to work in order to contribute to the union struggle, mobilization, and organization of workers within the context of their class realities, conditions and aspirations.

By submitting this **Road Map**, TUCA´s **First Continental Conference on Trade Union Communication** presents the concrete agreements and contents resulting from a truly collective effort. These results constitute a solid foundation for advancing towards measures with a real impact on the entire communication structure of TUCA, its affiliates and its fraternal organization, and serve as a basis for the commitments and actions we are going to pursue during the next term.

The Conference is the last in a series of three continental conferences that started with the Conference ***"Transforming and strengthening trade unions to represent and organize the working class as a whole",*** in November 2020, and was followed by the Paulo Freire Continental Conference ***"Trade union education and training in the new context and the new model of trade union organizing",*** held in March 2021.

TUCA recognizes the need for decisive progress regarding our trade union communication both with and between our unions and with our affiliated union and fraternal organizations, **to make sure that our union structure will be our main source of communication and information with the working class of the Americas, and to ensure that our communication will be our strength and our voice.**

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TUCA´s Secretariat

2.

Communication in the Americas: an overview

2.1 Democratization of communication and trade unionism in the Americas

The restructuring of the communications macro-sector marked the first quarter of the 21st century, and above all, the growing influence of the Internet. While radio and television took the lead in the 20th century, web-based information exchange became the main channel for contemporary societies due to new technologies such as cable and satellite in the past 20 years. More and more people use the "network of networks" to search for knowledge or come together in different ways; mobilize for collective causes and processes; interact with friends, companies, and institutions; or carry out financial transactions.

The Internet promised to democratize access and to create knowledge. In early 2010 the so-called "Web 2.0" bolstered those promises as social media and the new and simplified ways of sharing content and interacting enhanced inclusion not just in terms of people's access to information but also in the dissemination of ideas. The Internet has racked up further accolades, from the academy to public discourses and, above all, from companies that promoted new services leveraging such potential for openness and democratization.

Several authors consider that the new forms of producing and disseminating information and culture are responsible for a structural transformation and have even introduced new concepts such as information society, network society, or knowledge society. The rise of such perspectives was accompanied by an attempt to undermine the role of work and the abuse in the capitalist system, erase workers as a class with diverse ideas, and dilute the neoliberal offensive's new strategies since the 1990s.

The Internet made it possible to overcome the barriers to freedom of expression resulting from the limited frequency spectrum for radio and TV services and the high costs of pay-TV. Thanks to the Internet, new voices gained access to a space previously controlled by big corporations and few hands usually associated with the political elites in the different countries that pursued liberal, anti-popular agendas while ignoring the existing barriers to accessing Internet services and the equipment necessary to use it. This brought new hopes to the trade union and social movements, given the possibility to create websites and social media profiles and establish direct communication with both union members and society.

However, the past few years have unveiled the limits of such promises. Although it is not new, the commercial nature of the Internet has now become more explicit. Although researchers, civil society, and the Government contributed to developing the World Wide Web, big corporations have held a great deal of control since the beginning, especially since the 1990s. Conglomerates are present in the web infrastructure, the telecommunication services provided, and the range of apps and contents offered by portals that were either associated with big information technology groups (such as MSN and Microsoft), the operators themselves (Terra and Telefónica), or national media groups (Globo.com and Globo in Brazil, and Clarin in Argentina).

The first decade of the new millennium witnessed the rise of new players, above all the digital platforms. Service providers such as Google, Facebook, Amazon, YouTube, Yahoo!, Twitter, and Spotify gained an increasing number of users. They expanded their activities around the globe, as part of a renewed expansion process of groups from the global North, especially from the United States, to the global South. These players made the communications sector even

more complex. They introduced new forms of imposing their business logic and concentration of power and new barriers to advancing freedom of expression. Nowadays, big platform users outnumber the population in most countries. For example: Facebook: 2,45 billion; Youtube: 2 billion; WhatsApp: 1,6 billion; FB / Messenger: 1,3 billion; Youtube: 1 billion; Tik-Tok: 800 million; Snapchat: 382 million; Twitter: 340 million. Therefore we have to ask: What do citizens, who are also union members, do online? How do trade unions communicate in the era of social media? Is online activity exacerbated in a world that is facing a pandemic? How can we reinvent ourselves?

At the turn of the 2020s, the world was still following the same path, although still quite far from universal connectivity. According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), in 2019, 51% of all individuals worldwide had access to the Internet[1]. This number clearly exceeds that of a decade before, when the index stood at half of the current value. According to the 2021 Digital report, 59.5% of the population was connected this year, a 7.3% increase from the previous year. A total of 92.6% of users accessed the Internet from mobile devices. On average, people spend 6 hours 54 minutes a day on the Internet.

However, access is fraught with inequality. While the ITU survey revealed an access percentage of 87% in industrialized countries, this number stood at 44% in developing countries and 19% in the least developed countries. A continent-specific analysis shows that 83% of people were connected in Europe, compared to 77% in the Americas, 73% in the Community of Independent States (CIS), 55% in the Arab states, 45% in Asia, and the Pacific, and 29% in Africa. The regional division the ITU adopted for the Americas does not reflect the inequalities within the regions. According to the 2021 Digital report, connectivity was at 90% in North America, 72% in South America, 67% in Central America, and 62% in the Caribbean. This amounts to a difference of almost 30 percentage points, or 50% of the index, between North America and the Caribbean.

There are some additional indicators of inequality. Regarding the difference between the urban and rural areas of the world, the ITU observes a connection rate of 72% in the first case compared to 37% in the second. The respective percentages for the Americas are 74% and 50%. An analysis by age groups shows that connectivity among young people was 69% compared to an overall average of 51%. In the Americas, 90% of young people had access to the Internet, compared to an average of 77%. Regarding gender, 55% of men and 48% of women were connected. These percentages were the same in the Americas, with 77% of women and 76% of men browsing the Web.

However, a critical qualitative dimension goes beyond the quantitative access dimension, as inequalities materialize in several aspects, such as connection speed, accessibility, and affordability. Above all, the models provide either limited or unlimited access. The mobile plans available in several countries across the Americas offer limited data packages or franchises, thereby restricting people's data usage. The cut-off measures that block the connections once the packages have been used up make using the Internet more difficult as access is restricted to the GB available for that plan. More recently, telecom operators have started charging so-called "free services" (zero-rating), where the data consumption of big platforms is not capped, thereby favoring such companies.

Although we all acknowledge the importance of the Internet, the coexistence between new and more traditional forms of communication cannot be ignored. Radio and television, both open and pay-TV, continue to be relevant around the globe, including the Americas. Data by Nielsen Consulting shows that in the US in 2021, 28% of the population used streaming services. However, broadcasting services were still used by 24% of video audiences, and cable TV accounted for 38%[2]. As for Latin America, a survey by BB Consulting

1 Information available at: https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/facts/FactsFigures2020.pdf

2 Information available at: https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/article/2021/sports-still-loom-large-and-streaming-content-drives-viewing-growth/?utm_campaign=Corporate_Marketing&utm_medium=Email&utm_source=SFMC&utm_content=Newswire_Newsletter&utm_id=08_25_2021.

found out that in 2021 24% of the population used pay-TV and streaming services, 19% streaming services only, and 17% pay-TV only[3].

Platforms, algorithms and their impact on freedom of expression

Although it may not yet be widely recognized that Internet access is far from universal, the role of digital technologies in the economy, politics, and culture is undeniable. As pointed out before, the end of the 2020s is marked by the rise of digital platforms. The platform model is far from new, and realtors, credit cards, and TV broadcasters connect individuals, entities, and public institutions. What is unique about digital platforms, however, is their capacity to take such interactions to new heights on a global scale by relying on a solid technological basis and embarking on a process of large-scale data collection and intelligent data processing with the support of applications that aim at anticipating and shaping people's practices. Platforms were set up as technological systems capable of managing information, interactions, and transactions on several issues, all of which turned them into key Internet hubs.

For many years, platforms have tried to present themselves as neutral intermediaries, but it has become clear that they are active mediators in the past few years. Therefore it is necessary to take a critical look at technology and communication and understand that these systems were created to fulfill specific interests. These can be economic: making profits and gaining market shares, or political: creating self-serving conditions or conditions that favor other groups. This character, which is by no means neutral, appears in the internal rules they define and in the systems' architecture, the interfaces, the resources, and the ways they are used.

