

Economics and Everyday Life

How does economics connect to our daily lives?

That's the question we started with at a June workshop of the Summit Citizens' Conference. While the leaders of the 'big seven' capitalist countries were meeting down the street at the Economic Summit, we were creating tools for economics education with 50 popular educators from across Canada.

The workshop was co-organized by the Jesuit Centre and the Economic Animation Project of the United Church of Canada. It was the first step in a collaboration that has led to this issue of **The Moment**.

A francophone group in the workshop dramatized the experience of a textile plant in a small Quebec community. The first actor represented the multinational company, WonderBra.

He turned to the next actress, representing the Canadian branch plant and said: "Sorry! With free trade, we're closing shop and moving to Georgia where labour is cheaper." The domino effect continues:

Branch plant to seamstress of 30 years: "Sorry! We're closing down, you're out of work."

Seamstress to her daughter: "Sorry! I've lost my job. I can't buy you a birthday cake."

Daughter to the corner baker: "Could you give us a cake on credit?"

Corner baker: "Sorry! Everyone in town is out of work. I'll check with the credit union."

Credit union: "Sorry! I can't give you credit; my loyalties lie with my largest client, WonderBra Company."

In protest of this unjust system and sequence of events, the workers, families, and small businesses unite and throw their bras into centre stage!





We know more than we think we know about economics. We were made to feel ignorant in free trade debates that argued the Mulroney deal was just a 'commercial' agreement. Even after the Tories and big business spent over \$30 million 'educating' us. over 70% Canadians went into the elections feeling they still did not understand free trade. We were meant to be kept in the dark.

Yet when we begin to describe and analyze our own lives, we can see the intimate links between the economic system and political structures, social policies, and cultural identity.

The drama recreated here in photos is just one example of how we can share our own understanding of how the economy functions

In this story, and in real life, most women do not benefit from the economic system as it is now structured. And among women. native women, women of colour, disabled women, lesbians, poor and working class women are particularly oppressed.

But women are fighting back. Women's groups have organized against the Mulroney trade deal and the privatization of social services. They have challenged economic language that hides our real experiences.

As one strategy to help us work toward social and economic justice, we are proposing a major campaign for our own economic education. In this effort, we must also redefine economics in a way that recognizes women's role in creating both life and wealth.

What's Inside

This issue of The Moment is entitled Understanding Economics: Starting with Our Lives. The articles are tools to help us talk about economics on our own, more human terms.

This is only one step in the long-term process of taking control of the economy so that it no longer benefits the rich at the expense of the poor. As we 're-name' the economy, we are on our way to 're-claiming' it.

Watch the Media (pages 3-4) suggests some ways to look behind the 'news' for the economic (and usually male) interests represented in the press, and particularly in the 'business' pages.

When Someone Asks (page 5) compares the kinds of questions businessmen ask about economic activities with the questions we can ask about their impact on our lives.

In the photo-story The Single Mom Express (pages 6-9), we follow Farida through a day in her life, as she chugs along in a train (the economic system) that drains her of her monev and energy. She starts to question how it's structured and where it's going.

The Popular Educators' Kit (page 10) suggests dynamic ways that the photo-story can be used; it also provides a design for a two-hour workshop that helps participants examine a day in their own lives in economic terms.

Naming the Moment (pages 11-14) deepens the analysis of Farida's experience as a single mother, comparing the 'bottom line' of big business with a bottom line that takes into account the invisible work of women

In Grabbing the Moment (pages 13-14), we propose a major campaign for popular economic literacy, and offer examples of what some groups are already doing.

Contacts and Resources (page 15) notes groups that are working in the area of economics education in general and women and the economy in particular. Educational materials are listed.

We have integrated suggested uses and group activities into most of the key articles. The Moment is to be read, digested, critiqued, stolen, copied, cut up, recreated, started from and built upon. Let us know how you use it!



Watch the Media

'All News is Business News'

During the weeks leading up to the Economic Summit in June, 1988, the Globe and Mail plastered the city of Toronto with a series of ads. They captured our attention immediately with large photographs of key world figures, most of the leaders attending the summit as well as China's Premier Deng Xiao Ping and Chile's President Augusto Pinochet.

