

Summary of Topshee Conferences 1984-2004

1. NATURE OF HUMAN WORK

August 23-26, 1984

The first Conference consisted of two parts: (1) a Workshop comprised of academics, leaders from both organized labour and the Atlantic Community; (2) a public Conference. Both segments of the Conference were designed to explore the Nature of Human Work from three perspectives: 1) Historical; 2) Theological/Sociological; and 3) Business/Economics. The public Conference also sought to identify actions that could be initiated to seek solutions to the concerns of unemployment; the impact of technological change; and, enhancing human dignity through work.

2. MASTERS OF THEIR OWN DESTINY?

June 21-23, 1985

The 1985 Conference focused on three workshops, each preceded by major talks or panel presentations. Workshop 1 appraised the current status of democratically owned and controlled structures that were crated to enhance the power of Atlantic Canadians to influence their present and future conditions. Workshop 2 focused on concepts for economic development that could compliment the lifestyle of Atlantic Canada, create employment, and provide services. Workshop 3 was designed to develop specific strategies that would help Atlantic Canadians move closer to the ideal of becoming masters of their own destiny.

The Conference was attended by 265 persons.

3. SOLIDARITY- THE SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND June 19-21, 1986

The third annual Topshee Memorial Conference was designed to build on some conclusions made from the earlier conferences:

1. That the clientele base for conferences has become the leaders of organizations in Atlantic Canada that have been mandated to extend the power of their individual members through organization and collective action.
2. While these member-owned and member-controlled organizations have power, they recognize their limitations in influencing decision-making in Atlantic Canada.
3. That during both previous Conferences there were a significant number of references to the need for joint efforts through solidarity groups, coalitions, or alliances to exercise the combined power of the organizations represented. The 1986 Conference planners recognized that there are differences between the representative organizations, but, also saw that there was much in common between them. The 1986 Conference was designed to help identify and focus on this common ground.

The Conference was attended by approximately 350 persons.

4. FROM WORDS TO ACTION: August 20- 22, 1987
THE HUMAN DIMENSION OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The 1987 Conference was about putting people first, in economic and community development. The Conference was designed to help Atlantic Canadians address the issue of our dual dependency upon external capital and remote government. The Conference also addressed the issues of unemployment; powerlessness, and the need for community-based economic development with the objective of arriving at a sense of shared purpose. The Conference's task was to consider innovative strategies for development which have been successful elsewhere and to determine the feasibility of their application in Atlantic Canada.

Approximately 370 persons attended the 1987 Conference.

5. SOCIAL ANALYSIS: June 24-26, 1988
TAXATION AND THE SOCIAL WAGE

The 1988 Conference used the process of social analysis to explore the issues of taxation and the social wage. There was discussion on: TAXATION: What goes into the system? Who pays? Who doesn't?; and SOCIAL WAGE:- What comes out of the system: Who gains? who loses?

Social analysis helps to raise questions about society. Its purpose is to develop a critical awareness of the world and to set a direction towards social justice. In social analysis the chief resource was the participants themselves. The Conference enabled the participants to practice social analysis through the use of resource materials, discussion, and their own life experiences.

There were 204 participants at the 1988 Conference.

6. DEMOCRACY AND POWER: LOCAL ACTION August 24-26, 1989

Participants at the 1988 Conference understood that it was indeed possible for "ordinary" people to analyze and understand complex societal issues. Building on that analysis, the 1989 Conference participants examined the possibilities for meaningful change in society based on effective social action. The Conference relied on participants to develop their own analysis through discussion, debate and sharing. In that sense, everyone who attended was a resource person.

Approximately 340 persons attended the 1989 Conference.

7. THE NATURE OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT IN ATLANTIC CANADA- PROGRESS & DEPENDENCY **June 22-24, 1990**

The Atlantic Canadian economy appears to lurch from one crisis to another. Communities such as Canso, Summerside, and Grand Bank have become synonymous with the economic ills that have plagued the region for generations. Atlantic Canadians while well versed in the consequences of living in a poor region, find few answers to Questions like- Why are we poor? Why do there crisis happen over and over? This year's Conference explored the nature of underdevelopment in this region.

The 1990 Conference was attended by approximately 335 persons.

8. TO ACT JUSTLY....SOCIAL PRINCIPLES AND SOCIAL ACTION **June 21-23, 1991**

Members of popular organizations in Atlantic Canada have struggled with the need to reform society by applying commonly held principles of social justice. The Conference revisited the roots of the principles of social justice, examining the connections between these principles, the social goals of popular organizations and exploring methods to allow popular organizations to more fully realize their stated goals.

