The Peace Movement as a Learning Site

by Barbara Roberts

I'd like to begin by posing a series of not-so-rhetorical questions, inspired by an adult educator of our grandparents' and great-grandparents' generation. He said, "Think about the world you want to live in. What do you need to build that world? Demand that your teachers teach you that." That was Peter Kropotkin. So I want to think about the kind of world we'd like to live in, and assume for the moment that we actually do live in it.

I. If we did live in such a world,

a. What kind of learning might be needed for this peaceful world? Think about this partly in terms of what we need to learn to make sense of the world, or in terms of clusters of competencies ... any adult ed framework you like.

b. Where might this learning take place? Where are the learning sites?

c. In what general cultural framework might these learning sites be embedded?

II. Next, apply these same three questions not to how the world might be if we had our druthers, but to how it actually *is* now.

a. What kind of learning does take place *vis-à-vis* a peaceful world? Use the same framework — making sense of the world, competencies, whatever.

b. Where does this learning take place?

c. In what general cultural framework are these learning sites embedded?

I would argue that we will not find the answers to these questions in the mainstream peace movement of today (although I think we would do much better in the women's peace movement), nor do I think we would find them in the discourse of adult education practice and theory of today.

What does this mainstream adult education discourse tell us about transformative learning in general and this kind of transformative learning in particular? And can we safely act upon what it tells us?

It tells us that people — adults— can change. But *can* people change, and in what respects, under what conditions?

I have carried out my work on the assumption that people *can* change, that at the very least we can choose our responses to the settings in which we find ourselves, and more strongly put, we can choose significant aspects of the future, including who we ourselves will be in that future. But is this true? Can we rely on that assumption?

This is essentially a question about the realism of the assumption that intentionality is a significant causal factor in the learning that takes place throughout our lives, and hence about the assumption that social transformation is essentially — that is, in terms of creating causality — a learning project.

I would put forward instead a proposition Mike Welton and I have been chewing over, that the socialization that occurs throughout the life span in the sites of adult experience is *more* powerful than *all* our education systems and efforts. We are socialized by our circumstances, and it is important to realize that our knowledge, both of these circumstances and of our self-shaping in response to these circumstances, is mediated by these same circumstances. As Phillip Corrigan, the

marxist scholar of culture, has remarked, human capacity is mediated by particular social forms — including the capacity to sense and direct that mediation.

The assumption that intentionality is — or can be — causal seems to me to fit much more convincingly in an individualist than a socially-based paradigm. We can learn from historians of social change movements such as Gene Sharp that successful change comes about through the works of groups of people acting together, not individuals. So it seems logical that transformative learning would include an emphasis on developing the skills, attitudes, values, knowledge and so on that are appropriate to work in group settings, which are not necessarily the same as those appropriate to work as an individual or, more precisely, in an individualistic way. Moreover, as Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital in the 20th Century* points out, and my research on the garment industry has verified, many of us increasingly find ourselves, in large parts of our lives, in an adult *un*learning society, where deep structural processes undermine much of our knowledge, skills, and resources. Increased individual knowledge, skills, and resources can become liabilities rather than assets, as cheap new workers are preferred to expensive experienced ones. On the other hand, to increase knowledge, skills, and resources for working collectively seems to offer greater possibility for transforming such a setting.

All too many mainstream adult education efforts are intrapsychic in orientation, focussing on 'learner characteristics' almost to the exclusion of the context in which the learner develops those characteristics. Surely the loci of deep change or of the points of interven-

tion for the promotion of change are outside us, at least as much as inside. It follows then that a key learning task for us as adult educators is to understand more about these loci. Where are they, what are the sites in adult life that are really (as opposed to ostensibly, or identified in the literature as being) organized to allow adults to learn what is critical for developing a peaceful world, and what are the blockades and barriers?

'Androgogy' itself seems to me to be a major barrier. Malcolm Knowles says he meant the term to describe the learning of adults, which it does not, but in fact he chose well if unwittingly. Androgogy means the teaching of adult males, and in fact that *is* what the discourse focuses on, what informs the terms in which the discourse takes place, and what legitimates whose experiences and whose voices are present in the discourse. The correct term for adult education would in fact be anthropogogy, if that's what we had taking place.