The platforms spearheaded a new information paradigm in the current round of neoliberal capitalism, based on mass data collection (which some authors call "datafication"), algorithms and artificial intelligence systems, and the dissemination of customized applications that guide user experiences with the help of recommendations. Algorithms and artificial intelligence (AI) systems have become the main elements for analysis and decision-making about social processes, whereby complex human explanations and analysis are replaced by recommendations based on correlations, often biased by how a system is set up. This affects vulnerable groups such as workers, women, Black and indigenous people, LGBTQIA+ people, and young people. The obscurity of such systems is yet another serious problem, as societies and even the States are unaware of how, why, and based on which criteria decisions and recommendations are formulated.

Drawing on a large user base, these players monitor digital footprints (such as the so-called cookies that track our browsing), explore users' interests, and even build up their psychological profiles to sell products and services or promote causes politicians or candidates. The business models those players developed are based on this dynamic. In other words, their monitoring, profiling, and exploitation activities are not just a side effect but rather the backbone of how such companies make money and become global conglomerates.

These conglomerates became the leading players in the online environment, with their activities covering several segments, such as search (Google), social media (Facebook), app stores (Apple), browsers (Chrome), transport (Uber), accommodation (Airbnb), video (YouTube), audio (Spotify), e-commerce (Amazon), finance (PayPal) and work (Mechanical Turk). According to the Alexa ranking of most accessed sites in August 2021[4], the ten most visited sites were platforms: Google, YouTube, Tmall, QQ, Baidu, Sohu, Facebook, Taobao, 360, and Jd. The 20 most accessed sites include other US platforms, such as Amazon, Yahoo, Zoom, Live, Reddit, and Microsoft. Out of the 20 most visited sites, only one was

3 Information available at: https://telaviva.com.br/22/06/2021/na-america-latina-numero-de-assinantes-so-de-ott-supera-o-dos-que-assinam-apenas-tv-paga/.

4 Information available at: https://www.alexa.com/topsites.

non-commercial: Wikipedia. All sites were from the United States or China. In the latter case, the survey reflects the weight of the number of Chinese users. The fact that none of the platforms is from Latin America and the Caribbean or Africa is evidence of the predominance of the global North and China compared with the countries in the periphery of the capitalist system.

Among the applications with the most active monthly users, the 2021 State of Mobile report[5] shows nine were digital platforms, out of which seven were from the United States, one from China and one from Sweden: Facebook, Whatsapp, Facebook Messenger, Instagram, Amazon, Twitter, TikTok, Spotify, and Snapchat. And according to the same survey, the following companies developed most applications in 2020: Google, Microsoft, Facebook, Amazon, Zoom, Adobe, Disney, and Uber, all of them from the United States, ByteDance from China, and BEC from Canada. Yet again, there are no Latin American or Caribbean applications or developers engaging in one of the main ways of accessing content and apps online.

Platforms are more than just the most accessed sites and the most frequently used applications as they have expanded their operations into different Internet segments. Google, renamed Alphabet, is the leader in search engines, smartphone operating systems (Android), free streaming (YouTube), browsers (Chrome), and app stores (Play Store). It also has subsidiaries in several areas such as health, access services, and autonomous cars. Facebook acquired Instagram and Whatsapp, consolidating its position as the social media powerhouse while expanding its business activities to virtual reality equipment. Amazon began by selling books and is now marketing a wide range of products and "cloud services" for businesses (AWS), work platforms (AMT), and video services (PrimeVideo and Twitch). Microsoft has also turned to new segments, such as video games (Xbox) and corporate solutions (Teams).

As a result, the digital monopolies gain more space, not only as companies with substantial market power but also as gatekeepers at the control points of information flows. They seek to strengthen their condition as the new gatekeepers of the Internet by creating "walled gardens," trying to stimulate the time and commitment with the company, seeking to maximize the escalation of commercialized monitoring regarding data collection and processing and the introduction of new applications. At the same time, these players have gained ground online in different countries of the region, for example, the duopoly of Facebook and Google dominates online advertising.

Platforms result from the general development of neoliberal capitalism and the breakthrough of a new technological paradigm. At the turn of the 2020s, and more specifically in the face of the coronavirus pandemic, they emerged as new models for the organization of experiences in online environments. The neoliberal discourse presents data processing algorithms and the "platformization" of activities as solutions to economic, health, and social crises. This echoes past attempts at "technological solutions". However, the emergence of these new players brings along more negative effects and risks than solutions to overcoming the obstacles created by the crises.

These companies profoundly impact freedom of expression and access to information worldwide and across the Americas. Platforms define how users access and produce information, what is posted, and what becomes more or less visible, all of which directly impact public debate. The data collected leads to architectures and dynamics that stimulate user engagement and favor the content that provokes the most positive and negative reactions. Therefore, many environments create what some authors have called "bubbles", where the architecture favors the visibility of information that reinforces our views while hiding potentially challenging ideas, thereby increasing radicalization.

Another effect of the platform architecture is the dissemination of what is known as "fake news". The use of the term has been criticized by

5 Information available at: https://www.appannie.com/en/go/state-of-mobile-2021/.

public authorities, scholars, and regulators after it began being used by politicians to address critical remarks against them. To replace the word, the concept of misinformation gained strength; it is defined as the deliberate production of false information to obtain specific results, both economic (such as monetizing and creating profits) and political (like favoring allies or attacking opponents). However, this practice is not new; platforms provided it with a scope and speed never seen before. They became fertile ground due to their logic that favors extreme and even misleading content. Platforms were also used for what is known as online harassment and political violence, such as the actions of human trolls and bots to attack rivals and, above all, minority groups.

Conservative political forces used this environment for the dissemination of anti-popular discourses. Although the right-wing movements and corporations, thanks to their economic power, had already used the new channels to promote their products and models, the far-right has gone a step further and used these systems based on psychological profiles and routing as a new way of broadening their discourse to attack institutions and progressive forces alike. Over the past years, the Americas have witnessed the rise of different groups that resorted to misinformation and hate speech for political reasons. The election of Donald Trump in the United States in 2016 became famous after it had been detected that Cambridge Analytica, a political marketing company based in the United Kingdom, had used an app to obtain tens of millions of user data from Facebook. However, their activities were not limited to the United States. In 2017 Cambridge Analytica created an application in Mexico to collect data used in the 2018 election[6].

However, the problem goes beyond Cambridge Analytica. The new information paradigm and the increasing power of platforms are spreading the model of customized surveillance, data processing, and applications, including the subsequent access control to information and the political debate for an increasing number of segments. "Big data", "business intelligence", "artificial intelligence", and other technologies and methods are marketed as new forms of flow management, even to governments and organizations of the political left.

Research published by the *Science* journal showed that fake news spreads faster than the truth: 1% of fake news pieces spread among 1000 to 100.000 people, whereas news telling the truth is rarely read by more than 1000 people. Similarly, fake news is spread faster than the truth: fake news has 70% more retweets than factual information. This means that people themselves contribute to multiplying them. Lies succeed because they tend to elicit reactions of fear, outrage, and surprise.

We are therefore facing a challenging situation. Truth itself is at stake. Suppose we add an extremely serious element, i.e., the concealing of fascism by the media, the naturalization of hate speech, the rise of political forces of the anti-democratic and authoritarian far-right such as VOX in Spain, Bolsonaro in Brazil, Orban in Hungary, or Trumpism in the United States. In that case, we can see that the model is gaining ground. After Bolsonaro was elected in 2018, it became clear that 50 million messages were sent via WhatsApp by remote control to influence the elections.

Communication and the situation in the Americas

The growth of the Internet and its restructuring due to the new dynamics induced many changes in the Americas. There is an ongoing dispute between traditional big conglomerates over the control of the public debate and their role as gatekeepers of the Internet. In the Americas, these phenomena appear in regionally specific ways, with a clear difference between the countries of the so-called global North and the so-called global South. It has been recognized, at last, that the new era is associated with several problems, leading to a wide range of reactions in

6 Information available at: https://noticias.uol.com.br/internacional/ultimas-noticias/2018/03/24/como-a-cambridge-analytica-atuava-para-alem-dos-eua.htm.

the field of state regulation.

Unlike in Europe, communications in the Americas were established as part of a business model. Although telecommunication and broadcasting were recognized as public services, their exploitation was transferred to private, profit-oriented entities. This approach, which was initiated, above all, by the United States and their Communications Act of 1934, was replicated in many parts of the region. The Neoliberalism of the 90s gave rise to a wave of flexibilizations of the already weak legislations and the privatization of telecom systems in several countries. In the United States, the private AT&T monopoly went through a concentration of media ownership as part of the convergence of media and audiovisual conglomerates that led to the establishment of global communication giants. In Latin America and the Caribbean, privatization and opening up to foreign capital were parallel processes that facilitated big groups from the global North such as AT&T, Telefónica from Spain, and Portugal Telecom. As part of this process, several big regional groups were set up, first of all, América Móvil.

