

Review

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For Youth Workers And Youth Work

by Doug Nicholls (Policy Press, £14.99)

In the current political climate, there is a malign overemphasis on compliant youth workers being instrumental in producing compliant youth. So it's good to see a book come along which reaffirms what youth work is really all about and the reasons why many go into this line of work in the first place; that it offers a powerful tool for transforming the world. And as this timely book also reminds us, this is also one of the reasons why youth work has come under such a sustained attack recently from those in power.

They are not blind to youth work's enormous potential to challenge state monopoly capitalism and the dominant neoliberal agenda. Of course, young people are at the sharp end of that agenda. In one important section *Youth In A Suspect Society*, which builds on the work of educational and cultural theorist Henry Giroux, Doug Nicholls outlines how young people are experiencing increasing levels of super-exploitation and disenfranchisement unknown to previous generations. This provides a compelling theoretical analysis of the extreme effects of neoliberalism, consumerism and the new authoritarianism on the state of youth and how this leads to the disposability and demonisation of non-functional groups such as young people who are no longer viewed as being at risk. They themselves are the risk! In challenging this, the author points to the need for a cultural shift in youth work with class consciousness, trade unionism and socialism just some of the key elements in shaping this change. He argues that this shift is crucial if young people are going to be helped to realise their potential and become part of the struggle against inequality and social injustice.

One very minor quibble is that there might have been more analysis of how youth work could clearly and directly inform and influence trade unionism in a progressive way, around organising young people and in communities for example. That aside, this is a powerful, wide ranging and thought provoking book which needs to be read by a wider audience than just those involved in youth policy making, academia or those who work directly with young people.

Marxist methodology is deeply informed by the radical interaction between theory and practice - by praxis in its most revolutionary sense - and how this can effect political change through cultural action. This book is therefore useful and important in both making sense of that often difficult and demanding process and much more besides.

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<http://www.morningstaronline.co.uk/index.php/news/content/view/full/124043>