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INTEGRATION AND SOCIAL COHESION

The ATD Fourth World Approach:

The experience and expectation of the poorest as the paradigmatic model for the struggle for integration and social cohesion

By

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Introduction

Integration and social cohesion refer to the fundamentals of the human condition: How can and do people live together, one besides the other, in equal dignity? What obstacles prevent them from being together? What can and must be done to overcome them?

Poverty, especially deep poverty, is the paradigmatic example for such questions, besides – and too often in connection with – old age, disabilities, migration, minority status etc.

Extreme poverty accumulates insecurities of different nature to a point where social exclusion becomes an almost inescapable risk.

According to the definition of extreme poverty in the Report of Joseph Wresinski, the founder of the Movement ATD Fourth World, to the French Economic and Social Council, of February 1987 (“Great Poverty and economic and social insecurity“),

“A person’s or family’s security rests on certain foundations such as employment, health, housing and education. When these foundations are sound, people are able to meet their responsibilities to their work, their families and their communities and to enjoy their basic rights as citizens. When these foundations are undermined, the insecurity that results can be more or less severe and permanent. This insecurity leads to extreme poverty when it affects several areas of life at the same time and when it becomes persistent. This in turn compromises the person’s or family’s chances of regaining, independently and in the foreseeable future, their lost rights and responsibilities.”

Specific insecurities also affect migrants and minorities: their foreign origin or different identity (in terms of traditions, culture, religion, language or ethnic roots) often entail risks of exclusion, to start with non-recognition as participants in the political community of citizens or in the dominant cultural community; in the case of asylum-seekers and that of Roma and Travellers, exclusion can touch at the social and material existence level! Old age and, in particular, disabilities can also cause various kinds of exclusion from social life. All these specific insecurities call for corresponding integrative measures for the sake of social cohesion. Extreme poverty, for its part, with its cumulative insecurities, stands paradigmatically for all these risks of exclusion.

It does so also because it brings various legitimising considerations for social and welfare policies, such as peace and security, freedom, fairness, equality and justice, solidarity down to the essential: the recognition of, and the respect for, the equal dignity of every human being.

“All human beings, regardless of their place in society, are equal in dignity, which must be respected, not violated by any reason. Equal dignity is the basis for fundamental rights especially the right to freedom of expression, to live as a family, to housing, to health care, to work. Those who live in extreme poverty are the first victims of the violation of human rights.”

Consequently, “social cohesion” and “integration” have to be understood in a wide meaning: the latter should not concern migrants only nor minorities, for which a participatory linking with the (cultural and political) community of citizens should be the real objective; and “social cohesion” must encompass mutual participation in the civil society, culture, education and politics as well as the economy and the labour market.

Members of the International Movement ATD Fourth World (ATD = “All together in Dignity”/Fr. “Aide à Toute Détresse”) share the belief that

“Injustice, powerlessness, shame humiliation, and exclusion as experienced by those living in extreme poverty must not be tolerated. Our priority is to reach out to the poorest and most ignored people, be alongside with them, and create links with them and between them. Ensuring that those with the hardest life are at the heart of all projects and listening to the dreams and expectations they have for themselves and their children, we can reach a mutual understanding. When the most excluded people can contribute their knowledge and experience to society as equals, extreme poverty will be overcome.”

“ATD Fourth World welcomes everyone. It unites people whatever their origin, social status, culture or beliefs to fight against poverty”.

I. Extreme Poverty as experienced by the poor themselves

Before the Wresinski Report of 1987 it was not usual in Western Europe to consider processes of impoverishment and social marginalisation from the perspective of those who were permanently experiencing poverty and social exclusion. Attention was being attached rather to groups, which got into situations of insecurity because of economic crisis or social change. Thus, in the 70es of the former century, emerged the concept of “new poverty”. The impression was that completely new categories of persons affected by poverty could be recognised, who had nothing in common with the poor of past centuries. Historical enquiry, however, contradicted this thesis and pointed to causal relations and common structural grounds between “old” and “new” poverty. Nevertheless, extreme forms of poverty (“chronic poverty”, “multiple deprivations”) were still distinguished quite often as special categories or negative projections in relation to “new” or “normal” forms of poverty. Objections were raised against research concentrated on “marginal groups” like the hoemeless or people living in “focal” societies, because they were relatively small groups or the duration of their stay in poverty was atypically long. Fear was also expressed that to start with people who manifestly could not come out of their marginality, was to neglect the fact that people affected by poverty were subjects “in a position to manage in part their own carrier”. But such objections could not affect the Wresinski Report, the concern of which was precisely to perceive people whose opportunities and competencies to act were extremely limited, as active and passive subjects, with a view to take advantage for all from their experience in resisting misery. This proved to be the only way to avoid the danger which many authors warn against today that is to exclude, by concentrating on specific categories of people in situations of poverty, other categories, or to fall back, at the expense of the poorest, into the century-old distinction between “good” and “bad” poor.

“The poorest have always been bad poor, but not for reasons of congenital bad morality, as has repeatedly been asserted by mankind from century to century. They have been, and still are, bad poor because below a certain level of poverty it is no longer possible to live according to the norms of good behaviour of the neighbouring community.”

There are several reasons to start with extreme poverty when exploring and combating poverty and social exclusion:

- methodological rigour: a correct analysis cannot deal exclusively with moderate or average situations of insecurity;
- efficiency of corrective measures: to start with those situations which are most difficult to solve helps to prevent social rupture and marginalisation of parts of the population;
- Justice: in the name of equality those people have to be privileged who have in the past been given the least protection and promotion.

The struggle of the poor for integration

Families with a difficult life in Switzerland (to start with our proximity experience) say that it is not poverty that is the most painful but injustice. They feel tormented by injustice and the feeling that life is going on without them. They see insecurity growing and their greatest

anxiety is about the future of their children and the adolescents. Many among them have no perspective for their own future; they did not acquire any skill or craft and are now without a job. The situation concerning apprenticeship is difficult everywhere, and one can see the economic world and that of learning blaming each other: “Employers make no effort” – “School produces dummies only”, instead of joining efforts for the sake of the future of today’s youth. The increasing number of jobless among young people is indeed telling. Under these circumstances, young people with difficulties at school, who may have been placed in special classes, have only very limited chances of appropriate training and finding a job. Parents recognise that in some cases their children need to find themselves in smaller special classes where they can learn at their rhythm but they also fear for their future which requires speed and performance to find a job.