The 1991 Conference was attended by approximately 250 persons.

9. FOCUS ON FIRST NATIONS: A TIME FOR RETHINKING **June 26-28, 1992**

The conference was an observance of more than 500 years of contact between Native and Non-Native cultures. That history raised many questions for all Canadians in our search for social justice. Conference participants had the opportunity to: understand the legal, social and cultural aspirations of First Nations' people; discover shared interests and values, and explore ways to support the aspirations of aboriginal people.

The 1992 Conference was attended by approximately 350 persons.

10. WOMEN AND VIOLENCE **June 11-13 1993**

The Conference attempted to analyze the root causes of violence against women, explored alternatives to violence in our society, and attempted to develop strategies which individuals, workers, and popular organizations can use to resist and overcome violence. Conference participants had the opportunity to attend workshops on direct violence, economic violence, workplace violence, and institutional perpetrators of violence.

The 1993 Conference was attended by approximately 365 persons.

11. HEALTH CARE IN TRANSITION

June 1994

The 1994 Topshee Conference focused on health care with particular emphasis on community control and health promotion. The Conference attempted to assist people to understand the complexity of reforming health care amidst cost cutting and slashing of services.

The 1994 Conference was attended by approximately 300 persons.

12. EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR WHAT?

June 9-11, 1995

The Conference participants were challenged to the reality of what is happening in the global economy and government re-structuring and, as a result, in our education and training systems. Participants had the opportunity to hear various perspectives on changes in education and training systems in Atlantic Canada, and to discuss the impact of these changes and what actions they can take in their own organizations and communities. Participants also had the opportunity to attend workshops on specific education and training issues and on alternatives in curriculum and community-based programs.

The 1995 Conference was attended by approximately 275 participants.

13. COMMUNITY SURVIVAL & SOLIDARITY- ALTERNATIVES AND ACTION

June 7-9, 1996

Conference participants had the opportunity to learn more about the economic, social and political changes that are affecting their communities and organizations and to share their experiences. In small groups and workshops participants discussed alternatives and action for community survival and solidarity. These included current issues, roles, skills and tools for community-based development and for collective action.

The 1996 conference was attended by 300 persons. 55 volunteers contributed to the conference.

14. THE MEDIA AND POWER, DEMOCRACY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

June 13-14, 1997

The topic of the 14th conference was timely given the growth of media monopolies, recent loss of some alternative media (such as the New Maritimes), cutbacks to the CBC and the recent rise of new and somewhat controversial media such as the Internet. Through presentations, small group discussion and workshops, participant's explored four key questions: How do the media represent or "frame" us and our organizations? Why are some people, organizations and issues framed the way they are in the media? What are the implications for power, democracy and social justice? and, What can we do about it?

The 1997 conference was attended by 274 participants (331 registered).

15. PEOPLE FIRST: PURSURING A JUST ECONOMY **June 13-14, 1998**

Participants at the 1998 conference examined global development in the context of economic justice, specific economic issues facing the Atlantic region, and practical tools and mechanisms for mobilizing toward a just economy. Throughout the plenary presentations and workshops, participants identified roles and strategies for what should be done by governments, by communities, by people's organizations and by individuals. Suggested strategies include education, policy development and advocacy, coalition building, community-based alternatives and the need to forge selective links regionally, nationally and globally.

The 1998 conference was attended by 325 participants.

16. SOCIAL JUSTICE: A DIALOGUE WITH YOUTH **JUNE 10-11, 2000**

Developing ideas as to how Youth and the Traditional Constituency can support each other in efforts to enhance Social Justice and can address issues affecting youth and youth out-migration from the region.

The 2000 conference was attended by 222 participants.

17. RECLAIMING DEMOCRACY: PATHWAYS TO PARTICIPATION
MAY 25-26, 2002

The meaning and practice of citizen engagement and participation in our social, political and economic organizations. Participants examined traditional pathways for citizen engagement and participation and map out new ones.

The 2002 conference was attended by 261 participants.

18. GLOBALIZATION: THE WORLD WE WANT **MAY 15 -16, 2004**

Challenging the assumptions of corporate and elite views of globalization while examining the effects of their decisions on local people, communities, economies, nation states and our world. Participants evaluated international trade agreements, profiled activism and resistance to the current globalization agenda, and assessed alternative trade practices in terms of workers' rights and environmental issues.

The 2004 conference was attended by 161 participants.