

Editorial

Eurig Scandrett
Queen Margaret University

The previous issue of Concept came out amongst fears of public sector cuts in the UK, this issue coincides with these cuts starting to become a reality. This editorial is written in the week in which George Osborne, UK Chancellor, announced his Comprehensive Spending Review with public sector cuts amounting to £48 billion by 2014-15, disproportionately targeted at the poorest and at women. Admirably, it is the trades unions have been using their strength in the public sector to lead the protests, arguing that 'there is a better way' (Scottish TUC's campaign for jobs, services, fairer taxes and a living wage).

Ostensibly, the strategy of the Conservative – Liberal Democrat coalition is to reduce the size of the public sector, laying off public sector workers, and expect private enterprise to expand to mop up the unemployment. Services which cannot be met by the private sector are supposed to be picked up by the 'Big Society'. It is largely the trades union leadership, also, who have been pointing out the fallacy of this strategy – indeed that it is a thinly disguised project of privatisation. The victims of this ideologically driven project, if it is carried out, will be the working class communities with whom community educators work.

It is timely that this issue of Concept has a strong focus on class. Both Gerry Mooney and Stuart Connor analyse the ideological preparation for the attack on the working class. Connor explores newspaper coverage of the Karen Matthews case in West Yorkshire to illustrate the myths of community as both saint and sinner. These myths are not new, but their recent employment on infantilising and pathologising impoverished working class communities serves to reproduce their portrayal as 'other'. Mooney describes the use of rhetoric of 'Broken Society' in political narratives of both right and centre left as class misrecognition – sections of the working class are denigrated and stigmatised, no longer deserving of social acceptance. These two articles explore how such narratives legitimise the withdrawal of welfare from the 'undeserving poor' and subsequently, the dismantling of the welfare state.

As employees and recipients of the welfare state, women are disproportionately affected, as regular gender audits of the government's cuts have demonstrated. Jo Ozga, in this issue, reports on another way in which policy in Scotland, masquerading as devolved decision making is having a negative affect on women. The Single Outcome Agreements were implemented by the SNP government which was elected in Scotland in 2007, through which local authorities were given greater flexibility in the mechanisms by which they could achieve national targets. As a result, this research by Scottish Women's Aid concludes, in most local authorities services designed to address violence against women have suffered.

Attacks against public services, against working class communities, against women, and indeed against education and against the wider environment, invite a response which is political, educational and imaginative. The remainder of the articles address the opportunities for such resistance. Jim Crowther and Ian Martin present a historical

context for Scottish adult education's role in resistance to social and economic exploitation, whilst also at times collaborating in these oppressive relations. In particular they distinguish between the 'respectable' and the 'radical' forms of adult education and invite Concept readers to find new ways to adopt radical practices. Hannah Barugh and Dan Glass make a claim for such radical adult education in their community and environmental activism. They critique national and international environmental policy as serving the interests of business whilst exacerbating the environmental impact on the poorest communities. Barugh and Glass argue that using the methods of popular education can provide a link of solidarity and mutual learning between communities whose environment is being exploited, and direct activists tackling the causes of wider environmental destruction.

As English Universities move towards quasi-privatisation and a free market in educational commodities (and as we go to press, Scotland launches a Green Paper which looks likely to go in the same direction), Liam Kane explores whether there might be spaces for radical higher education in Hugo Chavez's Venezuela. Careful to avoid the rose-tinted spectacles, Kane offers some hope for how Higher Education might respond to the challenge of contributing to social justice.

Finally, in a new departure for Concept online, this issue offers a photo-essay, one year on from the Gude Cause centenary celebration of the 1909 Edinburgh women's suffrage march. The 2009 procession was a spectacular celebration of this victory of universal suffrage and a major step in the direction of gender equality. It reminds us never to take for granted those achievements won from struggle and that this struggle continues. Such ongoing struggles for democracy and for women's rights were also expressed through the multiple contributions to the Gude Cause of community, women's, youth, workplace and many other groups and campaigns. At a time when the interests of women and working class communities are under renewed threat, such celebratory resistance is sorely needed.