



Day 4

United Kingdom

PROMOTING YOUTH-ADULT CO-MANAGEMENT

- Wake up England! Youth have arrived!

National Youth Agency, Leicester

We went to speak with Bill Badham, Development Officer on the NYA Active Involvement Team and a key officer on the Hear by Right and Act by Right programmes.

PCI: Have you heard about co-management before? How do you feel about it after seeing the book?
NYA: I have read your booklet and am familiar with co-management. What strikes me is that co-management is very similar to the international framework devised by



Roger Hart in 1992 - his 'Ladder of Participation'. He pointed out that there is now a huge emphasis on what he calls "representation democracy." 'You go and represent me on the school council and do things on my behalf...' This is at the expense of "participative democracy" - which involves all young people. But all the youth participation in the world is as nothing if there is no CHANGE! If they do not result in change, they are all a distraction. So I think that probably there is something in co-management if you can relate it and place emphasis upon the examples of what changed as a result in the daily life of young people - what young people tell us it is better as a result.

PCI: So there are no traditions of youth participation in decision-making here in England like we have



The National Youth Agency

in Brazil, my home country. So how do you feel you can deal with this culture of non-participation?

NYA: What makes you really angry is that here in Great Britain - the 4th richest nation in the world the situation for young people really has not changed much in the last few decades. Young people deserve a better deal.

Actually, it's about power. Adults can't deal with that issue of power. In Nottingham, where I live, there's a pedestrian area where you see a sign up outside a café saying: 'strictly no children, thank you' That's just awful! You wouldn't find that in Italy Spain or in most of France. In England, there is a culture of disrespect for young people.

We should skill up the young people to be activists is my answer! There are endless government sponsored training schemes for carpenters, plumbers, policeman - but absolutely nothing to train them to be citizen activists. That is the democratic deficit we face here. Also, there needs to be more honesty in our relationships with young people: we really need to trust them



to take on responsibility - because when you do, amazing things happen. There was an example in a school where the young people had a problem with too much home-work: they were dashing it off as there was too much of it. By engaging the students in a dialogue about quality versus quantity, a good compromise was reached. Also, I heard of a school where the student council banned crisps - because the students were dropping crisp packets all over the playground. Give them the chance, and young people will behave with incredible responsibility and amaze everyone. All we have to ensure is that they are given that chance.

PCI: What do you feel about the need to set up a Ministry of Youth or to get the vote for young people at 16?

NYA: The vote at 16 we have supported since it was first mooted back in the '90s - but essentially, it is a distraction. Get young people



involved in Exclusion Hearings at schools - get them involved in the settlement of where the children go in divorce hearings: that would be real progress.

A Youth Ministry might be one of the answers but I feel we need a range of structures. The Children and Young People's Unit is now dismantled - but it was a good model. An Independent Young People's Commissioner might be a good answer.

But it all comes back to the question of Power. As long as adults think of power as a cake - and if you take a bigger bit, then my bit has to be smaller, it is never going to work. The reality is that, if you involve young people in a real way, the cake gets bigger, and we all have more power and more responsibility. That's the reality we have to get across to government.