Over the 20th century, the region consolidated big media groups, such as Clarín in Argentina, Globo in Brazil, Televisa in Mexico, Cisneros in Venezuela, Caracol in Colombia, and Lukic in Chile. The two most important telecommunications conglomerates are Claro, a part of América Móvil, and Telefónica of Spain, both operated in various countries. In pay-TV, it is important to mention the presence of DirecTV and its operations in several countries. A ranking prepared by Mastrini and Becerra also hints at a robust foreign capital presence in the region via Telefónica of Spain or DirecTV or as part of different film companies' investments Disney WarnerMedia and Discovery (which merged into a single group).

On the other hand, the non-commercial public and community media always found it challenging to grow and consolidate their position in the region. The effective constitution of the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) of the United States was not completed until the 1970s. It has been subject to several attacks against its very existence and funding ever since its creation. Most Latin American countries went through similar processes, as the development of their public or non-commercial broadcasting systems began in the 1960s. The rise of neoliberal governments in the region in the 1980s and 1990s contributed to the dismantling of several of these media outlets, investments were withdrawn, and some were threatened with privatization. The only exception is Canada, where a more structured system supports CBC.

The region has a long tradition of alternative and community media players, which act as communication outlets for trade unions, social movements, and indigenous and original peoples. However, this block of counter-hegemonic voices has always been subject to restrictive legislations and persecutions like in Brazil, where unauthorized community radios are shut down and those in charge are imprisoned. Moreover, the concentration of power has always made this dispute extremely unbalanced in all countries of the region. There has always been more room for the conservative agenda of businesses than for the visions of workers and social movements, which were systematically silenced or even criminalized or exposed to manipulative coverage like in the case of strikes and other mobilizations.

Trade unions and alternative media outlets played a substantial role in the struggle against the neoliberal offensive, the dismantling of labor legislations and social security networks, but also against the sale of relevant public and state companies as well as coup d'etats or attacks against democracy. Such progressive means, which were owned by the organizations themselves (such as Rede Brasil Atual in Brazil or Página 12 in Argentina), voiced the interests of workers, both during open conflicts with companies, especially during mass mobilizations (like strikes or national meetings) and during the crucial debates about the political agendas of the nation.

Ever since the Internet started operating, the trade union and alternative media perceived it as a channel that might help to broaden their scope and enhance their dialogue with workers and society in general. Trade unions, union

federations, and social movements prepared their sites, blogs, and email newsletters to disseminate their information among grassroots with the help of means, which might contribute to social dialogue. Given the growth of digital platforms, many union entities recently began to use such spaces, creating profiles and setting up their own web presence, such as online TV channels and podcasts. However, if alternative media had already suffered because of the obstacles the big media conglomerates put up against the democratization of public debate, the new Internet scenario, as analyzed before, means that there will be an increase in the number of old and new gatekeepers, especially the digital platforms.

The population and union and social organizations managed to set up channels to communicate directly with their grassroots and respective audiences while diversifying their content production; nevertheless, their circulation was increasingly concentrated by and reliant on digital platforms. First of all, platforms dictate the way contents must be presented (messages of up to 280 characters on Twitter or the compulsory requirement to include pictures on Instagram). New, video-based platforms like TikTok require social movements to increase their production capacity to adapt to their formats. This means that discourse-building and communication with target audiences come under pressure following the introduction of new performance metrics, such as likes, shares, and comments. Second, they define the dynamics of the messages' reach (times, formats, and issues that are more or less acceptable according to their algorithms). For instance, over the past years, Facebook brought the reach of pages down, thereby imposing radical cuts on the reach of pages and means, but also on organizations. And Google's changing criteria regarding search results contribute to the decision, whether a union or campaign page shall or shall not be "found".

As capitalist companies, the platforms look for different ways to profit; profile-based advertising is one. Therefore the communication of trade unions and social movements contributes, to some extent, to the creation of such profiles, which can be exploited by whoever has the resources to do so, among others by companies with activities in the segments covered by the unions or by conservative forces, in general, to stir public debates or even disseminate fake news. Charging for the reach is another option, even though many messages do not reach all followers. Therefore such environments opted for increasing the marketing of public debates, thereby creating possibilities for those who have the necessary financial resources, such as companies and political forces both conservative or of the far-right, and making it even more difficult for organizations without or with limited resources to be in touch with their followers and, even more critical, audiences beyond their "bubbles." Finally, the platforms have turned into content producers, which they favor afterward, such as the programs YouTube, Spotify, or AppleTV produce themselves. Thereby they create barriers against the dissemination of counter-hegemonic discourses.

The legislations of various countries may have favored this scenario. For instance, in the United States, the Communications Act of 1934 legitimized the logic of commercial networks, whereas the Telecommunications Act of 1996 liberalized the rules governing property concentration. In Brazil, broadcasting is still regulated by legislation dating back to 1962, the *Código Brasileiro de Telecomunicações (Brazilian Telecommunications Code)*, while telecommunications were liberalized in the 90s by the *Lei Geral de Telecomunicações (General Communications Act)*. In Costa Rica, the old broadcasting legislation, the *Ley de Radio* of 1954, is still in force. In El Salvador, the *Ley de Telecomunicaciones (Telecommunications Act)* of 1997 introduced a model similar to the Brazilian and US models and favored the financial aspect[7]. In the case of Paraguay, the *Ley de Telecomunicaciones (Telecommunications Act)* of 1995 introduced a model that favors the commercial exploitation of communication services while reserving a limited space for community media. The same applies in the case of Peru´s *Ley de Radio y Televisión* of 2004. In Mexico, the Federal Law of Radio and Television

7 A 2016 a reform made progress on certain issues, such as the recognition of community radios and the introduction of a mandatory procedure for the selection of broadcasting frequencies.

of 2006, known as *Ley Televisa*, introduced a plan favoring the sector's companies. In Colombia, the *Ley de Tecnologías de la Información y las Comunicaciones (Information and Communication Technologies Act)* of 2009, amended in 2019, also confirms the commercial nature of service exploitation but includes some mechanisms regarding the access of vulnerable people, for example in rural areas.

In the first decade of the millennium, the access of progressive governments to power generated a debate about the regulatory framework of the telecommunications sector; however, this process was consistently accompanied by difficulties and fears regarding the resistance of the giant oligopolies of the industry would offer. During the Chavez administration, Venezuela passed the new *Ley Orgánica de Telecomunicaciones (Telecommunications Act)* in 2000, and the *Ley de Responsabilidad Social en Radio, Televisión y Medios Electrónicos (Social Responsibility in Radio, Television and Electronic Media Act)* in 2004, which strengthened public and community media while creating new obligations for private service providers. In 2009, under the presidency of Evo Morales, Bolivia enshrined the right to communication and the prohibition of monopolies in the country's Constitution. Bolivia also passed the *Ley General de Telecomunicaciones y Tecnologías de Información y Comunicación* of 2011, which reserves specific spectrum bands for the State and indigenous peoples. During the presidency of Rafael Correa, Ecuador passed the *Ley de Comunicaciones (Communications Act)* of 2013, which included mechanisms to stop private media from committing abuses and improve the balance between the different media systems. In the case of Argentina, the *Ley de Medios (Media Act)* of 2009 limited media concentration and established obligations regarding the demonopolization of monopolies and oligopolies, in addition to conceding channels to non-commercial entities and social movements. These processes met with intense opposition of private media groups trying to brand the initiatives as expressions of "control" and "censorship". Other processes that began in 2021, such as the new constituent assembly in Chile, will debate guidelines regarding the subject.

When Mauricio Macri dismantled the Argentinian legislation, some of these changes were reverted, while Lacalle Pou did the same in Uruguay. The recent right-wing governments of the region also went ahead with their liberalization agendas, like Donald Trump in the United States, who relaxed the remaining legal obligations even more, and Michel Temer and Jair Bolsonaro, who encouraged business-friendly reforms in the broadcasting and telecommunications sectors, while attacking public communication and trying to privatize and eliminate the Brazil Communication Company.

