

# Educating for a change



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# 6

## Looking Ahead: Implications for our Work in the 1990s

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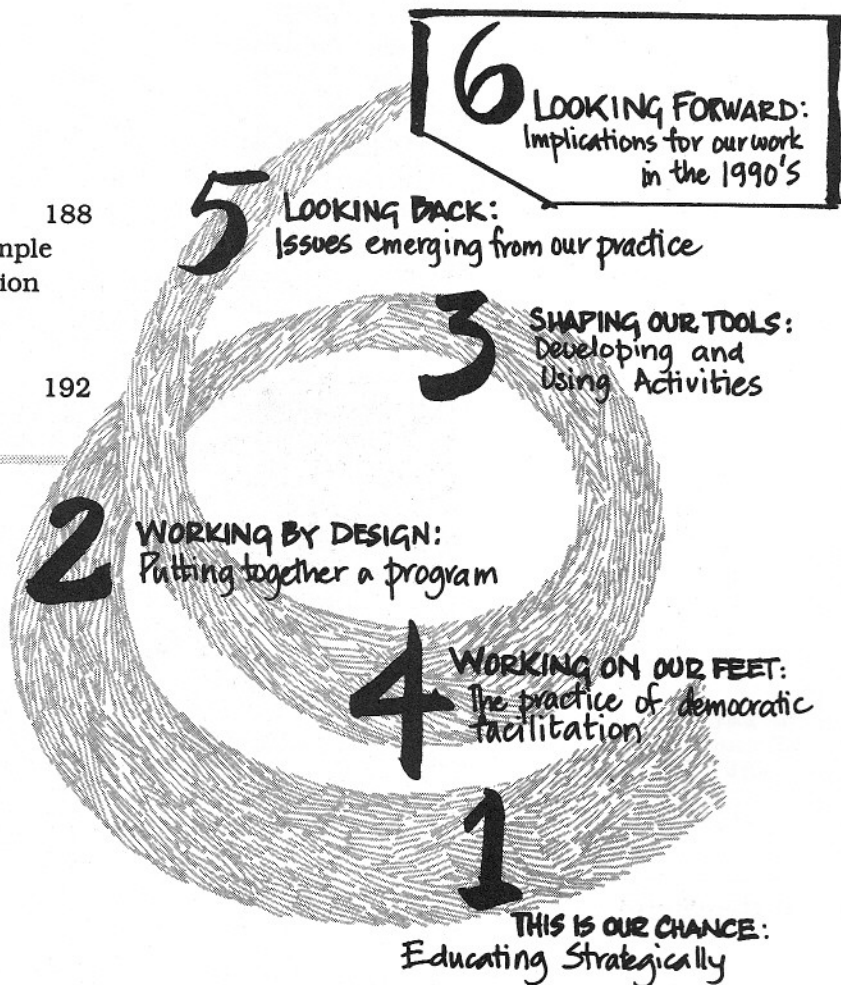
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On the eve of the 21st century the experts are hard at work charting and predicting future shock. At the DMI we're wondering about what's in store for Canadian educators and activists too, and we've decided to try and put some of our thoughts on paper.

We have no "expert" pretensions of having the final say. Rather, we hope our musings might act as a catalyst for your discussion on future directions, as it has for ours. In the spirit of lateral thinking, we invite you to consider not so much what's "right" or "wrong" about these comments, but what's "interesting" in them.

In general we feel that some tough challenges lie ahead – but they are challenges that will provide opportunities for social change workers. There are probably too many of these challenges to fit within the covers of one book, let alone one chapter, so here we've settled on twelve discussion areas or sites of struggle. We've grouped them loosely into four categories, recognizing that each site has multiple layers that often spill over into other categories. We think these are all challenges that are critical to the success of a social change agenda.

But first, a word about agendas in general. We live in a political and socio-economic system that benefits some people more than others. We believe that this situation has not evolved "naturally" but by design. Those with wealth and power strive to maintain a position of privilege, and their decisions help shape the direction our society takes. Theirs is a dominant agenda: it operates from a position of power.

This agenda is constantly being reshaped as the world around it changes. It can also be subject to inter-elite rivalries as economic empires collide. Viewed from below, the dominant agenda is often seen as monolithic. But we would be short-sighted if we didn't look for the cracks in the wall.

In response there's a popular agenda, which can be well or poorly organized. Often defensive in an age of privatization and cutbacks, the popular agenda can and does develop its own vision of a future society that will benefit the majority. The popular agenda is sometimes deeply divided – kept fighting on one front or issue to the exclusion of everything else. Its quota of power starts from nil and increases slowly with the level of organization and determination.

So here, under each heading representing one of the twelve future challenges, we have subheadings of "dominant agenda" and "popular agenda". To the popular agenda we have added implications for educators. In our view there is no doubt we will be identifying with the popular agenda rather than trying to build something separate.

Part of the role we can play as educators is to uncover the often hidden components of the dominant agenda and help strengthen the organizing efforts of the popular sector. Though supportive, we can't be uncritical of any popular agenda that simply exchanges one oppressive structure for another. This is the essence of our concern about democratic practice being built into organizations while they are still in opposition. The way we work today will be an indication of the society we will build tomorrow.

ECONOMIC  
CHALLENGES**Canada's economic  
future at stake****The dominant agenda**

In the 1980s they called it privatization, deficit reduction, structural adjustment, and a host of other technical-sounding names. What they meant was muzzle government regulators, reduce corporate taxes, cut back on "costly" social programs, and, most importantly, give business a freer hand in an expanded market, in other words, Free Trade.

In the 1960s and 1970s, social upheavals led some people to question the role that corporations played in society. So the 1980s became a time for large companies to fix up their image and rebuild public trust in their "stewardship". Reagan and Thatcher became the standard-bearers for the corporate line that in the world's current sorry state the governments and not the private sector are to blame.

Canada's Progressive Conservative Party rode the crest of this logic to two electoral victories in the 1980s. Increasingly, investors and financiers could do no wrong. Questionable practices such as corporate cannibalism, leveraged buyouts, insider trading, and real estate flips – to name just a few – provoked relatively little public reaction (partly because these practices were clouded in mystifying language and often dismissed as purely commercial concerns with no political or social implications).\*

But in helping "shift the blame" towards government and away from the private sector, Canada's mainstream politicians painted themselves into a corner. Any mention of increased public spending or new taxes is now bound to get a lot of adverse public reaction.

Through it all the corporate image-makers have been highly successful at damage control and blame shifting. And we should expect more of the same in the 1990s.



DEBORAH BARRIDT

\* By corporate cannibalism we mean the practice of some companies whose purpose in buying out other companies is to dismember them and sell off their parts for a profit. A leveraged buyout is the corporate practice of borrowing large sums of money (often from banks) against the assets of the company being bid on.



