3

An Approach: Introducing The Four Phases

Not a method but a way of thinking

At the end of a training workshop in our approach to **naming the moment,** a member of one community group exclaimed:

"I realize now that I have a hole in my thinking: I have trouble holding contradictions!"

Because we have been taught to think in either-or terms, we tend to ignore or dichotomize the contradictions around us. Yet central to this kind of political analysis is 'dialectical thinking'.

Rather than 'either-or', it requires a 'both-and' way of looking at forces, of seeing the dynamic interaction of contradictory ideas and forces. It involves naming and using them creatively and productively.

Learning to **name the moment** or to do political analysis for action is not just adding a new tool to our repertoire of analytical skills. It is, in fact, another way of thinking, a different way of looking at the world and acting upon it.

In the process, we will come up against the dominant thinking in our western liberal culture, which is more idealistic and absolutist, linear and ahistorical. In developing our own practice, we will also be developing a more historical and dialectical view of our actions.

Notes

A word of warning

We realize the danger of this 'approach' being taken as a recipe or formula. This would be a distortion of the underlying principle: that all our actions, including the act of doing political analysis, must be appropriate to our own particular historical context and time.

Hopefully, the questions raised and processes illustrated here will stimulate groups to think about their own analytical work. But any specific practice of political analysis has to be hammered out by a group itself, given its own constraints and possibilities.

Tools are just tools

In a highly technological consumer society like ours, there is a tendency to think that the latest tool can solve all our problems. We are fascinated by new toys, and sometimes expect them to provide a quick fix!

It's important to guard against this understanding and use of the tools and techniques described in the following pages. Analytical tools are needed in the practice of political analysis for action. They can help make our analysis sharper, more creative, more participatory.

Groups will choose or create tools, depending on their specific objectives, the culture and practice of the group, the time available, etc. Our primary hope is that the examples given here make people feel that political analysis is something that they can do themselves and that it will make their work more effective.

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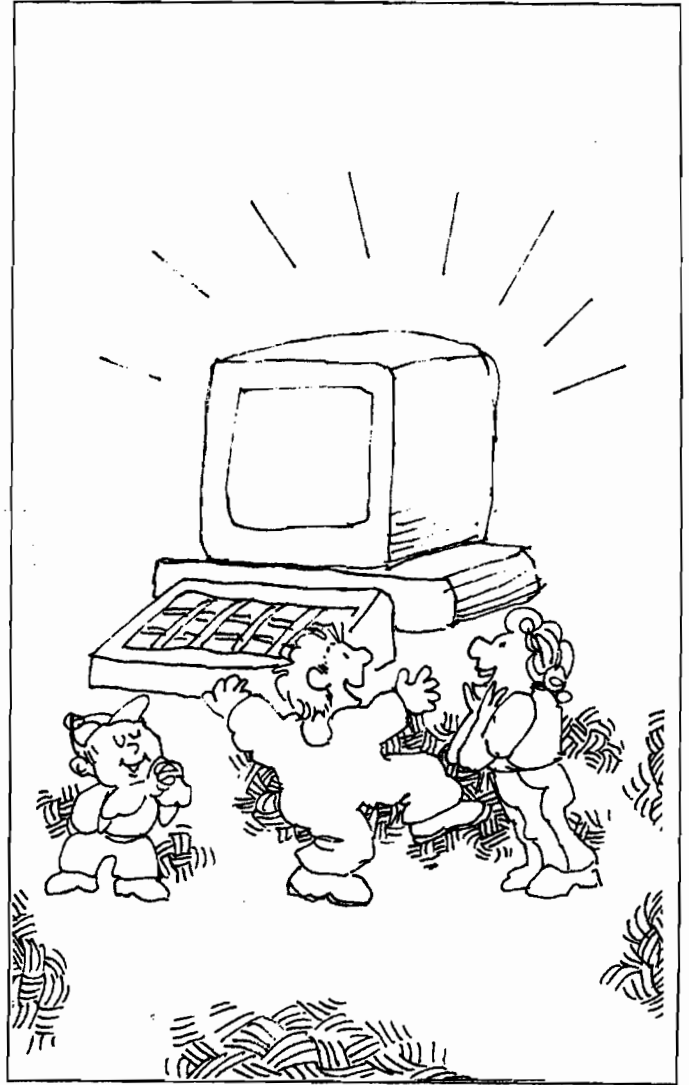
This chapter offers a training program in a more dialectical way of thinking. It's a bit like learning a sport. When we first try it, all the movements are awkward. So there are exercises that we do to warm up.

We learn the new motions step by step; the game itself is broken up so that we can practice one piece at a time. Then when we begin to master the pieces and put them together, we start to internalize the skills; they become second nature to us.

We have divided the process of **naming the moment** into four phases. In the following pages, you will be introduced to several analytical tools. But our hope is that eventually the four phases meld into an ongoing process, a way of thinking.

Action is the key

The main goal of **naming the moment** is to act more effectively for change. Action is the heart of this process: the analysis is based on an evaluation of past actions and leads to more strategic action in the future.

Action is the reference point in the phases; it must be taken to give meaning to any of them. It's a spiral process: we move through the four phases to plan for action, we act, then we reflect on that action and what we've learned from it. Ultimately, the reflection and action are inseparable, become one.

Notes

Naming the Moment: Phases and Questions

The process of political analysis for action, or **naming the moment** moves through four phases:

PHASE 1 – Identifying Ourselves And Our Interests

Who are 'we' and how do we see the world?

How has our view been shaped by our race, gender, class, age, sector, religion, etc.?

How do we define our constituency? Are we of, with, or for the people most affected by the issue(s) we work on?

What do we believe about the current structure of Canada? about what it could be? about how we get there?

PHASE 2 – Naming The Issues/Struggles

What current issue/struggle is most critical to the interests of our group?

What are the opposing interests (contradictions) around the issue?

What are we fighting for in working on this issue - in the short-term and in the long-term?

What's the history of struggle on this issue? What have been the critical moments of the past?

PHASE 3 – Assessing The Forces

Who's with us and against us on this issue (in economic, political, and ideological terms)?

What are their short-term and long-term interests?

What are their expressed and their real interests?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of both sides?

What about the uncommitted?

What actors do we need more information about?

What's the overall balance of forces?

Who's winning and who's losing and why?

PHASE 4 – Planning For Action

How have the forces shifted from the past to the present? What future shifts can we anticipate?

What 'free space' do we have to move in?

How do we build on our strengths and address our weaknesses?

Whom should we be forming alliances with? In the short-term and in the long-term?

What actions could we take?

What are the constraints and possibilities of each?

Who will do what and when?

PHOTOCOPY THIS PAGE AS AN EASY REFERENCE!

Notes

The four phases are intimately connected and can be happening almost simultaneously. When we are clarifying our goals or suggesting new allies, for example, we will also be reflecting on who we are and what we believe.

The rest of this chapter provides detailed introductions to each phase, with examples of how various groups have carried it out.

# PHASE 1 – Identifying Ourselves and Our Interests

This phase involves:

*   clarifying who we are in terms of class, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age, sector, etc. *(examples 1 and 4)*;

*   expressing our views of how Canadian society is structured *(example 1)*, how we would like it to be *(example 3)*, and how we think change happens;

*   identifying how we think our group can contribute to a movement for social change;

*   clarifying both similarities and differences in our political perspectives.

Why is it important?

If we want to change the structure of society and the course of history, we must see ourselves as part of that society and history. Our analysis will reflect our own interests, who we are in terms of class, race, gender, age, sector. Our goals will be tied to our own experiences within current power relations.

Naming the moment helps us read history and act more effectively toward social change. While this analysis shifts from one moment to another, it is based on a more permanent structural analysis: how we see society structured and how we want to change it.

It's important to talk frankly about the different perspectives we bring to the longer term questions, even if we don't agree. The differences, in fact, may offer both constraints to and possibilities for our proposed actions. They will inevitably affect how we read and use present moments for short-term goals as well as for longer-term objectives.

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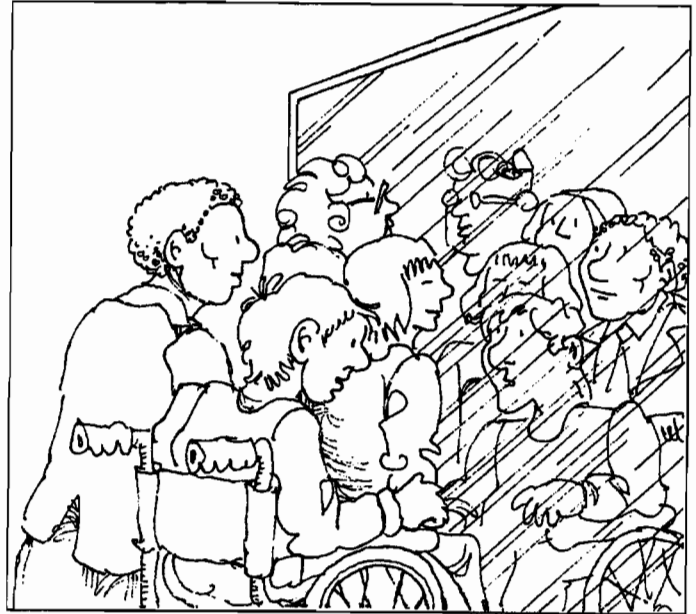
How can we do this?