Every day we see parents deploy great will force with a view to assist their children to succeed in acquiring skills and a job. Parents dependent on social aid as the only alternative left for them by society nevertheless have not lost the feeling for the culture of work and try to do their best to transmit the corresponding values to their children. Is society prepared and willing to meet this ambition of the poorest?

The experience of young people known to the Movement ATD Fourth World in Switzerland is quite diversified. Some succeed in training and find, and may keep, an apprenticeship and even a job. They often come from families where the culture of work is intact and their parents have been helping them thanks to their own experience and commitment within the Movement. But even there job situations remain fragile and the risk of unemployment rests high:

“There is always something which despite everything prevents our children from reaching where they want to. It’s because of the way we are being looked at and we are looking at ourselves. So many times we have been told, you are worth nothing – you end up believing it yourself.”

Many others, mostly from families where culture of work is lacking since too long and has been replaced by feelings and experience of failure and dependence from assistance, are going through the same chain of difficulties: failure in school, special classes where children come out without achieving the required level, sometimes breaking off from school and placing in an institution, trying out an apprenticeship, desertion or dismissal, discouragement as regards learning and training, alternation between unemployment, useless training courses, temporary work and/or small jobs on the side...

To quite a number of young people without education and training and without a job insertion into the disabilities insurance scheme is being offered as an alternative with “more stable perspectives” than social (welfare) assistance. Already in 1984 ATD Fourth World Switzerland referred in its publication “Swiss without name” to young people who were sacrificed for the sake of certain developments in society as have been their parents before. Some of these young people and of their parents have the energy to refuse to be labelled in such a way: “We are neither disabled nor do we have handicaps. We want to work!” Others resign and accept this kind of “security”.

Persons experiencing poverty refuse to be classified according to categories of beneficiaries within the scheme of social services, such as “disabled persons”, which stigmatise them by way of exclusion and refusal of access to the labour market. However, the State system of

social services often imposes a choice between equally unfair situations like an insecure and low income job, unemployment, disablement, welfare assistance or disenfranchisement, a choice which is heavy to make and to bear for the persons concerned and their families.

“When you are in the scheme of welfare assistance, all the time you will be requested to account for what you are doing. You are never free. We do not know our rights and even if you believe to know them, you nevertheless feel forced to submit to the arbitrary of the services and the professionals who are taking decisions for you without you.”

Within the system of social protection persons in a situation of insecurity have the feeling that they become rapidly objects for the management of the system and lose every qualification and vocation to participate as a subject.

Often people have the impression that they are not getting support for their own projects and aspirations in their efforts to quit assistance; dependence on social services prevents from attempting at new projects. For instance a woman of 25 years who received a disablement rent was helping a football club by unpacking cardboards at their stand, and got in exchange some pocket money and, more importantly, the possibility to take part in the activities of the club. As she was lectured by the social service about accounting, she gave up immediately and would not dare doing anything anymore, not even for nothing. Equally, the first question put by the social service to a person who for her whole life had been combating against misery and who wanted to give evidence of her fight had written a book and found a publisher, was about her earnings from that project...

We must recognise that our system of social services often hinders the promotion of persons and prevents them from participating effectively in society. The people feel that they are “outlaw” and that they have to stand for the consequences. They have lost courage ...

“If you are without a job, in fact the only right left for you is to do nothing...”

Evidently not all people in deep poverty are without a job. But those employed very often have only uncertain jobs, with low pay, with atypical working hours and with low security status. Such jobs are seldom a sufficient lever to get out of poverty for ever and to offer a future for the children.

Nevertheless, in spite of uncertain perspectives, people in difficulty do not give up aspiring for employment. When they find it they feel proud:

“When you have a job, it gives confidence in yourself” echoing “they despise you if you don’t work. How to explain that to your children? At school children are ashamed to admit that the father has no job.”

A group of ATD Fourth World in Belgium, focussing on the theme of employment, showed that there were too few jobs for people with low qualifications and that access to programmes of training and integration into the world of work was too selective. Support to persons with greatest difficulties was far from being sufficient. The obligation to show results and the high number of cases prevent trainers and accompanying persons from taking special care for those

who are most destitute and powerless. The group emphasised that poor workers consider of great importance that work should permit for everybody to be useful for society, to be respected and to be able to support his or her family. Nobody should be forced to accept just any job or other activity for the only reason that there is no choice. But this is precisely the danger with today's measures for the integration of people in the labour market by which persons who depend on social welfare are obliged to accept measures that do not fit them and never open up access to a sustainable job. For instance, a mother bringing up alone six children has been offered housework in exchange for allowances, but the working hours were not compatible with family life: she was threatened that her two youngest girls would be taken away for placement, under the pretext that she was not in a position to take care of them properly... Nevertheless she desperately wanted to work, and devoted herself to persons of old age, hoping that she would finally be employed for sure – but in vain, because available measures were not designed for that... In several countries which have developed social services and unemployment as well, the poorest fear the emergence of a new form of forced labour, a situation which some of them have experienced in their youth: work in farms or in institutions for the placement of children, now hopefully of the past ...

How to avoid that persons in deep poverty are obliged to accept uncertain jobs with no real perspective for a better life? The above mentioned Belgian group, composed of members of the Movement ATD Fourth World with experience of poverty, researchers in the field of employment, representatives of enterprise, and persons accompanying the poorest in their steps of social and professional integration, suggested two paths of reflection for this highly complex debate concerning employment:

- the creation of new jobs that at the same time correspond to non satisfied needs, are accessible for poorly qualified persons and would help them to get training and improve their performance. The social economy should certainly be in a position to create such jobs, particularly in the domain of proximity services. Without new jobs of good quality, the most certain result of promotional, educational and accompanying programmes will be to increase competition between the jobless without improving globally their perspectives.
- The recognition that not all persons with the great difficulties will accede to a regular employment, whilst respecting at the same time their will to be useful. Consequently the right to volunteering should be reinforced independently from the social status of the person concerned, but unpaid work remains a matter of free choice and should never been imposed or included in the integration curriculum.

