

Speaking Out About Science

By fostering conflict, politicians produce tension between members of the community that should be working together. Science vs. Ecology. Ecology vs. Economics. It doesn't have to be this way.

BY JENNIFER LYALL

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Unfortunately, that society doesn't exist in Canada.

Franklin, a prominent Canadian scientist and activist, sees the desire for justice and equality as the root of most activism. Franklin is currently a senior research scientist at the Ontario Research Foundation and currently retired from University of Toronto's Faculty of Engineering. She has been active in the feminist, peace, and environmental movements, which, she says, share many values and ideals.

Franklin says because our

profit-oriented society pushes people to maximize financial gains, general issues affecting all of society are devalued and social problems become "privatized". She says our society tends to look at problems and solutions as individual concerns, instead of getting people together to find alternatives.

She cites the acid rain situation in Ontario as an example of this trend. People deal with the problem by buying bottled water because the issue has not been adequately addressed at the public level. People shouldn't have to find personal solutions to an environmental problem like this, says Franklin, but the approach to solving the acid rain

problem at root cost has been politically shunted.

Franklin says the issues are neglected because the government is motivated by profit, not justice. So the Stein Valley in British Columbia will be logged to buoy the economy even though it will have a negative effect on the environment.

"We are not governed, we are managed," says Franklin. "The difference is that the government has to mitigate the various interest groups and see there is no one who dominates to the detriment of the others. That, I think, is essentially lost. The neo-conservatives run a government as if it were a large corporation. The difficulty is, there is no legal and rightful obligation to be interested in anybody."

Franklin says the fight for social justice "can only be done on a level neither personal nor

profit-oriented.

"Whether it's Stein Valley, equal pay or nuclear submarines, each is a manifestation of a process that isn't working. That process is parliamentary process."

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Franklin criticizes the government for discouraging progressive and innovative solutions to the problems plaguing Canada. She says the government maintains the status quo by treating issues as if they were football games, with two sides and an inevitable winner.

"But most of life's activities are not zero-sum accounting where somebody gains and somebody loses. It is not black and white, it's not the bad guys and the good guys," says Franklin.

Because our society evaluates issues on the football model, we are constantly forced to choose between "false alternatives", rejecting one benefit in favour of another. Franklin offers the example of ecologists pitted against economists when the environment becomes something that can only be protected at the expense of jobs. But she says it is not usually necessary to sacrifice one thing for another.

By fostering conflict, the government produces tension between members of a community that should be working together. But this tension is in

the politicians' economic interest, Franklin says.

This state of "permanent belligerence" is particularly important to the economics of military research and arms production, areas to which large amounts of money are committed for long periods of time.

"There is a need for a permanent enemy to keep the technological machine going, to assure the legitimacy of [military] spending," says Franklin.

If there is no perceived threat, there is no need for the weapons, so someone has to guarantee at the end of the military production or research, there will be a market for the product.

Military-related spending accounts for an estimated 25 per cent of the total Canadian budget, an expenditure Franklin calls "utterly and totally unjustifiable and immoral."

"How is the population conned into thinking one quarter of our national wealth ought to go into making us and others more insecure?" she asks.

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She says the government continues to spend money on defence not because we need it but because it has already made a huge investment, making the defence industry very important to the economy. But she says our money and talent in such areas

as engineering could be put to better use and still boost the economy.

Franklin suggests since "nuclear power was a technological dead end," Canadian scientists should apply their expertise in nuclear science to the prevention of accidents caused by dismantling.

"No one has yet safely dismantled a nuclear reactor. The people who built them have the best knowledge. Let's use the knowledge."

Franklin also sees other productive and peaceful uses for technology such as environmental protection.

"I would much rather see Canada excel in this world in high-tech, sophisticated equipment," she says.

But Franklin does not see an end to militarization until our society begins to value justice

more than money, and says it's time for us to start re-evaluating our priorities.

"If you want peace, work for peace and equality. Peace is not so much the absence of war as it is the absence of fear. Fear means being afraid of things one has no power to change. An equal society is one in which people have control over their lives," Franklin says.

"One of the great barriers to achieving justice and equality is the inappropriate use of our natural, fiscal, technical, and human resources, which are often related to international threat systems."

Franklin says most of the measures the governments claim are to ensure peace and our future survival are actually steps towards war and self-destruction.

Franklin offers a feminist

approach as a solution.

"If the world does not get away from the mode where private and national gain is the main motivation and adopt a woman's world, which is aimed at minimizing disaster, there is no way to the future," asserts Franklin.

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