

# Conference News

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May 1990



Cape Educational Computer Society  
UWC Didactics Department



COMPUTERS  
FOR TRANSFORMATION  
National Conference 5-8 July 1990

Conferences are often dreary affairs. In this age of Glasnost we have introduced a few additions and alterations to help to bridge the gaps between academia and community. We even have cultural events sprinkled around the program and for every theoretical paper you will find a practical workshop to match.

Some of the highlights that you can look forward to...

### Keynote Addresses:

- An ANC National Executive member will open the conference laying out the political context for the use of computer technology in the struggle for a post-Apartheid South Africa.
- Ihron Rensburg, Projects Officer of the National Education Coordinating Committee will discuss the education crisis in South Africa as the context for the development of computers in education.
- Internationally renowned radical sociologist Paul Olsen from the Ontario Institute for Sociology in Education in Canada will give several inputs on the issues of computers in society and education internationally.

- Alec Irwin, Education Officer for the National Union of Metal Workers SA, will outline the issues being discussed within COSATU with regard to technology in a future SA

CECS and the Didactics Department at UWC.

### Discussion workshops and practical demonstrations

Discussion workshops and practical demonstrations will be held on a whole range of issues. Debates should rage all day on controversial topics and practical hands-on demos will challenge your preconceptions, confirm your suspicions or excite your imaginations.

These are some of the topics to be

covered:

- Computers in schools and universities
- Democratic practice, community organisations and computer technology
- Women and computer technology
- Computers in Trade Unions
- Telecommunications and networking
- Computers and health issues
- Computerising libraries and resource centres
- Media and desktop publishing

And many more...

### Cultural Events

Politics and technology is so often alien to popular culture and so we need to put people

# Highlights of the Conference

economy.

- Two international telecomm-unications experts, Steve Walker from Geonet in London and Michael Polman from Antenna in Holland will be giving a global perspective on telecommunications (communic-ating through computers and telephones) and how progressive organisations are connecting with each other all over the world.
- The conference sessions will begin with a panel discussion with panelists from the Education, Women's and Labour sector and from each of the host organisations,

## Conference Highlights Conference Highlights Conference Highlights

at the centre of technological development. People's Culture helps us to do this. We will blend in with the talks and workshops some interesting and surprising cultural events.

No people's conference is complete without a big social event so on the last evening of the conference we will lock up the computers and take off our shoes to some of the best local dance music in town.

### And at the end of it all...

Delegates will put their heads together and decide where to take things from here, how we will coordinate and cooperate nationally to serve the needs of transformation towards a democratic, non-racial, non-sexist South Africa ...and when the next conference will be held.

## THE PROGRAM

### Thurs 5 July

- 10.00am - Registration of all participants begins
- Briefing session for all contributors 1st Campus Tour
- 1.00pm - Lunch
- 2.00pm - 2nd Campus tour
- 5.30pm - Supper

7.30pm - Official public opening

### Friday 6 July and Saturday 7 July

- 7.30am - Breakfast
- 9.00am - Conference begins - panel discussion
- 11.00am - Parallel sessions of discussion workshops
- 1.00pm - Lunch
- 2.00pm - Keynote address
- 3.00pm - Parallel sessions of practical workshops/demos
- 5.30pm - Open session. Computer facilities will be open for informal work/play and book-stalls and displays on show. A small exhibition will run from 2.00pm till 8.00pm.
- 7.30pm - Supper
- 9.00pm - Evening program of cultural events

### Sunday 8 July

Sunday's session will provide a half day to pull together all the strands of the conference, to formulate resolutions and to lay the basis for future cooperation at a regional and national level.

- 7.30am - Breakfast
- 9.00am - Summary, analysis, assessment of the conference proceedings
- 10.20am - Workshop on future cooperation, structures
- 12.00am - Resolutions
- 1.00pm - LUNCH
- 2.00pm - Closing session of conference
- 3.00pm - Delegates leave.



# TECHNOLOGY = CONTROL

**T**echnology is being developed in the world at an unprecedented rate but as always, the technology is being created to further the interests of those with money and power.

Technology is not neutral. But the newest technology based on the microchip seems to have acquired a mystical life of its own. The microchip is driving people out of work. It is reducing the rest to mindless automatons.. It is creating sinister banks of information about us open to manipulation by the power hungry.