The same group emphasised that for persons in greatest distance from the labour market to be able to find a job or a useful activity of good quality, they need other persons who support and accompany them actively over a quite long period. An accompanying person helps to increase chances of success if this person takes into account also difficulties besides those concerning access to employment, such as health problems, heavy debts, housing questions etc., counts on aspirations and projects of the accompanied person and remains in contact once the employment hoped for has been obtained.

When listening to poverty-stricken families one understands that work is an aspiration for them: a normal job, not a substitute for unemployment, not a job for disabled persons, but a job with a pay that allows them to take care of the family. At the same time, a job is not considered an objective in itself. What they want in their deepest feelings is to be able to participate in society.

On the other side people in great poverty also fear in their deepest feelings that nobody is there to listen to them, and that they are misunderstood and even ignored. A mother to state:

“It’s the same everywhere – the poorest have nothing to say. Maybe they talk everywhere also about integration, but to those who are left out of their own community nobody would speak. Their efforts are not recognised. They would like to participate but nobody would listen to them.” The same mother explains how she found in a hospital where she was seeking for a treatment, the forms which she had to fill in did not correspond to her life: she was asked to indicate the level of her education and did not know how to reply because her school carrier was almost inexistent. She was asked who in the family could support her but she did not want at all to be a burden to anyone of her children who had also to cope with difficulties for themselves. She was offered a treatment which her budget was unable to afford. She had to consult a dictionary to understand the forms she had to fill in and she had to go back to her doctor to confess that she had not understood everything from her former appointment. And she asked us: “How can you feel at home if in your own country you feel that you are ‘out of’ the forms they give you to fill in?”

The concept of “integration” can give rise to misunderstandings (and more so the one of “assimilation”): it stands for an approach starting from a situation of inequality since the effort is often required from one side only that is from those who suffer from lack of “cohesion”. This request often inspires fears with the most disadvantaged persons and families. They think that it is for foreigners who want to find a place in the country to which they have come from abroad, or for some specific categories of people. They ask why and how it should be applicable for those who are excluded in their own home country, from their own community. And they feel like “assimilated” to foreigners without rights. Or they fear that “integration” as applicable to them means “to make us enter by force into schemes created by others without dialogue with us”.

Contrary to these misunderstandings and fears, should it not be possible to deepen the understanding of the concepts of “integration” and “cohesion” so as to make them to mean a situation where everybody finds him and herself to be at the side of others, the ones together with others, and where all live, think, speak and work together? This would require an effort of change shared by all sides in order to lay the foundations of a new way of living together. This cannot be achieved without the explicit recognition that our society is in need of the poorest, of their experience and knowledge as well as of their contribution, in order to really become a society where every person finds his or her place.

II. Partnership

Partnership with people who are living in poverty is a crucible in the approach of the Movement ATD Fourth World to integration and social cohesion. The purpose is to:

- raise awareness of poverty as a violation of human rights
- listen to the needs and views of people living in poverty and respond to them

- give priority to those most affected by poverty, not those easiest to reach
- ensure that the voice of people living in poverty is heard in all spheres of society
- create opportunities for those living in persistent poverty to participate in, and contribute to, the community as a whole
- ensure that their views are represented when policy is decided and decisions are made.

To illustrate this approach, a recent Forum between families, teachers and the Education Department of the Canton of Geneva may serve as an example both for the method followed for ensuring genuine dialogue and partnership and for the importance of school as the place where young people (and their parents) enter and integrate into their nearest community and into society as a whole.

From November 2003 to Mai 2004 ten teachers, ten parents and four permanent volunteers of ATD Fourth World have together been going through a cycle of four meetings about the theme “A school of all children”. On 8 December 2004 a public Forum organised by the Department of Education brought together some hundred participants to experience the dialogue between professionals from the education sector and parents in difficult life conditions with the aim of reflecting together about the ways of improving communication between school and all parents. For this dialogue to become possible, several steps had to be implemented:

- A steering committee composed of parents, professionals of education and volunteers met before and during the cycle for reflection, testing out of methods and efforts to overcome obstacles to the dialogue.
- ATD Fourth World proposed as participants in the cycle parents with whom the volunteers had been able to establish a lasting relation of confidence; these parents knew about the Movement since two years at least and were keen to meet other parents with similar problems concerning their children at school.
- The participant professionals of the education sector and parents genuinely felt concerned about the question of family-school relations and accepted to devote their free time for this during four Saturdays. The teachers did not have children from the families concerned in their classes; this contributed to ensure a certain freedom of speech.
- The ATD volunteers have been working intensively with the parents, at least twice between each meeting of the cycle, in order to make them feel prepared to speak with the teachers. For the first meeting, each of them had chosen as a starting point a concrete experience he or she had made. It was important for them to have written down beforehand what they wanted to say from themselves, thus enabling them to overcome the fear that they would not find the words or that they would be carried on to say things they would not want to say. It was also important for doing away with the feeling of inferiority that participants were equally split between parents and teachers.
- Working according to techniques tested by ATD Fourth World in France, Belgium or in New York (“crossing of knowledge and practices” – see the Annexes below) allowed each participant to bring in knowledge enlightening the others and at the same time to understand why, for instance, parents do not show up at the school of their children or teachers would be calling on child welfare services.

Coming together repeatedly in a cycle of meetings helped progressively to establish confidence between parents and teachers. Thanks to this confidence they were able to speak to

each other openly, without passing judgment and without personal attacks, and to seek together what could be done to promote a better future for all children. Conviviality during breaks and lunches was also an important factor as well as the various ways of meeting and discussing with each other, of common creative activities such as wall painting, theatre playing etc not to speak of moments of hilarity!

At the end of the Forum participants had managed to speak a common language, to understand each other in simple language and to realise that they had a common concern in the wellbeing of the children and knowledge to share. Teachers joined training courses in their schools. Parents have now the courage to meet teachers of their children, participate in parents meetings and, consequently, they also feel it easier to talk with their children and to give them better support for the school.

