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1PM (16091 bytes: 274 ln)  
To: cmbg@ccwf.cc.utexas.edu at SMTP-po  
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at SMTP-po  
Subject: Questions and comments after CEM convention  
----- Message Contents -----

Text item 1: Text Item

Received: by ccm ail from gov.ns.ca  
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From: Pat Kipping <HLFXTRAD.EDUC.KIPPINPL@gov.ns.ca>  
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Subject: Questions and comments after CEM convention  
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HI Cynthia. I'm not exactly sure how to get this to the CEM members. I will  
send it to you and cc it to the people I have email addresses for on the  
steering committee. Use your own judgment as to whether it should go  
on CEM net or if you have a list for Steering Committee, Board and Staff.  
Pat K

Dear CEM Steering Committee members, Board and Staff.

While preparing my report for the organizations I represented at the CEM  
founding convention, I realized there were several things I wish I had  
said when I was at the Convention. I offer them here as part of the effort  
to digest the proceedings. I am sure you have thought about all these  
points but I would like to add my voice.

I would also like to thank all those who planned, organized, implemented  
and accepted responsibility to follow up the Convention. I felt very well  
looked after in St. Louis and always knew where I was supposed to be  
and what I was supposed to be doing. Due to other commitments I am  
not able to play much of a role in CEM, the organization but I feel very  
committed to this movement to challenge and resist the corporate  
controlled commercial cultural environment, and to comprehend and  
improve our global human-dominated cultural environment. Thank you for  
the opportunity to renew and extend that commitment.

Sincerely,  
Pat Kipping  
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Is CEM a movement, an expanding institution or both?  
There is a big difference between a popular movement and an

organization or institution. There seemed to be some confusion in the working groups as to where the action plans were directed. Some seemed to assume there was going to be an institutional structure to carry out our wish lists. That is a seductive and comforting thought for many overextended activists but dangerous if we hope to build an international, inclusive, diverse, grassroots movement.

I am excited to locate the work I do with AML-NS, CAMEO and other groups as part of a popular movement which has been so accurately named and described to challenge the cultural environment and all it entails. But I am reluctant to become involved with yet another mammoth institutional structure, especially one so rooted in the US cultural environment, attempting to define constituency, build consensus on policy statements and develop representative and accountable structures, procedures and actions.

Recommendation: I urge the Board of Directors of CEM, the organization to make explicit the distinction between the organization and the movement so all members of the movement and the organization can locate themselves appropriately. CEM has already shown that it is prepared to work with other popular movements. It can also learn from their experiences as they struggled through transitions from popular movement to institutional structures and in some cases, back again. The women's movement, the environmental movement, the peace movement, the international development movement, the civil rights movement, and the anti-apartheid movement are some examples.

Should CEM be an international organization or a US organization? This was a very important question posed by Bill Fore and the Religion Working Group. Berit As, a Norwegian feminist peace activist once said, \*before you can make change, you must first accurately describe reality.\* The reality, so well illustrated at the CEM founding convention, is that there already exists a burgeoning grassroots, international, diverse movement to challenge and improve the cultural environment which is dominated by commercially driven interests. The other reality we are working with is that most of those commercial interests originate from or reside in US based transnational corporations. They affect the global cultural environment but they are only subject to laws and regulation - if any - within the borders of the USA. This means that the issues and points of engagement for CEM are different for people who live in the USA and those who don't.

As a Canadian living in a little-known region of Canada, with our own distinct and rich regional culture, I am better able to pick and choose how I engage with US mainstream culture than those who live in the USA. I am also engaged in struggles to understand how it affects our collective lives and resist its further incursion. That is how I participate in the cultural environment movement. But I am not prepared to take responsibility for challenging or changing the political, social and economic landscape from which most US mainstream culture grows. That is something that only Americans can do. They must do it on behalf of the rest of the world as much as for themselves and their own people. The rest of the world can support and inspire the work of US cultural environment activists but we cannot add that to the work we already have to do to resist American commercial culture and nurture our own cultural sovereignty.

Recommendation: I would like to see the CEM Board of Directors and Steering Committee acknowledge that the location of the work of CEM, the organization, is in the USA and aimed at cleaning up it's own back

yard which is rapidly becoming the backyard and playground of the rest of the world. Likewise, it is the job of US citizens to open up it's cultural institutions to cultural imports from other countries. An international advisory board and a network of international affiliates should be established to inform, inspire and support that work.

There is a very good film about the role US TV culture plays in global development. It is called Distress Signals. Distribution information is available from John Sirabella, National Film Board of Canada NYC office (212)596-1774

Media literacy education as a strategy for dealing with the cultural environment.

I did not attend the Educational Imperatives working group although I am very involved with media literacy education. I am involved with media literacy at the site of the family and community more than the school system. I feel it is important to clarify the role media literacy education can and should play in the cultural environment movement. It is also important to make a distinction between that role and the school system as a site of struggle for cultural environment movement engagement.

Media literacy education is a strategy for dealing with all aspects of the cultural environment. People who are media literate understand what they are seeing, how it is affecting them and others, and how to participate more effectively in the institutions which create their cultural environment. They also seek out alternative media and alternatives to commercial culture. Over half of the working groups acknowledged this in their action plans and recommended some sort of media literacy strategy or link. It was also recognized that strategies for developing a media literate citizenry must move beyond schools, into families and all other aspects of community.