Finding out who we are and what we believe is really a life-long process. If we want to be more conscious about it, we could start by responding to the questions under Phase 1 on page 27.

Boxed in on the following pages are examples of what some groups have done to address one or another of these questions.

Example 1 - Lifeboats

This activity can provide a 'social X-ray' of a group. It works well with a larger multi-sectoral group, if people don't know each other very well.

The purposes of this exercise are to help people identify common interests and to highlight the major characteristics of the group.

This is the scenario: We are on a ship that might sink so we must practice getting into lifeboats. The facilitator calls out categories (gender, age, race, etc) on which basis we divide ourselves into lifeboats. When a category is called, participants scramble to find others in the same category. (See **A New Weave,** pages 79-80, in the **Resources** for more details). This is how we used it in one moment workshop:

By province or country of birth

This gave us a sense of each other's backgrounds. While we recognized that our analysis would be Toronto-centric because that's where we work, we learned that only 8 out of 17 were born in Ontario.

We identified current political forces in our places of origin. Those from British Colombia and Great Britain named 'right wing attacks on people's rights,' for example; a Quebecois talked about Quebec nationalism and the Ontario-born identified 'Orangeism'.

By decade of birth

When we divided by decades, we could easily see that the majority were children of the 50's. No one over 55 or under 25 was represented; we had to acknowledge that this would affect our analysis. For fun, each age group selected a song from the decade and sang it to the group.

By cultural background

Most people were of British origin, with some American, European, and Latin American. The absence of people of Asian, African, and Caribbean origin was identified as an important gap, which we would have to address as a group.

By gender

We were quite evenly divided between men and women. Each group was asked to discuss what they felt the other gender would bring to the workshop. The men felt that a feminist perspective would be important to our analysis. The women expressed fears that the men might tend to make the discussion too intellectual.

The 'Lifeboats' activity can be adapted to almost any group, purpose, and time frame. What characteristics are important to identify in your group: occupation, racial identity, years of involvement, positions on a particular issue? As is evident in the example, you can use each new grouping to pursue specific questions in more depth.

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Example 2 - Social Tree
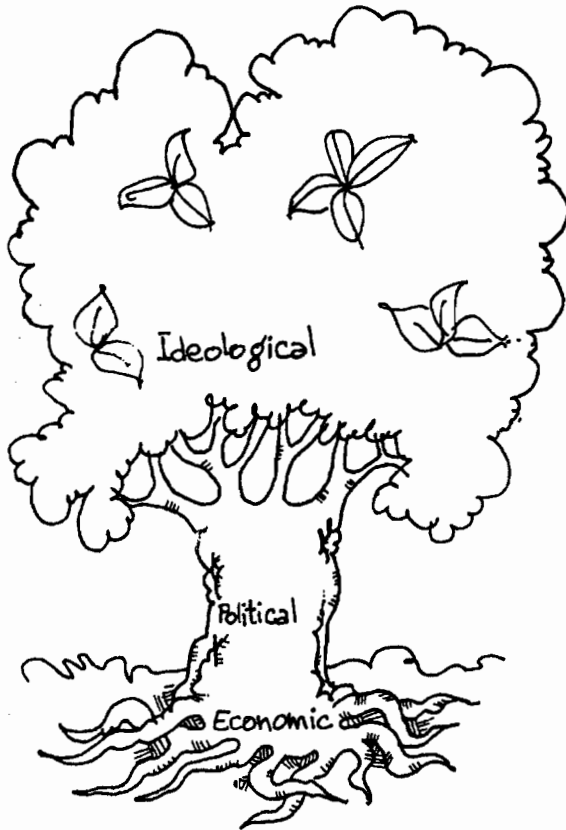
In Phase 1, as we identify ourselves, we also need to clarify our different political perspectives, how we see society now and how we would like it to be.

We have found the 'social tree' a useful tool for examining our understanding of Canadian social structure.

The roots represent the base of any social structure - its **economic** system (in Canada, our form of advanced capitalism). This defines the relations of production.

The trunk is the social and **political** structure that makes the system run (eg. our parliamentary form of government, social organizations and institutions).

The leaves stand for the **ideological** elements of society - school, churches, media and cultural forms that transmit the beliefs and values of the system.

No aspect of Canadian society exists in isolation from the others; no tree has leaves without a trunk or branches without roots.

While the economic system gives rise to certain political structures or ideological forms, ideas and institutions also influence the shape of the economy.

There is a dynamic and integrated relationship between the parts.

Notes

Here are two ways this tool has been used:

• One group wrote on index cards what they thought were the significant characteristics of Canadian social reality. They worked in three small groups, to identify economic, political, and ideological features.

They taped the cards on a large tree on the wall, placing them in the appropriate areas. Then they looked at the bigger picture and asked: What are the common elements of our analysis? Where do we disagree?

• In another workshop, in early 1986, just after the MacDonald Commission Report suggested free trade, participants identified the key tensions in Canada at the moment as those illustrated on the tree to the right.

Critiques of the tool

It is interesting to note some of the problems emerging with this tool. In a couple of instances, groups protested the use of the tree as a metaphor for society.

In the first case, they critiqued the image of uprooting the tree as the metaphor for fundamental structural change. They felt it was not an appropriate metaphor in Canada, where trees are a major natural resource and cultural symbol. And so the discussion of the metaphor itself raised important questions about how we understand the process of social change.

In another context, the social tree was criticized for giving prominence to the economic roots. The role of sexism and racism in maintaining the structure is not clearly integrated into the model. Feminist and anti-racist movements are helping to reframe our understanding of social structure in this way.

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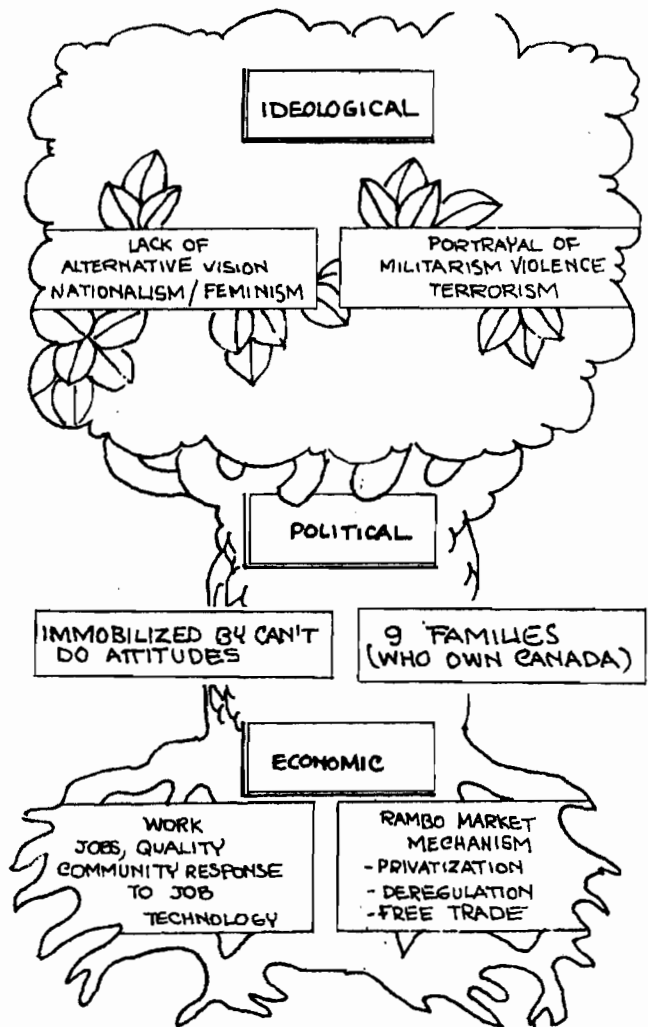
Example 3 - Vision Exercise

Using the tree metaphor, some activists identified a 'lack of alternative vision' as a key ideological force.

In early 1987, we devoted three hours of a moment workshop to exploring our visions of the kind of society we would like to create.

Taking the time to do such a thing seemed novel. As people working for social change, we often find ourselves fighting against injustices of all sorts without thinking about what we're working for in the long term.