The fundamental aspect of the ATD approach to poverty and social exclusion lies in the recognition that it is the people with experience of poverty themselves who want to start moving with a view to overcoming insecurities, but also that they must not be left alone. The volunteer ship starts with listening to what the poor want to say for themselves; this requires that volunteers must be empty of preconceived ideas and concepts. It means helping the poor to stand up, to recognise themselves as valuable persons and to know and assert their own rights.

The greatest need of the persistently poor is to have other people with them on their side. This need motivates men and women who become ATD Fourth World Volunteers. They serve as witnesses for the courage and endurance of families in poverty. They foster communication between these families and people in mainstream society. They help to create links for the sake of integration and social cohesion. They build bridges for the poorest towards society and cultural, economic and political institutions.

ATD Fourth World Volunteers are full-time trained workers who share a common commitment to very poor families in industrialised as well as developing countries. They are concerned by the need for long-lasting involvement with these families, lasting beyond the varying approaches of successive anti-poverty programmes, government policies and changes in society. Together with very poor families, volunteers seek ways to build a future where every person, especially the poorest, will both be able to gain access to his or her citizenship rights and be able to participate actively in the life of his or her community. They develop their knowledge of poverty through a commitment to listen to and learn from the poor. They convey the daily struggles and hopes of the poorest to international organisations, political parties, governments, churches and other groups of society. Programmes set up by volunteers and disadvantaged families include preschools, street libraries, job training, community development and cultural activities and events. They work to create forums where the persistently poor can voice their concerns to others. Local meetings encourage adults to speak in public and to participate in the life of their community. National and international gatherings allow people from all walks of life to learn from one another and to build partnerships around the poorest people and their communities.

Partnership is the re-establishment of dialogue, unprejudiced, unbiased and free from stereotype. It creates and fosters confidence as the basis of reciprocity in exchanges, relations and action. It helps finding common solutions between disadvantaged families on the one hand and schools, social protection and welfare institutions, doctors, and representatives of economy, culture and politics.

Beyond dialogue people living in poverty genuinely seek to help creating conditions for a better world for all: one world, not a fragmented world any more. They bear a “catalyst” message making possible and prompting a new way of looking at, interpreting and changing, society and the world.

III. Representation: Presence and influence in politics

In discussions about integration and social exclusion proposals are increasingly made to give a voice to the poor, to associate them with the elaboration, implementation and evaluation of social policies and, more generally, to secure the representation of disadvantaged populations. Very significantly, the European Council (Heads of State and Government of the EU) at their meeting in Nice in December 2000, when adopting European objectives for the fight against poverty and social exclusion, commended governments “to promote, according to national practice, the participation and self-expression of people suffering exclusion, in particular in regard to their situation and the policies and measures affecting them”. For the Movement ATD Fourth World this has been a cornerstone of its action since its beginnings.

All had been born out of the sharing of a common life and experience. At its origin in 1957 ATD Fourth World was in fact what we would call today a Quarter’s Committee (“Comité de quartier”) in the only slum suburb (“bidonville”) of the Paris region with a majority of autochthon families. Steps had to be taken to meet municipal authorities (to obtain water and electricity as well as the recognition of the inhabitants’ citizen status) or school authorities (for inscription of children in school registers), and also national ministries which were preparing for the destruction of the site without caring for the future of inhabitants.

Whilst settling all over France, ATD had to deal with everyday questions as they emerged from legislation such as the one depriving the most disadvantaged families of family and social protection allocations for the reason that no member of the family had a stable and recognised employment. Expanding over Europe, the Movement was confronted with questions about the place of the poorest in the building of Europe, be it on its democratic and human rights foundations as in the Council of Europe, or in its economic and social dimension as in the European Union.

During this 45 last years, ATD Fourth World has developed two instruments to respond to these challenges:

- A dynamic acquisition of knowledge about the life experience of persons and families in great poverty, through the creation of a systematic collection of interviews and writings about the Movement’s action and the development of an Institute for Research and Training in Human Relations, with the mandate of giving credit to this life experience and knowledge.
- The development of “Fourth World People’s Universities” where persons in great poverty can share common reflection and confront their life experience with that of other persons and groups. These are spaces of free exchanges where the poorest can attend and are being listened to, where their capabilities are recognised and where a dialogue can be initiated and carried on with society.

These two instruments generate a collective message that should enable our societies to change, to abolish exclusion and to secure respect for the dignity and rights of all. Such change should concern not only all citizens but also public authorities, legislation and political

programmes. But how can they be influenced and how can the life experience of the most poor and proposals born out of this perspective be introduced to them?

ATD Fourth World has made a choice: instead of developing representation of a special group of people like persons in situation of poverty or families experiencing great poverty, it preferred to promote a non-exclusive society by introducing as first partners of such new construction those who had paid the price of an exclusive society, condemned as they were to live in deep poverty. Thus it attempts to help those who have the experience of poverty and social exclusion to fight not only for themselves but also for those who are not yet in a position to speak out and to manifest their dignity. It helps them to fight for more poor ones than themselves. The motive of this fight is not satisfaction of rights of a category of the population but access of all to the rights of all. It ascribes a special social role to a group of the population that is suffering from the non-recognition of its dignity.

For certain, the very poor are not alone to lead the fight for a non-exclusive society, but they have a particular role to play. It is for this reason that ATD Fourth World is conducting a political action in which persons who have been living through great poverty, thanks to training in the Fourth World People's Universities, cooperate with other people who have not made personally that experience but who acquire for themselves knowledge and competence based on the experience of the poorest. Each participant contributes to this common fight led by various members of the Movement, each according to his or her competence and availability, as the case may be with a view to elaborating a strategy, preparing a file, analysing texts, preparing a conference, giving a lecture, taking contacts, paying visits ... Individual persons can be chosen for the purpose of co-ordination of political action, as delegates or spokespeople, independently of their social status and origin. But experience shows that in political action there are important moments when political leaders and representatives must have the opportunity of a direct dialogue with delegates who themselves are experiencing poverty and exclusion. It is indeed of the utmost importance for the fight against exclusion to re-establish such dialogue and to bring political representatives in direct contact with the reality of exclusion. Such encounters prove to impress upon those representatives who maybe never had the opportunity to receive collectively persons in great poverty.

