

Editorial

This issue of *Concept* comes out in the midst of public sector cuts which are promised to be ‘deeper than Thatcher’s’. In the 1980s and 90s, when Margaret Thatcher was rolling back the state, privatising public services, administering public sector cuts and leaving a legacy of market driven prosperity for a few, and poverty for many, there was also a mobilisation of resistance. The ‘Metropolitan Socialist’ Local Authorities supported communities in poverty and communities of interest to organise against the onslaught on society which, as Mrs Thatcher argued, there was no such thing. This was the time when new forms of protest starting emerging from social movements: Greenham Common became a focus for feminist and peace activist politics to converge as US weapons of mass destruction were confronted with women peace campers, bright coloured fence decorations and photographs of loved ones. Direct action environmental campaigners occupied roads and airports, operating outside of the mainstream green NGOs. Solidarity movements provided coordinated support to opponents of apartheid in South Africa before the internet made such international connections easy and led to the liberation of Nelson Mandela and the collapse of the racist regime. In Britain, Black activists took to the streets and challenged the overt and covert racism of the police. In Scotland, Thatcher’s Conservatives were rejected in the ballot box, and civil disobedience brought down the Poll Tax, ultimately leading towards devolution.

Some aspects of Thatcher’s cutting regime resonate today, but we are in a different situation which demands new forms of resistance. This issue of *Concept* explores some of the possibilities of resistance in the current era, from the perspectives of youth work, social enterprise and multiculturalism. Tony Taylor describes initiatives in England which have mobilised youth workers to move beyond a sense of despair in being harnessed to managerial targets of crime prevention and entrepreneurialism, to a campaign for a democratic youth work which puts the interests of young people at the centre of dialogue and which aims to politicise rather than socialise. One significant opportunity for politicising young people, although by no means the only one, is the electoral process itself. Stuart Moir in West Lothian illustrates how promoting voter registration and participation in elections amongst eighteen year old new voters provides an opportunity explore the nature of democracy and citizenship both within and outwith parliamentary processes. Indeed, even work with younger people on has generated a critical engagement with the institutions of democracy and contributed to the move towards the franchise of citizens at sixteen.

A distinctive feature of community work in the current era is how to engage with enterprise. As the 1970s and 1980s looked for opportunities for struggle ‘in and against the state’, in a different context there may be a locus of resistance occurring today ‘in and against the market’. Both Left and Right have been discovering varieties of ‘social enterprise’ which community education workers cannot ignore, and two contributions to critical engagement with the phenomenon are included in this issue. Whilst social enterprise is often used as a euphemism for incorporating activists into the realm of market relations, these authors argue that it can also be an opportunity for accountable economic regeneration. The possibilities offered by social enterprise for economic regeneration and tackling poverty are explored by Mike Danson and Geoff Whittam. In a paper originally developed for trade unionists, they examine the failure of economic policy in Glasgow in which low paid jobs are dependent on high earners’ consumption. Not only does this ‘trickle down’ model trap many in worsening poverty, it also comes apart in a recession when consumption is constrained. In this context, social enterprise can be understood as shifting economic focus away from consumption and onto social

activities such as caring and community building. On the other hand social enterprise can also be understood as commodifying these activities, and mopping up the collateral damage of the market. A more complex and nuanced understanding of social enterprise is therefore needed if it is to play a role in addressing the failures of economic regeneration to tackle poverty.

One of the mechanisms in which social enterprise is embedded in community led economic development is through community trusts, argues Ian Cooke. He makes the case that community trusts provide many advantages over other forms of economic development or state services. Indeed, as community trusts are neither exclusively focused on the generation of private wealth, nor investment in public service, they constitute an institution which integrates functions of social enterprise and social benefit in the interests of their community owners. Whilst not necessarily replacing state provision or state-funded voluntary sector, community trust do offer an alternative which can operate independently of both state and the private sector.

Finally, racism continues to present a challenge in community work and academic analysis. The resistance to established, white institutional racism in England and Scotland which developed in the 1980s has moved on without disappearing. We are certainly seeing a resurgence of racism, and also new forms of its expression. Political debate, not least in the 2010 general election, has frequently focussed on the 'problem of immigration' as if the problem lies with the immigrants themselves, rather than a global system which bifurcates workers into rich and poor and generates migration. There is a high level of toleration of a public discourse by politicians and the media which demonises immigration, asylum seekers and foreign workers, and policy which sets targets for deportations of vulnerable people. Islamophobia is growing both amongst the privileged chattering classes and fascistic militancy of the English and Scottish Defence Leagues. Targets of racism are as likely to be Muslims, Eastern Europeans or Gypsies as they are 'Black' or 'Pakistani'.

Two explorations of resistance to this resurgent and changing racism are presented in this issue. Nahid Aslam looks for resources to challenge Islamophobia which refuse to fall into a trap of equal and opposite violence. Starting with Gandhi's Hindu confrontational *satyagraha* and *ahimsa*, and Martin Luther King's Christian non-violent militancy, she uncovers resources within her own Muslim tradition of equally insightful if less well known practitioners. Alla Norrie and Ashraf Abdelhay on the other hand demonstrate the potential of a dialogical multiculturalism. Whilst multiculturalism has been challenged from all sides, from advocates of radical anti-racism to reactionaries promoting 'social cohesion', Norrie and Abdelhay describe how the Multicultural Study Circle at Edinburgh's Adult Learning Project is both able to affirm and critical interrogate cultural identity. Drawing on the methodology of Paulo Freire, the cultural resources of the diverse ethnicities and nationalities in the group cease to be divisive absolutes and instead become source material in a process of collective learning.

In a time of cuts, recession, racism and ongoing marketisation and bureaucratisation it is important to know that resistance is still strong and innovating as well as drawing on the resources of the past. The practice of community education across all sectors has much to learn from these initiatives.

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