Over the past few years, the discussion about Internet regulation gained momentum in the region, although less so than in other continents like Europe and Asia. As far as access is concerned, various broad band plans were launched, for example, in Canada and Colombia. The principle of neutrality on the web was confirmed in the United States and Brazil (although there was a setback under the Trump administration). Concerning online discourses, new proposals have been made, above all due to concern about misinformation. Several prohibitions had already been in place in some countries like Brazil and Venezuela. However, new laws and projects have been presented in recent years. In 2020 Nicaragua passed a new law against cybercrime that criminalizes several activities on the Web, and in 2021 Colombia amended its electoral legislation, impacting the dissemination of misleading news. Bills to ban fake content were presented in Argentina, Chile, and Peru. In the case of Bolivia, it has been impossible to repeal or tighten press legislation dating back to 1925, despite the efforts of Evo Morales and his Government to democratize communications. Finally, Argentina went through an exciting experience: In 2004, the Coalition for Democratic Communication was set up with trade unions, social, communicational, and territorial organizations, whose contributions were included in the Audiovisual Services Act. The coalition acted as a grassroots space for the discussion of democratic broadcasting legislation.

2.2 - Popular communication, alternative media, and the convergence of communication in the Americas

For a long time, popular communication has been a political commitment by social movements and popular and union organizations alike in the Americas. It has been part of the organizations' experiences, at least since the 1970s. Several initiatives have been created that shaped the public debate about the democratization of communication and, at the same time, put into practice their way of conceptualizing and realizing it based on the proposals of popular education, starting from the specific local realities.

To take a more recent example, we can highlight the historical role of popular communication during the organization of the World Social Forum and the continental campaign against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA/ALCA). An information cooperative of social movements (*Minga Informativa dos Movimentos Sociais*) was created while organizing the regional movements involved in the campaign to develop a message with a voice of its own. The aim was to provide further visibility to the struggles and proposals of the working class and find answers to the challenges it faced by bringing together the different movements in the continent to develop "a social agenda on communication".

The information cooperative of social movements, led by the Latin American Information Agency (*Agência Latino Americana de Informação*, ALAI), with the participation of the Latin American Coordinating Committee of Rural Organizations (*Coordenadora Latino Americana de Organizações do Campo*, CLOC), the World March of Women (WMW), Jubileu Sul and the Martin Luther King Center (Cuba), among others, became a crucial experience for the region, as it put forward an alternative, collaborative media coverage of the main events, campaigns and activities throughout the continent, thereby mobilizing efforts in different countries.

Bringing the popular mobilization together with its own communication efforts was crucial for the campaign against the FTAA/ALCA, and the agreement was finally turned down. As stated in TUCA's Handbook of Trade Union Communication (*Manual de Comunicação Sindical da CSA*, 2014), that campaign marked a significant turning point well beyond its primary objective because it achieved a considerable convergence in the field of alternative communication, whose political and organizational efforts led to alliances and processes that continue to exist today, such as the Converging communication policy of social movements (*Convergência de comunicação dos movimentos sociais*) within the context of the Continental Day for Democracy and against Neoliberalism and the Communication Forum for the Integration of Our America (*Foro de Comunicación para Integración de Nuestra America, FCINA*). Paulo Freire's ideas played a crucial role in building communication as a dialogue-based collective process, as discussed in this paper.

Considering the experience of the region's social movements, it is essential to stress the commitment to training activists to become better communicators. Since the first communication cooperative (*Minga*), social movements have developed their communication mechanisms, learning valuable lessons that have helped consolidate practices and policies. Therefore, this period was marked by significant progress in communications. The way popular communication is approached varies from one period to the next, as it varies according to the changes in context and technology. For instance, since the 1970s, popular communication has managed to expand its reach. It involved the mass media, broadcasting, and the Internet, which required the production of new content and the creation of new languages.

Alternative media: instruments of the working class

Thanks to the debates about the democratization of communication that began several decades ago, it was possible to consolidate several popular media outlets in the Americas. They aim to start a discussion about ideas and

narratives in public opinion to challenge the region's concentrated and hegemonic media players. Among such initiatives, the multi-state teleSUR deserves special attention. It was created in 2005 and provided international coverage in Spanish, English, and Portuguese. Other examples are Brasil de Fato, founded during the World Social Forum in 2003; Alba TV, an international community channel created in 2007; and the historical Latin American Information Agency (ALAI), which took up its activities in 1997.

The working class has some crucial allies among radio broadcasters: Rádio Mundo Real, an initiative of Friends of the Earth International, and the Latin American Association for Popular Education and Communication (*Associação Latino-Americana de Educação e Comunicação Popular*, ALER), which runs a network of satellite and online international popular radio stations, among others. In Brazil, the *Brasil Atual* network and Workers Television (TV dos *Trabalhadores*, TVT) were set up as union-owned media outlets through an alliance of the Bank Workers Union and the Metal Workers Union of the ABC region in São Paulo.

All initiatives are important given their potential to produce Web-based content and provide news coverage that gives priority to the agenda of the working class mobilization against Neoliberalism and in favor of democracy and its increased visibility as well as to other issues, which require international attention from a critical, popular perspective, such as feminism, the fight against racism, and environmental justice. Given their wide circulation and capacity to influence public opinion, above all in the context of a massive onslaught against labor rights and reforms that impair the working class, such media represent an alliance that is fundamental for trade unions.

To make sure that this alliance is strengthened, it must be set up as a feedback mechanism: On the one hand, it will be necessary that such media continue to lead a journalistic debate along the lines of the social and political commitments undertaken, in which the workers are the main subjects, whose voices must be listened to and amplified, whereas, on the other side, union organizations must commit to expanding the dissemination of such media to counter the hegemonic media and their role in criminalizing social and trade union struggles.

Popular communication, Internet, and social media

Recent transformations like the immediacy of digital communication, mass Internet access, the use of social media, and the economic problems of the political left create new challenges for popular communication in the 21st century under the current material and cultural conditions of the working class. Thus, organizations need to look at communication as an ever-evolving process, constantly analyzing challenges and strategies to be implemented in any given context.

Besides the need for permanent dialogue with alternative media, it will also be necessary to build popular communication while maintaining its guiding principles, such as the notion that we all are communicators – i. e., capable of producing and distributing information and culture –, who invest in self-organized initiatives of workers and training.

This building process must be based on strategies, products, and languages, which adapt to each reality. This means that the capability to communicate and the times and tools invested will not be homogeneous, given the diversity of the working class. For example, social media may be an essential tool; nevertheless, it may not be the most suitable means of communication in places where Internet access is still precarious or can only be established with the help of mobile phones.

For this reason, it will be necessary to articulate traditional forms of communication like radio stations, newsletters, and community outlets with the use of new tools, such as instant message applications, Whatsapp and Telegram, which facilitate the creation of channels and the dissemination of contents through audio, video and text messages with a vast potential reach. It will be important to consider that communication in an era of misinformation and fake news is

an attack against democracy and needs to be guided by democratic values and dialogue. Far from being a one-way discussion, the debate should be encouraged. Communicators ought to listen carefully to the questions and concerns voiced by activists to integrate those items into the agenda.

Digitalization, which has reshaped labor relations while causing an impact on the entire working class within the format of "precariousness 4.0", has nevertheless marked some challenges regarding the practical side of popular communication. Over the past years, the agendas of popular movements like feminism and the fight against racism have become more popular on social media. These topics have even been depoliticized by hegemonic media who instead focus on the criminalization of the union and social struggles. This process requires a detailed analysis, and it is necessary to associate the political contents to the collective, organized subjects that undertake such efforts.

On a positive note, the widespread use of social media has made it possible to streamline the way content is created and shared. So, for example, we can tweet about the actions and mobilizations of the working class. However, the use of social media requires an organized and coordinated strategy that involves different organizations and movements and good use of the languages, formats, and tools they offer.

The underlying assumption on the digital platforms that enable communication is that we need to reach as many people as possible, as shown by the number of likes and other metrics. This assumption forces us to use "bots" and sponsor posts for people to get to know our movements, as if the challenges of collective action depended solely on people being familiar with our movements or not. Therefore, we must dispel the notion that social media are a democratic space for debate, rather than products created by transnational companies, operating in line with their interests and based on mechanisms that are unknown to most people.

As explained by several authors, the use of social media must therefore be accompanied by a critical debate and collective reflection of the fact that platforms belong to transnational companies, which operate in line with their economic interests, as they update the capitalist dynamics imposed on labor as well as on workers' ways of living by creating incentives for individualism, consumption, and the imposition of meritocratic thinking. Integrating the agenda and demands of other popular movements—such as feminism, the fight against racism, and environmental justice—with those of trade unions is detrimental to workers' organizations, as it disconnects them from their collective, popular purpose, presenting only a limited and staged version of the movement based on false individual and commercialized solutions. This is the strategy adopted by transnational companies known as green or purplewashing.