Preparations for such encounters are essential, in order that delegates do not speak for themselves only but also for people in their quarter who cannot yet transmit their life experience because of too deep poverty, exclusion and the difficulties of their life. In most cases, delegates would refer to work in their People's University group, so that they could make use of a collective experience and knowledge, giving preference to those who suffer most from exclusion.

In the **Council of Europe** ATD Fourth World has been active over 15 years through continuous contacts by permanent volunteers with the secretariat and through their participation in meetings of NGOs having "consultative", now "participative", status with the Organisation and in intergovernmental committees and bodies in charge of preparations for major conferences. The Secretary General and groups of officials have been in contact and dialogue with delegations of children, young people and adults in great poverty, at meetings well prepared and bringing to bear unquestionable expertise.

At the **European Union** ATD Fourth World organised every second year between 1989 and 2004 European sessions of the ATD People's Universities. Half of the participants were delegates of families in great poverty from the whole of Europe; the other half included

European representatives, officials, deputies, members of the Economic and Social Committee etc. The session of Mai 1999 was particularly important: under the title “We all play a role in upholding human rights” it made it possible for People’s Universities to collect on the basis of preparatory work at local level the principle items for a European policy to fight poverty and social exclusion. This greatly influenced the decision taken at the Lisbon Summit of March 2000 to launch a European Strategy to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion. The European objectives of this Strategy as adopted in December 2000 have been drawn significantly from the results of this session of the Fourth World People’s Universities.

In **Switzerland** several members of Parliament asked recently the government to organise regularly a National Poverty Conference, in order to promote a global and coherent policy aiming to eradicate great poverty and to promote the participation of the poorest in society. They also asked that persons in situation of poverty be associated with this Conference. According to ATD experience this requires two steps to be taken: first, groups and persons in situation of poverty who should be able to speak out freely must be identified and recognised, and they should accept to prepare for the conference. Second, the conference must be organised in such a way that the delegates chosen by these groups will not only be listened to but also understood, and that a dialogue will emerge from this listening and understanding. Consequently it cannot be a classical-type conference. Organisers must keep in touch and make a common effort with associations in which the poorest come together and express themselves.

The question has been put whether the Movement ATD Fourth World could and would be prepared to lend its hands for the creation of associations or committees of beneficiaries, users, clients of social protection services. Much can be said indeed about the need for such “counterparts” for the services and the profit which may be taken from consultation and dialogue with them in terms of better quality of the services provided and the performance of the providers, better acceptance of modifications in the services and better integration of the users (as has been shown during the evaluation of national plans to combat poverty and social exclusion of some of the EU Member States). ATD Fourth World for itself, whilst considering this possibility has however opted for a wider, less sectional approach in bringing together persons experiencing great poverty. The main reason for this choice is the fact that persons in great poverty insist that it is their dignity which is at stake. This dignity is not recognised and respected in the first place by granting a special status of beneficiary of social assistance, but by recognising and respecting the contribution which these persons are able and ready to make to the society as a whole. This does not mean that ATD Fourth World would not develop and support proposals, dialogue and action concerning social protection and assistance. But the Movement takes care that not only persons in great poverty who are users of social services will be encouraged to express themselves but also those who refuse to submit themselves to the controls connected with such services as well as those who managed to get out of the situation of great poverty. The Movement is careful not to lock the associative practice and life of the poorest into a relationship with social work only, which could compel them either to participate in social control or to engage in social conflict. The more people are poor and fragile, the less they can oppose themselves to others. They expect above all our efforts to provide real and sustainable possibilities of integration and social cohesion.

ANNEX I

CROSSING OF KNOWLEDGE

Presentation of a publication by a Research Group of Fourth World – University in French under the title: “Le croisement des savoirs” Paris (Les Editions Quart Monde) 1999

This book is the result of a two-year project whose ambition was to introduce the knowledge of people living in poverty into an academic environment.

In total, there were thirty two participant-authors:

- Fifteen “fourth world activists” who presented knowledge drawn from direct experience of extreme poverty: they all had lived in and endured the consequences of poverty. All had taken part in the “Fourth-World People’s universities*” for many years, where they had acquired listening and speaking skills.
- To represent academic knowledge researchers and professors were chosen from different disciplines and from several universities: twelve agreed to take part, whose disciplines were: law, economics, education, physics, criminology, history, and sociology.
- Knowledge derived from action with the most deprived was represented by ATD Fourth World core workers; they were five and constituted the smallest representational group so as to keep the focus on the priority aspect, the activist-academics dialogue.

Origin and Significance

In 1983, in a lecture at the Sorbonne in Paris, attended by Fourth World families and Academics, Joseph Wrésinski (who was the founder of ATD Fourth World) repeated his challenge to the academic world. He spoke of a family who was one of the most marginalized that he knew. Through their story he demonstrated their understanding and knowledge of the situation they were in and of society at large. He emphatically declared that

“moral and political responsibility, as well as scientific rigour, demand that the academic world turn its attention to people living in poverty, not in the first instance to teach, but to engage a dialogue and to learn from it. It is time to share knowledge, that is, reciprocal sharing of knowledge between all those who know and those who have been excluded. That means asking that part of the population that is on the bottom rung of the social ladder to give us the benefit of their thoughts and what they alone know.”

And he addressed the academics: *“You, the academics, you the avowed possessors of knowledge, you must ensure that the thoughts and reflection of the poorest are recognised as valid. Without you, their validity is constantly challenged and denied; nobody listens to the poorest; instead, we impose outside interpretations on them that prevent them from reflecting on their own life.”*

Finally in June 1993, at ATD Fourth World’s initiative a working group made up of academics, full time core workers and Fourth World activists was formed. Its goal was to work out the necessary condition for an experimental project intended to develop dialogue and a reciprocal relationship between the three types of knowledge: the knowledge of those who have lived in extreme poverty and exclusion, the knowledge of those who have committed themselves to working with those living in persistent poverty and the knowledge of academics.

Two years later, the project was finally started up and it ended with the publishing of five subjects dealing respectively with the following themes: history; knowledge and learning; work and daily activity; family, and citizenship.

