

Themes that Emerge from an Examination of Past Experiences

A number of themes emerge, most of which can be inferred from the above summary. Perhaps the most noteworthy has been the importance of **collaborative partnerships**. The rapid growth of the disability movement in Canada and internationally was the result of such partnerships. Certainly the disability movement was the driving force in initiating the changes that occurred; but, for change to be effective in the long run it requires changes in political process, in policy and in the paradigm of thinking. Disabled peoples' organizations worked together with academics and people in government to accomplish the changes that occurred. Certainly the rapid growth of Disabled Peoples' International can be attributed to the partnership between the disability community and governments. The Canadian government and later the Swedish government included a representative of the newly emerging disability rights movement in their delegations to the United Nations in planning the International Year of Disabled Persons 1981. This resulted in the new organization having influences as an official member of a government delegation rather than as a non-governmental organization. For partnerships to work effectively it is important to recognize the integrity of each partner. In meetings in Vienna by the Canadian delegation, careful strategies were being planned. It was understood and agreed upon that government representatives would have to take a different position than the representative of the disability movement. This clear understanding right from the beginning allowed the partners to work effectively with each other in influencing changes within the Advisory Committee to plan the International Year of Disabled Persons. This partnership created a synergy for revolutionary change that had long lasting impact through the United Nations World Programme of Action.

Another theme that emerges is **Canada's role as a "tipping agent"** internationally and foreign policy contributing to significant shifts in the development of disability issues. Canada's role internationally has been analyzed from a number of different perspectives. A recent article by Neufeldt and others have looked at Canada in the context of a tipping point. It analyzes the forces that lead to a "tipping point" that then creates long lasting change through the influence and intervention of government. Often the forces that lead to this change are driven by civil society. Much has been written about the role of Canada as a peacekeeper in international events. The concept of a third force balancing the impact of the superpowers has also been talked about a lot during the last several decades. Certainly Canada's Minister of External Affairs in the nineties, Lloyd Axworthy, talked a lot about Canada as playing a significant role within the context of this third force analogy, with perhaps the best example being Canada's role in achieving international acceptance for the agreement banning anti-personnel landmines. In like manner the Canadian government played an important role in the disability movement. In the early nineteen eighties the influence of government created a tipping point working collaboratively with disability organizations contributed to a radical paradigm shift within the United Nations. Canada provided funding to promote the full participation of disabled people within the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons 1983-1992. Canada also took the initiative and introduced a resolution to conduct an international study on the violation of the rights of disabled persons. Perhaps nowhere is the concept of a tipping point more dramatically seen as when Canada cast the deciding vote within the International Labour Organization to adopt a convention of rehabilitation and employment for persons with disabilities (1984). This happened during the committee meetings in preparing for the ILO General Assembly. Business was totally opposed to the idea of the convention. Labour was totally supportive. The government had the deciding vote to approve the convention to be recommended to the General Assembly. The vote within the government sector was extremely tight. Even though the Canadian delegation had received instructions not to support our concept of a convention, they changed their minds at the last minute and the idea of the convention passed. During the General Assembly it received unanimous approval.