It will also be necessary to understand that the operating dynamics of social media still entail an ideological dispute that challenges movements and collective action. The logic of "canceling" and the immediacy of the debates make it challenging to engage in a dialogue-based collaborative, in-depth discussion about politics and social relations. Therefore, instead of "going viral", it will be necessary to keep up our commitment to collective ideas and agreements, prioritizing the organization and advancing a political force. This means that we have to concentrate on the ways and means to disseminate information and prepare, realize and expand debates, which must be based on the political culture of organizations and their accumulated collective experiences, to work out the political reasoning behind the actions and the realities that have been built up in each territory.

In the area of TUCA's alliances, several popular movements developed their own initiatives for popular communication, as they propose and develop critical alternatives for content production, both internally and externally, and circulate their action and mobilization agendas. This process, carried out within the movements, links the theoretical and practical training regarding the ways and means to communicate to the practice of communication. It considers that both processes are collective and inextricably linked to each other.

Movements such as the World March of Women and the cooperation with organizations like CLOC/Via Campesina are committed to the self-organization of communication collectives that draw on feminist experiences while investing in the internal training of activists as communication subjects. Starting with the organization of schools, courses, and technical advice for popular communication and the development of network-based communication, it will be possible to make sure that communication can be produced by resorting to the organizations' own means, such as newsletters, sites, transmission lists, audiovisual contents and the presence in social networks.

As part of the organizing processes of such popular movements, communication acts as a continuous, collective process, which links the movements' political vision to their everyday practical work. This includes an effort to encourage the participation of women and young rural and urban workers in communication, thereby conceiving the act of engaging in and thinking about communication as a universal right. This includes putting into practice several political principles as part of communication by using accessible, non-sexist language, breaking up gender, racial and heteronormative stereotypes, and ensuring the regional, generational, and political diversity of the materials produced.

The integration of the political agenda of organizations into the practice of popular communication is expressed in the political debate about communication; in the refusal to be orientated by the parameters of global platforms; in the criticism and awareness-raising regarding the dynamics of vigilance and datafication; and in the political decision in favor of using free and safe tools.

Furthermore, the practice of each organization unfolds as part of the alliances and converging experiences of movements, organizations, and alternative media, thereby expanding the debate with society and improving the allocation of time and other resources needed in the political processes. Such alliances, which may develop as part of the coverage of events, later unfold in the context of communication, where they turn into a permanent practice of content and campaign sharing that leads to the organizations' mutual strengthening.

Based on this proposal, it must be accepted that, while the alliances are not yet in a condition to do entirely without the debate with big media corporations, they strengthen autonomous ways of communication, which are independent of big corporations and thereby contribute to the emergence of a popular basis and guarantee the sustainability of communication as a public and democratic good (ALAI, 2013).

Converging experiences

The practice of converging movements in the experience of the *Minga Informativa dos Movimentos Sociais* during the first decade of the new millennium played a fundamental role in the political activities and processes in the Americas. As a result of both the self-organization of the movements' communications and alliance-building, the cooperation process between popular movements, alternative media, and cooperation at a regional level to cover the events and the agenda of the popular camp in the Americas reshaped its focus.

Among such processes was the Converging Communication Policy of social movements, which ensured that daily reports about the mobilizations and texts, photos, videos, and radio programs were published during the People's Summit Rio+20 in 2012. Convergence-building was also reflected by the final declaration of the People's Summit Rio+20, which mentioned the democratization of communication as a matter of urgency for the emancipation of peoples and women, thereby indicating its place on the agenda of key issues for cooperation in the struggles of social movements.

The converging communication policy began its activities based on an agreement between the media and the movements, which placed their communicators at the disposal of the process. Content planning and production are done together, so communicators of different

organizations can set up a radio team; photos can be shared, communicators distribute news writing and web activities among each other, etc. The Converging Policy's communication products express the political synthesis of a process or event, and for this reason, the political positioning and representativeness of the organizations have to be guaranteed.

The Converging Policy's method became the political choice and practice of organizations and movements in the camp of TUCA's alliances. Converging communications can be activated to cover events or processes, as in the case of the events celebrating the tenth anniversary of the defeat of the FTAA/ALCA, in La Habana in 2015, which laid the founding stones of the Continental Day for Democracy and Against Neoliberalism.

Within the context of the Continental Day for Democracy and Against Neoliberalism, the organizations that initiated the cooperation, which included TUCA, confirmed their commitment to building popular communication, as expressed by the final declaration of the continental meeting held in Montevideo in 2017: "We will continue to encourage the cooperation of our alternative, popular media with a communication strategy in all our countries, to limit the power of media in the region. We will stand up against the power of transnational companies and defend free Internet and free technologies".

During the Meeting of Solidarity for Democracy and Against Neoliberalism, held in La Habana, Cuba, in November 2019, the participating movements made progress towards setting up the GT of communication of the Continental Day and activated the Converging Policy. They produced reports and carried out a joint network action to support Cuba against the imperialist blockade under the hashtags #ManosFueraDeCuba and #SeguimosEnLucha.

Besides this event, workers, youth, indigenous and women's movements signed a commitment to act as an alliance during actions like the People's Summit in Chile, the International Action of the World March of Women, the International Week of Anti-Imperialist Struggle, the Day of Action against Dams, and the 4th TUCA Congress.

2.3 - TUCA and the challenges of trade union communication

Trade union communication is linked to the historical challenge of the working class to recognize itself as such, to voice its ideas, defend its interests and fight for these principles in society, from the workplace to elections or major political processes, such as referendums on issues of local or national interest.

Workers' communication is at the heart of the political debates that shape our collective fate in a capitalist society. It aims to challenge vertical models linked to dominant interests.

In his "Extension or Communication?" book (1983), Paulo Freire stated that communication is intrinsically linked to the social and human world and to knowledge production and exchange among individuals who come together in different forms of association and cooperation in larger or smaller social groups. When individuals are not isolated, communication enables interaction. Therefore, communication is the critical element of sociability. Communication entails collective thinking and action and intersubjectivity that implies reciprocity between people.

The author includes education under this notion and establishes a link between education and communication.

"Education is communication, it is a dialogue, it is not just about knowledge transfer, but a meeting of interlocutors who seek the signification of meanings," Freire states.

TUCA's Communication Manual (produced in 2014) also asserts this understanding. "Communication is about, above all, the relationship between a person or a group of people, before, during, and after the transmission of data, messages, and contents. It is a horizontal process that establishes reciprocity between the sender and the receiver of such a message. Communication makes it possible to establish an interrelation and takes into account how the recipients react to the message."

However, dialogic communication does not

characterize the trade union movement in a capitalist society. Capitalist societies stand on class struggles, which keep exploitation, collective organization, and institutions in check. This conflict builds and sustains the system's hegemony, and those confrontations also encompass the political and cultural realms. Thus, communication loses its dialogic nature. As discussed above, the ownership of information, knowledge, and the media has fallen into private hands controlled by commercial groups and conglomerates, especially in the Americas.

In the current economic and political model, there is a vertical social approach to information, either within the production units to perpetrate the dynamics of exploitation or in the public sphere as discourses that legitimize the system through corporate media outlets, in what the authors call Cultural Industry(ies). As mentioned above, the commercial media, which subject communication to the pursuit of profit, have dominated the public spheres, concentrating power in few hands across the Americas.

In all historical contexts and regions, the ruling classes have partnered with the media to defend their interests and perpetuate the working class's exploitation. The dissemination of these worldviews impacts the working class itself, as it is constantly bombarded with messages that attempt to justify the intrinsic inequality of the capitalist system and deconstruct its demands, reinforcing the oppression of workers and minorities. Exploitation, *machismo*, racism, LGBTphobia, and the different forms of oppressions increase due to the lack of representation in these spaces and the discourses that legitimize oppressive relationships—in addition to discrediting the efforts to debunk them.

The media stigmatize union organizations. They attempt to tie unionism to bureaucracy, perpetuity in power, and corruption. They try to hide how important it is for the working class to be organized to defend its rights. Trade unionism is a barrier to the labor flexibility of the neoliberal model that seeks to advance an individual project instead of a collective project that protects our rights. Effective and targeted communication is crucial to repositioning trade unionism. It is not just a matter of producing a video, a campaign, or a story, but designing a strategy to reassess the class perspective and its mechanisms as part of the general democratic struggle.