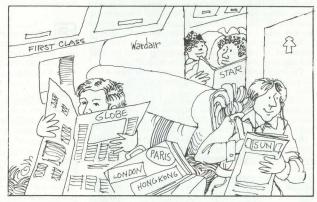
For the Globe, declaring that 'All news is business news' was just a new angle on advertising its business section. But this statement is also a blatant admission that all news has economic implications, whether or not it's in the business pages.

Not incidentally, all of the photographs in the ads were of men, except for Margaret Thatcher. Only one was a visible minority leader. We could easily add to the initial claim: All business news is mostly white and mostly male news.

The ad was also a reminder to us that the media is an important player in 'economic' meetings of 'political' leaders. Over \$6 million was spent to service every need of the 5,000 visiting journalists, to promote Toronto development and tourism.

Tools for media analysis

Here are two exercises we can use daily to uncover the economic interests in the news and to question their connections to our daily lives.



1) 'We buy more than the news'

 Pick up today's newspaper and measure the column inches devoted to ads. Compare that figure to the inches devoted to 'news' reports. Which has more?

When we buy a paper, we are invited to buy a variety of goods and services. While digesting the news and ads, we are also absorbing images of the 'good life'.

- Check the ads for the way they portray women. Do they reflect our lives?
- Do an inventory of the kinds of goods being sold. Who will buy them?

Recent Globe and Mail included ads for health spas: 'avoid hair loss', clothes: 'finely tailored', and jewelry: 'go for the gold'. Could the single mother in our photo-story (pages 6-9) buy these things?

• Compare newspapers. Can you identify different class and gender interests they speak to?

Wardair recently ran different ads in the Globe and the Toronto Star. The Globe's was definitely directed at the male executive jet set: "The difference between our Atlantic crossing and theirs is night and day."

The Star's Wardair ad appealed more to

the middle income household, including women. It proclaimed 'unprecedented reductions' in fares and listed rates for domestic as well as international flights.

The Toronto Sun, by contrast, had no airlines ads. It is aimed at a more working class readership (which doesn't mean that it represents workers' interests). Ads emphasize savings on domestic goods: cars, furniture, appliances, clothes, records.

2) What's the business page got to do with us?

Why do so many of us avoid reading the business section?

We probably realize that it's aimed at those who control our economy, as this Globe ad implies: '85% of the top executives of Canada's largest companies can be reached with any issue of Report on Business.' What can it really teach us?

The business pages contain information about shifts within our economic system. And those shifts affect us all. But when we browse through those pages, we often feel like we're reading a foreign language. How do we translate corporate statistics so that we see how they are connected to our lives?

· List the brand names of some of the appliances and furniture you own. Then try to find these companies in the corporate reports. Who benefits from their profits? Do you?

In our current photo-story, for example, Farida has a refrigerator made by Inglis and works on a computer purchased from the Hamilton Group. Both companies are

listed in the Corporate Summary below. Unless Farida were a shareholder in one of these companies, the statistics are useless to her.

• Develop a list of the kind of economic information that is missing from the business pages that would be useful to us. A group called 'Alternative News Indices Project'* suggests that the Toronto Stock Exchange and DOW Jones Industrial Average don't give us certain information about the economic conditions in our lives. They propose regular updates in the categories listed below as 'alternative indices'.

*For more information, contact: Alternative New Indices Project. The Centre for Communication, Culture, and Society, Carleton University, Ottawa, Ontario KIS 5B6.



ALTERNATIVE INDICES

- the gap between the rich and the poor
- the number of homeless people
- the proportion of seniors living in poverty
- the rate of structural unemploy-
- a record of industrial accidents global starvation levels
- extent of environmental damage wage gaps between men and women in similar occupations
- segregation of racial minorities in various jobs



When Someone Asks. . .

Question the Questions!

This page usually begins with the questions most frequently asked about an issue. But the questions *not* asked are equally important. Around economic matters, for example, businessmen ask:

- Is there a market for this product or service? Can one be created?
- What does it cost to produce (labour, raw materials, energy, design, advertising, interest)?
- How much can it sell for? How much profit will it make?
- How can hassles (environmental, legislative, tax, and labour relations) be avoided?

