
ISSUES AND DEBATES/ ENJEUX ET DEBATS

Europe at the Crossroads: Any Lessons for Canadian Policy Makers?

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Europe is at the crossroads. Authoritarian regimes in Eastern Europe have been toppled through popular uprisings. Representative democratic states in Western Europe are preparing for economic and political integration. The political unity Eastern and Western Europe is no longer merely a glimmer of light in the distant horizon. Europeans are actively discussing it and savouring the possibilities. Social policy and social work have not been immune from the turmoil unleashed by these momentous social processes. Social administrators, social work educators and practitioners are actively exploring the potential contained within pan-European networking and collaboration.

The drive towards greater European unity is strongly economic. Moves towards the economic integration of Western Europe by 1992 and the harmonization of professional qualifications aim to enhance labour mobility and profit-making opportunities within it. The potential for multinational companies to exploit the resources, cheap labour and talents of workers in Eastern Europe is substantial. What role do academics play in the unfolding of this historical process? Are they harbingers of change or servants of the *status quo*? Commercial business interests, multinational companies, charitable trusts and public authorities have been involved in funding initiatives aimed at fostering academic exchanges amongst institutions of higher education in European Community member states and drawing Eastern Europe more closely into the capitalist framework by facilitating greater cooperation between Eastern and Western European scholars. But the outcome of such enterprise cannot be taken for granted. The end product may endorse the existing patriarchal capitalist ideological framework of the West, but it may also result in the formation of new ideologies to inform theory and practice.

To begin with, the driving forces behind such social turmoil are not simply economic. They are also social, cultural and political. Europe is currently enmeshed in a significant ideological battle in which peoples' hearts and minds are the prizes for the victors. Are Western European capitalist representative democracies or Eastern European socialist centrally planned economies the most desirable forms of social organization for a world nearing the 21st century? An answer favouring the former often underpins much of Western European political rhetoric. Thatcher in Britain, for example, glories in the alleged 'defeat of socialism' and superiority of British institutions over others. At the same time, Britain is being hammered in the European Court for its failure to uphold human rights and gender equality in its welfare provisions.

Reality for academics disinterested in the verbal sabre-rattling and posturing taking place publicly reflects a greater complexity. Many are beavering away trying to create genuine egalitarian relationships between themselves and their European partners, and responding sensitively to the specific needs of individual students, taking into account their diverse ethnic origins and cultural traditions as well as their economic potential.

In social work, for example, staff and student exchanges funded by the European Commission through ERASMUS have fostered initiatives facilitating the training of students in other European Community countries. Each scheme requires collaboration amongst a minimum of three European Community countries to develop joint programmes of study covering the academic curriculum, practice placements and assessment. Such ventures have challenged academic assumptions about the period of training necessary to reach basic qualifying level and what goes into the teaching and practice curriculum; probed the feasibility of transferring social work skills, knowledge of social policy developments, and understandings of the specific legal framework under which social workers practice from one country to another; and compelled individuals and institutions to find ways of surmounting linguistic and cultural barriers. Finding answers to the questions posed by such collaboration have both excited and taxed the staff and students of participating institutions as they try to develop the appropriate tools for accrediting work/periods of study undertaken in another country, relinquish responsibility for assessing one of 'their' students to an institution in another country, and create a pan-European curriculum. Contacts with Eastern European colleagues reveal an interest in liberation philosophies such as feminism and black perspectives as well as increasing the production of inexpensive consumer durables.

Although a meaningful evaluation of the directions being taken by collaborative pan-European academic ventures is premature at this state, the initial prospects are promising. Many academic sacred cows are being re-examined. Some, such as the inalienable right of an institution to hold exclusive control over examination procedures are being modified through the formation of joint boards. Others, for example, maintaining academics' freedom to innovate and dissent have been reaffirmed. Unnecessary competition engendered by professional jealousies and interinstitutional rivalries has been reduced through collaborative work. Staff and students are having their understanding of working in other cultures tested by having to negotiate appropriate learning opportunities for themselves and practice their trade in other contexts (Cannan *et al.*, 1990). Then there are the predictable problems to overcome. These include finding funds for these ventures, releasing staff to develop such initiatives in under-resourced and overstretched social work agencies and educational establishments, finding time to acquire other language skills and knowledge of different countries' social systems and traditions and ensuring that the students who participate in exchange schemes have a rewarding and stimulating experience which meets their personal interests as well as the academic requirements of their course.

The development of pan-European collaborative networks respecting the integrity of different individuals, societies and cultures as an integral component of their theory and practice can be significant for Canadians. They provide practical outcomes. Canadians may find these worth examining in formulating proposals progressing the thorny issue of recognizing Quebec's claim to sovereignty and 'distinct society status' in the wake of the Meech Lake Accord.

References

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Do the Right Thing* Right

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This essay is condensed from a longer brief called "Do the Right Thing Right: An analysis of the consultation on community mental health services legislation undertaken by the Ontario Ministry of Health." It was presented to the public hearings on community mental health services legislation held across Ontario in April/May, 1990. The authors are indebted to all of the people who were interviewed during the document's development. Copies of the full text are available from David Reville, Queen's Park, Toronto, Ontario M7A 1A2.

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In the spring of 1990 the community mental health branch of the Ontario Ministry of Health sponsored a public consultation on community mental health services legislation. This is an account of that consultation with specific reference to the involvement of people labelled mentally ill. We refer to individuals so labelled as "psychiatric consumers/survivors" rather than as "patients" or "clients." This signals our alignment with people who have experienced long-term psychiatric treatment as well as our sensitivity to philosophical disagreements which continue to divide the ex-psychiatric patient movement.

This essay begins with background information on consumer participation and community mental health services legislation. It moves to a sketch of findings from key informant interviews and attendance at the public hearings. It concludes with a brief account of consultation which the authors undertook as an experiment in alternative process, followed by recommendations made to the Graham legislative sub-committee about consumer/survivor participation in future public consultations. Our intent throughout is to contribute to the debate on "consumer participation" which is currently a significant policy issue within the health and social services fields.

Background

Consumer participation in health issues began in Canada in the late 1960s (Warner, 1981). While participation by consumers of mental health services in