And yet it takes vision to mobilize groups to act. The moment people see that something can be different, they feel a lot more energy for the work.

The objective of the activity described below was to give us time to reflect on our different assumptions about what we were working toward and to begin to construct a common vision.

- Individuals spent 10 minutes writing down the characteristics of the society they wanted to live in.

- In small groups, we shared those ideas. Then each group created a collective drawing to illustrate the common threads of the vision of its members.

- Groups displayed their drawings in a plenary to share our visions and the similarities and differences in them.

Most images reflected a desire for a society with values rooted in a reverence for all things - people, nature and an acceptance of diversity. People talked about supportive communities where there was an integration of work and home life.

There was tension around how this vision would work on a global scale. What would happen to mass production and advanced communications technology, for example?

While imagining a more just future, we still had to confront the contradictions of the present. We realized that we needed to work a lot more on our vision of alternatives, given current conditions.

Example 4 - Monitors

We recognized that our own discussion often unconsciously reflects the sexism, racism, ageism, homophobia, and middle class perspectives that permeate our society.

So we periodically assigned members of the group to be monitors for each of these 'isms'.

Their role was to listen especially for signs of bias in our conversations, and to point them out to us - either at the moment it was heard or during the evaluation at the end of a workshop.

For example, one person signaled the use of the term 'Black Monday,' when we talked about the stock market crash in October 1987. It made us more conscious of how 'black' is often used as a derogatory term. The monitors reminded us in a systematic way about how who we were influenced our analysis.

Notes

PHASE 2 – Naming the Issues

This phase involves:

- identifying the key issues/struggles in the sector where we work and in the broader Canadian and global context *(example 1)*;

- clarifying what are the major contradictions (opposing forces) at play within and around an issue *(example 2)*;

- reviewing the history of struggle around this issue and the shifts in forces from one moment to the next *(example 2)*;

- defining our group's short-term goals and longer-term objectives in working on the issues *(example 3)*.

Why Is It Important?

Some groups have very clearly-defined issues, while others may shift issues depending on the moment and need.

It is important to name the key issue we are working on and the contradictions it reflects.

As conjunctural analysis involves learning to read history, we must always look at present struggles in terms of their past evolution and where they might move in the future.

The real value of an ongoing systematic analysis of events is seeing the shifts over time. Then it's possible to project developments and shape them strategically.

Defining short-term goals and longer-term objectives is another way of clarifying why we are working on an issue, in both conjunctural and structural terms.

If we want to identify who's with us and who's against us, we have to be clear around what interests they are with or against us. If we are using the analysis to develop more strategic actions, we must know what we're working toward.
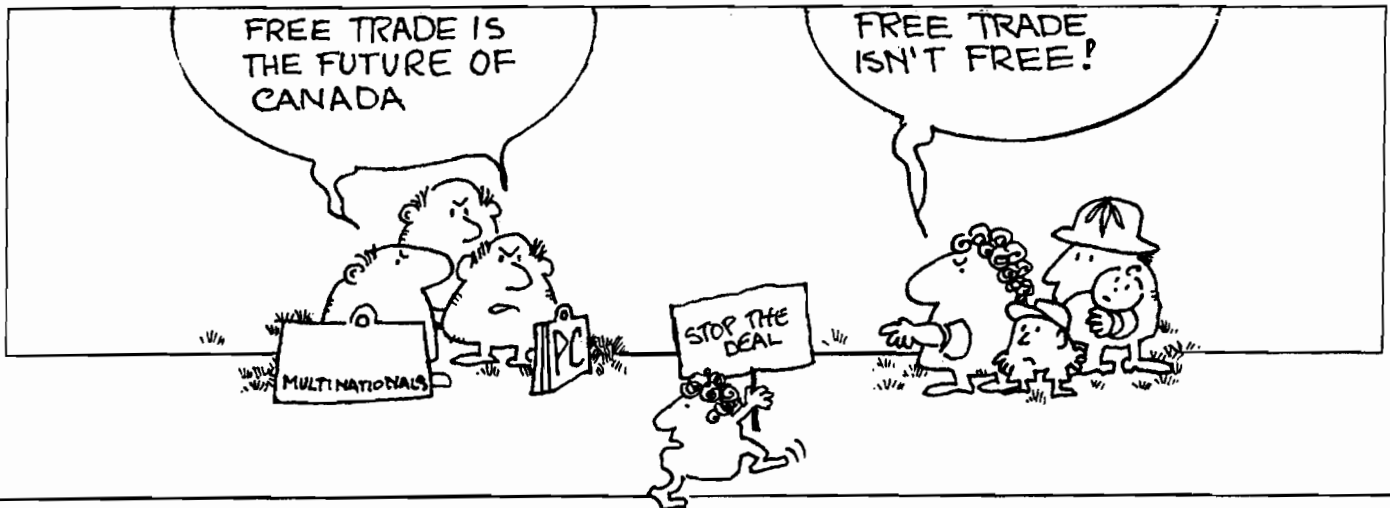
Notes

Example 1: Fleshing out an issue

During the 1987-88 moment workshop series, the twenty participating activists chose to focus on the issue of 'free trade'.

Because the issue seemed so big and all encompassing, we felt the need to define the many opposing interests reflected in the free trade debate. This is how we did that:

- We brainstormed a number of ways that the issue could be looked at. Thirteen aspects were listed on a flip chart.

- We shortened the list to eight, and voted with sticky dots. Each participant had two votes to stick on the area she/he would like to focus on.

- Four areas were selected and small groups formed to examine them:

  1) privatization of social services;

  2) role of culture and media;

  3) militarization and foreign policy;

  4) trends of transnational capitalism.

- Each group researched its area, and reported to the plenary a month later.

This deeper 'naming of the issue' allowed us to see free trade as just one aspect of a neo-conservative trend, related to privatization, deregulation, decline of the welfare state, etc.

Example 2: Drawing an historical timeline

In early 1989, the Jesuit Refugee Services–Canada (JRS-C), along with other groups, was responding to new government legislation around refugees. A shortened screening process threatened many refugees with deportation.

In joining forces with other groups to form a national network called VIGIL, JRS-C reviewed the struggle around the refugee issue in Canada. This historical review helped activists trace how public consciousness developed in relation to key incidents over the past few years.

A synthesis of this timeline appears on the next page. The group chose to look at the past ten years, focussing on the last two.

The actors and actions on behalf of refugees are below the timeline in italics. Government actions which have threatened refugee rights are above the line.

To develop strategies for the coming year, the group also projected anticipated future events and potential reactions to them. Situating present actions in the context of past and future scenarios helped to identify the kinds of forces at play.

A group adapting this activity might select a different time line in reviewing its own issue. It is also important to situate your own group within the context of the history of the struggle.
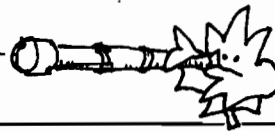
Notes

HISTORICAL TIMELINE

| Reviewing The Past 10 Years											
	Government bureaucrats informed, not public		Unemployment ('They're stealing our jobs.')		Media campaign against refugees		McLean announced intended restrictions		New laws proposed	Passed	Implemented
1978	Boat People	1982	Reces-sion	Refugees from Cent. Am., Iran, Afghanistan		1958	Singh Case	1986	Tamil Boat	1988	1989

(Note: "New laws proposed" aligns with 1987)

Close-up of past 2 Years															
	Government introduces interim measures			C-55 introduced		National emergency declared		C-84 introduced	Turks deported		Bills passed			Elections	Bills implemented
1987	Jan	Feb	Mar	May	July	Sikh Boat	Aug	Sept	Oct	1988	July	Nov	1989	Jan	

Hawkes proposal rejected in cabinet   Formation of National Coalition for a Just Refugee/Immig. Policy   Bills stalled in Senate   VIGIL and court action

Projecting the next 2 Years						
	Government working out the wrinkles of the new system - few deportations			Once public attention has waned, more deportations		Court action decision
1989	Jan	April	May	June	1990	1991

Court Action launched Vigil network formed   Refugee Rights Day   Vigil Conference   Canadian Council on Refugees Conference

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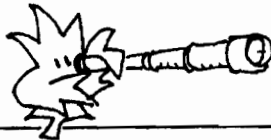
Notes

Example 3: Clarifying our goals

With an historical perspective on the issue we are working on, we can clarify what we are working for in the future. This identification of goals is critical to the **naming the moment** process.

Some groups do goal-setting as part of their program planning process. But they often stop with short-term goals, and fail to propose longer-term objectives. There are dangers in focussing merely on one or the other. With vague longer-term objectives, a group may flounder, not knowing how to get there from here. Action plans must be built around concrete, realizable goals. On the other hand, focussing only on short-term goals may lead a group to actions that don't build toward a longer-term impact.