Turning from the question of learning itself to the peace movement as a learning site, it seems to me that a significant number of the blockades and barriers to learning how to transform ourselves and the world for peacefulness, are present within the peace movement itself.

The peace movement (and here I speak of the mixed mainstream peace movement in Northern American and Western Europe) itself is not a peaceful place. As Berenice Carroll pointed out in her (1972) critique of peace studies, many peace researchers, and I would add, many peace movement activists, still subscribe to the "cult of power," whose members think of power as dominance, and live and think "in the value universe of the topdogs." The definition of peace is still often limited to "the absence of
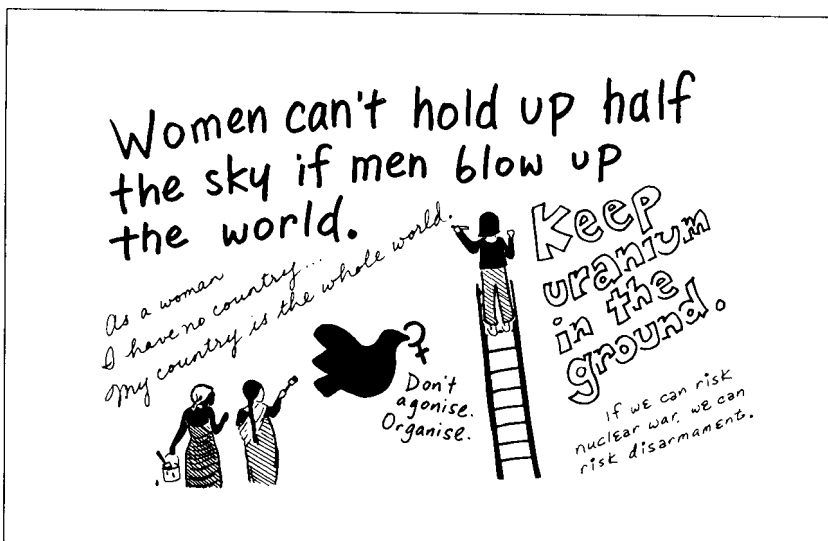
war," or even "the absence of nuclear weapons," and little attention is paid to the actual incidence and patterns of direct and structural violence in the world, or indeed in North American and Western European society. All too often the peace movement seems preoccupied with content that is about war and weapons, not peace and social transformation, and uses methods internally that are anything but peaceful or transformative. As John Broughton and Marta Zahaykevich point out (1982), the peace movement is also generally using educational methods similar to and based on the same positivist 'objective' 'neutral' 'scientific' tradition as those of the state apparatus; it is not characteristically a liberatory movement.

Hierarchy, male dominance, sexism, authoritarianism, centralism in decision making — all these are typical of a large part of the mixed peace movement to one degree or another. The experience and

participation of women are frequently excluded, wittingly or unwittingly, directly *and* structurally. Since these are among the most potent sources of learning available to the peace movement today, their loss has profound consequences. For it is crucial to realize that women and men have different life chances, life choices, and life experiences, which in themselves shape different knowledge, skills, resources, attitudes, values. Moreover, our whole social and economic and political and interpersonal system is based on the appropriation of women's unpaid labour, the subordination of women's interests to men's, the permission for men to use direct physical violence to enforce these processes (which of course control men, too, by giving them a poor substitute for their own lack of self determination and competence as whole people). And these processes are also reinforced globally by indirect structural violence.

It seems to me that in order to dismantle some of the institutional and interpersonal blockades to liberatory and transformational adult learning, these points need to be recognized and digested by the mainstream mixed peace movement. Sorting out their implications should become a fundamental part of the agenda of the learning tasks of the peace movement. And of course this will aid the movement in understanding more about and developing strategies around the political, economic, cultural and other structures that mitigate against peace in whatever way they define it.