But we have other questions to ask about economic activities and products, that have more to do with their impact on our lives:

- 1) How will it benefit me and my dependents? In terms of free time, cost-saving, pleasure, status, health, information, creativity?
- 2) Can I afford it? How much work do I have to do to get it? What will I have to give up? Will it make me want to buy more?
- 3) What social relations does it promote? Does it reinforce individualism and interdependence among people? Does it contribute to greater gender and racial equality?
- 4) How does it affect the environment? What nonrenewable resources are used to make this product/activity? Does it regenerate or destroy the environment — in my neighbourhood? in the world?
- 5) Which corporations profit from this product/ activity? Are there boycotts of these corporations at present? What are the working and living conditions othose workers who produce these products/activities?
- **6)** Where does it lead us? Does it help us to do things that will change our lives for the better now? Does it help build foundations for a more equitable future?
 - 7) What are alternatives to this product/activity?

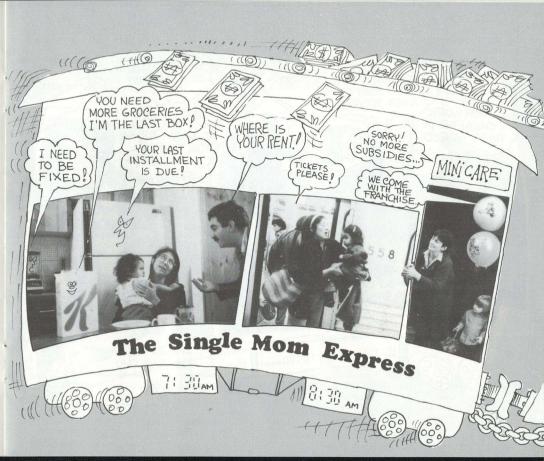
When thinking of buying a TV, for example, how would I answer these questions:

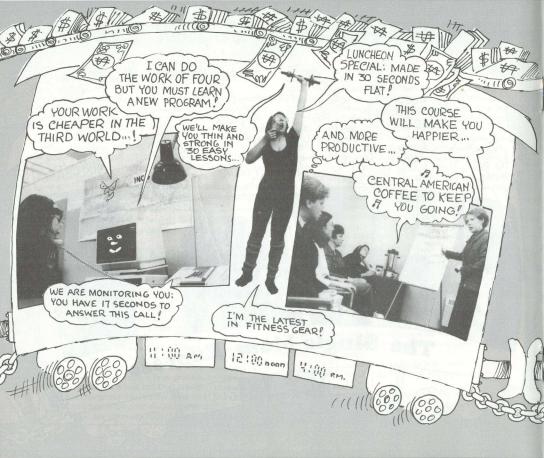
- 1) The $T\dot{V}$ can benefit me in terms of free-time: it will occupy my children, it will give us both pleasure and information.
- 2) Whether or not we can afford it depends on our income. For Farida in the photo-story, it represents well over one week's gross pay. TV ads will pressure us to buy more things.
- 3) A TV may cut down on interaction in the household, even though it will give us things to talk about with our friends who also have TVs. Television is filled with programming that is sexist and racist; we need to become critical viewers.
- 4) TVs are made from many non-renewable resources (petroleum, copper, zinc, etc.) But in their use, they are not particularly destructive to the environment.
- 5) Major multinationals benefit a great deal from television: as producers, advertisers, information-shapers. The workers who make televisions range from women in Singapore making microchips under terrible conditions, to Canadian trade unionists, to highly paid engineers. Presently there are no boycotts of this product.
- 6) Whether a TV helps us improve our personal and social lives is questionable. It is known to reduce critical thought and slow down brain wave activity. It can also reduce our interest in reading. It will not tell us much about groups working for social change.
- 7) If we had more control over the programming of television, if we were very selective in what TV we watch, if we used television more interactively by discussing what we see with others, then, television could become a powerful vehicle for learning and organizing for change.

