

WORLD FORUM ON EDUCATION

Presentation by

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First of all I would like to say how happy all of us Québec delegates are to be here in Naplouse, especially at this critical moment of your history. Your people are being victimized through an odious colonisation venture by a hooligan state who without shame transgresses international relations laws normally applied among civilized nations and peoples. But I would like you to know that advocates of a fair, enduring, and rightful peace can count on our solidarity as your nation moves towards a freely accepted agreement that will put an end to this unjustified and shameful colonial situation.

Based on my experience of the Québec context, my presentation focuses on the importance of an educational process centered on the emancipation of persons and communities. This process is defined as popular education and it allows individuals to acquire essential tools for becoming active citizens. This means that a citizen must exchange his infrequent passive elector role with a more active and freely assumed responsibility for his own development, without third party interference.

In order to present you with our own experience, I must first state the fact that Québec's history is also that of a people that was subject to colonialism until the 20th century. Because of our steadfast and relentless resistance in the face of the colonizer, we exist today as a French-speaking nation with its own specific institutions, whose original and most dynamic culture lives through the French language spoken by the majority. On the other hand, our fellow Native peoples are still somewhat subject to the colonialist supervision of the Canadian federal government. Thus, Canadian Native people are relegated to reservations confined to a small fraction of their ancestral territories. Your own great poet Mahmoud Darwich wrote a wonderful poem honouring Americas's First Nations called *Red man's last speech*.

As Quebecers, we are part of a federation called Canada originally constituted of two principal nations representing two colonizing states, the French and the British. We never wished for this to happen and this was never democratically determined. In spite of our constitution, essentially a fiction, this two-headed federation gradually transformed itself and became a centralizing state which is largely influenced by US government policies. But this reality is rejected by a large majority of my fellow Québec countrymen, no matter which political allegiance they adhere to.

On the other hand, at least until the latter half of the 20th century, the people of Québec were mostly dominated by two types of factions. First, the dogmatic vision of the Catholic religion prevailed over our moral, cultural and spiritual lives – in many areas, this restricted our political, economic and social development. Nevertheless, I must add that from the second half of the 20th century on, a more progressive clergy joined forces with non-religious groups in order to help Québec modernize in several essential sectors such as education, health, social services, and all manners of struggle against poverty's many forms.

Then, from an economic point of view, before 1960 Québec was altogether dominated by British, Canadian and American interests. This is less the case nowadays because a strong and state supported upper middle-class has emerged, though I must admit that exploitation at the hands of one's own people rather than by strangers does not change much in the daily life of wage-earners, self employed and poorer social groups.

This being said, the educational experience that I now wish to present is sustained by two complementary sources. On the one hand, a strong nationalist trend in favour of Québec's accession to independence attracts a great number of citizens. If this project has not yet reached its expected conclusion, even though it nearly did after the 1995

referendum, it nevertheless contributed to the construction of a strong civil society which supports a wide range of autonomous social movements who play an important role with regards to Québec's social, economic, and cultural development.

For example, a Women's World March against violence and poverty was organized in 2000 by the Québec Women's Federation. This importantly educational activity was most successful world-wide and showed the extent of women's solidarity. A similar activity is presently held and is expected to conclude in the Congo by a large gathering of women from all peoples and all nations.

Only through an immense educational effort fostering responsible citizenship was it possible to construct such a large array of social movements expressed through thousands of local organisations and covering a wide spectrum of interests. Two important examples will illustrate this and its effects on society : one, the struggle for environmental protection; and two, the struggle against Canadian participation in US Middle-Eastern wars.

Our country has many natural resources. This whets the appetite of international capitalist predators as well as that of other industrialized or nearly-industrialized societies. While these resources constitute an important economic development vector, it can also become the source of an

irreversible environmental disequilibrium. Ecologists are conscious of this danger and expend much energy on popular education. This in turn facilitates large-scale mobilization which has considerable political impact. For instance, the Québec state as well as several large companies who expect important profits are now being defensive in the matter of shale gas extraction, as they are unable to demonstrate that their methods are secure. In forestry, industries as well as the state must now take into account people's cautiousness. The people have become quite knowledgeable about the importance of ecosystem protection.

On another level, the Quebecers' resistance to Canadian military engagement in Irak and Afghanistan is kept alive by popular artists. Large mass mobilization speaks eloquently of the success of educational work accomplished by the opposition to war movement. If it weren't for the fact that we are subject to Canadian policy, I can vouch for the fact that Quebecers would never support this criminal military action whose main objective is to defend the American petroleum industry and other such multinational industries as well as Israel's Middle-East interests.

It appears then that the Québec experience in matters of education has proven to be and remains the best way towards a stronger affirmation of a people's desire for independence

and towards the implication of a greater number of citizens committed to the development of our society.

Through education, we strive towards the enhancement and consolidation of a democratic society supported by the affirmation of people's desire for sovereignty. We are convinced that people are rich with practical knowledge which only needs to be developed and expressed through their active implication in the numerous fields of action. Knowledge through education thus allows us to revisit older forms of powers which fostered ignorance and fear, and to have a new perspective on them. Where we are concerned, education fosters the profound belief that our humanity's quality is equivalent to that which we recognize in others. We believe that in spite of certain natural catastrophes we can, with the proper tools, be masters of our own destinies.

In conclusion to this presentation, I want to express my belief in the fact that one of the effects of our educational effort no doubt resides in the sustained interest of our people where matters of international solidarity are at stake. Many of my compatriots participate in international cooperative projects without any imperialistic motivation or desire for profit. Our people are sensitive to the need for international solidarity in this changing world. We are about 8 million people but we know that our future is intricately linked with the establishment of solidarity and friendship networks with other

nations and peoples. It is on the strength of this belief that we are now here, with you, in the hope of demonstrating concretely our support for your courageous and determined struggle against colonialism and towards freedom.

We are convinced that you will win.

Paper presented by Henri Lamoureux, member of the Québec delegation at the World Forum on Education held in Palestine, October 27th-30th 2010.

LITERATURE AS A PEOPLE AND CULTURE SPECIFIC AFFIRMATION TOOL

First I would like to express my great pleasure at being here with you in Palestine, at a crucial historical time for your nation. Also, my presence here manifests my solidarity with those men and women who so courageously fight for their freedom in the face of oppression.

I have come here with a desire to learn about Palestinian literature and in order to exchange ideas with you on the matter of literature's essential role as a creator of cultural identity. I will speak from my knowledge of the rich Québec literature, rife with our own efforts to be recognized as a distinct and culturally autonomous society, although this is not yet so politically.

Your great writer Mahmoud Darwich wrote that Palestine was a metaphor. Perhaps the same could be said about Québec. This metaphor stands for survival efforts of groups of women and men who recognize each other as sharing the same historical background, the same collective ethics and who feel they are at the core of human progress. Your poets, like ours, speak with the voice of the nation to which they were born. Oppressed peoples' literature can only be one of struggle and affirmation. This is so for us as it is for you.