The project demonstrated the potential success of people from very different backgrounds working together.

Combining their vast and varied knowledge and experience, the participants were able to reach a clearer picture of what constitutes poverty and in doing so, to look at progressive ways forward in the fight against it.

The Experimental “Training-Action-Research” Programme

was a Franco-Belgian undertaking and administration was done by ATD Fourth World’s Institute for Research and Training in Human Relations.

A common protocol was agreed upon by all participants. It set out:

- the ultimate purpose, the operational objectives and the methods;
- the organization and the missions and tasks of the various participants;
- the ethical standards which all participants undertook to respect;
- the work schedule.

The Conduct of the Programme

Group Work

The training-action-research part of the programme was spread over two years (from the 1st of March, 1996, to the 1st of March, 1998) in the following way:

- the foundation work was provided by the Fourth World activists. They worked three days a week, for twenty-two months, in subgroups of three; the groups in France met in Caen, Rennes and Lille-Paris, and the groups in Belgium met in Brussels and La Louvrière. For half a day a week each subgroup was supported by a volunteer resource person (a teacher not actively involved in ATD Fourth World).
- collective work on selected topics was carried out by all the agent/authors together. It took the form of three-day seminars every two months (ten seminars in all) at Les Fontaines Cultural Centre in Chantilly (France).
- the production of the memoirs was carried out in thematic groups, with the Fourth World activists, the academics and the core workers working jointly on topics agreed between them. Each thematic group met locally for a full day every two months, alternating with the months in which there were seminars.

The Pedagogical Team

To bring the enterprise to a successful conclusion, it was necessary to form a solid pedagogical team. Its role was to facilitate the production of knowledge, to organize the process, and to prepare and direct the three-day seminars. This team was made up of:

- the programme director, whose task was to ensure that the objectives and ultimate purpose of the programme were respected, and to direct the operation as a whole.
- two academics, training counsellors, employed part-time to advise the academics and the core workers.
- a pedagogical counsellor, employed part-time to accompany the Fourth World activists. Because of the importance and novelty of this production, the pedagogical counsellor was also the pedagogical resource person for the programme as a whole.
- an academic evaluator, employed part-time, whose task it was to assemble the knowledge drawn from the training-action-research as the process unfolded and to evaluate its different aspects.

On average, the pedagogical team met for one day every fifteen days, that is, thirty-three times over the two years of the programme.

The Scientific Council

In order to examine and validate the method and content of the research, a team of distinguished Belgian and French scientists were called upon to form a Scientific Council. The Council met twice a year and was invited to participate in some of the seminars. It was also asked to participate in the organization of a European university colloquium, whose aim was to examine the results of the action and their influence on the content and method of university teaching and research

and on initial training.

Methodology

To create a more refined understanding of the existence of extreme poverty and attempts to eliminate it, the experimental Fourth World-University programme endeavoured to bring different kinds of knowledge and agents into dialogue. To bring about this intersection and creation of knowledge, the programme had to have coherent objectives and consistent means. It was also necessary to create a method of working that sufficiently supported the project as a whole, as well as the agents themselves, on a daily basis. The questions dealt with in the intersection of different types of knowledge could not be improvised. It would thus have been insufficient simply to assemble Fourth-World activists, core workers and academics from different disciplines, in order for them to create a project together. Hence, it is useful to describe the building of the project, so that the reader may have a idea of the conditions necessary for such an experiment.

What is “research-action-training”? How can such a project be put into action? How does one allow for the formalization and sharing of knowledge between agent-authors coming from such different backgrounds? How does one allow for both reciprocity of understanding and collective intellectual production?

> How to achieve reciprocal understanding:

- * Allowing each participant to construct his/her own way of thinking: This was most particularly the case for Fourth World activists and core workers. Indeed, knowledge born of experience, like knowledge born of action, is essentially linked to personal life. Both are less formalized than scientific knowledge. To achieve a level of recognition necessary to the mutual exchange of knowledge, they need to be put into more formal frameworks. The structure of academic knowledge also has to be reworked. It has to be made communicable to and analyzable by the other agent-authors.
- * Finding equitable modes of expression: Equivalent speaking-time and words and vocabulary of equal weight were needed to allow for reciprocal exchange. Different forms of expression had to be brought together: images, writing, accounts from experience, debates, interviews, analyses...It was also necessary for the administrative team to regulate and reformulate modes of expression, and to intervene with suggestions for new approaches if subgroups got caught up in misunderstandings. To give everyone the chance to reflect on and appropriate for him/herself what had been said, all the exchanges were retranscribed. Different types of subgroups were created in order to allow for exchange between all of the 32 agent-authors.

> How to construct a collective way of thinking

- * Constructing pedagogical methods in concordance with the stages of research: During the full course of the two years, the pedagogical team was constantly juggling with time-schedules so that each subgroup could make headway. Each work period had to correspond to the necessary stages of research: choice of themes, construction of frameworks, state of the question, collection of data, analyses, writing...
- * Proposing methods that allow for collective and evenly balanced production: It was necessary to adapt the research guidelines to groups made up of persons with very different kinds of knowledge.

Drawing on experience, the three pedagogical counsellors had to find suitable methodological resources and adapt them to the situation in order to attain these objectives. The contributions of the three pedagogical counsellors were as follows: procedures focusing on modes of expression and dialogue at the Fourth World People’s Universities; production of knowledge as pedagogical aim of adult education; research guidance for professionals in continuing university training. Right from the start, the intersection of the pedagogical team’s different capabilities allowed for the elaboration of the programme’s method of working.

To allow for dialogue between the different groups of agent-authors and for a collective definition of the research project in question, the pedagogical team itself had to bring together its different kinds of “know-how”. In this fashion, the pedagogical team was able to create a methodology that, according

to its internal structure, allowed for the integration of the knowledge of each group of agents on a given subject.

Pedagogical Procedures: Building a Structure

It was the pedagogical team's task to propose procedures appropriate to the aims of the project as the programme developed. Three different steps were necessary:

- . the formulation of research questions
- . the analysis of collected data
- . the writing of memoirs

The different modes of interaction between participants

It would be impossible to continue to describe in detail the unfolding of the programme and remain within the limits of the present work. Thus, only the modalities of interaction determined by the pedagogical team, to allow for the intersection of different types of knowledge and participants at different levels, are presented. The rotation and variation of subgroups allowed for permanent interaction between all the participants. Most of these subgroups, created in the first months of the programme, were operative during the full two years.