The non-scientists are encouraged to feel numb and powerless in the face of its mysterious onward march. Micro-technology funded with almost limitless budgets, arose out of the needs of the United States Military to gain greater control over their war machines .

It is this issue of control that lies at the heart of all the arguments we find around micro-technology as it spills out of the military bases into business and industry, and of course right into the home and school.

It is control and profits which industrialists are looking for with tame robots that never go on strike. It is control which police and security forces look for when they build up massive databases. It is control which repressive governments are looking for when they aim to develop the artificial intelligence systems which can monitor telephone lines for suspect conversations.

Some technologies have patterns of control so intricately woven into them that they should be

**Technology is the means by which the world can be oppressed!**

rejected out of hand. Nuclear power, it should be argued, is so intractably structured around the idea of the authoritarian State that outright opposition is the only sane response.

But the issues are rarely so clear cut. Indeed many technologies, whatever their origins, do represent a part of our lifestyles that most of us embrace and accept. Just because the telegraph was originally a military intervention to link parts of the distant battle-fields, does not mean that it cannot be used for humane purposes. Most applications of micro-technology -the word processor used to type this article, the digital watch, the calculator - have no particular malign purpose. True, they represent control, but no more control than many of us would want to exert on the world around us.

Now that this power is available, in whose hands should it lie and how should it be used ? The danger is that, by default it is being developed by people who would misuse it, or use it for narrow interests whilst the rest of the world unwittingly fall under patterns of control that we begin to accept as normal. Like dumb props on a stage we are being moved without protest whilst others act out their own interests.

The key to this problem lies in the recognition that micro-technology is NOT a scientific frontier that inevitably advances under its own

momentum, but a flexible chameleon that can be made to take on the shape of those who mould it. In factories, robots and computerised machine tools can either be made to reduce workers to the level of bored machine minders or can enhance and amplify their skills. Some unions have successfully negotiated technical change agreements. In Australia for instance, Telecom workers successfully made job design proposals to Telecom to ensure that the majority of their workers did not finish up with unskilled jobs. It implies that the workforce in factories and offices, and the trade unions that represent them, become at least as adept at analysing the technology as they are at reading the small print in contracts of employment. But it can be done.

The new technology will, if through interaction we allow it, only be used by those in power to amplify their authority. The challenge to us is to recognise this and oppose it, refusing to accept any proposal whose sole justification is that it represents "technology, progress and the future".

But we should not be blind to the positive opportunities that technology can offer us daily. Micro-technology, like any technology will follow the pattern that we impose on it.

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*"Technology for Peoples Power" will be a topic at the Conference.*

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## WOMEN WIRED UP!

We publish an edited version of this pertinent article on male domination, presented by Dale Spender in notes to the Edinburgh International Television Festival, September 1982. Extracted from **THE WORLD WIRED UP** by Brian Murphy.

**I**t was just after five and the operators, all women, had left for home. The men lounged around the machines, legs splayed out, some up on desks, others straddling chairs. Each tried to outdo the other. No-one was really listening to anyone but himself. Cameraderie was expressed through intonation, an inclination of the shoulders, an abrasive stream of consonants.

This was a bull session. The talk was computers - which new models were best suited to the company, where they might be positioned in the system for maximum effect. Later the rant broadened to society itself - what could happen if the telecommunication system was completely privatised; which company was best placed for a quick assault on the new market; what that market could grow to be. There would be new leisure opportunities, more exciting jobs to do.

In the office of a New York stockbroker, conversation abates while a woman delivers cups of coffee all round. She leaves and the patter starts up again. Sides are taken, strategies mapped out. The computer communications revolution is charged with the electricity of a commando raid. Corporations are seen as armies facing one another across the battlefield of the stock market.

In another office, the "mad genius" sits in front of his computer. He waxes lyrically about potentialities, capabilities, information exchanges and instant reproduction. It is the stuff of revolution, immediate incandescent. It could change the nature of human interaction he says.

The books pour forth. Authors explain the time and labour - saving characteristics of the new machines. Their image is of a "woman in her kitchen". The video terminal displays today's recipe while the computer manages cooking, cleaning and the ambient temperature. She never speaks.