### The popular agenda/implications for educators

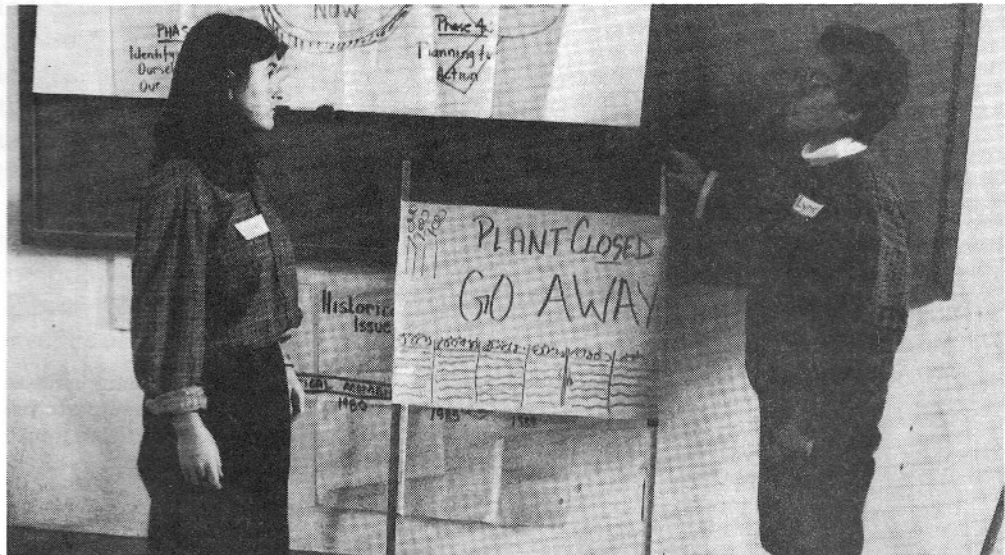
We can see the results of the dominant agenda on our streets today. The number of food banks continues to grow. Longer lineups at more food banks accompany an upsurge in BMW sales. Wealthy Canadians talk about expanding free trade to the Americas while working-class people experience plant and office shutdowns that push jobs south of the border and thousands of employees out on the pavement. What is good for a few has not turned out to be fair treatment for the many.

Anti-poverty organizations, unions, churches, environmental groups, students, and communities are among those fighting the painful measures. Many are affiliated at the national level to the Pro-Canada Network. Coalition strategies like PCN have been tried before with mixed results. One problem in the past was that vanguard politics often brought along the hidden agendas of an elite leadership and/or an attempt to submerge difference in the rank and file.

In the 1990s educators for social change can support a new style of coalition, one that allows a broad, representative voice to emerge to challenge current economic policies. Critical to moving our collective economic agenda onto the front burner will be the new solidarity emerging between community groups and unions. It's a meeting of quality of life issues and the core of economic resistance. As educators for social change we need to be active in these coalitions. Our specific skills can help build trust based on what we have in common and respect for our differences.

Coalition-building is not easy, because groups may share some common interests and be in opposing camps on others. And there is the very real question of power struggles within sectors and organizations and with people who try to control agendas.

An area that needs more attention is "organizational culture". At the DMI we feel work in this area is critical to future joint efforts to help one group understand not only how another works but also what the possibilities and limitations are. Social change educators can also help coalition members shape processes that can lead to the development of an alternative economic project.



**Lifting the last  
frontiers: capital  
and resistance go  
global**

**The dominant agenda**

Over the past twenty-five years many transnational corporations became private empires with sales greater than the Gross National Products of some Third World nations. Although these companies have spread their investments to most corners of the globe, they are still facing many irritants in their world-wide capital accumulation plans. Some Third World countries, for example, continue to insist that a share of the profits of foreign corporations made on their soil be reinvested locally.

In the 1990s, conditions are changing, giving investors new confidence. The Soviet empire is disintegrating, and the big three economic powers – Japan, Europe, and the United States – now predominate. Eastern Europe is open for business and Third World countries are no longer able to play the United States off against the Soviet Union. Three megatrading blocs seem to be emerging, each one built around a major economic power with all other participants becoming the junior partners. Debt is the lever used to persuade reluctant nations to participate in this new international economic order.

Policing these arrangements continues to be the job of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The advice these institutions give to poorer nations (backed up by a threat of no more loans or investment dollars) sounds familiar to most Canadians by now: "Cut government spending; cut social programs (where they exist); bring down trade barriers; and give private investors a free hand." This advice creates a red carpet for transnational corporations preparing to play countries off against each other while seeking unrestricted access to their cheap labour and raw materials.



DEBORAH BARNDT

### **The popular agenda / implications for educators**

Spiralling Third World debt became a major issue for the popular agenda in the 1980s. Today citizens of Third World nations know through bitter experience that the IMF's structural adjustments mean greater sacrifice for an already impoverished majority. They are taking to the streets to fight price rises, cut-backs, and layoffs as their governments cave in to restructuring pressures.

They're humming the same tune in Ottawa these days, which makes a "foreign" problem sound familiar, providing us with a logical starting point for work around international economic issues. Some non-governmental organizations – for example, OXFAM, CUSO and the Toronto Committee for the Liberation of Southern Africa (TCLSAC) – are developing popular education sessions that link the structural adjustment programs we see in Third World countries with the Conservative agenda in Canada, making these vague international concepts more real and concrete in the examples of our daily lives.

In our hemisphere the Free Trade agenda is a testing ground for international solidarity. Canadian jobs are being lost as corporations shift production to non-union plants in the United States or to the even cheaper labour area on the Mexico-U.S. border known as the maquiladoras. A real danger exists that the victims in each country will blame each other rather than the real culprits.

With this in mind, a project called Common Frontiers has been formed to tackle this cross-boundary corporate initiative. A brainchild of the Latin American Working Group in Toronto, Common Frontiers has grown to involve many affiliates of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC). The Pro-Canada Network has endorsed it and the Ecumenical Coalition for Economic Justice (ECEJ) has done some excellent research for it.

Popular educators need to support initiatives such as Common Frontiers that bring Canadians into direct contact with counterparts in other countries. We can play a part in helping build a strong sense of equal partnership that crosses language and cultural differences. If we can help foster an openness to learn from other experiences and value opinions coming from outside Canada's borders, we are on our way to making common cause in tackling capital's global agenda.

But the mere existence of strong international opposition to the global corporate agenda is not enough. Through exchanges, workshops, and conferences, we need to support the building of workable alternatives to present economic trends in Canada. In the process we need to draw on the wealth of experience that our southern partners have. They too are likely to be interested in any insights we have to offer on a common goal of restructuring the world economic order from the bottom up. Who said it was the "trickle-up" effect?

### The "human resources" talk back

#### The dominant agenda

There is much discussion in corporate and government circles of "human resources". People are seen as factors of production, to be moved geographically and slotted functionally according to the needs of the planners. In this discourse, "critical shortages" are announced, and "building a competitive workforce" becomes a top priority.

On the receiving end of this agenda are the increasing numbers of Canadians caught at the "bad jobs" end of an increasingly polarized labour market. People are on the move, from Schefferville to Montreal, from Kimberley to Vancouver. Their paths are shaped by economic decisions over which they have no control, and the impacts on family and community life are their own problem.

Completely absent from most human resources thinking are the people who are unemployed, underemployed, or in a low-wage service sector job. For them, not being considered part of the workforce shuts the door on opportunity.

The human resources perspective is damaging enough domestically, but its blind spots are highlighted in the treatment of immigrants. The majority of Canada's immigrants now come from the Third World and are expected to take jobs at low wage rates. However, immigrants who enter with money get preference. Meanwhile the policy debate on immigration focuses on expanding the consumer market and increasing the population to counteract emigration and the low domestic birthrate. Competition among workers, regionally and internationally, is the name of the game.