In recent decades, there has been crucial media support for the neoliberal offensive in the Americas. In North America, these agents were instrumental in stimulating a new liberal wave and justifying the international and regional inequalities that followed. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the media supported right-wing regimes against labor rights and public policies that protected human rights, exacerbating dependent relationships. The 1990s were marked by an aggressive spread of Neoliberalism in the region and intense repression of popular mobilizations.

But, as mentioned above, this is a system marked by hegemonic disputes. The working classes challenged the political and cultural forces behind the regional and national neoliberal regimes and paved the way for the progressive governments of the 2000s. Workers' communication efforts and the alternative media outlets were crucial to this ideological dispute and the deconstruction of the liberal-conservative ideology of Neoliberalism. The ruling classes pushed back, overthrowing many of these progressive administrations through coups and rigging elections leveraging economic power.

Once again, the media were instrumental in attacking left and center-left administrations, legitimizing coups (as in Brazil and Bolivia) and promoting right-wing candidates (as in Argentina, Uruguay, and Ecuador). There are many examples. *Grupo Globo* was perhaps the main opponent of the Workers' Party administration in Brazil, and *Grupo Clarín* fought Kirchnerism in Argentina. As mentioned above, these efforts are no longer limited to traditional broadcasting. There are new players across the large digital platforms, as already mentioned in Donald Trump's election in the United States.

In 2020, the Americas were hit by the aftermath of the 2007-2008 economic crisis in the United States. But now, the new coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated the contradictions and

inequalities of the system, punishing workers—especially the most vulnerable—and causing severe damage due to the loss of millions of lives and the overall deterioration of working and living conditions in the region, especially in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. The pandemic has exacerbated job insecurity with new informal models of labor relations, mainly mediated by digital platforms. The region's nations struggle to ensure full immunization and face complex obstacles to secure income, jobs, and rights for their populations and recover their economies.

This scenario highlights the importance of strengthening alternative means of communication from the workers' perspective. Trade union organizations must conduct communication, support, and sponsor communication to promote dialogic and horizontal interaction between individuals. TUCA has been discussing this issue with its affiliates and has worked on guidelines and principles. The Trade Union Communication Manual puts forward TUCA's position on the matter. The document states that unions and union entities must understand that:

Their identity, cohesion, strength, organization, and fighting capacity are tied to their internal and external communications efficiency.

> Union communication is the result of union action. In other words, communication is needed to build a society for workers.

> The trade union movement must take part in those media spaces where reality is interpreted and discussed. There is a "virtual" or "media-based" reality, which results from the interpretation of those who dominate the means of communication through which the message is transmitted. We need to understand that what the popular and workers' movements have done to counteract the hegemonic discourse of media powerhouses is simply insufficient.

> Despite the harassment and control of the media over the population, a great deal of information is ignored, hidden, erased, and eliminated from the agenda of the main media players. The trade union movement must consider that its struggle also consists of raising awareness and fighting the exclusion and invisibility of workers, women workers, trade unions, popular movements, migrants, farmers, people of African descent, poor people, women, etc., in the media.

> Building their own media is costly from an economic standpoint, and workers' unions must invest resources to create their own media. The financial investment should be devoted to promoting a particular event or campaign, continuous training of communicators, and purchasing the necessary equipment.

> Communication training must consider the challenges of the contents to be shared by the trade union movement. This requires creativity, perseverance, resolution, training, having clear objectives, and mastery of technology tools.

> The self-sustainability and financing of communication efforts are, of course, a leading source of concern. TUCA urges its affiliates to look for the resources available in national and international, public and private institutions and organizations, supporting alternative, community, union, university, etc., projects, often underutilized due to lack of knowledge or misinformation.

> Workers must be aware, master, and take advantage of the resources available through new technologies to face the media offensive. The many tools available make it possible to develop alternative channels and communication channels. However, it is important to remember that they are also an ideological instrument of the ruling class, owned by large communication conglomerates (Facebook, Twitter, software, etc.) when using these resources. The challenge is to put them to work at the service of solidarity and the collective interest. To do so, it is necessary to produce reliable and quality products and content.

> Finally, communication is too important to be left solely in the hands of journalists and media owners. We need to understand that union communication is not a privilege of journalists, and it is a matter of social justice that involves all working men, women, and citizens.

Overview of union communication across the affiliates in the Americas

TUCA's Communication Manual provides a set of guidelines that reflect TUCA's understanding of trade union communication. The Trade Union Communication Conference is an opportunity to evaluate and update these guidelines and adapt them to the new challenges TUCA and the trade union movement in the Americas face. To this end, it is essential to carry out a communication diagnosis in the different affiliates and fraternal organizations to identify positive aspects, problems, obstacles, and challenges to assess the communication practice of trade union organizations.

As already indicated, trade union communication faces historical challenges. The power of media conglomerates amplifies the messages that justify neoliberal rationale, secretly defending the interests of the dominant classes. To sustain a system based on exploitation and highly unequal, first, it is essential to debunk the notion that it fosters oppression and spreads an ideology of apparent equality and freedom, attributing the asymmetries to problems of "merit." Deconstructing workers' identity, using concepts such as "collaborator" and "entrepreneur," is nothing but an attempt to eliminate the class identity of workers as subjects of individual and collective rights.

The pandemic shows that there was a fall in formal employment and an increase in informal jobs. This means that the current system is taking advantage of the pandemic to maximize profits, reduce labor and create job insecurity. This is an attack against trade unionism. Neoliberalism does not want unions, and they have replaced the term "worker" with "entrepreneur." Union communication efforts now face the challenge of questioning a solitary individual, who believes they are the architect of their own destiny, their "success," "their willpower," and does not believe in the organization, and sees the State, the unions as obstacles.

The beginning of the 2020s brought severe transformations in the world of work that made this dispute even more difficult. The emergence of more global production chains and the expansion of job insecurity, and new forms of informal employment and exploitation are tearing down the foundations of 20th-century labor relations, such as contracts, working hours, and the set of rights provided for in legislation, agreements, and collective bargaining agreements. These new developments, which had already affected the Global South, are now taking a toll on the Global North. New employment arrangements—especially the so-called platform work organized under models with few or no rights—wipe out workers in long, results-oriented working hours, subordinating workers to obscure algorithm-based management systems, generate low incomes and make union organizing more difficult.

As highlighted in the Final Resolution of the 4th TUCA Congress: "These challenges impose the need for actions that renovate the traditional style and practices of trade unionism and open up new options to choose actors strategically to respond to the changes of neoliberal capitalism in the first decades of the 21st century. However, given the current phase of capitalism, it is necessary to develop creative strategies to represent all workers, regardless of their employment relationship.

Thus, there are two types of challenges. The first concerns trade union activity itself in this scenario. Trade union communication is closely linked to trade union policy. Therefore, the first obstacle is related to the changes and adaptations union organizations are promoting and how they respond in the current stage of neoliberal capitalism to the offensive of the ruling classes against workers, their rights, and the working-class union organization.

"The union movement was stigmatized by the political power and the hegemonic media. In the same way, organized workers are now also stigmatized by the new neoliberal wave that ultimately wants the extinction of union action. The attack on unionism is also explained by the need to extinguish rights. TUCA's 4th Congress resolution stated that "trade unionism must prepare the working class to organize and plan

communications strategically."

However, trade union communication also has relative autonomy and its own specific challenges. It has to face the fact that large communication conglomerates have traditionally dominated the sector, and the irruption of digital platforms has now changed the context. The fight for hegemony and audiences is even more challenging in the Americas, given the media ownership concentration in the region and each country and the intense political involvement of the major media conglomerates in anti-popular and conservative-liberal agendas.

In recent years, the trade union movement in the Americas has been working on improving communications. Most TUCA affiliates have created their own websites and social media profiles, and TUCA's affiliates have focused mainly on using new technologies. The sites provide an institutional overview, information about each union (its boards of directors, secretariats, and units), news and multimedia repositories, generally with images and videos.

Some unions have made available additional communication channels. Some unions continue using newspapers, which are now available on their websites to read online. Another widespread channel is the use of newsletters. Facebook is the more widely used digital platform. According to a communications survey carried out by TUCA, 39 of the 48 affiliated associations have a profile set up on that platform. The second most widely used social media among affiliates is Twitter. Out of the total number of affiliates, 27 have created profiles on the microblogging site. Instagram, one of the largest social media platforms globally, has also become a channel for union communication but to a lesser extent. Only 16 affiliates have profiles on that platform.

Developing TUCA's and Affiliates' trade union communication policies

For the union movement to be able to carry on political actions to advance the immediate and general interests of the working class, including the defense of democracy, peace, and sovereignty (as stressed in the Resolutions of TUCA's 4th Congress), union communications must become one of the unions' core lines of action. Union communication structures must be equipped with the necessary policy, human, and financial resources to do so.

