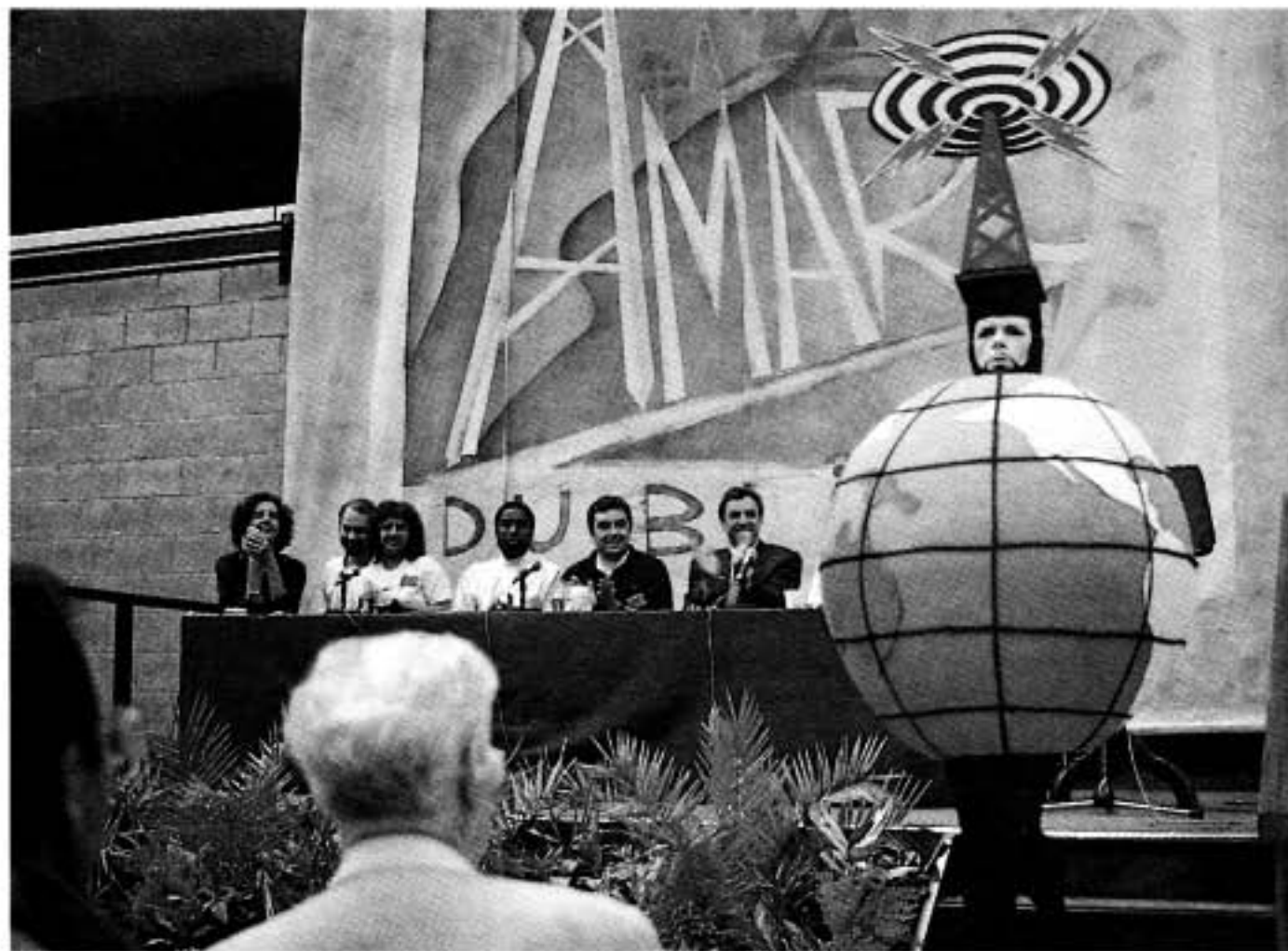


# COMMUNITY RADIO: tuned in and turned on

**Community radio has the potential to be the third voice between state controlled radio stations and private commercial stations.**

**The Fourth World Assembly of Community Radio Broadcasters, held in Dublin in August, focused on "the right to communicate".**

**By Sue Valentine**



"Radio for the people, controlled by the people". . . the opening ceremony at the Community Radio Broadcasters gathering.

years and with more than 30 up-and-running community radio stations, community radio is still considered to be experimental. Worldwide, community radio does not count for more than one percent of the stations that broadcast.