DMI ARCHIVES



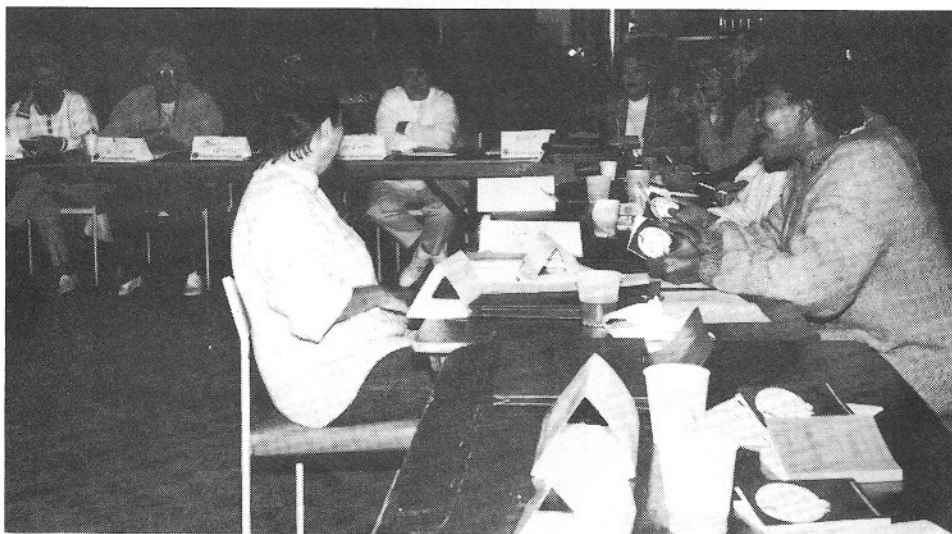
### The popular agenda/implications for educators

Working people are more than factors of production. They require security, dignity, and creativity in their jobs, and this is a power issue. Individual workers cannot exercise power, but the collective decision to give or withhold intelligent co-operation has major economic implications. This decision is exercised through trade unions.

During the last generation, unions in the United States have lost ground: they've gone from representing 30 per cent of the workforce to less than 20 per cent. In the same period unions in Canada have gained strength, moving from representing 30 per cent to nearly 40 per cent. Working with this increasingly confident and outward-looking social institution is quite different for an activist educator in Canada than it is for our colleagues in the United States. Nonetheless, as the Conservative/corporate agenda in Canada gets implanted through privatization, deregulation, and free trade, the very existence of unions is being threatened.

Unions are not immune from the prejudices, sexism, and racism that affect all other Canadian institutions. Individual members tend to see immigrants as taking away jobs or as being a drain on our economy and welfare system. This is blaming the victim. Similarly, many unionists fear that current members will be undercut by immigrants, who come motivated to struggle hard to make a better life for themselves and their children. Educators within the trade union movement, in co-operation with some outsiders, are developing courses and materials on employment equity to address such fears and challenge the racism that allows the economic establishment to divide and conquer.

A major challenge for educators is to develop our own capacity to bridge cultural divisions and to commit ourselves to a practice of mutual respect and inclusion. This commitment may also mean joining in struggles led by cultural groups demanding equal rights, employment equity, changes to immigration policy, and full participation in economic decision-making.



MARGARET MCCOLL

POLITICAL  
CHALLENGES**First Nations on the  
move****The dominant agenda**

For the First Nations of the Americas, through the last five hundred years of conquest and settlement the dominant imposed agenda has been the White agenda. Whether facing the results of Europeans shipping "new world" gold back to Queen Isabella or fencing in a homestead on land with no apparent owner, the aboriginal peoples have been robbed and bloodied by superior firepower. The perception of Indians as "savages" has endured, reproduced over and over in cowboy movies rerunning on TV or available at the video store.

The conquest of the First Nations did not come easy and over the years there have been major rebellions against White rule. Eventual pacification often included the signing of a peace treaty in which the Whites graciously ceded some marginal lands to Native habitation. Today a paternalistic network of government payments and services has been structured around Native reserves. Many government officials and industry executives still view the aboriginal peoples and their way of life as an obstacle to progress. Even some immigrants who suffer daily discrimination themselves have come to see Indians from the dominant perspective.

Lands once thought useless and ceded to the First Nations now sit on oil reserves or precious minerals, and the pressure is on to move Native people off those lands. Successive Canadian governments have been content to just keep talking about past treaty promises rather than honouring them. But the events of summer 1990 at Kanasatake/Oka in Quebec proved that state force will be used if Native people do not behave "with moderation" in pursuing future demands.



DEBORAH BARNDT

### The popular agenda/implications for educators

There is a new element of militancy backing up the demands of Canada's First Nations for fair treatment in the 1990s. The confrontation at Kanesatake/Oka struck a chord with the people of the First Nations across Canada, as witnessed by the many solidarity road blocks that went up around the country. The time for talking for its own sake is over and the moment for meaningful negotiation has arrived. The scuttling of Meech Lake in Manitoba by Elijah Harper, a Native member of the provincial legislature, was a firm reminder that Canada's indigenous people need to be treated as nations – no more second-class citizenship. Sovereignty and self-government have been put firmly on the public agenda and will have to be dealt with, or further militancy can be expected.

Against all odds, First Nations have been able to maintain their cultural traditions. Native artists have developed a strong arts-community link in many large urban centres across the country. Cultural communication has been a vehicle for the expression of aboriginal concerns and has provided a foot in the door of mainstream media. Greater media exposure to First Nations' values and outlook has begun to have a profound effect on how other Canadians view the world around them. Education continues to be a site of struggle for Native communities, which are rejecting the residential school system that separates off their young people. Community members are grappling with the questions of accountability and control over education on their own lands.

Aboriginal educators, their communities, and diverse cultures may also challenge some of the basic assumptions non-Natives have about how education happens. The consensus model of decision-making or the "medicine wheel" concept of learning engenders non-linear and perhaps ultimately more deeply democratic practices. Aboriginal educators also bring new perspectives on the role of culture and spirituality in our work.

Non-Native popular educators are being challenged to take seriously the voice of First Nations participants in workshops. But we should be thinking not only about the odd chance for them to speak, but also about having Native people as part of our planning, design, and facilitation teams. At conferences we help to plan, we need to ensure that the organizers whose organizations are usually on record as opposing Canada's treatment of First Nations include the Native agenda in their programs.

To develop longer-term alliances with First Nations people, the question of trust will be central. Such trust will have to be earned through clear support for Native sovereignty and from the development of equal partnerships where mutual learning can occur.



DEBORAH BARNDT



**Sovereignty and  
association****The dominant agenda**

The 1990s have ushered in a global trend to greater cultural self-determination. The space for the accommodation of cultural difference is still to be gauged, but globally the issue could lead to the breakup of many larger countries.

In Canada, demands from Quebec as well as from the First Nations challenge the traditional concept of one nation running sea to sea. It used to be that capital both in Quebec and the rest of Canada would fight talk of separation. Now capital in Quebec is not so concerned about separating as long as there is no fundamental systemic shakeup along the way. With the advent of Free Trade, the trade and investment axis is shifting significantly to north-south and away from east-west. The rest of corporate Canada can accommodate separation more easily now than in 1980.

Quebec entrepreneurs increasingly want to get out from under the anglo shadow, and here their interests combine with other sectors of Quebec society. For many of those other sectors, the cultural questions loom largest when in fact their deeper economic interests may be quite at odds.



RYAN REMIÖRZ - CANAPRESS



**The popular agenda/implications for educators**

A majority of Québécois are fed up with their treatment by the rest of Canada and are ready for a change. The trade unions, community, and other grassroots organizations see ending anglo domination as an opportunity to build something new and different. They bring a radical edge to change in Quebec's future status in relation to Canada.

Those of us working for social change in English-speaking Canada need to support a rethinking of the concept of nationhood. In the process we may very well run up against reactionary elements. We should try not to silence them but begin to deal with their comments as we move towards a new Canadian construct. The ability of organizers, activists, and educators to help shape a social change agenda is closely related to the degree of openness established in dealing with difference. Increasingly, part of our work will be confronting the fears that we all have about "the other", looking at where those fears come from as well as exploring the positive contributions that people of different cultures and backgrounds are making in our society. In the process we will also need to confront some very real conflicts of interests based on those differences.