An environmental group named as its long term objective **to achieve sustainability** of the planet. They distinguished this from 'sustainable development', a catch word being used by corporations and governments to justify a more subtle form of control.

They identified indicators of sustainability in the long-term:

- zero waste;
- soft energy and small scale alternatives;
- local control of bioregionalism;
- increased food production in urban centres;
- zero discharge in the Great Lakes;
- no more subsidy on primary resource extraction;
- international trading of recyclable resources.

Many of these indicators had technical implications, but clearly depended on a shifting of political forces and an increasing public consciousness.

The group had major responsibility for public education in their organization, and so they focussed their short-term goals on the educational process. They brainstormed several aspects of their task:

- to get a working definition of 'sustainability';
- to translate that definition to a broader public;
- to identify the blocks to sustainability and to uncover good examples of it;
- to expand the numbers of environmentally active citizens to 400,000;
- to identify the sectors they want to reach;
- to work cooperatively with groups;
- **to create a shift from NIMBY to NIABY consciousness.**

This last goal became the heart of their strategy. They recognized the growth of Not-in-my-backyard (NIMBY) groups who were fighting landfills and dumping in their own communities. These new activists represented an important constituency for further education.

The group's hope was that their programs and materials could help move such folks toward a NIABY perspective (Not-in-anyone's-backyard). This would imply a deeper analysis of the causes of environmental destruction and a broader concern for the whole planet. These would be steps toward taking more positive action for sustainability.

Notes

PHASE 3 – Assessing the Forces

This phase involves:

- listing the major actors (in the economic, political, and ideological sectors) that are with us, against us, and uncommitted on the issue *(example 1)*;

- identifying key groups, organizations, and institutions as well as personalities who lead the organizing for and against *(example 1)*;

- clarifying the real and expressed interests of the major actors, their short-term goals and longer-term objectives *(example 2)*;

- selecting the most critical relationships/tensions *(example 1)*;

- analyzing the strategies being adopted by both sides *(example 2)*;

- naming both short-term and longer-term allies;

- assessing the balance of forces for and against, who's winning and who's losing, and in what ways *(examples 3 and 4)*.

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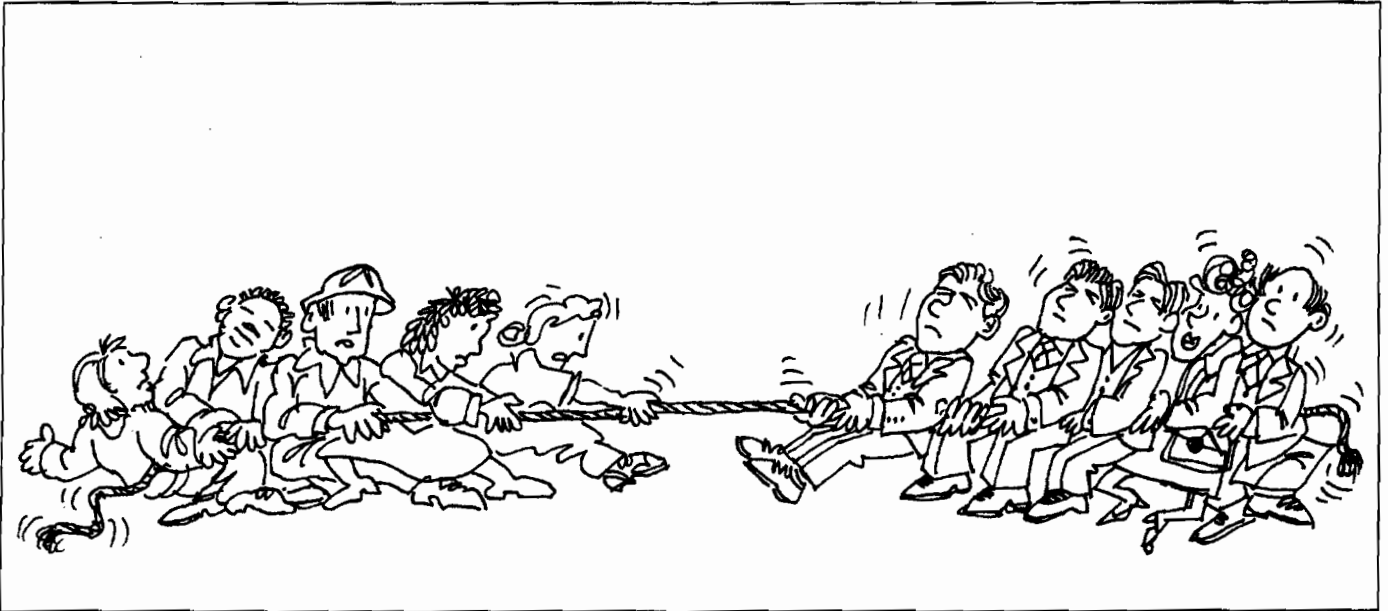
Why is It important?

This phase is the heart of the process of **naming the moment.**

In assessing the forces organizing for and against an issue, we are coming to terms with who is on our side and who is not.

Listing the actors is primarily an analytical process, while assessing their relationships is a process of synthesis.

Identifying persons and groups by sector (economic, political, and ideological) helps clarify where the battle is most intense. At certain moments, it may be hottest in the political sphere (e.g. during elections), in the ideological sphere (e.g. the Rushdie affair), or in the economic sphere (e.g., the debt crisis), but the three will always be interacting.

It's important to decide whether certain groups share our long-term interests or only our short-term goal. We may make tactical alliances with such groups, but recognize the limits to collaboration.

Assessing the overall correlation of forces is the key task. It involves looking at the interrelationship of all the various forces, their strengths and weaknesses. It means coming up with a balance sheet, one that indicates who's winning and on what terms, who's losing and why.

How can we do it?

Example 1: Listing The Actors

- Identify at the top of a large sheet of paper the short-term goal and the longer-term objective you are working toward.
- List in three columns forces in the economic, political, and ideological spheres that are with us, against us, and uncommitted (with = red, against = blue, uncommitted = green).
- In naming actors, describe their short-term and long-term interests.
- List short-term allies but long-term opponents on 'forces with us' side but in blue; long-term allies but short- term opponents on 'forces against us' but in green.
- Put in parentheses those areas or actors requiring further research.
- Assess the major contradictions in the three spheres (economic, political, ideological);
- Identify the major opposing interests;
- Relate the opposing interests identified in one sphere to those in other spheres;
- Decide the balance of those forces: who's winning, who's losing, and why.

Notes

| Short-term goal: | To expose (fight) racism in police repression |
| Long-term objectives: | To fight racism in ourselves, our organizations and institutions. To build a non (anti)-racist, non (anti)-sexist socialist Canada. |

FORCES WITH US	UNCOMMITTED	FORCES AGAINST US
	Ideological	
Community Newspapers – Contrast		Toronto Sun
Minority Women's Movement		Education System
Black Action Defense Committee		Philippe Ruston
Wade Lawson Defense Committee		Police Association
– Sherona Hall		Women's Movement
		Churches
		Concept of multiculturalism
	Political	
Teachers' Unions	Many rank and file members	National Citizen's Coalition
USWA – Michael Lewis	Church	Ontario Housing Authority
NDP	Solidarity Groups	Police Association
Native Peoples	NDP	Conservative Party
	Liberals	Immigration System
		Multicultural Policy
	Economic	
Black and Eggleton pro SARC	75% of population	Entrepreneurial Immigrants
Refugee support groups		Ebony Magazine
Employment Equity Alliance		Business opposition to
Women's Movement		employment equity
		Toronto Chamber of Commerce

Notes

The chart on the preceeding page was developed by a workshop of community activists in early 1989 examining police racism following the killings of two black men. The multi-sectoral group divided into three groups, each focusing on one sphere: the economic, political, or ideological.

Only partial results of the analysis appear in the chart. The group first clarified their short-term goals and longer-term objectives; one group redefined the goals in stronger terms, noted in parentheses. Sample of actors in each sphere are listed.

The listing of the actors is not often a straight-forward task. People will bring their own perspectives of which forces are most important. They may argue about who goes in which column. This process of debate is in itself critical; it is how the deeper interests get identified.

Some contradictions in the listing illustrate this debate:

- The group examining ideological forces distinguished between the minority women's movement and the broader women's movement. They argued that if a group wasn't taking an active stance against racism, then it was a 'force against'. On the other hand, the women's movement appeared as a 'force with us' in its support for employment equity emphasized in the economic sphere.

- The group focussing on political forces looked specifically at the splits within groups. The NDP, for example, appears both as 'with us' and 'uncommited'. One key labour-union is named as supportive while it is recognized that many rank and file union members may not be.