From the construction of a framework to diagonal analysis

The research process, even though it could be separated into successive steps (definition of an aim, elaboration of hypotheses, construction of interpretive models, dealing with the facts...) was one of tentative exploration.

From Analysis to the Writing of the Memoirs

In committing to the programme, each participant knew that the final research product was to be something written, a memoir, that would eventually be published, in this book.

The order of the five memoirs presented in this book was decided upon at the end of the programme, with the agreement of all the agent-authors. Even though each memoir is written independently of the others, and can thus stand on its own, a certain development of thought is proposed to the reader: to begin with the larger picture, that of one group (History Memoir: "On pride and shame"), then that of the family (Family Memoir: "Time and the Family Project"), followed by the memoirs on the different types of knowledge and *savoir-faire* (Knowledge Memoir: "Liberating knowledge!"; Work and Human Activity Memoir: "Hidden Talents"), and to end with the political dimension (Citizenship Memoir: "Representation, Extreme Poverty, Citizenship").

ANNEX II

Integrating the Knowledge of the Poor into Academia: A Challenge for the Year 2000

Observations from a Conference Sponsored by the International ATD Fourth World Movement, at the Sorbonne, Paris, April 23-24, 1999

By Michal Krumer-Nevo (Jerusalem)

What is knowledge? Are there different types of knowledge? Does its source affect the type or essence of the knowledge? These and other issues were discussed at a conference sponsored by the International Movement ATD Fourth World, held in April at the Sorbonne in Paris.

The goal of the International Movement ATD Fourth World is to fight poverty, especially extreme poverty, and ensure human rights for all. The Movement operates in 24 countries. It has 350 members called “permanent volunteers” and some 200,000 additional members worldwide, about half of which (called “Fourth World Families”) live in extreme poverty; the other half (called “friends” or “allies”) come from all strata of society and serve as friends of the Movement in their home countries. The Movement maintains ties with some 2,000 anti-poverty organizations that together comprise the “Permanent World Forum on Extreme Poverty.”

The Movement was founded by a Catholic priest, Joseph Wresinski, in 1957 in an emergency camp for homeless families in a suburb of Paris. Father Wresinski himself grew up in extreme poverty and, in meeting with the families in the camp, could sense the distress and shame that had been his own family’s lot. At the time, Father Wresinski understood that the key to the war on extreme poverty lay not in individual assistance or in recognizing the poor as victims of fate, but in viewing them as a social group living on the periphery of modern society. The name “Fourth World” expresses the Movement’s attitude toward living in poverty: first and foremost, it expresses the obligation to “see” people living in poverty wherever they are. Fourth World Families are those living in extreme poverty among us, in developed countries, in a world of wealth and abundance. The concept of a “Fourth World” goes back to the French revolution, in which the term was used for those whose poverty barred them from participating in the National Assembly and, therefore, from fully realizing their civil rights. The Movement’s name hints at an approach that perceives families living in poverty as a “people” - a collective entity with an identity (and, inevitably, with opinions, expectations and abilities), and struggling to realize its civil and social rights.

Father Wresinski’s first steps in the camp were varied. With the residents, he organized trash collection, mail distribution, and the beginnings of a collective effort for the distribution of coal. They created a family centre and places to study, pre-schools and a “street library” for children and workshops for adolescents. They also established a barber shop and beauty parlour. Keeping in mind that in order to fight extreme poverty one must change not only the lives of the impoverished but the mind-set of society as a whole, this resulted in that Father Wresinski’s establishment of a research institute for the study of poverty which was composed of representatives of the families and volunteers who had joined this work.

In the 1960s, the Movement and its research institute developed a philosophy that has since been embraced in many European countries: that extreme poverty reflects not only a lack of

material resources but leads to social exclusion, and that life on the periphery of society does not allow people to enjoy the security and potential for social participation that is usually granted to those in the mainstream. This approach has led to the perception of poverty as an infringement of human rights - civil and political, as well as economic, social and cultural rights. Extreme poverty is perceived as “living proof that human rights are indivisible” (Wresinski, 1988). The perception of extreme poverty as an issue of social exclusion and violation of human rights served as the basis for change in society in general and among social institutions that previously viewed poverty as a marginal problem.

Today, the Movement operates many programs - educational, cultural and occupational - in poor neighbourhoods. It also serves to change public opinion,¹ and impact on policymaking at both the country level and the level of the European Community. In addition, it participates as a consulting body to policymaking of such organizations as the United Nations through UN agencies at the international level as well as others, at the national level.

The conference held at the Sorbonne was actually a summation of the activities of one particular project conducted by the Fourth World Movement in France and Belgium between March, 1996, and March, 1998. The project evolved from the realization that activities designed for the poor reflect the knowledge and understanding of distress of, and possible avenues of assistance by, people who themselves do not live in poverty. Coming as it does from “outside,” this knowledge is only partial. To complete it, there must be recognition of three types of knowledge concerning poverty: that possessed by one who lives in poverty, which is “knowledge taken from life”; that possessed by one with practical experience in the war on poverty (although he himself is not poor), which is “knowledge from action”; and that resulting from the study of the poor, which is “academic knowledge.”

The project’s roots lie in a lecture delivered by Father Wresinski at the Sorbonne in 1983. In it, he utilized the story of a family living on the periphery of society in extreme poverty to demonstrate the family’s understanding and knowledge of general society, and of its own plight. He declared that “moral and political responsibility, as well as scientific precision, required the academic world to turn its attention to the poor, not in order to learn and teach, but to create with these people a dialogue in order to learn from both it and them. This is the time for the mutual exchange of knowledge, meaning to ask those at the bottom of the social ladder to make known their thoughts and provide others with the knowledge that only they possess.” Wresinski issued a challenge to the academics: “You must ensure that the thoughts and knowledge of those living in poverty are given validity. Without you, their words will carry absolutely no weight. No one will listen with any seriousness. Instead, we will continue to force upon them assumptions and perceptions from outside, and will in this way, prevent them from understanding their own lives.”