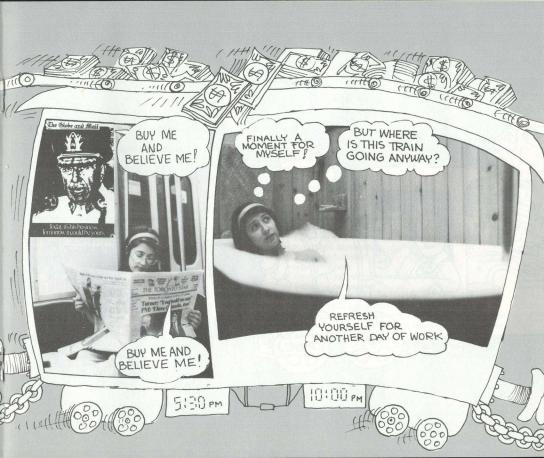
Buying the TV is just the tip of the iceberg; purely 'economic' questions reveal little of the real social and political values at stake.

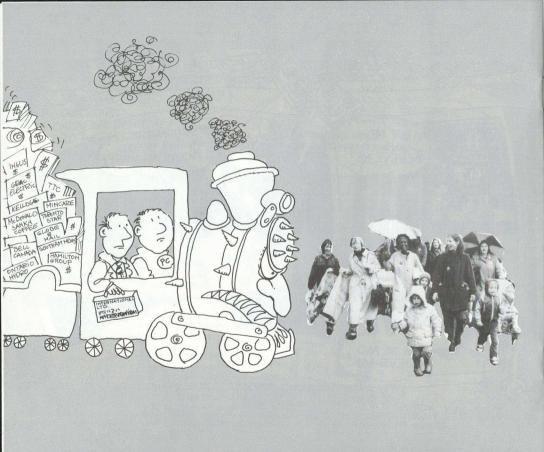
Try applying these questions to some of the activities in the following photo-story: preparing breakfast, day care, word processing work, fitness class, etc.

Better yet, use them to evaluate your own daily activities!









Popular Educators' Kit



You Work All Day and What Do You Get?

The photo-story you've just read is to be used!

Read through the pages with others.

Where does Farida's money go? Who benefits? What alternatives are there available to Farida? What support would she need to change things?

· Review each photo.

Describe how things are now for Farida. How could they be different? What would need to be done?

Connect the story to your life.

What parts of Farida's day can you identify with? What's different about your life?

A Workshop Plan

Try this activity (ideally in a two-hour workshop)

Individually (30 minutes)

- Everyone gets a piece of flip chart paper and three crayons or markers of different colors; blue, red, and green.
- Draw a large circle on the paper and mark it into 24 hours.
- Inside the circle, draw or write something to represent the activities you undertake in a typical day (getting up, taking a shower, making breakfast, talking to children, travelling to work, paying bills, etc.)
- Choose a few activities, circle them, and mark outside the circle who benefits from the activities; use red for yourself, green for your family or community, and blue for corporate power.

Small group (30 minutes)

• Share the results in groups of three to five. Discuss the ways that corporate power has shaped the way in which those activities are carried out. Why is it organized like it is? How could it be organized differently?

Plenary (60 minutes)

- Groups report back to the plenary.
- Talk about (or make role plays around) how some of the following enterprises see your household:
 - your bank
 - the owner of an automobile manufacturing plant
 - the nearest supermarket
 - soap manufacturers
 - a beer company
 - the municipal public works department
 - cosmetics company
 - your own employer
 - the group you are meeting with right now
- Share your visions for alternatives to the present organization of our economic activities. How would you organize your household and neighborhood if you could start from scratch?
- Evaluate the workshop: What did you learn? How do you feel about 'economics' now? What will you do differently - as a person? as a group?

• Now make your own photo-story!

One October afternoon, three women did this activity. The results were the basis for developing the photo-story, The Single Mom Express. Production was squeezed into the busy days of the photographer and actors. Four of them are single mothers!



Naming the Moment

Bringing the Economy Home

From when she wakes up in the morning to when she collapses in the bathtub at night, Farida, the single mother in our photo-story, is contributing to an economic system.

We rarely take time to identify the many ways that our every activity feeds that system. Nor do we often ask: who ultimately benefits from our activity? Or where is this train going?

Why? We have been taught that economics is the domain of businessmen and economists. Intimidated by their language and concepts, we feel powerless to challenge them.

When we try to raise issues of the environment, neighbourhood, peace or health, they tell us that we are not "realistic" and we "don't understand good business practice". Often, what they describe as "sound economics" seems like dangerous gobbledy-gook to us. Somewhere inside ourselves we know that it is!