Likewise, the cultural environment in which our children spend a large part of their day - schools - must be included as a location for struggle, not just for media literacy but against the corporate sector which has targeted schools as a goldmine of commercial potential. They have established corporate-owned, for-profit private schools such as Burger King Academies and the proposed Edison Project schools. They have formed for-profit companies such as Educational Alternatives Inc. to manage publicly funded school systems according to corporate models and for private gain. They promote government policies of deficit reduction and tax cuts which result in schools being so desperate for curriculum resources that they are forced to accept the solutions that those very same corporations can provide in the form of corporate sponsored curricula by the likes of Exxon, McDonald's and Proctor and Gamble. The very worst of these is Channel One in the USA and the potential YNN in Canada which misrepresent media literacy and attempt to co-opt media literacy education to serve their own commercially driven goals.

Recommendation: I was shocked to see that Working Group 3 - Educational Imperatives did not make a clear statement about this. As a media literacy advocate who has spent a great deal of time and energy resisting YNN from setting up in Canada, I felt betrayed to discover that this was left out. I hope the Steering Committee will take a stronger stand against the commercialization of schools in future documents.

I also recommend that the CEM Steering Committee and Board of Directors consult Captive Kids: A Report on Commercial Pressures on Kids at School prepared by Consumers Union in New York City and build

an alliance with that organization.

Working Group 12 report based on media illiterate assumptions.

It is unfortunate that Working Group 12 - War and Peace and the cult of violence, didn't include any participants with media production or media literacy background. The action plan seems to work from a couple of faulty assumptions which indicate a lack of understand as to how the media industry works:

- a/ that media violence is a distinct problem which can be fixed in isolation rather than a symptom of the commercial nature of corporate controlled, un-regulated, profit-motivated media industry
- b/ that the commercial media have any legal accountability to society or caring for the well-being of viewers except in relation to how it affects their profits.

The most important recommendations to come out of Working Group 12 are:

- 1/ the one which calls for \*strategies to reduce the levels and impact of such violence\*. One of the most effective strategies for reducing the impact of TV violence is known as \*media literacy\* - a term curiously and conspicuously absent from these recommendations.
- 2/ the call for \*strategies that result in advertisers reducing their sponsorship of violent programming\*. Such a strategy will depend on a critical mass of viewers who are media literate enough to identify gratuitous and glamourized violence, identify sponsors of offending programs and know how to notify advertisers that they intend to boycott their products.

Recommendation: I urge the Board of Directors and Steering Committee to support and strengthen initiatives which already exist to address these recommendations. I am thinking in particular of the Media Awareness Network (Canada) which has already established a clearinghouse for resources on media violence, among other things, and can serve as a continuously updated resource guide on media violence and media literacy education materials, organizations and experts. The Canadian Cable Television Association has already created a very useful brochure addressing media violence issues from a media literacy perspective. It is called Watch What Your Children Watch and was made available free (on request) to all cable subscribers in Canada in 1995. It is based on a more extensive document. A Review of the Effects of Television Violence on Children of Different Ages by Wendy Josephson, available from the (Canadian) National Clearinghouse on Family Violence. This is a very important document with practical recommendations for parents and the television industry.

V-Chip off the old block

It is clear to most media literacy activists, cultural environment workers, indeed even to Keith Spicer, Chair of the Canadian Radio and Television Commission which has required its use in Canada, that the V-Chip will not do much to improve the levels of violence on TV screens or how it impacts most viewers. In a March 16, 1996 Canadian Press story, Spicer was quoted as saying that \*Parent control devices like the V-chip are only a supplement to public education, voluntary action by broadcasters and better programs.\* Indeed, there are some, myself included, who feel that it could actually make the situation worse, by fooling viewers into thinking their interests are being taken care of, relieving broadcasters of their need to respect broad community standards because it is now possible for parents to assume full responsibility, and distracting

attention away from more comprehensive solutions such as comprehensive media literacy education and support for better programs and alternative media.

Recommendation: Despite the statement above, I urge the entire cultural environment movement to recognize and exploit the opportunity for public education presented by the regulation of V-chip technology and the attempts to develop a workable, meaningful classification system for use with it. In the USA, CEM should research and develop interventions regarding classification systems and seize every opportunity to point out the importance of context when dealing with media violence.

Viewer's Declaration of Independence or INTERdependence?

I fully support the sentiments expressed in the draft Viewer's Declaration of Independence but I would like you to stretch the paradigm and consider a declaration of INTERdependence as opposed to independence. I understand the desire for viewers to declare themselves independent of commercial culture. But there are a few dangers there. The foremost being that most people can't or won't declare themselves independent until they can see that there is something better and accessible to replace the current culture with. The second pitfall is that we have learned from the environmental movement and hopefully from the women's movement that we are not independent in reality. We are all connected, interdependent, and it is the inability and unwillingness to recognize that interconnectedness which has resulted in so many unbalanced and destructive power relationships in this culture/society/environment. In other words, we are all in this mass (mess) together.

Many of the presenters at the CEM Convention demonstrated this interdependence by word and deed. In particular, two of the opening speakers recognized the root problem of the commercially-dominated and humanity-repressed cultural environment to be \* the cult of the individual\*. Joan Brown Campbell called violence a symptom of \*me-ism\* based on a protective, ownership model. Bill McKibbin talked about the \*limitlessness of the individual\* and how that concept fuels commercial consumerist culture. Social and cultural change workers outside the USA have long recognized this \*cult of the individual\* as the single most difficult trait of US culture to resist and challenge. It would be a shame if CEM were to entrench and perpetuate \*me-ism\* when we have a perfect opportunity to shift thinking away from individualism toward interconnectedness.

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