Many of us living in English Canada have been cut off from the important developments of popular education and popular resistance in Quebec, sometimes because we are simply oblivious to events there. We need to work hard to break down those barriers, enter into an exchange with our Quebec counterparts, and learn from their rich experience.

Educators in the rest of Canada, whether or not they agree with Quebec sovereignty, must respect Quebec's right to self-determination. Regardless of the outcome, it will be important to build a strong association between popular sector work happening in both contexts.

Separateness does not diminish the importance of continuing to struggle around the issues of language and culture that have often divided us and limited communication. Rather, it increases the importance of a horizontal approach between equals, respectful of difference. This approach may succeed where vertically imposed solutions like Meech Lake or ideological assumptions that don't take cultural differences into account have failed. Success is important if we are to first maintain and then strengthen popular sector unity, all the while collectively navigating through the difficult waters.

SOCIAL  
CHALLENGES**Deeds not words:  
feminizing our  
practice****The dominant agenda**

Governments and corporations have recognized the problem of women's job ghettos and unfair pay practices, but the problems remain. Although a few booted and suited women have made it into the boys club, male privilege in the workplace and society in general is still the norm. Women who have spoken out about sexuality, reproduction, and family life have faced a patriarchal backlash, which among other things challenges their right to control their own bodies.

As a society we have only just begun to recognize the level of violence against women in the home and to see that it is part of a deeply ingrained pattern of male behaviour where being "in charge" is what is "to be expected". There is still tremendous pressure, in the media and in some Canadian religious institutions for example, to deny that incidents of violence such as the Montreal massacre of fourteen women in December 1989 are anything more than random acts.

**The popular agenda/implications for educators**

Most politicians and company executives agree with the concept of having more women in decision-making positions, but the old-boy network is very much alive and selects its own members.

Women in the 1990s will continue to fight for better legislation on employment and pay equity in the workplace. A growing number of popular organizations have women's caucuses as an integral part of their decision-making structures. There is also a trend among established women's organizations to incorporate questions of race and class in their equity demands, opening the door to closer working ties not only with the labour movement but also with differently abled and working-class women and women of colour.

Social change education, even when its focus is not on gender, needs to learn from feminist theory, especially where it links the personal and the political. At the DMI we feel that middle-class White feminists in the women's movement need to work closely and equally with women of colour and working-class women. We also believe that we must all model different ways of working that challenge the type of exclusive networks based on privilege that we abhor in the old-boys network.

Popular organizations and unions still dominated by men will be challenged by women impatient with organizations that fight for social change but still mirror gender inequities themselves. In designing and facilitating education sessions, popular educators need to ensure a voice for the broad range of women of different abilities, background, age, colour, and sexual preference. These voices need to be built into our teams, our print and audio-visuals, our issues, and our work processes.



## **Confronting White privilege**

### **The dominant agenda**

Canada has a long and unsavoury history of racism. The White Europeans who settled Canada pushed the original inhabitants aside to stake their claim. The Whites imported some Blacks as slaves and by law actively discouraged other Blacks from moving here. Those Blacks who did manage to immigrate over the past 150 years, particularly to Nova Scotia and Ontario, were accorded second-class citizenship and denied basic rights.

Earlier this century prospective Chinese immigrants had to pay a special head tax before being allowed into Canada. The story is much the same for people from places or with backgrounds not considered desirable by Canadian officials.

An expanding industry and agriculture required more immigrants to do manual work. Initial recruitment efforts were aimed at mainly attracting poor Whites from Europe, but gradually this pattern changed.

Today Canada chooses 75 per cent of its immigrants from Third World countries. Now about one in three residents in Metro Toronto was born in another country and most communities of colour are growing faster than White communities. While racism is increasingly recognized as a Canadian problem, the system and ideas that perpetuate racism are still intact – in the workplace, in our institutions, and in our communities.

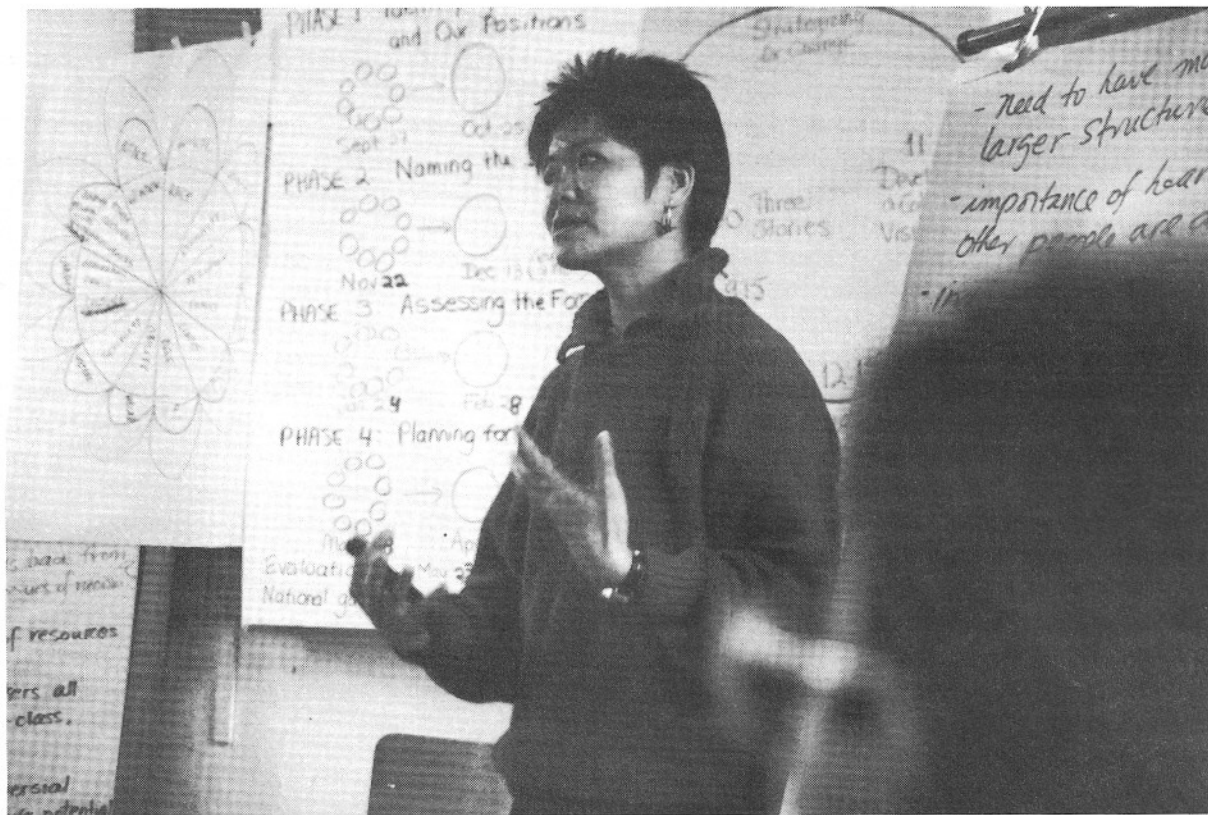
The current official term for promoting harmony is "multiculturalism". This concept, promulgated by the federal government since 1971, avoids the more sinister aspects of the "melting pot" theory once prevalent in the United States but obscures the historical and newer roots of Canadian racism. Recent police shootings of Blacks in Toronto and Montreal, unrest in Nova Scotia, and the events at Kanesatake / Oka are just a few of the indicators of a deep and pervasive racism avoided by the multiculturalists.