The word 'economics', in fact, means 'managing the household.' When we think in terms of our everyday lives, it has to do with how we organize our material needs. In a household, these basic needs are not isolated from our social needs. So when we talk economics, we should be talking about how we see the world we live in and what kind of world we want.

But those who are in power in our society promote a very narrow definition of economics. Only those things which can be measured in dollars have any value or meaning. The labour of working people is undervalued; the domestic labour of women isn't valued at all. It's time to bring the economy home!

What counts?

Farida works at INCO, the International Nickel Company. Without her work and the labour of thousands of INCO workers around the world, the raw ore, unmined and unsmeltered, would have little value.

The money made from the production of nickel goes to purchase and maintain the machinery, pay the workers, and increase the profits of the owners. Farida is underpaid; her salary helps cover the costs of food, shelter, and clothing for herself and her child.

But she is not paid for some activities, such as raising a child, caring for her sick father, nurturing relations with coworkers, or volunteer work around environmental concerns.

All this work is important. Without it, our families and communities could not exist. But to an economist, such activity is invisible, unless it is exchanged for dollars.

Let's look more closely at the household.

Economists can't measure the happiness of a child or the beauty of surroundings except as they contribute to the family's productivity. Economists can't measure things like job satisfaction or quality of production. They have no measure for satisfactory sex, or healthy children, or good community relations. Nor do they give value to all the hours put into community, political or recreational activity.

What economists could measure are the dollars that go into and out of Farida's house: what she spends and what she earns. But they would have no idea what really went on in this home at all. A healthy household, to them, would be one where income exceeded expenses.

Whose bottom line?

Without our work, the world economy would not function. And yet a very few people (corporations and states) shape it and direct it, according to a dollar-based economic system.

These economic and political leaders judge the success of any activity by its ability to show an excess of measurable benefits over costs. This is called "showing a profit". It is their bottom line. The records are kept in a cost-benefit ledger. If

the benefits are not measurable in money, then they are irrelevant.

The basic economic unit of our society is the corporation.

The law treats corporations as individuals, although they might be made up of thousands of workers. Any corporation is designed in a hierarchical fashion: to maintain control from the pinnacle and to assure rapid response from the bottom of the pyramid.

Each corporation, like each household, maintains its own ledger; it is considered a healthy corporation if income exceeds expenditure.

In a corporation, job satisfaction can only be measured in terms of higher productivity; impact on the environment is defined as potential loss of income to the corporation. Corporate leaders may express concern about quality of life and the ecology, but these factors don't fit into the accounting system.

One company's balance sheet

INCO, the company where Farida works, is a multinational mining company active in northern Ontario. It is a success in the corporate world, turning a handsome profit (\$125.2 million in 1987). INCO's success, however, has meant:

- profit at the expense of the workers who are not paid the full value of their labour:
- the domestic work of families who create and nurture workers with no pay or recognition:
- the destruction of over 900 square miles of white pine forest;
- a contribution of 683 million tonnes of acid rain:

- the production of war materials that were sold to both sides during the first and second world wars:
- the encouragement of state terror in Guatemala and Indonesia, where there are branch plants;
- · working conditions that have resulted in cancer, crippling back injuries, whitehand and deafness for many INCO workers.

These costs do not appear on the INCO books. They are either completely unrecorded or they appear in the ledgers of individual households or the 'social programmes' of governments.

As taxpayers, we ultimately bear the burden of many of these costs. In recent decades, middle to low income earners are paying more taxes, while the proportion paid by the rich is decreasing.

More importantly, no one is keeping a balance sheet for the immeasurables, such as women's work, community-building, the environment, our sense of justice and well-being. No one is keeping a ledger for the whole of creation.

Taking on the train

Our lives have become battlegrounds for the competition between different balance sheets. Corporations want our time, our dollars and our energy. Like Farida, we're on a train that we haven't chosen. And it's chugging along, frantically, at our expense.

When we spend three hours a day getting to and from work or move regularly to find affordable housing or work, when we have trouble finding the time and space to nurture relationships and participate in community activities, these are economic

and political problems, not just social ones. What are the costs? What are the consequences? We need to start talking about these issues in our own terms.