- There was protest by other groups when the economic subgroup identified Conrad Black and Toronto Mayor Art Eggleton's support of the Social Assistance Review Commission recommendations as a positive force. The group clarified that certain politicians and corporate leaders might share our short-term goal of exposing racism in the police force, without a real commitment to the longer-term objective of fighting systemic racism.

Such critical questionning of the deeper underlying interests is a major purpose of Phase 3 in the **naming the moment** process.

After assessing the forces, groups synthesized their analysis by identifying the major opposing interests in each sphere. The economic group counter-posed the forces of wealth against the movement for employment equity.

In the ideological sphere, 'multiculturalism' was identified as a key liberal concept which ultimately worked against 'us' by obscuring racism. The group also questionned exactly what is meant by 'we', by asking: Are all progressive groups working to fight racism?

This examination of systemic racism, then, forced groups to look critically within their organizations as well, to understand the more subtle internal forces acting for and against change.

The process of listing the actors and assessing their interests also suggested new allies for anti-racist struggles, for example, the untapped interest of solidarity groups, the more progressive elements of the church, etc.

Notes

Personalities count

In trying to understand the present moment, we must also take into account the role that certain persons play. Though they represent institutions and their interests, some individuals become important symbols of those interests by force of their personality and their position.

During the three years of national free trade debate, for example, there were key figures pitted against each other in different spheres. Thomas D'Aquino of the Business Council on National Issues represented the **economic** interests behind the deal, while Bob White of the Canadian Autoworkers Union was a kind of folk hero for the interests of working people.

In the **political** sphere, especially during the 1988 elections, it was Brian Mulroney versus John Turner. **Ideologically**, academics put themselves on both sides of the battle line. John Crispo of the University of Toronto served as a key government consultant while Marjorie Cohen of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women was a frequent spokesperson for the Pro-Canada Network.

The Uncommitted

On many issues, large portions of the population may not be sure where they stand. It is as important to identify the uncommitted forces as it is to name those that are clearly with and against us.

These groups are potential allies. We must ask why they straddle the fence. If we understand better where they are coming from, we may find where their interests coincide with ours.

In this area is the elusive role of 'public opinion.' Refugee rights groups realized the importance of this factor as Canada began to close the doors to refugees in early 1987.

Government strategy, aided by the media after the arrival of the boat of Tamils, for example, was to fuel the flames of racism within the Canadian public. Immigrants were also pitted against refugees who were seen as 'queue jumpers'. The challenge was to help people see their deeper common interests with refugees.

Allies: short and/or long-term?

In listing groups that support a particular issue, we must distinguish between those that are with us in the short term and those that actually share our longer-term interests.

In fighting to stop the Mulroney trade deal, for example, we found some strange bedfellows in the Liberal Party and select elements of the business sector.

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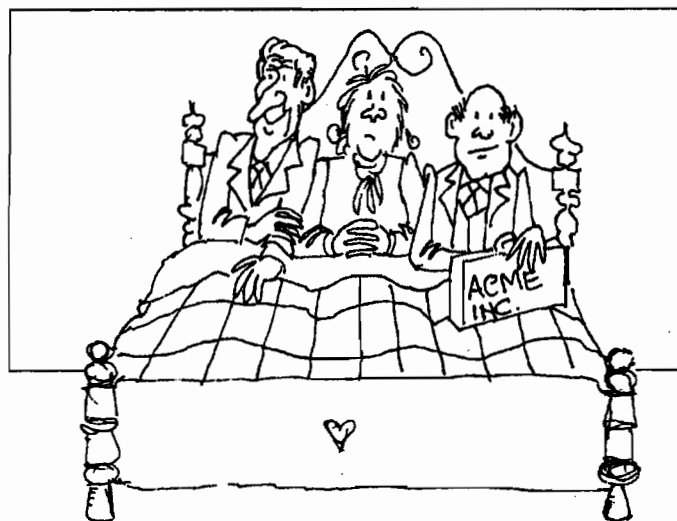
Example 2 - The Table Metaphor

In the fall of 1986, native organizations in Canada were preparing for the final First Minister's Conference on native self-government, to be held in early 1987.

A native leader participating in the moment workshops helped us look at the forces at play around this issue. The 'table' became a metaphor for naming the actors and assessing their interests.

First of all, the table is a western not an indigenous construct, brought to Canada by European settlers. In the same sense, the First Ministers Conferences were also called and framed by the government. Native people would not have created this form of negotiations.

In trying to examine the opposing forces, we asked three major questions:

Who's at the table?

We placed the four native groups and their lawyers on one side, the federal and provincial government representatives and their lawyers on the other side.

We did a quick analysis of these actors in terms of class, race, and gender; not surprisingly, white male business class interests predominated.

What's on the table?

The next question forced us to name the expressed interests of the two major opposing forces. We described the strategies evident in the behaviour of the State actors (keeping the debate within the legalistic frame of the constitution, affirming the provincial and federal levels of government as the only two sovereign governments), and the strategy of the native groups (to emphasize aboriginal rights as an historical given, not as something being requested of the colonial government.)

What's under the table?

We had placed a small table in the centre of our circle to focus our discussion. At this point, we turned the table upside down and asked: What are the real interests at stake in this government-constructed debate?

We divided into four small groups to examine aspects of these opposing interests: ideological, political, military, and economic.

This activity helped identify alliances that progressive groups could make with native people on this issue. Peace and environmental activists, for example, joined forces with native people in showing how the increasing militarization of Canada served the economic interests of multinational oil companies like ESSO, while taking control of the land and resources of northern native people, destroying the ecology and culture that sustains them.

Notes

Example 3: Dramatizing contradictions

Listing the actors and analyzing their interests and strategies reveals their strengths and weaknesses. Built on a deeper understanding of these opposing interests, we finally need to assess their relative strength and relationship.

The technique of 'theatre of the oppressed' lends itself well to focussing on contradictions in power relationships. In a 1989 moment workshop, community activists learned to use the tool to examine tensions within their own groups around the question of building a base.

After warming up and learning to sculpt each other into positions of power, participants were asked to recon-struct incidents in their own experience reflecting internal tensions around base-building.

The drawing below shows the sculpture created by a women labour activist.

In decoding this image we find:

A   the domination of white men within the labour movement;

B   the efforts of feminist members to raise the con-sciousness and activity of women trade unionists around their own rights and interests;

C   implicit racism among white women activists that excludes women of colour from their efforts.
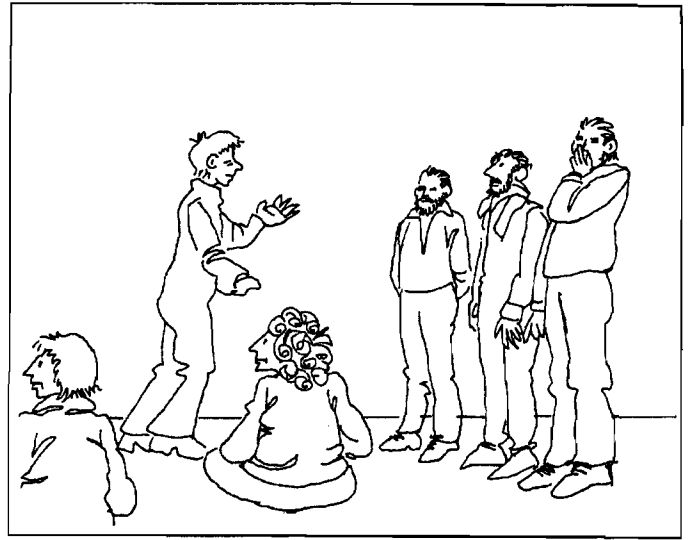