The dominant agenda of multiculturalism, when pursued, focuses on remedying individual cases of unacceptable behaviour while avoiding the systemic practices that exert the real impact. When impatience and anger at persistent injustice mobilize communities, as in Toronto or at Oka, the dominant forces attempt to separate the moderates from the militants and to name their preferred community leaders, dividing communities and trying to dilute their strength to fight back.

### **The popular agenda / implications for educators**

Black activists are challenging racist structures and attitudes embedded in White-dominated police forces. School trustees of colour along with progressive White counterparts are pushing for curriculum that challenges racist stereotypes and practices. Unfair hiring practices persist.

But there is strong pressure on legislators to bring in laws like the Employment Equity Act with goals and timetables for visible minorities, as well as for women, Native people, and the differently abled. Artists and cultural workers of colour are demanding that both dominant and oppositional cultural organizations examine their policies for hiring, decision-making, programming, and allocation of resources.



DEBORAH BARNDT

Anti-racist education is an area that popular educators – White, people of colour, and Native people – need to be directing more energy to in the 1990s. However, to do so we have to be clear about our different stakes in this work. Those of us who are White traditionally have not had to deal critically with our cultural identity – it is “the norm”. For Black educators, cultural identity is an ever present factor and always an issue. Increasingly, all of us as educators need to deal as honestly and openly as possible with who we are, so we can help others in our workshops do the same.

Anti-racist education also requires rethinking about who plans and facilitates the sessions. Our preference is that wherever possible in a team of two, at least one will be a person of colour. To practise what we preach, we need to ensure that popular organizations involve people of colour as full partners, being mindful of the problem of taking people away from their bases where they are often most needed. It is also crucial that the materials we produce carry the voices of people of colour and Native people in the text as well as in the visuals – and without falling into tokenism.

In addition, an anti-racist approach to social change education involves exposing the limits of multiculturalism, challenging White activists to see the racism so apparent to its targets, joining with activists of colour in their struggles for equity, and resisting all efforts to keep “the militants” shut off on the margins.

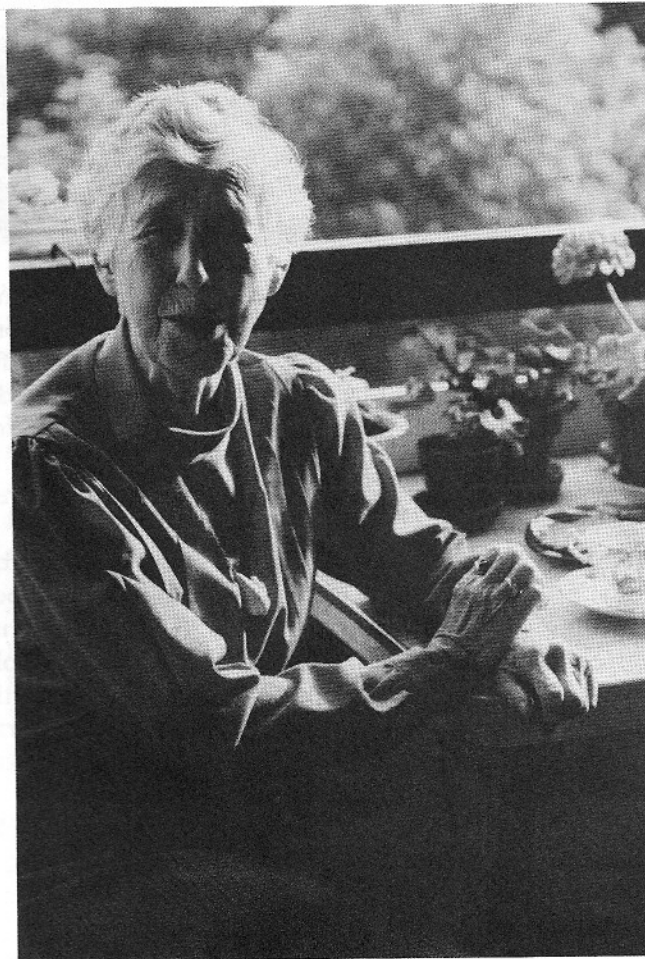


**Taking back the  
Grey Agenda****The dominant agenda**

Older people today fare little better than the many disposable items our industries produce. Advertising in a consumer society such as Canada's places a premium on youth culture, constantly reminding us all – no matter what our age – that young is beautiful. Management, influenced just as much by its own advertising as you or I, places a premium on adaptability and mobility in an era of rapid technological change. The doors just seem to close the older you get.

Most people, once they are counted out of the labour pool, fall back into paternalistic state hands that seek to "serve them", "amuse them", or "use them" to continue the pattern – rather than incorporate their experience or knowledge into self-managed endeavours. In recent years the government has treated the Canada Pension Plan not so much as a right for every citizen in recognition for contributions to the workforce but as a luxury, a prime territory for cutbacks.

Inequities that hit women, racial minorities, and other non-dominant groups before retirement age are compounded afterwards. The result for many is a time of grinding poverty and continued second-class status.



DEBORAH BARNDT

**The popular agenda/implications for educators**

Not all older people accept being put on the shelf. Some are speaking out at public forums, through the media, or in books to challenge dominant perspectives on ageing. Others, like British Columbia's Raging Grannies, provide an alternative perspective on a variety of issues, using cultural forms such as drama and song.

In the process they challenge societal stereotypes about older minds and abilities. In the mid-1980s older people were the first group to organize and successfully oppose the Conservative government's attempt to cut back pensions as part of its structural adjustment program.

In the 1990s it is evident that many older people are becoming aware of the needs in their own communities and of their responsibility to use their knowledge to help find solutions. Such needs include lack of housing, overuse of prescription drugs, and ethical decisions regarding use of modern technology – as well as the need to work for peace and a liveable environment.

As social change educators we have to be aware that in the everyday life of many communities, older people are at work using their experience and concern, helping one another in building a more humane world.

In workshops with both older and younger participants, it will be increasingly important to discuss ageism and how it can divide us in the same way that racism and sexism do. Younger educators need to work at developing relationships with older people, since so much in our society segregates us by age. Seniors represent a tremendous pool of volunteer energy and knowledge and can bring leadership and labour to many of the struggles we work on.

All of us have a stake in combating ageism. Where possible we should draw from examples of the very different treatment given older people in aboriginal cultures and in other societies beyond our borders. This understanding can help us guard against unconsciously reproducing dominant paternalistic attitudes in our work.

Seniors and their organizations may need support from social change educators. At the DMI we are currently working with activist Doris Marshall to plan and implement leadership training sessions for older people so that they can become the subjects of – rather than the objects of – later life programming.

**A matter of  
planetary survival****The dominant agenda**

Environmental destruction has emerged as one of the hot issues of the 1990s – after long decades when politicians and industry largely dismissed earlier warnings as the “price of progress”.

For the last two centuries, capitalism operated on the understanding that the world was an infinite storehouse of resources that were “ours” to exploit. Now, faced with clear evidence that there are limits to what the earth can bear, some executives are having to re-evaluate the basic premise of “expand or die”.

Resource extractive industries still view more stringent government guidelines as irritants that will hurt profits. Manufacturers, usually located in more populated areas, often come under close community scrutiny, particularly for obvious breaches of air pollution standards or dumping practices. But both the resource and manufacturing sectors still seem to be dragging their heels on cleanups or installation of new, clean technology.