In the African broadcasting centre, five males and two females (appointed as a result of pressure from a Western development agency) discuss the new 'non-formal' education campaign. It will use video and micro-computers to teach women in villages more efficient cooking and hygiene techniques. Their conversation is highly technical. They talk of penetration levels, take-up rates, medium term evaluation and long-term follow-up. The women remain silent.

The Malaysian development agency brochure addresses itself to Western managers, searching out micro-electronic assembly plant sites: "The manual dexterity of the oriental female is famous the world over. Who therefore could be better qualified by nature and inheritance to contribute to the efficiency of a bench assembly production line than the oriental girl?"

Japanese interactive home information experiments are conducted in afternoon hours. They reach women and children only. The male researchers are surprised to find the information is largely ignored. Nevertheless, they push on with the original concept. It was pioneered by the men at the Ministry of International Trade and Industry. This is an important edge to have in the world economic battle. As a side effect it might change the structure of society and bring "good things". The experiments will continue.

In the women's toilets, below the hall where this cocktail event is taking place, the talk is not of a revolutionary home information service. There is a response rehearsal in progress. Voices are raised and lowered in ritual tones. Back in the hall these tones are deployed to register support for whatever the male providers plan to do. No one listens.

*For all intents and purposes we live under a male dictatorship when it comes to media. Like any other dictatorship that controls the channels of communication it can produce material that reflects its interests and promotes its image favourably. It can censor what it finds subversive. It can push its own propaganda.*



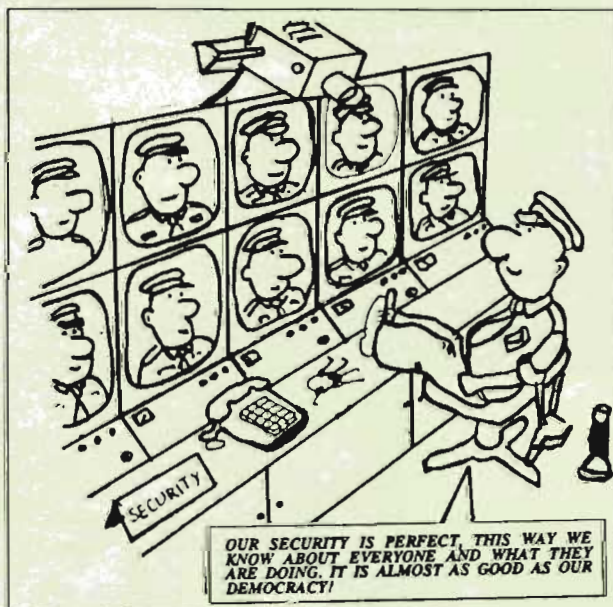
# EXECUTED BY A COMPUTER

On Friday, 9 November 1979, at 10pm three young men driving on Highway 20 stopped at a gas station in Etampes, near Paris. Twenty-year-old Claude Francois was at the wheel. With him was Baptistin Lamont and Marcel Seltier. They were on their way to a dance at Salbris.

"Fill it up!" said Francois.

Mr. Nicoas, the service station operator, took a dim view of the tattered blue jeans, the leather jackets, the license number which did not look right because it was patched up with bits of black tape (3383 FM 13, indicating the car was not from the local area). Francois paid with a cheque on which his signature was hurriedly scrawled. Nicolas took it reluctantly, but called the police to report the "suspicious" car and its even more "disruptable" occupants.

In Etampes, police officers went to the computer terminal linking them with the central file of the Interior Ministry, in Paris, a file whose very existence had recently been denied by a Cabinet member. In a response to a brief flurry of commands, the police entered the car's license number into the computer's



memory for checking against its data bank. The system soon flashed its verdict: the vehicle was stolen.

Etampes called Orleans on the phone. A special night brigade was dispatched. The white and black police Renault intercepted the Peugeot driven by Francois at a red light. Then everything happened very fast. The only police officer in uniform stayed inside the Renault; the other two, in civilian clothes, got out. One of them covered the Peugeot with his machine-gun at the ready. The other stood in front of the suspect's car and armed his .357 Magnum.