Representatives of the three knowledge groups participated in the project. All were French speakers from France or Belgium. They included 15 representatives of impoverished families (Fourth World Families) who knowing to read and to write, participated over the years in various activities of the Movement who have “knowledge taken from life”; 12 representatives of academia in France and Belgium with backgrounds in law, finance, education, medicine, physics, criminology, history or sociology who have “academic knowledge”; and five permanent volunteers from the Fourth World Movement who have “knowledge from action”.

¹ The projects the Movement employs to effect a change in thinking are quite varied. Aside from participation in various UN committees, they include, for example, an international newspaper (Tapor) for children living in extreme poverty and non-impoverished children alike, with a circulation of 5,000.

The project participants were divided into five groups, each discussing one of the following subjects: family, knowledge, civics, history, and work and daily life. All of the groups were of similar composition in that each had representatives with “knowledge taken from life,” “knowledge from action” and “academic knowledge.” The proceedings in and among the groups were most intensive and were conducted with utmost thought and planning. The goal was to create a meeting of equals among thinkers and writers from the different knowledge and background groups, and summarize the proceedings in a large volume.

The importance of the conference could be seen in the participants. In the exalted halls of the Sorbonne there were some 250 people: those who had participated in the project - academics, practitioners and representatives of the poor - and guests, most of them academics from Europe and the United States.

I shall now present here a number of observations from the lectures, presentations and discussions that took place at the conference.

The opening lecture was given by the French philosopher Michel Serres. He focused on the uniqueness of the knowledge emanating from give-and-take. Unlike material objects, knowledge does not become diminished when transferred to others. In fact, it grows. An important element in the growth of knowledge is the recognition, through the knowledge, of the other. The knowledge possessed by people living in poverty concerning themselves and society in general is not complete until others recognize it as such. Here is where the primary difference lies among academic knowledge, knowledge taken from life and knowledge based on action: Academic knowledge enjoys a preferred status due to social recognition. It is recognition of the various types of knowledge by others that will lead the struggle against exclusion and marginalization, as familiar knowledge is no longer peripheral knowledge, and those possessing it become less marginalized. Serres continued and said that all people struggle for recognition. The problem is how to seek recognition from others who themselves seek to be recognized. He compared this to a request for bread by the hungry. The secret, he claimed, is that when it comes to knowledge, everyone is hungry. All people - the poor *and* academics - seek recognition of the knowledge they possess. However, the preferred status of academics allows them to recognize the knowledge of the other before the other recognizes theirs. In summary, the meaning of wisdom is to forget everything you know about the other in order to allow yourself to learn about him, *from* him.

Afterward, each of the five groups presented summaries jointly written by the group members.

The group dealing with family focused on the concepts of “time” and when the family’s project is that of being a family (“project time”). Time was presented as an issue or problem: there is often a gap between the family’s perception of time and that of social institutions. The experience of the family living in poverty with time is ever-changing and dynamic: On the one hand, it can be chaotic, urgent, filled with crisis, or “loop” or “circular” time - with events themselves repeating. These, on the other hand, can be replaced by an experience of “stuck” time: long, static time during which nothing happens. The experience of time changes: It changes from when there is a threat to remove children from their families - the time spent waiting for a judge’s decision concerning the removal of children, to the time during which the children have been taken away from the home which is perceived as “dead” time, time lacking life, when nothing takes place. The group dealing with the issue proposed the term “family project” in order to describe the family’s mission as it defines it for itself. The definition of the “project” could be simply living together as a family. People living in

poverty often feel that child rearing is their way of struggling with fate, by creating a new generation whose fate will be better. However, impoverished living in poverty will require social recognition and support if they are to succeed with their “project”. According to members of the group, the support would have to be expressed more in partnership and participation than in concrete assistance. The “family project” is thus an idea that expresses the experiential meaning of living in poverty.

The group dealing with knowledge asked whether knowledge can be liberating, and if so, under which conditions. The group members claimed that for knowledge to be liberating, it must itself be liberated first. Liberated knowledge is that which requires an exchange of opinions, debate and the creation of ties between people and opinions. They concluded that knowledge that can effect change is not theoretical-academic, on the one hand, nor is it that which is derived from life experiences, on the other. In order to effect change, a less dogmatic view of the two is required if there is to be a bridge between them. The necessary knowledge is that which is “interactive” and placed between the two extremes - it is active knowledge, knowledge for action that develops through participation and integration.

The group dealing with civics discussed the failure of democratic, or participatory, systems to take into account the experiences and opinions of people living in poverty, people who are inaptly represented in such systems. Because of this, the people living in poverty are harmed, as is democracy itself. Because those who are the most poor are not represented in democracy. Their life experiences, needs and aspirations remain unknown to society as a whole, and fail to attract attention for social action. Society will be unable to offer the poor any solution or fight poverty if it continues to ignore the knowledge, life skills and struggles of those who live in poverty.

The group dealing with history redefined the issue under the heading: “from shame to pride”. The group’s goal was to understand and follow the process in which people living in poverty can effect change and go from a situation of exclusion and humiliation to one of pride, both personal and collective. It is the pride of belonging to an assembly of humanity that is aware of its values and acts in order to further the situation by which it will be recognized by others. Pride is created when individual experiences are given an overall social context, and when thus the feeling of shame is being diminished. A sense of pride also results from the ability to contribute to the other, something made possible when there is social recognition of this ability.

The group that discussed work and daily life described labour relations and wages as a basis for social relations. A person’s status as one who works (or doesn’t work) dictates much of his social relations. In addition, the nature of his work changes with technological developments. Full-time employment is reduced when the rate of unemployment rises, as the type of work also changes, e.g. when these days employment requires more and more training and education. What is the significance of these developments for people living in poverty? In addition to work that requires education and specialization, there are many types of jobs requiring “know-how,” which is acquired through daily living. Even if they are uneducated, people living in extreme poverty possess knowledge that is linked to the ability to negotiate, bridge and mediate, and which can be utilized for the purpose of employment.

Lucerne, 29 May 2005