There is some movement at the retail business level as supermarkets and other outlets see possible profits and good public relations in marketing environmentally friendly “green” products. But other companies are just becoming more sophisticated at appearing to be ecologically sound, with their glossy ads of rain forests intended to mark their contribution to the exploitation of labour and land at home and abroad.

Although public opinion in Canada supports the idea of government getting tough on corporations that misrepresent their products or pollute, the companies warn that they can and will close down and move to areas where legislation to protect the environment is non-existent.

**The popular agenda/implications for educators**

The people and organizations who have long worked to save the environment and have been ridiculed for it now see their work paying off. Public awareness has been helped in no small way by real events: nuclear disasters, oil spills, barges full of garbage that nobody wants, beaches off limits to bathers, and the fear of global warming, to name a few. Although we are becoming more aware of the fragility of the natural world around us, we nevertheless remain to a greater or lesser degree participants in a consumer lifestyle often tied into ecological destruction.

Environmental activists have shown an exemplary balance of policy lobbying with grassroots mobilization. In Canada and other northern countries, environmental groups are putting forward concrete plans to tackle the crisis. In the midst of the 1990 Ontario elections, for example, Greenpeace, Pollution Probe, Citizens for a Safe Environment, and the Nuclear Awareness Project joined to present politicians with a practical blueprint for future regulatory changes.

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### **A blueprint for action on the environment**

- a phase-out of the chlorine-based bleaches used by the pulp and paper industries by 1993
  - elimination of ozone-damaging chlorofluorocarbons by 1995
  - reduction of all discharges of toxic chemicals into air and water to zero by the year 2000
  - a halt to the construction of nuclear power plants and eventual phase-out of existing plants
  - legislation to eliminate excess packaging and require that all bottles be refillable
  - an environmental bill of rights
- 

We feel that educators not directly involved in the environmental movement need to pick up the sense of urgency held by our colleagues working from within. We need to keep in touch with the latest thinking so that we are not, for instance, supporting recycling when we should be talking about reducing the amount produced.

This single-issue focus has successfully reached a broad public but it runs the risk of being co-opted by the dominant agenda. The movement is still primarily middle class, appealing to people's individual concerns, but it has the potential for being linked to deeper economic structural issues and involving broader participation. As educators for social change we all should be interested in linking environmental concerns in our work with a broader race, class, and gender analysis. This will help support those in the environmental movement working to build a critical awareness among front-line environmental activists as they assess, among other issues, the impact of corporate "green campaigns".

Educators and activists together need to urgently deal with the environment versus jobs position that some working-class people take and which companies are eager to promote. Confronting surface contradictions can help us uncover the forces that stand behind them and find common ground for fighting the root causes of these conflicts.

We also need to look at our personal practices as educators, including the amount of paper we use and the kind of marker pens we buy. Can we design a more sane pace into our workshops to get off the treadmill and feel nourished by our interactions? And can we begin to learn from the worldview of First Nations people and work more in harmony with the natural world around us?



### **Humanizing the workplace**

#### **The dominant agenda**

By all accounts technological change in the 1990s will make previous decades appear stationary.

Communications, computers, and the related high-tech field will concentrate on new hardware – the machines that do things quicker and cheaper. Low-Tech forms of industrial production such as manual assembly work won't disappear but will more and more likely be farmed out to low-wage zones. Dominant interests are likely to continue to feed popular lore that technology is the price of progress and uncontrollable.

Talk about "tech change" can itself be a weapon that management uses to discipline a workforce asking for a greater share of the pie. Linked to tech change is "cultural engineering", which uses training and team-concept initiatives to reorganize work – all part of management initiatives to win hearts and minds.

#### **The popular agenda / implications for educators**

Traditionally, working-class response to tech change has been defensive. A few unions, however, have decided to try and tap into the tremendous potential that might result from the creative application of science for the greatest good. For example, the dirtiest jobs that are the greatest risk to workers' health can usefully be done by robots. And the new machinery in the world isn't worth a hill of beans without the corresponding human know-how to run it.

Pro-active union negotiation has resulted in management beginning to recognize the importance of consulting workers about when to shut down a car-assembly line as well as about how to eliminate backbreaking work. Workers in some defence industries in the United States and England have pushed for job security but opposed armaments production. To switch plant production to non-military activities requires labour to go on the offensive and provide a corporate plan to rival that of management: no longer a passive audience in the drama of technological change, labour instead needs to become the primary script-writer.

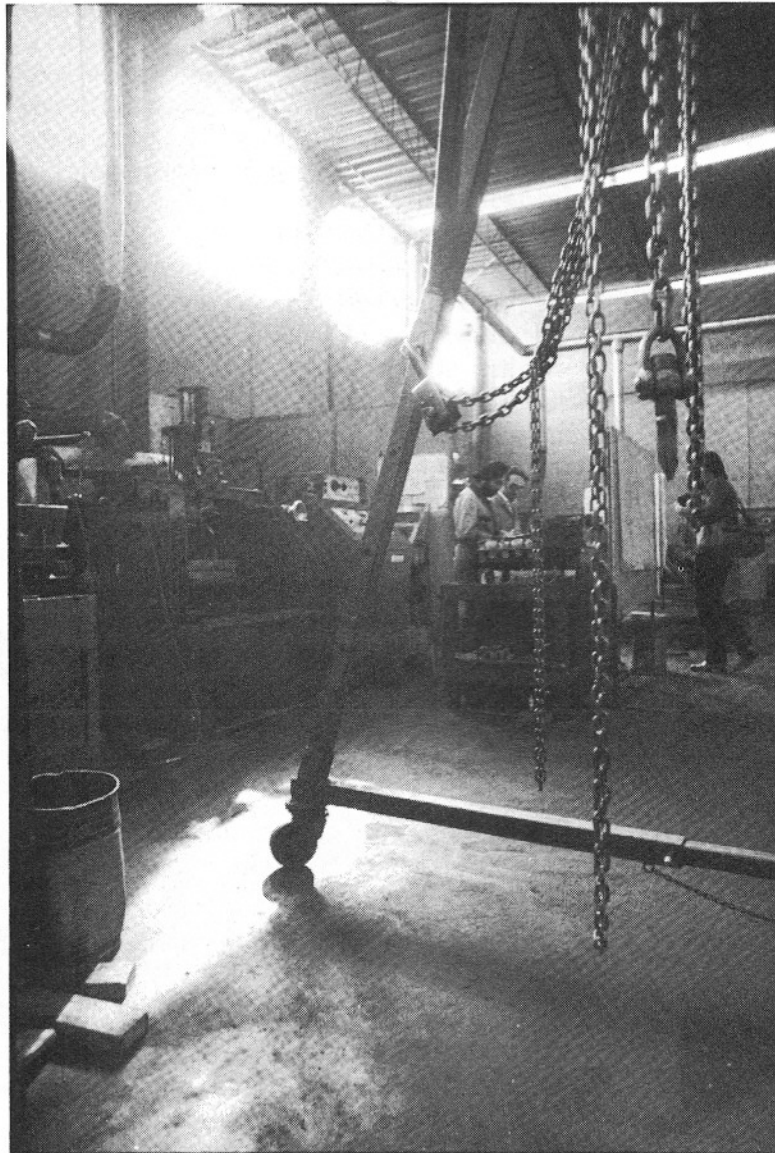
As educators we have to come to grips with tech change in our own backyard. The FAX machine provides tremendous new opportunities for team planning and design when not all team members live in a common geographic area. In workshops, video technology is often felt to be intrusive but we can harness it to enhance learning opportunities or to provide a graphic record of a session that participants can refer back to.