The problems of our economic system are located in the small activities of our day-to-day lives. Little wonder that Farida barely has the time or energy to ask "-Where is this train going?" and "Who is driving this train?"

These deeper questions are being asked by groups working for change - whether it's for affordable housing, more accessible public transport, universal day care, better working conditions, clean water, reproductive rights, support for single mothers. These issues are all interrelated in our daily lives, as they were in Farida's story.

One of the major contributions of the women's liberation movement in the late 1960's was to teach us that the personal is political. Our neighbourhoods and love relationships are being broken by the economic demands of corporations on our lives. Working to heal our communities is a political and economic act.

To undertake this work we need to take on the tasks of analyzing and reshaping the economy for our own more human interests. We are up against an unjust economic system controlled by the wealthy and powerful. But the formation of new coalitions around issues such as free trade has given us hope.

We can challenge who's driving the train, where it's going, and why it's going so fast. In the process, we may ask ourselves whether we want to be on this kind of train at all. The moment has come for us to take on the whole train!



Grabbing the Moment

A Campaign for Economic Literacy

Over half of those who voted in the November 1988 election refused to give Mulroney a mandate to go ahead with free trade, even after big business came to the rescue with million dollar ad campaigns and employers pressured workers to vote for the deal. And in the weeks following the election, the numbers of free trade critics swelled as plant closures continued at a startling rate.

The last couple of years of free trade battles have challenged us to understand more about economics from our own perspective. Working on shoe string budgets, many groups have created innovative educational workshops and materials.

Canadians are now more aware and more curious than ever about how the economy functions. We need to build on this momentum.

We propose a CAMPAIGN FOR ECONOMIC LITERACY as one way to multiply these efforts.

A campaign would have these goals:

- to raise the issue of economic literacy and education as a national need and basic human right;
- · to promote a more holistic understanding of economics, building an analysis based

- on peoples' daily experiences;
- to combat the jargon used by those who control the economy:
- to popularize economic analysis through multi-media projects in schools and community groups, making sense of concepts such as inflation and debt, while showing the value of concepts such as oppression, class, sexism, racism;
- · to link economics education to grassroots economic development projects, so that it both grows out of and leads to collective action.

In order to launch such an ambitious campaign, we need to be in touch with each other. We are eager to hear from you, if you are interested in the idea, and if you know of groups and resources that could contribute to a nationwide effort.

Examples of groups across Canada who are working in this area are found in the gray boxes on this page, and others are listed on the back page under Contacts and Resources.

From The Northwest Territories:

The Mackenzie Delta Tribal Council has been part of a major Regional Land Use Planning Program which has involved local people in studying the seasonal patterns of land use to strengthen land claims negotiations.

Community working groups have formed in four areas. They are made up of elders, who have knowledge of the land, and younger natives who bring more understanding of the administrative and legal questions.

Through 'land use mapping exercises', local fieldworkers have documented information on local resources, such as fisheries, etc.

They have also identified key issues in planning land use, such as the conflicts between subsistence and commercial fishing, between renewable and nonrenewable resources, which are being stripped by oil and mining companies.

Analysis of these issues will lead to developing alternatives to propose in the land claims process.

From the Maritimes:

A group of neighbourhood women organized a tenants association to fight a public housing policy that would force older women out of housing when their children reached 19 years, and to protect the area from gentrification.

Some of the women in the association began to talk about experiences of wife abuse; by sharing this problem, they organized to protect themselves and to confront their social workers. They also organized a community car, a vegetable garden, a buyers' club, and a drug program for their youth.

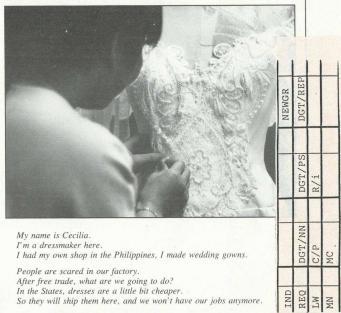
Recently they decided to take on a catering service. Instead of paying themselves wages, they put the money they earned in a common pot and used it to improve the lives of women in the

From Ontario:

Committed to grass-roots education and organizing around free trade, six Toronto photographers went out into the streets, visited workplaces, hospitals, and community centres. photographed people in their own environments and asked them: How do you think free trade might affect you/us?