The final resolutions of TUCA's 4th Congress point out a series of actions needed to carry out the unions' and TUCA's communications efforts. The document lists Communication as one of its core lines of action: "Redesign communication and strengthen the identity of the working class." One of the main objectives set out in the text is to streamline communication structures to fight for the identity of the region's workers and their recognition as subjects of rights and as an organized class. Unions must "streamline communications across the entire trade union structure in the Americas. This is a powerful tool to achieve this objective and fight the hegemonic model, its narrative and actions that harm the working class and attack its organizations".

To implement this guideline, we must pay attention to the unions' editorial policies and narrative strategies. Although also necessary, we must go beyond institutional news. An interesting approach could be opening up communication channels with members to identify concerns and more attractive arguments to work on the identity of workers and their recognition as a class and the role of trade union organizations. Creativity and adapting to changes are essential when engaging with the working class in all of its diversity, especially with the youngest.

This means we need to learn about the communication channels the working class and the union members use, how they access information, interact and communicate. The current communications ecosystem is quite complex. Although broadcasting is still important, the Internet is quickly gaining ground. Thus, to engage the working class and dispute the hegemony of the working class, we must know the information and culture consumption habits of this community. The development of TUCA's Communication policy should inspire affiliates to plan their own communication strategies, define objectives, indicators, and resources

to achieve their goals, establish the channels and their political-editorial line to reach their target audiences, and promote their causes, mobilizations, and concerns.

One of the tasks listed by the Resolutions of TUCA's 4th Congress of the TUCA is to enhance the websites so that they are "open, easy and transparent doors to access the relevant and updated information of all the organizations." The assessment carried out for this Conference provided elements to identify shortcomings in unions' sites, which can and should be used for more efficient communication. There are still unions that do not use multimedia content or make little information available on their websites. These can be used as more effective channels for political and ideological debate.

But the union communication strategy on the Internet goes beyond the portals. Digital platforms have multiplied in recent years. There are now numerous messaging services (WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook Messenger, Signal), social media outlets (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, Kwai), and audiovisual services (YouTube, Twitch, Spotify, Deezer, Facebook Watch). Therefore, we need to identify where our target audiences meet and develop customized strategies for each media type and each audience.

As mentioned before, these platforms impose barriers and attempt to control information flows. Therefore, we must adopt a thoughtful and critical approach to these environments and present alternatives. Suppose organizations cannot afford to stay away from these platforms. In that case, they can join the efforts to challenge legislation and movements against abusive and discriminatory platform practices led by digital rights and social movements in several countries in the region.

This more critical approach to using platforms is set out as a desirable behavior in the Resolutions of TUCA's 4th Congress. "Currently, social media are a special type of challenge for our organizations; they are relatively easy to access and provide opportunities and threats. To promote socio-political trade unionism in this day and age, we must make proper and responsible use of social media. We must fight against fake news and hate speech, convey clear messages and call for actions from and for the working class."

One of the main concerns is protecting the organizations' data. Trade union communication processes must consider existing concerns about the violation of privacy and the use of personal or private information through the tools available on the Internet, especially Facebook. In other words, governance—which defines internet and social media rules of engagement—must be integrated into the agenda and debate of trade unions and social organizations when addressing communication alternatives.

Thus, it is essential to establish a data management policy that protects the information collected, complies with national legislation, and safeguards supplier data from being used by employers or political forces for campaigns against trade unions and conflicting with workers' interests. Surveillance is a growing problem in the workplace, and the trade union movement must develop good practices to curb, instead of promoting these abuses.

Data management can be done more securely by developing in-house, open-source technology solutions. One of the trade union movement's main challenges is seeking technological autonomy instead of relying on digital platforms that collect workers' data to be exploited by the economic powerhouses. We should look into collaborative projects that can serve TUCA's interests and other trade unions' and serve multiple purposes, for example, data access and storage.

The more complex the environment and the more communication channels and platforms used, the more resources are needed. This is one of the most common concerns when discussing union communications: without resources and a structure, it is impossible to establish quality communication practices to achieve our objectives. In this sense, acknowledging that this is a core line of action means that we need to allocate funds to hire communication professionals and pay for media and communication services.

The resolutions of TUCA's 4th Congress point out that "professionalizing and expanding the communications teams in our union organizations will be essential to understanding the role we play and joining forces".

All the challenges described are relevant to both the affiliate unions and TUCA itself. But TUCA also faces other specific and additional challenges. The Confederation is responsible for articulating its affiliates to promote a trade union communication network that empowers members and helps work towards the priorities established in the Congress and policy meetings. The Resolutions of the 4th Congress cover a long list of issues, such as decent work in global production chains, the preservation of social protection systems, the fight to protect the environment, the fight against sexism and other forms of oppression through a multisectoral approach and the defense of democracy, peace, and sovereignty, strengthening labor rights in legislation and collective bargaining.

The Confederation's communication policy, therefore, should plan for communication campaigns on each of these issues. Planning efforts, as mentioned above, should establish the objectives, strategies, methods, channels, and priority and secondary audiences for each of these initiatives.

Planning is not only important for the success of the initiatives but also to encourage transparency and the participation of the affiliates in the implementation and replication of these initiatives in each country.

The Confederation's communication policy should address the different subject matters and design strategies customized to the different audiences. The Resolutions point out that certain groups deserve their own customized actions, for example, women, people of African descent, native peoples, youth, and migrants. Producing customized narratives and products for each group helps embrace the diversity among the working class. We also need to consider the interrelation between the different subject matters and groups, for example, the prevalence of migrants and young workers in environments of greater employment informality.

It is crucial for the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas to advance a Union Communication strategy with and among our unions, affiliates, and fraternal institutions. Our union network should be our primary source of communication and information with the working class of the Americas, and our communication efforts should convey our strength and our voice. The road map to be approved in our 1st Trade Union Communications Conference will show us how to achieve our goals in the coming years

3.

Synthesis of the main features and challenges for trade union communication in the Americas

The Road Map for **Strengthening and Transforming Trade Unions in the Americas 2021 – 2025** highlights communication as one of the main challenges facing trade union organizations in the Americas: *"Good communication of trade unions with society is crucial to enhance unions´ and federations´ capability to address a wide-spread perception in our societies that associates the labor movement with problems and conflicts"*. Communication should be seen as a source of power for workers at the union grassroots. It is important to strengthen this strategic tool within and between organizations to increase the social visibility of trade union work. Therefore, **strengthening trade union organizations in the area of communication as part of a coordinated effort with TUCA is of crucial importance.**

Communication tools are basic instruments to enhance and sustain the legitimacy of unions as social and political players, whose actions serve the purpose of improving living conditions and preserve democracy. However, **trade union communication in our continent is characterized by the fact that most unions lack organized communication teams.** Communication between unions, federations, confederations and umbrella organizations is not coordinated, so there is a clear need for coordination in our region. Furthermore, almost all affiliated and fraternal umbrella organizations lack the necessary conditions to develop communication strategies and plans; they are generally among those social and political players, which make less use of information and communication technologies to realize their activities.

According to a survey carried out jointly by TUCA and its affiliated umbrella organizations, unions considered that their communication teams should be enhanced in the forthcoming terms. Besides, organizations with communication areas lack their own annual funding. Furthermore, in their opinion the reach of the communication based on the current tools does not achieve dissemination levels that could be considered satisfactory.

On the other hand, the umbrella organizations emphasized the need for training and capacity-building in communication of their teams, their spokespersons, and the workers at the grassroots of their affiliates; in other words, the development of training activities regarding the subjects and tools of communication was presented as a need by everyone.

Multiplying the capacity to use new technologies and, subsequently, sustain a social media presence based on professionalism, ethics and transparency is currently needed to foster continuous innovation in the field of training activities. Both, social networks and new technologies enable the democratization of access to, and the contents of communication. It is vital to take advantage of union cyberactivism and digital transformation as fundamental strategies to enrich the organizations´ agendas with the feedback of affiliated union umbrella organizations and fraternal organizations.

The development of a communication policy should stimulate affiliated umbrella organizations to prepare their respective plans in the area by defining the objectives, indicators and resources needed to achieve their goals, as well as the channels and the political and editorial orientation of the entities´ discourse that will enable them to connect with their audiences and promote their causes, mobilizations and issues.

