

Twenty-Fifth Anniversary

The IIRE 1982-2007 – IV – While the Global Justice Movement Raises

Get the IIRE on the web! — and new technologies: 2000-2004

Thursday 13 September 2007, by [CALDWELL Susan](#) (Date first published: 10 September 2007).

I came to the IIRE in 2000 with a limited 4-year tenure as I was on leave from my teaching position in Montréal, Québec, Canada. I came to the IIRE with a professional background in teaching and curriculum development, including web-based courses, and a political background of being on the leadership of the various Québec and Pan-Canadian organisations and on the Women's Commission of the FI. I had never attended one of the 3-month schools at the IIRE but had been one of the team that led the 1997 Women's School.

Thus I came with great enthusiasm and one clear project – to get the IIRE on the web. In my view, the necessity of getting the IIRE on the web was in part due to the new development of the World Social Forum processes – and other international progressive responses – that used the web to organise, coordinate and distribute a political understanding that 'there is an alternative'. With travel costs in Canada being prohibitive due to its geographic size, the Pan-Canadian organisations had been successfully using e-mail and websites for a number of years to carry out coordination and discussion tasks, within the context of a bi-national and bilingual Canadian state. The IIRE faced and faces similar challenges – the high cost of bringing activists together from around the world for an extended period – 1 to 4 weeks – and of functioning in multiple languages – Castilian, English and French. All schools were conducted in two languages – English and French or English and Castilian – which added to the cost and complexity but also added to the interest in the discussion and analysis. I thought having a website would help prepare people for the schools and offer the chance for continuing the discussions after the schools. So working with Ailko van der Veen, we created a webpage for the schools. This was successful at providing an archive of the readings and resource material for the various schools but did not really serve to provide a means of discussion afterwards. Most of the presentations were in lectures, often in a 'cours magistral' style. While this can work well in the face-to-face context, without the support of a written outline, hopefully including a visual component, on-line users get lost.

Creating a web page meant that all presenters began to understand and develop supporting documentation, including outlines, readings that could be downloaded and links to other relevant website. Recordings had always been made of the lectures – and their translations – with participants making copies of the tapes to take back to their countries.

I think that the challenge of using IT – information technology – continues with new possibilities developing all the time. As one example, when I left in 2004, it was still rare for an academic institution to offer audio recordings of classroom lectures free to their students but now a rapidly increasing number of universities offer free podcasts linked to free podcast subscription software. While only one-direction – from source institution to user – this form of information technology can provide another means for the distribution of the presentations done at the IIRE.

In contrast to the first decade of the IIRE, during my four-year term, presenters using came only for a single day or two, thus limiting the possibility for collaborative discussion with the participants and the staff. One of the most satisfying moments was the meeting of the Fellows in 2003 which allowed for at least a weekend of the sort of exchange that was part of the school in the first decade (see Pierre's report). Peter has given the summary of this meeting in his report. One of the challenges facing the IIRE and its Fellows is finding a way to use the information technology to allow for some of this necessary exchange of ideas. Pierre's ESSF website plays an important role in accumulating critical essays and reports but that is just the beginning.

Since the 1990s, the political situation for traditional international organisations has radically changed with the development of other forms of international and transnational organising which escaped the limits of the UN based international meetings, such as the series of women's meetings begun in 1975 in Mexico. For example, the Fédération des femmes de Québec launched the World March of Women against Poverty and Violence 2000 following the 1995 UN women's conference in Beijing. In October 2000, women organised and marched in 87 countries around the world. They also conducted regional marches in Europe and North America and global marches in Washington, DC and in New York to pressure the UN. In January 2001, the first World Social Forum was held in Porto Alegre, Brazil to counter the arguments and propaganda from the World Economic Forum which regrouped the leading capitalists at Davos, Switzerland.

This process of international and regional social forum encounters created a political context in which the education that the IIRE offered could gain added significance. The IIRE's three-week-long Global Justice Schools provided an opportunity for activists within the social forum process to discuss theory, strategy and experiences with like-minded people from other countries. The Global Justice School in 2003 was particularly significant for its African participation and Philippine participation, an exchange that would have been hard to achieve by any other means. The Women's meetings of 2001, 2002 and 2006 provided the same opportunity for women to discuss the development and strategy of both their regional and the global women's movements. The Youth Schools offered younger activists from Europe the opportunity to develop a greater theoretical understanding of their activist politics.

All of these face-to-face experiences create the human bonds that are the central reality of an international. In the context of a continuing process of international and global activism, the role of the schools conducted at the IIRE is all the more important.

My four years at the IIRE were wonderful for me on the personal and political level. As a single parent, raising a son, I couldn't take off the 3 months to attend one of the original sessions. These four years gave me the opportunity to meet several hundred comrades from around the world, to teach and learn from them. I had attended various international FI meetings since 1987, including a 5 month stay in France, attending LCR meetings. Now I was able to attend the meeting of the groups in Germany, Sweden and Switzerland, with each group I learned more about the social reality behind their political analysis. Having come from Québec, I was invited by the coordinator of the World March of Women in the Netherlands, Charlot Pierik, to take part in the international meetings of the WMW in Rome and to represent them at the World Social Forum in Mumbai in 2004.

Since the 1997 Women's School, I have been developing lectures on women and globalisation. Clearly my work with the World March of Women reinforced this thinking. However, a radical shift in my perspective came about in 2004 while taking part in the Tri-People Grass-root Women's Peace exchange in Mindanao, the Philippines, organised by Eva Ferraren of Sumpay Mindanao International. I was to give my lecture on 'women and globalisation' at a closing seminar after two weeks of 'exposure' to the situation of the Lumad, Moro and Christian settler women and organisations. What became clear to me was my lecture did NOT really reflect either their analyses

or experience, as the role of the state (or lack of it other than as a military presence) and the issue of development required a serious supplemental analysis of a strategic perspective for this situation. I reworked my PowerPoint presentation which the women found very useful. They asked me to repeat it to another audience and translated it into several of the local languages. While clearly not all programme directors can have such an opportunity, this experience fits perfectly into the logic and ambitions of the IIRE in creating the type of political exchange that leads to new thinking for the revolutionary challenges we face.