I suggest that the development of the general cultural framework in which peace learning sites might be — *must* be — embedded, should be high on the list of our learning tasks. Resources for this task could come partly from feminist peace research and peace
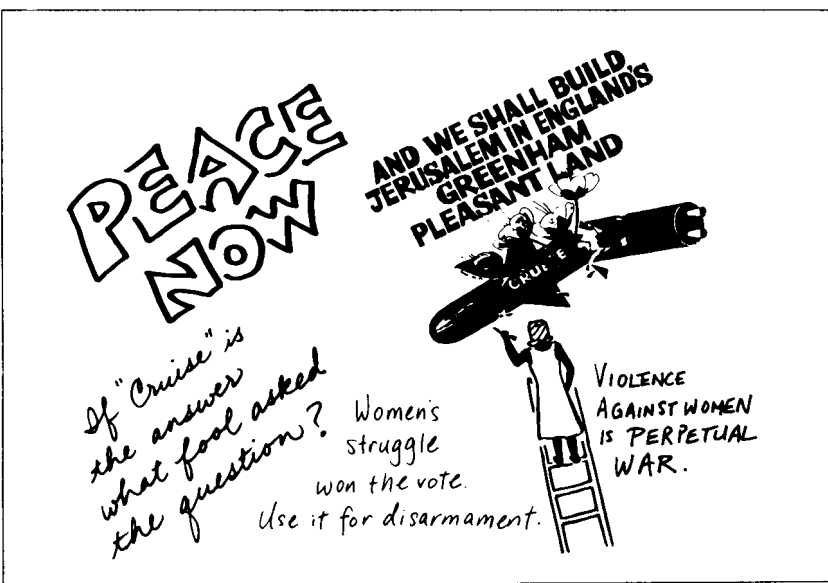
work, and it is the experience of this movement as a learning site that has largely shaped my questions and comments here. The women's peace movement (I include in my definition the women's global movement for peace, equality and development) is well described in thousands of articles, books, and audiovisuals. For example, I have attempted to describe and provide access to its resources in several published articles, and special issues of *History and Social Science Teacher* (Summer 1985) and *Atlantis* (Fall 1986). Important new books have come out by Betty Reardon of Teachers College, Columbia University, and Birgit Brock-Utne of the Institute for Educational Research at the University of Oslo.

One of the strongest feminist critiques of traditional knowledge and inquiry — sometimes called mainstream knowledge — is that they are decontextualized, and the chopped off limbs of the whole creature are analyzed as if they were discrete entities. If we uproot a plant from the soil in which it grows, and by this I mean, for example, if we decontextualize the personal from the political in our attempt to gain knowledge about social transformation, we end up with a dead plant, not a viable organic system from which we can learn.

Returning to my original not-just-rhetorical questions, I think that the kind of learning we are after cannot concentrate on intrapsychic interpersonal issues without focussing also on the political and community context in which these issues are expressed and confronted. We need to work on critical theory, conceptual revisioning, transformative political praxis and personal practice, and a respect for our own and others' accountability and competence, seeing these as part of a whole.

We rightly are concerned with facilitating changes in the consciousness and behaviour of individuals. But unless people's *experience* can be changed — and by that I mean the possibilities for experience, the cultural settings, the sites of experience — we cannot expect new consciousness and behaviour to be very well rooted because they will be dissonant with the setting and its rules and processes. And finally, I suggest we would do well to avoid the trap of what Jean Bethke Elshtain calls the "therapeutic class-

room," and the lure of focussing on powerful processes and approaches such as Joanna Macy's and Interhelp's despair and empowerment work, or visioning a peaceful world, or other attractive and to a large extent well founded and effective methods, to the *exclusion* of developing as part of the same learning task a critical understanding of the situated reality of our lives and consciousness.

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LORINDA PETERSON
The Bath

Today we broke the ice, and watched
it drift out from between us like the
softened water trickles off your breasts,
and faceless generations take place
in dingy albums, waiting there to be re-
called. We spoke of other loves and past
lives till our tongues mistook the cracking
ice for surface lines in photographs and
slowly felt their way around the edges;
every sound a wet splash or a cold fish
laid across our fattened bellies; every
breath acute and turned to bubble. In the
old enamel tub, our toes grew withered,
practised moving to avoid the floes we
tossed from tongue to tongue, and churned
the water, warm around our bodies.

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