TUCA will have the task to coordinate its

affiliated umbrella organizations and leverage a trade union communication network that will feed into the entities themselves and orientate the priority issues as defined by the Congress and TUCA´s political decision-making bodies. The resolutions adopted by TUCA´s 4th Congress mention specific segments that need to be addressed by targeted actions, including women, LGBTIQ+ communities, people of African descent, indigenous people, young people, and migrants.

TUCA´s communication policy must therefore include the planning of communication campaigns regarding these and other issues, such as the defense of democracy, freedom of organization, collective bargaining and the strengthening of union organizations throughout the Americas. As pointed out before, such initiatives must detail their goals, strategies, methods, channels, and priority and secondary target audiences. The development of planning practices will not only be important for the success of the initiatives; it will also be a contribution to transparency and enable the affiliated umbrella organizations to participate in implementing and multiplying such initiatives in each country.

Strengthening the unions´ role vis-à-vis citizens and governments by using alternative media will be paramount to shape unions and inform and give visibility to their struggles, achievements and demands. ***"Historical facts depend on who tells the facts; the working class must communicate its life"*. Our media and our productions have to reflect a gender and rights-based perspective. *"It is a challenge to be the voice of many women, who don´t have a voice"*.**

The trade union agenda has to reflect the demands and concerns of union grassroots. It needs to be flexible and dynamic, so as to integrate issues that emerge at the national and international level. Therefore, it is crucial to strengthen and diversify communication tools to include new technologies that will allow for the segmentation of information and narratives, while broadening their reach at the same time. ***"Access and knowledge are necessary to disseminate our struggles and make them visible".***

4.

Lines of action of the Road Map for the Strengthenng of Trade Union Communication in the Americas 2021-2025

Promoting the democratization of communication:

- Encourage public regulation with social participation, including legislation on broadcasting, telecommunications, pay-TV, internet, etc. Media monopolies need to be limited; this should include restrictions of horizontal, vertical, and cross-ownership.
- Encourage the strengthening of public, non-commercial, community and alternative media, and above all, spaces that provide civil society with outlets of its own, space (rules on mandatory uploading and quotas) and possibilities to express itself (right to airtime) through legislation and public policies.
- Encourage internet access policies that universalize connectivity and confirm the principle of web neutrality; defend mechanisms, which add to the transparency of platforms and data-processing systems (such as algorithms) and provide data-protection frameworks that discourage vigilant practices.
- Seek technological autonomy based on instruments that are regulated through association and collective project development providing different applications, including for data saving and access.
- Contest traditional media space. Trade union activities to counteract the hegemonic discourse have been insufficient so far.
- Raise awareness and fight against the exclusion and the lack of visibility of workers, trade unions, popular movements, migrants, campesinos, LGBTIQ+ populations, persons of African descent, women, and impaired persons.
- Include the issue of Internet governance in the unions´ and social organizations´ agendas for discussion and reflection.
- Push and demand the taxing of big digital platforms.

Developing, strengthening, and transforming communication structures:

- Prepare a strategic policy for trade union communication that defines the objectives, indicators and resources needed to achieve the goals, as well as the channels and the political and editorial orientation of the entities´ discourse that will enable them to connect with their audiences and promote their causes, mobilizations and issues.
- Move forward with a process of enhancing or creating communication departments or secretariats in each union umbrella organization, which will be in charge of creating, sharing and circulating information and contents.
- Strengthen the triad “Organization — Education — Communication”. Trade union communication is directly associated with union policy and organization and, for this reason, with the answer to the ruling classes´ offensive against workers and their organizations in the current phase of neoliberal capitalism.
- Invest resources in the creation and development of means and instruments for communication. Communication should

not be orientated exclusively towards publicizing particular events or campaigns, but rather towards the continuous training of communicators and the acquisition of operational equipment.

- Promote and move forward towards the self-sustainibility and funding of communication projects. Raise awareness regarding the availability of resources provided by national and international public and private institutions and bodies for the support of alternative, community, trade union, and university projects; very often such resources are not used up due to a lack of knowledge and information.

- Register the communication channels used by the working class: how they gain access to information, how they interact, how they communicate. To contest the hegemony of the working class it is necessary to know its communication and cultural habits.

- Quality communication that is capable of achieving its objectives will not be possible without resources and the necessary stsructure. Recognizing its crucial political importance implies the allocation of funds.

Permanent training in trade union communication:

- Train workers as subjects of popular communication. Communication is too important to be dealt with by journalists and media owners alone. It is important to understand that trade union communication is not a priviledge of journalists; instead, it is a matter of social justice that concerns all workers, and indeed, all citizens.

- Train teams, leaders, and union grassroots in communication-related issues.

- Develop technical training through different channels, instruments and languages. A socio-political labor movement requires the adequate and responsible use of social networks and implies the fight against fake news and hate speech.

- Design plans for the development of skills in the areas of social networks, digital security, web site design, blogs, design of campaigns and their contents, union cyberactivism. “We feel the deficits regarding such skills”.

- Offer joint technical and political training workshops about popular communication and social networks for affiliates with alternative movements and media of each country or region.

Develop union media spaces:

- Advocate for programs and mechanisms that encourage trade union, alternative and community communication in audiovisual, graphic and internet productions.

- Include opinion spaces, audiovisual platforms, podcasts, and news that exceed the trade union sphere: contents about culture, sports, economy, and international politics, among others. The conversations of the working class are not limited to industrial relations.

- Create mechanisms to listen to the grassroots and get to know their voices, actions and problems in order to improve the dissemination of their identities as working men and women, their self-awareness as a class, and the importance of union organizations.

- Enhance alternative media spaces such as CSATV, which conveys the perspective of the region´s labor movement. CSATV should belong to all umbrella organizations, and hopefully all of them can support and sustain it.

- Support and strengthen the role of the union press and alternative media in the fight against the neoliberal offensive, the dismantling of labor legislations and social protection networks, as well as against the sale of public companies, coups, and attacks

on democracy.

- Set up a laboratory or space to create contents for union communication in the Americas. “Work on our agendas, our aesthetics”.
- Create innovative tools. “Applications for union affiliation and organization”.
- Participate actively in the Working Group for the Continental Day for Democracy and against Neoliberalism as a decisive alliance of TUCA. Involve affiliated organizations to follow up the alliance.

Convergence in the area of communication: TUCA´s role:

The trade union agenda has to reflect the demands and concerns of union grassroots. It needs to be flexible and dynamic, so as to integrate issues that emerge at the national and international level. It is crucial to strengthen, diversify and revitalize ommunication tools by including new technologies that will allow for the segmentation of information and narratives, while broadening their reach at the same time. Access and knowledge are necessary to disseminate our struggles and make them visible.

TUCA will have to:

- Coordinate its affiliated federations and leverage a trade union communications network that feeds into the entities themselves and orientates the priority issues as defined by the Congress and TUCA´s political decision-making bodies.
- Carry out communication-related research to establish the general public´s perceived image of unions and the labor movement.
- Elaborate a continental map of union and popular media as well as communication experiences, an easily acvailable list that allows us to know what we are doing and where our organizations and regions can act as sources of consultation and reference.
- Activate its affiliates´ network of contacts with communicators and media and develop a practice of exchanging productions to reinforce the political identity of the region´s labor movement.
- Recover and enhance TUCA´s Communications Network as a permanent platform aimed at coordinating communication and the implementation of its policies. This network will comprise all affiliates of TUCA as well as fraternal organizations and will operate systematically.
- Coordinate communication structures to fight for the identity of the working class of the Americas, so as to advocate for its recognition as a subject of rights.
- Reinforce the agendas of feminist, anti-racist and environmental justice movements in its communication and contribute to the development of targeted strategies for different audiences: women, people of African descent, indigenous people, young people, and migrants. Providing targeted discourses and products to each audience is a valuable method to embrace the diversity of the working class.
- Enhance the communication of the Labor Observatory of the Americas and its pulications and information system.
- Empower itself, occupy spaces, and engage in the contest of meanings in our digital era; we must become trade union influencers.
- Set up groups of communicators beyond the limits of institutional communication, such as collective, self-managed experiences that depend on local dynamics.
- Promote the convergence of the communication of the labor movement and social movements to overcome the blockade imposed by media concentration with the aim of putting a communication strategy into action that enhances the visibility of the popular agenda.

The Road Map presented before the First Continental Conference on Trade Union Communication is the result of the joint effort of affiliated umbrella organizations, fraternal organizations, the Working Women´s Committee of the Americas, and the Young Workers´ Committee of the Americas. All of them are therefore responsible for the lines of action for the term 2021 – 2025 that have been submitted during this process.

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