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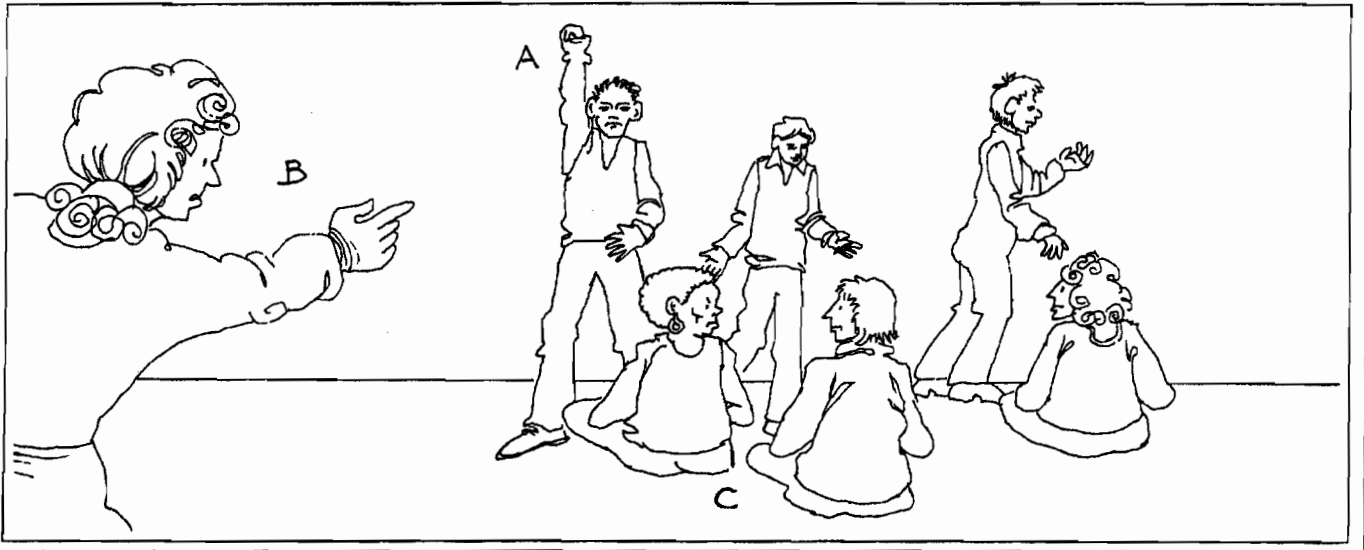
There are several ways to use theatre to dig deeper into these contradictions:

- Any one of the actors can be examined more carefully by asking:

  What other figures around this person would express in more detail his/her interests? Put them there.

  What would each of the actors in the scenario be saying? Say it.

  What would the next movement of each be? Do it.

- Accepting this as an accurate picture of the present situation, how would you like to change it? Reconstruct the sculpture to reflect the ideal. What would we have to do to get there?

This is one example of the use of nonverbal tools to examine power relationships. There are many other applications not only of theatre techniques, but also of drawing, photos, music, etc.

Find the forms that are culturally appropriate to the group using them and that group members feel comfortable with. Most important is that they help the group achieve its analytical objective; if that can be done with a lot of energy and creativity, all the better!



Notes

Example 4: Drawing the relationship of forces

A group working in solidarity with the Philippines chose a graphic method of describing the correlation of forces. The time was mid-1988, two years after the Marcos dictatorship had been overthrown by the more popular government of Cory Aquino.

The graphic below shows different aspects of the forces:

- The size of the circles represents the group's assessment of the relative strength of the various forces at that particular moment.

- The relationship between forces is reflected in two ways:

– their proximity to each other (for example, there is an overlap between the Cory government and the Senate, Congress, and Church; and the Philippine military is placed close to the U.S.);

– graphic symbols of the kind of relationships between forces (for example, guns representing the U.S.-supported force of the military against guerrilla groups - CPP/NDF NPA - as well as the armed struggle of those groups against the government).

This kind of graphic analysis can be done by various groups and their analyses of forces compared. It can also be done over time as forces shift, and their relative power and relationships change.
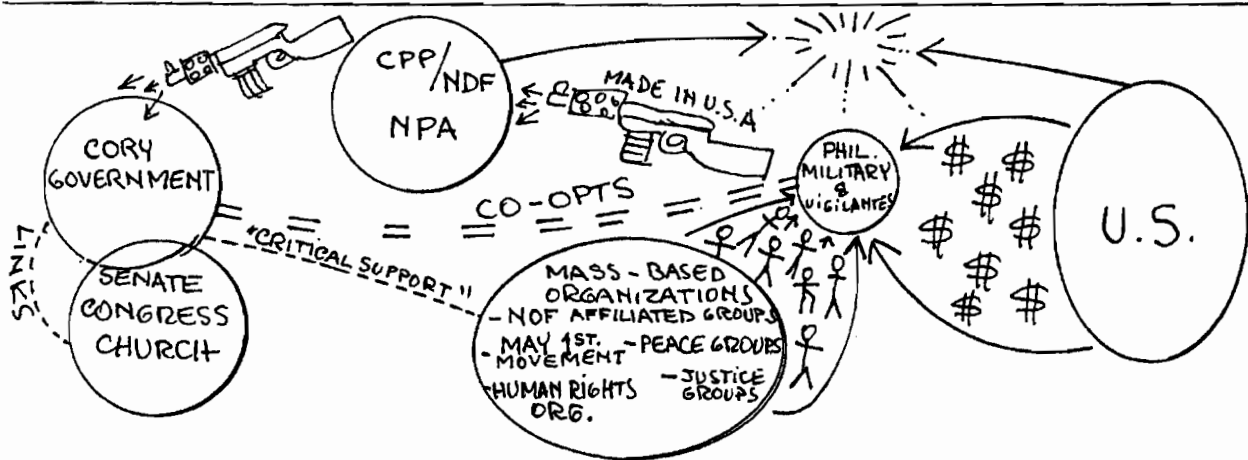
PHASE 4 – Planning for Action

This phase involves:

- evaluating past actions to assess which strategies worked well and why *(example 1)*;

- reviewing the shifts in forces in the past, anticipating future shifts, and assessing the 'free space' in the present moment *(examples 2 and 3)*;

- identifying strategies that build on our strengths, take advantage of their weaknesses, and tap the uncommitted *(example 4)*;

- selecting the most effective strategies, by evaluating the constraints and possibilities of those proposed *(example 4)*;

- proposing new tactical alliances and how to build them;

- considering how this moment can be used to move toward both short-term goals and longer-term objectives.
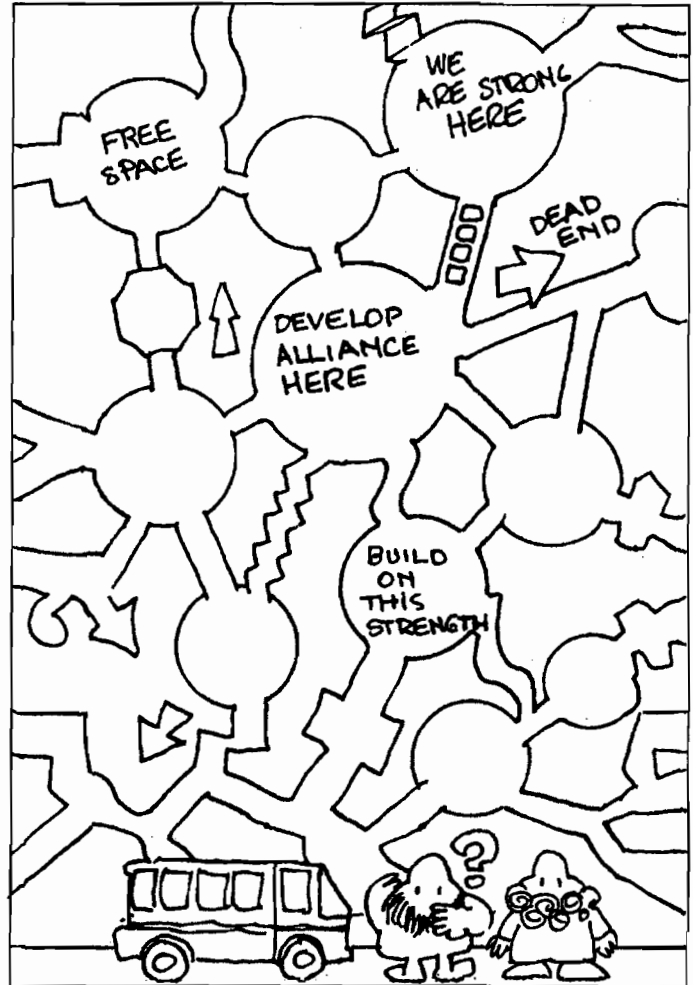
Notes

Why is it important?

Political analysis has little value unless it is applied to planning for action.

It can help us make more strategic decisions about how to use our organizational resources and energies. It can help us link with other allies who have similar goals, to build a broader-based response to the issues we are working on.

Based on our analysis of the relationship of forces (Phase 3), we try to identify what this moment offers that others don't. Even under the most repressive circumstances, there is some 'free space' or 'room to move.' An objective understanding of the social forces involved will help us decide what is historically possible.

But this phase also requires bold imagination. While recognizing the constraints, we need to push the possibilities. We need not only to think dialectically but also to act dialectically. This means finding strengths in what appear to be weaknesses, turning liabilities into assets.

The strategies we adopt provide the road map for our actions. The tactics we develop are the different vehicles we choose for following that map. Tactics need to educate, mobilize, and energize the group.

