

FOUNDING CONVENTION SETS POLICY AND STRUCTURE OF COALITION



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For Immediate Release

Three years in preparation, the Founding Convention of the Cultural Environment Movement (CEM) was held in St. Louis, Missouri, March 15-17, 1996, in cooperation with Webster University. It was the most diverse representation of leaders and activists in the field of culture and communication that ever met in the U.S.

The Convention was a standing-room event as over 250 participants representing 150 organizations from 32 states in the U.S. and 13 other countries crowded into the Holiday Inn Southwest. They were greeted by George Gerbner, founder and chair of CEM, and heard keynotes by speakers including Joan Brown Campbell, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches; writer and ecologist Bill McKibben; *Washington Post* columnist Dorothy Gilliam; Sumi Sevilla Haru, first national Vice President of the Screen Actors Guild; Keyan Tomaselli, University of Natal, South Africa; Lynn A. Curtis, President, Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation; Fred W. Garcia, Acting Director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy; Riane Eisler, author and cultural historian; and Cees Hamelink, Director of the Centre for Communication and Human Rights, Amsterdam. All had the same message: people must take control of their cultural environment and shape it to meet human needs.

The first International Broadcast Standards Summit, a pre-convention event, also heard from Keith Spicer, Chair of the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Council; Colin Shaw, Director of the Broadcast Standards Council of Great Britain; Sophie Cathelineau from the Conseil Superior de l'Audiovisuel, Paris, France; Janos Timar of the Hungarian National Committee on Radio and Television; Jill Hills, Personal Chair in International Political Economy at City University, London, U.K.; Ron Cohen, National Chair, Canadian Broadcast Standards; Mathias Ebert, media researcher, Berlin, Germany; Matko Mestrovic, a consultant to Croatian radio and television; Marc Raboy of the University of Montreal, Canada; and Robert McChesney, historian at the University of Wisconsin. The moderator was Jeffrey Cole, director of the Center for Communication Policy at UCLA, and the chair of a Summit panel was Mark Crispin Miller, Professor of Media Studies at Johns Hopkins University.

Following invocations from Christian, Jewish, Native American and Muslim traditions, Gerbner reminded Convention delegates that "this task is impossible, but it's happening. For the first time leaders representing over 150 organizations and 57 countries, 14 of which are here, are gathered to face a great challenge— to launch a strong enduring coalition....We are here to address the problems of a globalized, conglomeratized, standardized cultural environment that is damaging to our children, our democracy, society and communities. The culture wars are heating up and, appealing to legitimate concerns, are taking us in a repressive direction. We are here to offer the liberating alternative."

The program also included storytellers, Native American dancers and musicians, Latin American singers and other artists, and representatives of women's, ethnic, labor, disabled persons and other groups, giving live demonstrations of CEM's aim to have all liberating voices speak for themselves and to share stories that have something to tell instead of only things to sell.

The participants debated and approved in principle a People's Communication Charter, a Viewer's Declaration of Independence and a representative organizational structure, developed recommendations from 15 Working Groups, and organized themselves into a Coordinating Council of affiliated and supporting organizations and individuals. They elected a Steering Committee to serve between Coordinating Council meetings. The Steering Committee chose five Editorial Board members to review the recommendation before submitting them to the Coordinating Council. CEM is a nonprofit, tax exempt [501(c)(3)] corporation, with officers elected annually.