The resulting photo exhibit, called Making Free Trade Visible, has been used by unions, church groups, conferences and cultural events. A sample appears to the right.

The exhibit is still available for national circulation. Contact Dominic Farrell: (416) 977-8140, ext. 244.



They say it will affect our benefits. Here we have a health plan — there they don't: They say some garment owners will close plants and open under another name to get rid of unions.

In the Philippines there's a free trade zone. They make Levis, Reeboks, Adidas. Because there's cheap labour, for the people there it's very hard, too.



Contact Groups and Resources

Canadian Association of Labour Media

c/o Canadian Labour Congress
2841 Riverside Drive
Ottawa, Ontario K1V 8X7
(613) 521-3400
(publish Economics De-mystified: A Dictionary of Economic Terms for Non-Feonomics 1984)

Center for Popular Economics

P.O. Box 785
Amherst, Massachusetts 01004
(413) 545-0743
(publish Bottom Lines: A Critic's Guide to
the U.S. Economy, Pantheon Books, 1987)

Centre for Policy Alternatives

251 Laurier Avenue West. Suite 1004 Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5J6 (613) 563-1341 (publish Is It Fair? What Tax Reform Will Do To You, by Leon Musynski, 1987)

Economic Animation Project

United Church of Canada 85 St. Clair Ave. East Toronto, Ontario M4T 1M8 Contact: Joan Kuyek (416) 925-5931

Economics and People. Patricia Keays.

Ministry of Advanced Education and Job
Training Province of British Columbia, 1988.

GATT-Fly

11 Madison Avenue Toronto, Ontario M5R 2S2 Contact: Joan Delaney (416) 921-4615 (publish Community Self-Reliance: A Canadian Vision of Economic Justice, June, 1987)

Highlander Research and Education Center

New Market, Tennessee 37820 (615) 933-3443 (publish an Economics Education series, including Claiming What is Ours: An Economic Experience Workbook)

Progressive Literacy Group

Vancouver, B.C. V5M 1H9 (publish Writing On Our Side)

The Ram's Horn, a monthly newsletter of food system analysis. Brewster and Kathleen Kneen, 14 Blong Avenue, Toronto, Ont. M4M 1P2

Womenskills

4443 Irwin Street, #9 Burnaby, B.C. V5J 1X8 (607) 430-0450 (publish Economic Options for Women and Women Entures)

Women's Economic Agenda

c/o British Columbia Public Interest Research Group – TC – 304 Simon Fraser University Burnaby, B. C. V5A 1S6 (604) 291-4360 (publish Three Deals, One Game: B.C. Women Look at Free Trade, Meech Lake and Privatization, 1988)

Women's Research Centre

Vomen's Research Centre Suite 101 – 2245 West Broadway Vancouver, B.C. V6K 2E4 (604) 734-0485 (publish Women and the Economy Kit)

The Moment, published four times a year by the Jesuit Centre for Social Faith and Justice, 947 Queen St. E., Toronto, Ont. M4M 1J9

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Consultants: Pramila Aggarwal, Christine Almeida, Pat Bird, Marcy Cohen, Mary Corkery, Margot Fish, Deirdre Gallagher, Nancy Hannum, Deborah Marshall, Maria Wallis

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The Moment

What is THE MOMENT?

 An educational resource on key Canadian issues

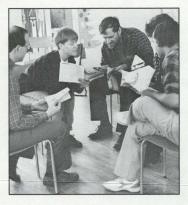
Who uses THE MOMENT?

• Church groups, teachers, community workers, popular educators, social



- 16 pages of ideas for discussion and action
- Analysis of current events
- Photo-story
- Original cartoons
- Bottom line questions and answers
- · Strategies for action

and much more. . .



A MUST FOR EDUCATION AND ORGANIZING. . . !



the Montent

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copies of Free Trade, 2:1 Winter 1987/88
copies of Health and the Environment, 1:3 Autumn 87
Out of print: Refugee Policy Crisis, 1:2 Spring 87 Native Self-Determination, 1:1 Winter 86 Free Trade, Introductory Issue Autumn 86
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