Both the strategies and tactics we propose should keep in mind our longer-term objectives as well as our short-term goals. Otherwise we may find ourselves winning in the more immediate sense, but not moving toward creating the kind of society we want.

Example 1: Post-Electoral Strategizing

Evaluation of recent actions is essential to planning future ones.

Activists from eight different sectoral groups met the morning after the November 1988 elections (municipal and federal) to assess their use of the electoral process and the impact of the results of their work in the future.

These are the questions used by each group:

- What key issue(s) did your organization/sector work on during the electoral campaigns?
- What were your short-term goals for the issue during the elections? What are your longer-term objectives in working on the issue?
- What strategies did you use (lobbying, media coverage, base-building, internal education, etc.)? How successful were they?
- What other sectors did you work with during the period and how?
- How will the results of the elections affect your work on the issue (s)?

Out of this collective analysis came new ideas for strategies. For example, women's groups who took anti-Tory stands during the elections now anticipated cuts in government support. This suggested the need for exploring potential new funding sources.

Notes

Example 2 - A global perspective on future events

A Canadian group working in solidarity with Latin America used the graphic tool on the next page to identify upcoming events that would affect their work and, therefore, should inform their strategy.
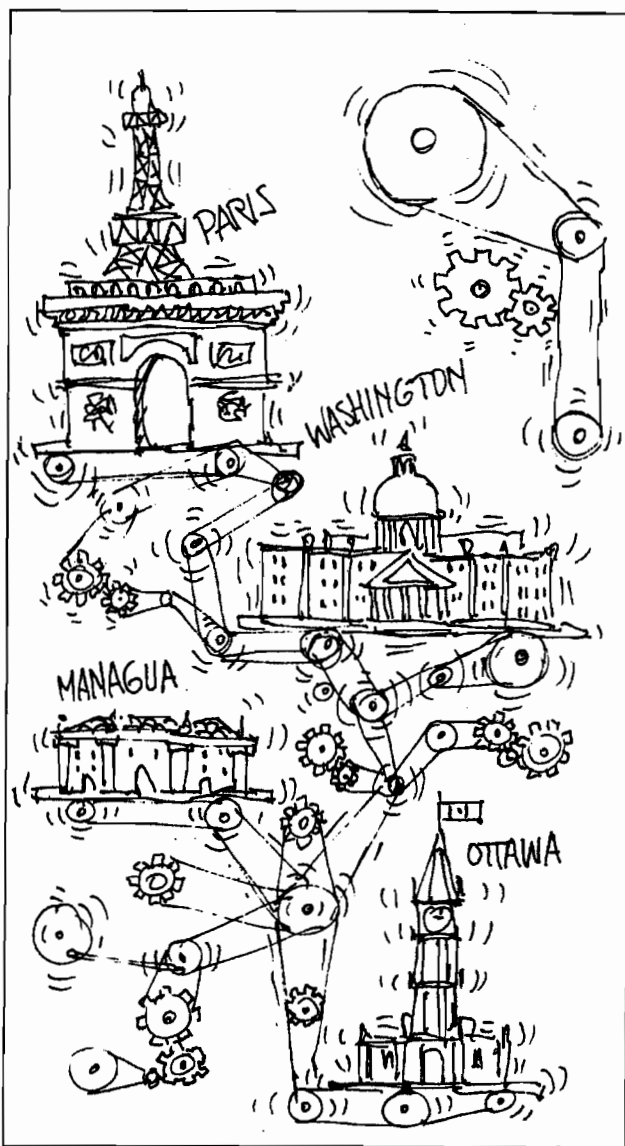
Because their solidarity work attempts to influence Canadian foreign policy vis-a-vis Latin America, they needed to follow the unfolding of events in three contexts, including the United States because of its major influence in both Latin America and Canada.

First they brainstormed what they knew of past, present and future events in each context, placing them on timelines on a large wall chart.

Then they asked how events in one context affect relationships with another. For example, the defeat of the Contra Aid bill in Washington gave some leverage to Canadians lobbying our government for a non-interventionist policy. To keep this space open, however, there needed to be real efforts to defeat the neo-conservative governments of both the United States and Canada in upcoming elections.

Out of this overview analysis, there were suggestions of strategies for Canadian working in solidarity. One was to educate Canadians about the links between free trade and U.S. intervention in Central America. The development of the Central American peace process clearly was to be affected by the outcomes of elections not only in North America, but also in Central America.

The concurrence of the elections in the United States, Canada, and El Salvador put a lot of emphasis on education and organizing to make best use of the electoral moment.

Notes

	ONE YEAR AGO May 1987		NOW May 1988		ONE YEAR FROM NOW May 1989		
CANADA	Refugee bills	Rise in N.D.P. popularity					
	Privatization of crown corporations, services		Economic Summit		Elections	Free trade Abortion Meech Lake Refugee bills Language rights	
			Free Trade Agreement				
			Election primaries Rise of rainbow coalition				
			Contra military aid defeated				
		Irangate Hearings	Contra humanitarian aid approved		Soviet – U.S. summit		November elections
UNITED STATES	October Crash						
	Joe Clark visit Central America	Nicaraguan currency exchange	Anti-US demos in Honduras	Guatemalans return home			
CENTRAL AMERICA	Esquipulas Peace Plan	Meeting of Central Amer. Presidents	U.S. troops invade Honduras	Sapoa talks	Mexican elections	Salvadorean elections	Foreign Ministers' meeting

Notes

Example 3 - Tracing proposed strategies

Another solidarity group also faced the challenge of analyzing events in more than one context. This group, however, was made up primarily of Filipinos in Canada, rather than of Canadians.

The Philippine support group developed the graphic on the next page to compare present conditions in both the international and domestic spheres. They saw the government, military and business forces in the Philippines currently holding the balance of power.
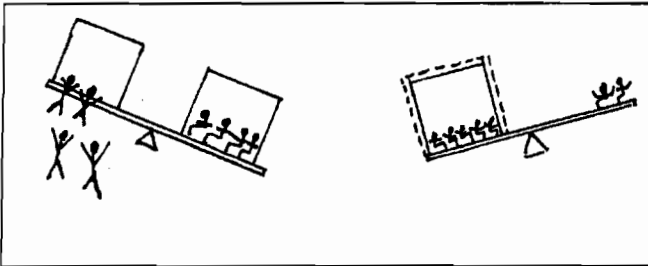
Their goal for the future was to achieve 'popular democracy', shifting the balance of forces through building a united left and allying with middle forces.

The group saw itself in the international sphere as working in collaboration with progressive groups in the anti-intervention movement, both getting updated analyses of the situation from them and offerring them an assessment of international forces.

The proposed activities of their work included education of Filipino immigrants and Canadians, networking with other solidarity groups, and organizing as part of the broader anti-intervention movement to support the movement for popular democracy.
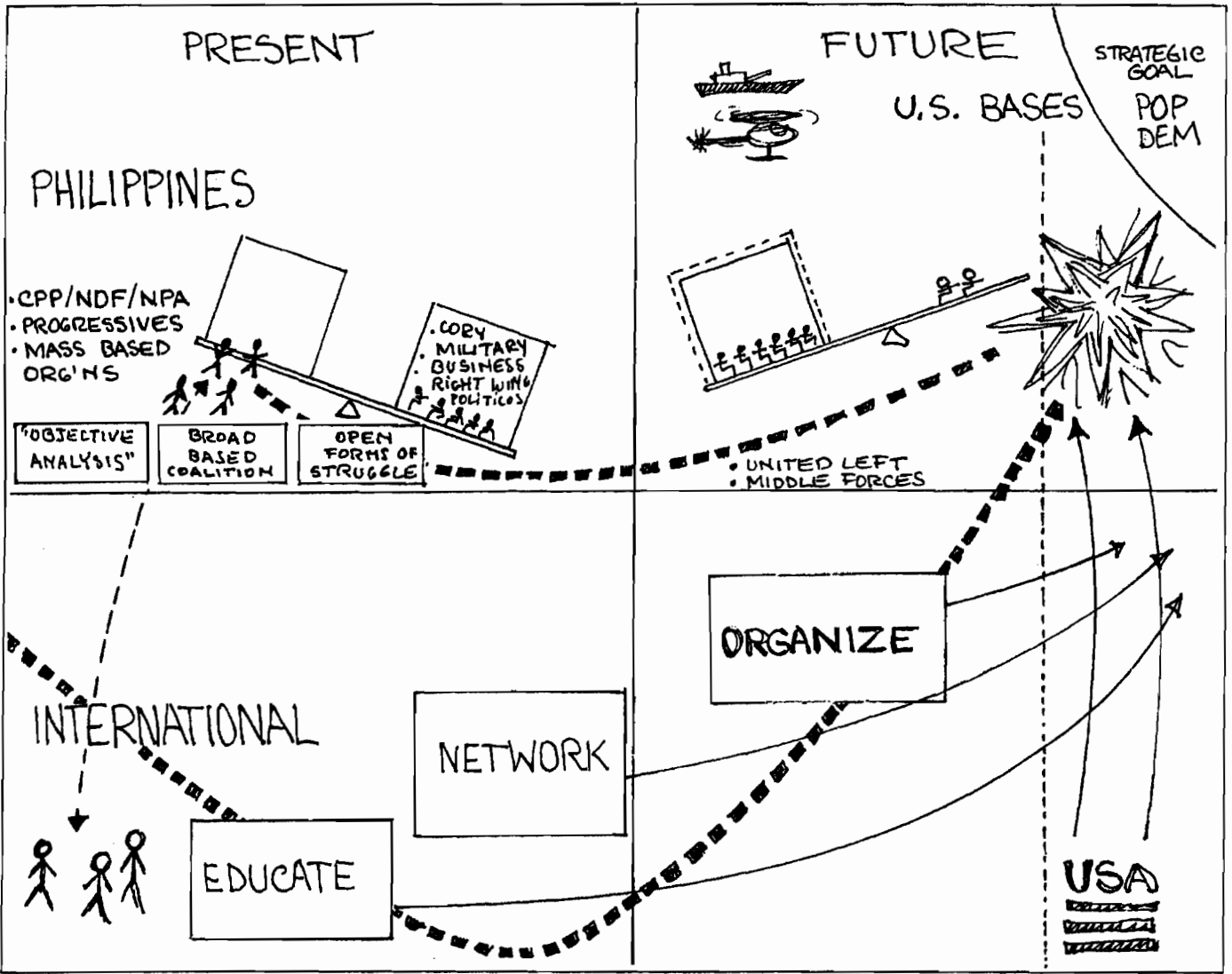
Once again, the role of the United States was critical to future scenarios. U.S. interests, represented by naval and air force bases on Philippine soil, are being challenged. And so, they anticipated an active military intervention from the U.S. as the anti-intervention movement grows.