As we use these tools we have to challenge the concentration of ownership and the control over technological innovation that tends to favour dominant interests. Workers will need support from other sectors, including radical engineers, sociologists, and popular educators. Together these groups can work not only to unmask the dominant agenda and counter the cultural engineering offensive but also to help shape tech change for our benefit.

The humanization of work is about **more** than technological change. To name just a few, it is also about

- ❖ building respect for worker knowledge
- ❖ linking skills training to working people's experience and interests
- ❖ looking at questions of power and hierarchy (especially in countering cultural engineering)
- ❖ re-valuing the importance of job security amidst rapid changes
- ❖ asking questions about the size of the workplace in the future.

These are all critical issues as we struggle for a more humane workplace.



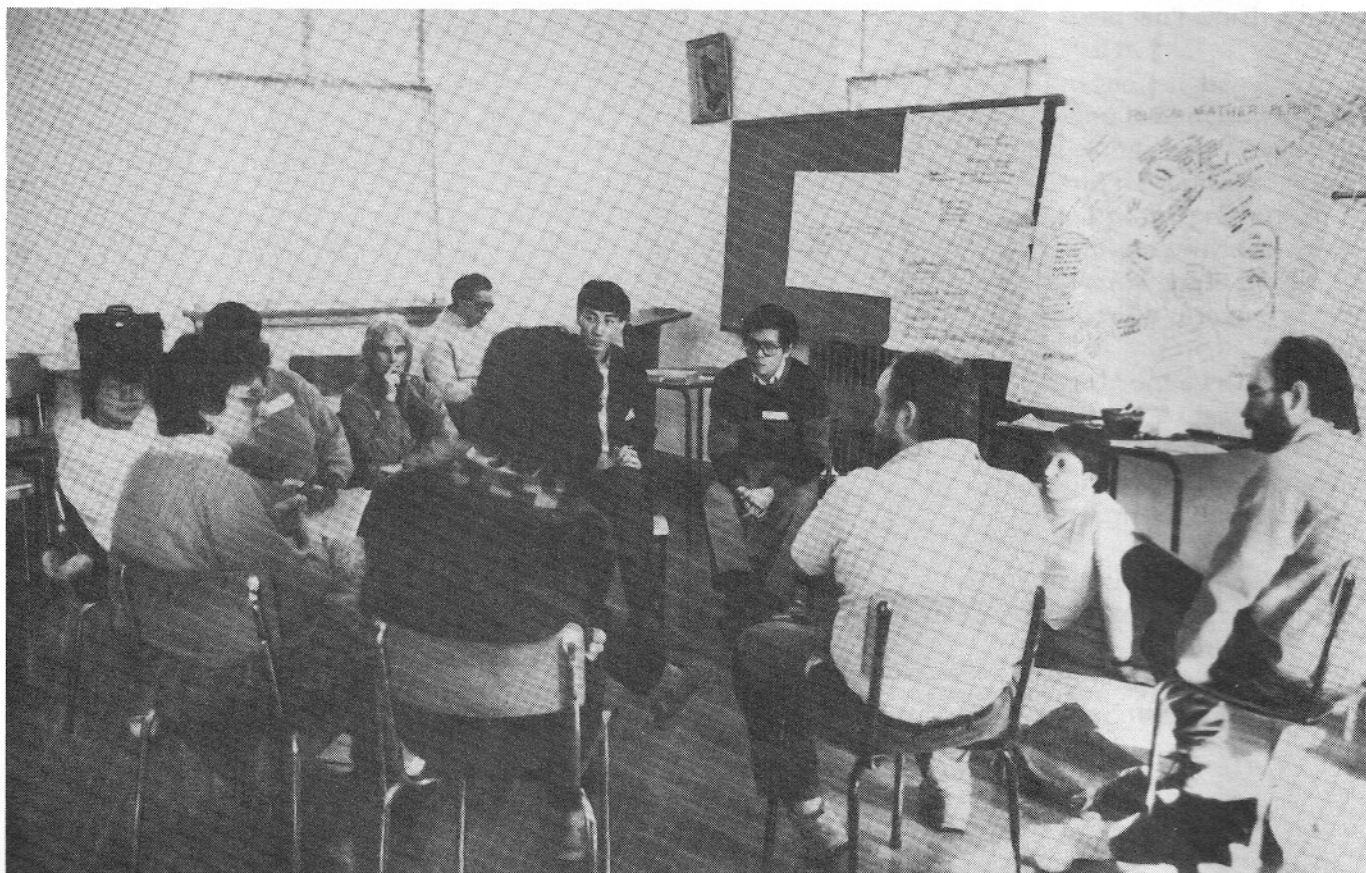
DEBORAH BARNDT

CULTURAL AND  
IDEOLOGICAL  
CHALLENGES**Democracy: the  
threat of a good  
example****The dominant agenda**

We looked *democracy* up in the dictionary to find that it comes from the Greek words "demos", or "people", and "kratos", which means "strength". The dictionary says that the people are the rulers in a democracy. Today this proposition is not doing so well in Canada, where central areas of decision-making have been largely excluded from popular participation and public control.

Capitalism's command structure, based on the use of private power often cloaked in secrecy, stands in stark contrast to the more open and horizontal relations of inclusiveness most people equate with democracy. Private power-centres reserve the privilege of decision-making for themselves when it comes to investment, nature, and the conditions of productive work, for instance.

What we are left with is a formal sense of democracy that is often equated in the public's mind with elections. In control of the economy and communications, a small elite of owners and managers also uses the political system to advance its ends. To keep investment decisions safe from social control, business leaders invest in political parties and influence their platforms.



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### The popular agenda/implications for educators

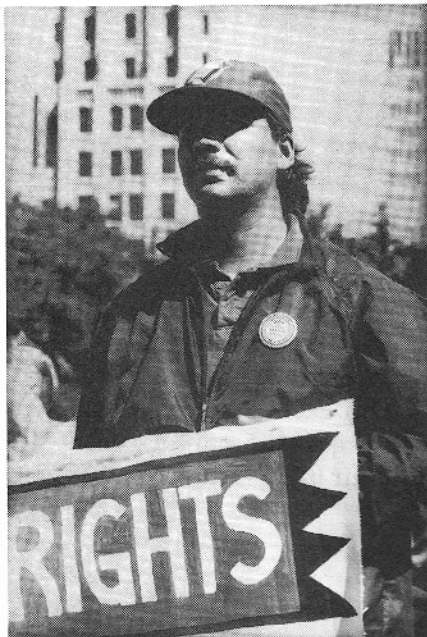
Participatory democracy is the terrain that the popular movement will continue to use for its fight. In Canada the unions, community groups, co-ops, and issue-oriented organizations will continue to play a key role in bringing about needed changes in the 1990s. Broad coalitions such as the Pro-Canada Network are challenging the notion that investment decisions with tremendous social implications are a private sector preserve.

As for elections, the New Democratic Party and some smaller political parties know the importance of keeping corporate funds at arms length if they want to continue representing popular sector interests and to be deserving of their votes. The rank and file of these parties has also discussed reforming the current electoral system with an eye to introducing changes to make it more representational.

