



REPORT BY IRENE POHOREČKA

GLOBALIZATION WORKSHOP



A group of approximately 12 women tackled the very challenging topic of globalization. Members of the workshop included Cecilie Counts from the AFL-CIO, and Ruth Arroyo from ISAT in Peru -- the balance of the workshop included women from across Canada.

We were asked to put into words, what we think of when we think of globalization. The responses ranged from "confusion" and "frustration" to "corporate imperialism."

At the first workshop, the approach taken was to go into groups of two, and discuss how we felt that globalization might affect our workplaces -- job security, two jobs for the price of one, goods and service imports, sale of natural resources, genetically altered foods, people moving to other countries for work. In the same small groups we were asked to discuss definitions of social programs -- healthcare, pensions, E.I., social assistance, public education, etc. The groups reported to the larger group until we had a rather comprehensive list of relationships.

At the second workshop, the approach was to start in small groups discussing changes that have occurred in the last 10 years -- with the gradual move to globalization.

Groups talked about:

Home -- We see tired, stressed women with guilt about being away from children, strained marital relationships. As the options for staying at home gives way to two-income families -- and as companies expect more and more time and new skills from their employees, stresses build up.

Workplace -- Technology has resulted in the disruption of old skills, and the development of new. There is a tendency for larger corporations to take over the smaller ones -- and corporate culture comes with it.

Community -- In the large urban centres, there seem to be more children on the street, as well as more homeless people. This may be a sign of few supports for single parents, children, etc. "Poverty plays into the hands of Walmart." Because people are poor, they tend to buy where the prices are the cheapest. The fact that those goods are made with child labour never reaches the consciousness of the consumer.

Unions -- There has been an upsurge in part-time employment. It takes a couple of part-time jobs to earn a full-time wage. Seniority is becoming less and less of a security, as companies demand new skills from its workers. There is a tension developing between unionized wages in this country, and cheap labour in other parts of the world.

The workshop moved in an ever-increasing circle.

After exploring the ways in which globalization affects our part of the world, we saw an NFB film called *Turbulence*. Here, we graphically explored how globalization affects other parts of the world.

Cecilie Counts, who participated in our workshop, had said in her keynote address to the general Conference.: "The global economy has come home. ... and it's a race to the bottom."

She had spoken about the objective of the global corporate agenda being to move capital without restrictions.

The means to this end include:

- 1. labour market flexibility (being able to use labour markets in other countries without labour regulations in place),*
- 2. free trade agreements (to eliminate tariffs, national protection of industries),*
- 3. unregulated capital (such as dumping U.S. dollars into other countries; this has backfired in the case of Bin Laden's financial dealings),*
- 4. union-free environment (to keep wages down),*
- 5. privatization (less money demanded by governments in tariffs, and taxes, to be used for services, etc.)*

These were all covered in the film, with the exception of union-free environment. There was an excerpt about a young woman in Thailand, who had survived a fire in a Mattel factory which saw over 80 of her coworkers killed -- young girls aged 11 to 16 making toys (Barbie dolls, etc.). The factory door was locked from the outside. She survived by jumping out of a window in what she thought would be a suicide -- but landing on the bodies of fellow workers. The horror of such a scene makes one think twice about buying Mattel toys.

The film went a step further and showed how people were fighting back. There was an excerpt about a group of low-income and homeless people taking over an abandoned house in Paris -- fixing it up, living there communally, and operating a soup kitchen. There was an excerpt about a group of families in Mexico occupying vacant land and using it to produce food for their own needs. Likewise, there was an excerpt about a meeting of anti-globalization activists from around the world meeting in Mexico to talk about strategies to offset the threat presented by globalization -- the threat of erosion of human rights, the de-valuing of human labour, and the widening gap between the rich and the poor.

At the end of the workshop, we were asked to think about what we could do within our community to raise consciousness about these issues.

In solidarity,
Irene Pohorečka

I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the membership of Local 191 for electing me to participate in this very valuable conference. I hope to be able to use what I learned from the conference as a whole to work for the members of Local 191.