It is interesting to compare the analysis done by the Canadian solidarity group working with Central America and the assessment of forces by the Filipino support group. On the one hand, there are real similarities in the structural contradictions that each is confronting.

The role of the United States in the Philippines and in Central America has followed similar patterns. There is a deep historical control by the U.S. expressed in economic, political, and ideological forms. Both regions have been strategically important to the United States in military terms as well.

Each solidarity group reflected their own limitations in their analyses. It was not surprising, therefore, that the Canadians had a greater handle on the details of the Canadian elections than on Central American elections. At the same time, the Filippinos lacked such detail in their analysis of the Canadian scene, while understanding better the subtleties of the situation in the Philippines (also reflected on page 45).

The Filippinos, in fact, suggested from this analysis that they make more direct links with other solidarity groups to deepen their own understanding of the strategies and tactics needed in the Canadian context.

Notes

PRESENT

FUTURE

STRATEGIC GOAL

POP DEM

U.S. BASES

PHILIPPINES

- CPP/NDF/NPA
- PROGRESSIVES
- MASS BASED ORG'NS

- CORY
  MILITARY
  BUSINESS
  RIGHT WING
  POLITICOS

"OBJECTIVE ANALYSIS"

BROAD BASED COALITION

OPEN FORMS OF STRUGGLE

- UNITED LEFT
- MIDDLE FORCES

INTERNATIONAL

ORGANIZE

NETWORK

EDUCATE

USA

Notes

Example 4 - Free Space Analysis

When it comes to planning actions, we need to expand our sense of the options we usually consider. The 'free space analysis' tool helps us to do that.

The concept of 'free space' is in itself important to political analysis for action. We need to identify what space is offerred by the present moment.

But in doing so, we often fall into one of two traps. We either discount immediately certain options as impossible, without exploring them fully. Or we select options that are poor strategies because we have not carefully assessed present conditions.

With the tool illllustrated below, a group may examine the constraints and possibilities of any proposed strategy or tactic. But the point is not simply to list those constraints and possibiliites.

Rather this is a dialectical tool: it encourages a collective process of looking for the constraints within each possibility and the possibilities within each constraint. It helps us to turn what seem to be liabilities into assets.

This process was used by the environmentalist group previously mentionned. They had clarified their short- term goals and long-term objectives (see page 36) and they had assessed the major forces working with and against them on these goals.

They were now examining different strategies, or spaces available, for achieving their educational goal of helping people to develop a more collective (and not merely personal) concern for the environment.

In the example on the next page, they flesh out the constraints and possibilities offerred by the proposed publication of a Green Consumer Guide.
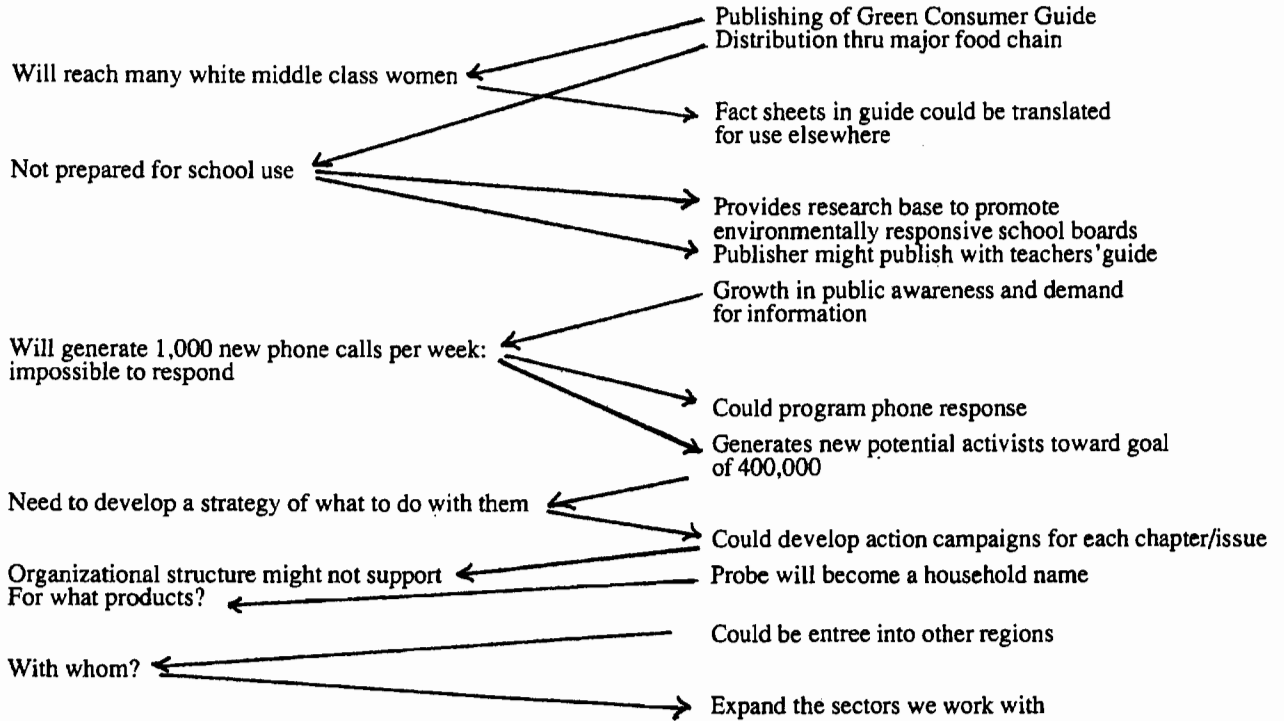

Notes

Our short-term goal: **To create a shift from NIMBY to NIABY consciousness (from personal health/safety to environmental impact on larger community)**

Our long-term objective: **To achieve sustainability**

FREE SPACE

Constraints   **Possibilities**

Publishing of Green Consumer Guide
Distribution thru major food chain

Will reach many white middle class women

Fact sheets in guide could be translated for use elsewhere

Not prepared for school use

Provides research base to promote environmentally responsive school boards
Publisher might publish with teachers' guide

Growth in public awareness and demand for information

Will generate 1,000 new phone calls per week: impossible to respond

Could program phone response

Generates new potential activists toward goal of 400,000

Need to develop a strategy of what to do with them

Could develop action campaigns for each chapter/issue

Organizational structure might not support
For what products?

Probe will become a household name

Could be entree into other regions

With whom?

Expand the sectors we work with

Once strategies are explored through tools like these, the most likely ones need to be selected. From there, a group can develop a specific action plan: for the next month, six months, a year or two.

It is important at this stage to be very concrete: about the strategy, alliances needed, activities to be organized, persons responsible, and mechanisms to evaluate its effect.

Notes