One of the young men, Marcel Seltier, reported:

"We didn't understand anything. We saw the one with the gun aim at Claude. A moment later, a shot rang out. The bullet went through the windshield and hit Claude's face just under the nose. We thought they were gangsters. The one with the machine-gun yelled: "Why did you shoot?". We got out of the car. Claude collapsed on the road. Right away they handcuffed us and told us they were the police. They called the ambulance. Claude was taken to hospital. They searched us and took our papers."

Subsequent investigation disclosed that the car belonged to Francois, who had bought it, legally, ten days before. It had indeed been stolen in 1976, but it was soon recovered by the insurance company, which sold it to the garage where Francois bought it. The computer file had never been updated to reflect the change in status of the car. The central police records still regard it as stolen property!

## UPDATE :

The trigger-happy policeman was not arrested. Claude Francois remained between life and death for many days. He is still in the hospital.

This unfortunate incident illustrates several features of the world in which we live. Prejudice at the gas pump led to the police action; faith in the infallibility of the computer turned the casual inquiry into an investigation. Inadequate standards and a mistaken view of computer power linked an innocent man with a forgotten crime. An over-zealous bully, with a big gun, provided by a frightened government, did the rest. Sure of his facts, the plainclothes policeman standing in the glare of his car's headlights was firing in more than the name of his society. His .357 Magnum was only the last piece of hardware in the hand of the Long Arm Of The Law. It was the most visibly destructive component in a system that included computers, terminals, programs, terminals and telephone lines.

*What does this mean for us and especially our children in a future world where technology continues to advance at an alarming pace?*

*Read this!*

# Conference notes...

## Times and Places

- The Conference will be held at the University of the Western Cape, Modderdam Road, Bellville, Western Cape.
- The Conference begins on Thursday 5 July 1990 at 7.30pm with an open Public Rally.
- The Conference ends on Sunday 8 July 1990 at 3.00pm
- Registration begins at 10.00am on Thursday 7 July in the Education Faculty at UWC. Participants are urged to register early as only 500 people can be accomodated. To make sure you get a place send your form and money by post.
- ALL events will start at the advertised time! Transformation in South Africa cannot wait for late-comers!

## Fees

- It will cost you R20.00 each to attend the conference. For students and unemployed, the fee is R10.00. This covers the cost for all 3 days. This does not include meals and accomodation.
- Accomodation will be provided for R20 per day at the UWC student hostels. This includes 3 daily meals. Apply early as there is a limited number of beds. Make sure you book in before 5.00pm on Thursday 5 July.
- Lunch and supper will be provided for R5.00 each for those not staying in the hostels. However we will hopefully be able to reduce this.
- We are willing to subsidise the above costs for those who will find it impossible to attend because of the cost. Please write to us to apply for a subsidy.
- T-shirts, posters, badges, books and resources of all kinds will be on sale so bring some spare cash.

## Creche facilities

- Creche facilities will be provided for children up to the age of 6 years for the duration of the conference.
- Creche will be available from Friday 6 July to Sunday 8 July.
- On Friday and Saturday creche begins at 8.30am and ends at 6pm
- On Sunday creche begins at 8.30am and ends at 3pm
- There will be a nominal charge of R5 per day.

## Etc...

- There will be two tours of the UWC campus on Thursday 5 July before the conference starts.
- The first tour begins at 10.00am and the second at 3.00pm, starting at the education Faculty
- Umbrellas, raincoats and jerseys will be needed!

# Conference Registration Form

The Conference begins on the evening of Thurs 5 July and ends on Sunday 8 July 1990. There will be full-day programs and evening activities. The venue will be the University of the Western Cape

## Fees and accomodation:

Conference fees for all four days are:

R20 for employed people

R10 for students and the unemployed

R20 per day for accomodation if required, which includes 3 daily meals.

Meals for those not requiring accomodation will be R5 each.  
(Subsidised accomodation and fees will be considered if motivated)

Make all cheques out to CECS.  
Send all correspondence to:

The Joint Conference Committee  
PO Box 24427  
Lansdowne  
Cape, 7780

Name: .....

Address: .....

.....

Tel: .....(h) .....(w) .....(Fax)

Occupation: ..... Organisation .....

- I will be attending the conference. I include R.... for conference fees
- I will require accomodation. I include R.... for accomodation

My interest/involvement with computers:

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I would like to see the following features/issues addressed at the Conference:

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For enquiries, phone 021- 6968450/1, fax 6968537