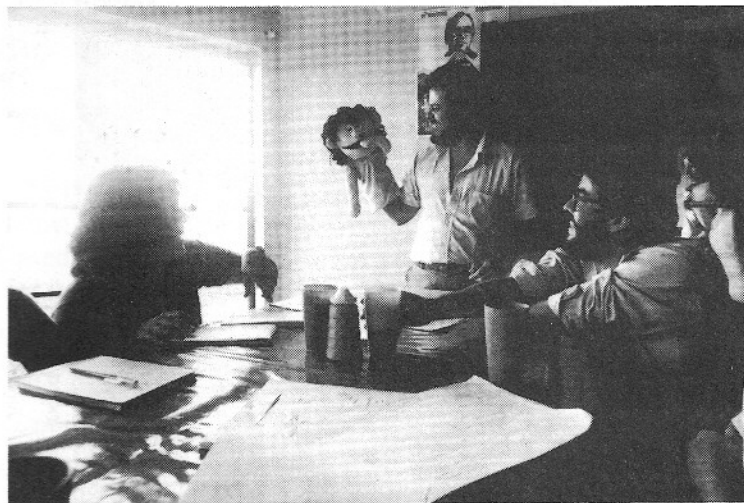
As social change educators we need to play our part in returning some of the original lustre to the word "democracy". This change needs to start at the base, in our own organizations, and it needs to be reflected in our daily work as "democratic practice". For this to be more than a slogan, we all need to tackle our own hierarchical organizational structures and help make them more collegial. We also need to shape programs that encourage broad participation and empower people to take the next step in challenging oppressive societal structures.

As educators we also have a role to play in challenging the narrowing of democracy to mean "elections" and to push for a truly participatory model. The broader public, ourselves included, needs to have a chance to discuss, to disagree, and to agree on how decisions are made. Part of this process is being able to share experiences and perspectives across cultures and continents, which will help us see what has worked, what hasn't, and why.

Democratic processes that work from the base up are a threat to those who currently sit comfortably at the top. One thing these people fear more than anything else is something that works and that they can't control: the threat of a good example.



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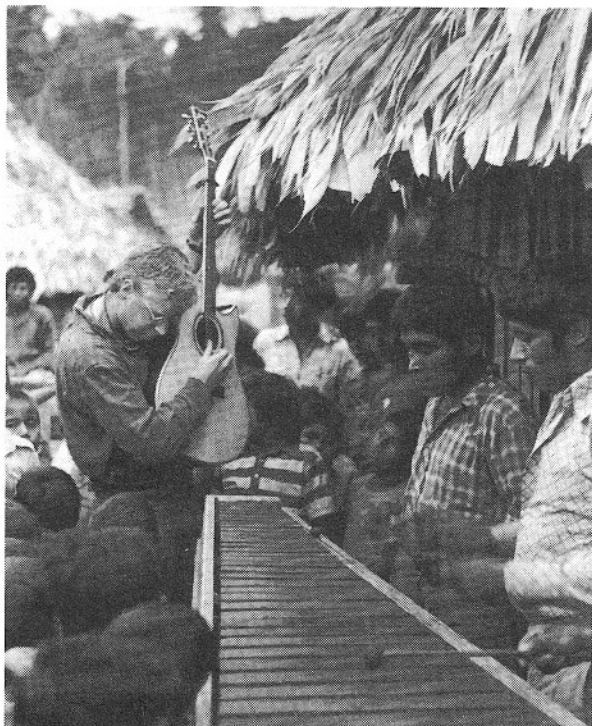
**Arts and media: The dominant agenda  
freeing the  
imagination**

The Canadian elites who helped shape the dominant economic, political, and social agenda in the 1980s have also targeted the cultural agenda for attention. Communication and the arts hold the potential to set our minds free – to not only help us interpret the routines and habits of daily life but also push us to imagine a life beyond the normal bounds. Although the technologies involved may not be in and of themselves politically loaded, ownership or sponsorship can set limits to what is to be communicated and to whom.

From the advertisers who support programs or magazines that help sell their products, to the television producers who shape their work with potential sponsors in mind, we do get an invitation to dream – but it's about their "must have" consumer items. It's a recipe that unintentionally shows up the hollowness of their version of everyday life.

Built as they are around a "star" system, movies, television, and the high-status arts – even newspapers – tend to feature human interest stories rather than stressing the potential power of a wider collectivity. When it is not being exclusive, prime-time television (like Hollywood before it) tends to be divisive by separating "us" off from "them": a subtle but pervasive form of discrimination stands behind a media megamessage linking "bad" with "foreign, dark-skinned, violent, poor" – people out to destroy our good way of life. We are being asked constantly to commit ourselves to a predominately White, powerful, wealthy, and male perspective, no matter what our colour, gender, age, or class background.

Above all, the dominant cultural agenda is effective. Our exclusion from the realm of the stars doesn't mean that most of us don't rush to get autographs – we do. Role models from Hollywood fill our dreams and limit our imagination.



DEBORAH BARNDT

### **The popular agenda / implications for educators**

Community culture has not been eclipsed entirely by commercial culture or the high-status arts, but it has been influenced. The word "amateur" used to be held in high esteem as signifying an involvement without monetary gain or motivation. That concept has come into disrepute with all the emphasis now placed on the professional, who is paid to be the best.

Although skill level is important to improving on craft, grassroots productions are often one of the few ways a community has of expressing itself. Luckily, the participation of familiar people in a production continues to be a drawing card for performances in neighbourhood venues. The concept of artists in residence or the workplace is an attempt to bridge the gap between artist and community. The Popular Theatre Alliance and the increasing number of alternative music and theatre festivals are examples of locally based initiatives with national connections. These networks and events help us recall our unwritten history and also experiment with new forms and content that can feed the inquiring mind.

We have been fortunate to have the publicly funded Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). Although commercial considerations and severe cutbacks in regional programming have put a brake on CBC Television's potential, it is still a vehicle capable of communicating some wild and occasionally unsettling ideas. Without the CBC and the National Film Board, the art forms of First Nations and newer and poorer Canadians would seldom if ever reach a national audience. Culture has often been the lifeblood of popular sector mobilization. Nowhere has this connection been closer than in the nationalist struggles in Quebec, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s.

As popular educators we know the creativity that can be unleashed through the use of lively participatory activities in our workshops. Once they've tried it themselves, participants become more aware that you don't have to be a professional actor or singer to role-play or compose a song. The activities give us all confidence to look for creative forms in daily life, to revalue grassroots cultural productions and to critically examine the choices we are constantly being led to make.

While we argue that high-status arts, commercial culture, and community culture are not either intrinsically radical or reactionary, ownership and control of arts and culture can make all the difference. And it should be unmasked.

We need to think about expanding connections with dissident elements in the high arts world. And we need to give greater thought both to communications that are effective and inexpensive and to making better use of the established media opportunities. But the task of giving new life, spirit, and force to our education and organizing efforts requires building a deeper understanding of culture – tapping into our histories, memories, identities, and forms of expression both at a collective and an individual level.

As educators, whatever we can do to expand our collective capacities to imagine other possible futures will be key to building a more just, humane, and democratic society.

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**BREAKING  
DOWN  
BARRIERS,  
BUILDING LINKS**

As Herbet de Souza, a Brazilian educator, once said, "Social change is more like algebra than arithmetic." We, the authors, certainly think that the twelve challenges we have just put to paper are not to be treated as a matter of "one plus one" or as a formula to be adopted in a linear fashion. On the contrary, we think it's possible that any two of them together could turn out to have the power of ten.

But what we hope we've communicated is our belief that the role of the social change educator is to break down the hegemony of dominant interests and to strengthen the legitimacy of popular groups and their capacity to take on those power structures. When we put these dozen challenges back into a larger picture, we focus once again on the interrelated nature of the oppressions we face. As social change educators we need to work at linking our educational work to organizing, to political action, and to building social movements – in the process forging new relationships from the ground up.

When and where any of these twelve sites of struggle will catch fire, we're not sure. But we are sure that there's a change a-comin' – and we hope to see you there.



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