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Mis-education through industrial rhetoric: a tragic outcome of UNCED

Joan Russow, October 1993

Many of these problems have arisen from a development model that is environmentally destructive (Agenda 21, 18.45 Fresh water)

A very serious outcome of UNCED is occurring in Education in Canada; through industries fostering an "environmentally destructive development model" in the guise of environmental enlightenment.

In chapter 36 of Agenda 21, a very important distinction is made between promoting "education," promoting "public awareness" and promoting "training." It appears to be clear, in Agenda 21, that non-governmental organizations, community-based groups, women's groups and aboriginal groups are called upon to assist educators in reorienting education. The role of industry is ascertained to be limited to specific areas of business, industrial and training programs.

" Educational authorities, with appropriate assistance of non-governmental organizations, including women's and indigenous peoples' organizations should promote all kinds of adult education programmes for continuing education in environment and development, basing activities around elementary/secondary schools and local problems. The authorities and industry should encourage business, industrial and agricultural schools to include such topics in their curricula. The corporate sector could include sustainable development in their education and training programmes. Agenda 21, section 36.5 1

In the section of Agenda 21 that addresses the " promoting of public awareness ", industry is included not as the dispenser of "education" but as the recipient of needed education.

" Countries and regional organizations should be encouraged, as appropriate, to provide public environmental and development information services for raising the awareness of all groups, the private sector and particularly decision makers. (Agenda 21, section 36.10 c)

In the section of Agenda 21 that addresses the "promoting of training" however, an important role for industry is envisioned:

“to strengthen national capacities.. in training, to enable governments, employers and workers to meet their environmental and development objectives and to facilitate the transfer and assimilation of new environmentally sound, socially acceptable and appropriate technology and know-how (Agenda 21, 36.13 c)

This section gives industry a very important mandate to assist in the retraining of employees to environmentally sound and socially acceptable technology. Rather than fulfilling this significant mandate, industry has embarked on a campaign to persuade (through educational institutions and through public relations campaigns) that their practices, which have been universally condemned, are "ecologically sound," or protective of "biodiversity". They have interpreted their mandate to educate the students in the regular academic program on "sustainability: economic, environmental and social" thus with this re-designation they have eliminated both "environmental education," and "global education. To fulfill this mandate, they have undertaken a two-prong approach: a) to influence education by having direct access to the classroom and to classroom teachers b) to influence education by being on boards of directors for National and Provincial Round tables that have been established to devise curriculum and develop educational materials for "sustainability",

a) Direct access to the classroom and to the classroom teacher

i) by influencing what is or is not included in the curriculum;

For example, textbooks lack information on deleterious impact of industry often because industry has had undue influence in the content of textbooks. In British Columbia 's Grade 10 socials curriculum, information about the deleterious impact of current forest practices was left out because of pressure from the Forest Industry.

ii) by setting up educational research centres that have access to the educational system;

For example, the Economic Resource Centre was set up by the Fraser Institute--a "think" tank of industry; and through this centre, industry had input into the design and implementation of the compulsory Consumer Education Program in the British Columbia schools.

iii) by funding what they deem to be necessary research;

For example, the United States military funded research into *Franciscella Tularensis* at the University of Victoria; this bacteria had been linked in some way to bacteriological warfare.

iv) by organizing invitational industry promotion sessions for students and teachers;
FORED organized with resource ministry funding a weekend retreat for teachers and students.

v) by offering allurements to educators;

Organizers of FORED offered some educators all expensive trips to the Queen Charlotte Islands;
paid by industry to find out more about forestry.

vi) by having undue input into government publications that are circulated as educational material ("All things Considered," Ministry of Forests)

viii) by sponsoring educational activities (At Globe 1992, Alcan, which sponsored volunteers who were primarily representatives from the University community, was able to flaunt its "greenness" through extolling the recycle-ability of aluminum while neglecting to mention the environmental destructibility occurring from the production of aluminum.

b. participants on boards and round tables set up to establish philosophical underpinnings for education

Industry is now using the concept of "sustainable development," and its redefinition "sustainability: economic, social and environmental", to justify its participation on round tables which are being mandated to formulate the philosophical underpinnings of education for sustainability.