**IN HIS** address to the conference, the president of the Irish National Association of Broadcasters, Jack Byrne, explored the potential ability of community radio to prove its claims that it offered a worthwhile alternative to commercial or state radio stations.

"Traditionally, radio has developed in one of four ways: authoritarian, paternal, commercial and democratic," he said. "Community broadcasters are against authoritarian control of what can be said, against paternal control of what ought to be said and against commercial control of what can profitably be said. All are anti-democratic."

In contrast to other forms of radio which see the development of information technology as a means of consolidating political power or as a new, lucrative business venture, community

radio sees democratic access to the microphone as being of central importance to the creation of a global society where political and economic power will be dispersed throughout the population.

Rooting the lofty idealism in reality, Byrne warned that broad access to electronic information would not automatically produce a better world. To believe that would be to create yet another myth. However, like all myths it contained an element of truth and that truth needed to be discovered and built on.

Ownership of and accessibility to the media were necessary first steps in the process of achieving a more equitable flow of information, but this was not enough. A society strongly rooted in computer and telecommunications systems could incorporate participatory democracy, decentralised control and social equality, but it would not happen as a natural spin-off, he warned.

"Wisdom must also enter the process. Take

the daily news from any media source and it will be obvious that humankind has not become much wiser over the centuries of massive increases in rational knowledge. We recently acquired the electronic means of disseminating this knowledge globally and almost immediately. But this is only a speeding up of the knowledge process. When are we going to wise up?"

Concluding his address, Byrne said that through community radio, people could look to each other for help, support and answers.

"The whole planet is economically, ecologically and politically enmeshed. We can't ignore the reality of interdependence. But too often these links and dependencies are the cause of hostility and violence, when they should be the cause for reminding us that we are all here together with nowhere else to go. We can destroy it all and ourselves or we can be safe and happy together. There is still time to make that choice." □

**Sue Valentine is Media Co-ordinator with Idasa.**

**IN A** country where the state has almost total control of the airwaves, talk about the creation of community radio stations may well be dismissed as the pet subject of radio nuts or the dream of idealists.

But, if we are serious about giving people the opportunity to express themselves, to communicate their ideas, beliefs and needs, then the notion of community radio offers real possibilities and need not be a far-fetched dream.

To the members of the World Assembly of Community Radio Broadcasters who met in Dublin, community radio is very much a reality. More than that, in the words of one of the speakers, "radio is the modern natural meeting place" and the medium for democratic communication.

In pursuit of this goal, the World Assembly of Community Radio Broadcasters (Amarc, its French acronym) was set up as a Canadian initiative 10 years ago.

In his opening speech to the conference, the president of Amarc, Michel

Delorme, announced an ambitious goal: "At the end of the century there must exist everywhere on this planet a form of democratic radio based on the participation of the population. We are approaching the year 2000, which gives us 10 years to achieve this goal."

In Delorme's definition, community radio is neither the expression of political power nor the expression of business, but the expression of the population. Rather, it is a third voice between state-controlled radio and private commercial radio stations.

There is no single model for community radio, however, as part of its strength lies in its diversity. Precisely because it is "community radio" it will reflect the society it serves. In Latin America there is popular radio, educational radio and peasant radio; in French Africa there is local rural radio; in Europe it is associative radio, free radio or neighbourhood radio, while in Asia there is radio for development. In Oceania it is known as Aboriginal or community radio.

However, says Delorme, community radio still needs to prove itself. In Canada, after 10