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Rethinking the relationship with the State.

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Abstract

This article explores the relationship between community work and the state in the UK in particular. By exploring the relevance and limitations of the book *`In and against the state´*, the article presents the idea that practitioners of community development can play a role in re-defining the role of the state by changing the discourse from `working in and against the state´ to `working for and as the state´. In this sense, constructing an ideological position regarding what the state should be and which role it should play could be equally as important as developing new approaches to practice in response to the influence of the state.

Introduction

In 1980, a group of UK state workers published the book *`In and Against the State´* (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1980). The aim of the book was to inspire people working in the public sector to reflect upon the influence of the state;

> Although the state may appear to exist to protect us from the worst excesses of capitalism, it is in fact protecting capital from our strength by ensuring that we relate to capital and to each other in ways which divide us from ourselves, and leave the basic inequalities unquestioned. (…) Those of us who work for the state are inevitably part of the state. We must find ways to oppose it from within our daily activity (…)

The publication of *`In and Against the State´* happened in a context in which the role of the state was not only questioned by state workers but also by the Conservative government then in power. In the decades that followed, the belief in the superior

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efficiency of the market over the public sector was endorsed and acted upon by the succeeding Labour and coalition governments. These changes affected the British welfare state and influenced the practice of community work (Craig et al, 2011).

In the current context, the debate over the role of the state and its influence in community work remains (see Craig et al. 2011; Hoggett, Mayo & Miller, 2008; Shaw & Martin, 2000). Yet, practitioners should consider not only the influence that the state has on their practice but also the role of the state itself. Rethinking the role of the state in community work could be equally as important as developing new approaches to address the influence of the state.

In this article, I will argue that in order to respond to the current of practice, the `working in and against the state´ argument has to be re-adapted and expanded. It has to be re-adapted because the role of the state and the organisation of the wider society differ significantly from that which existed in the 1970s. It has to be expanded because the ambivalent nature of the state requires that practitioners not only work `in and against the state´ but also `for and as the state´. Because practitioners work `for and as the state´ they have the opportunity to play a critical role in redefining the state as instrument for the achievement of progressive goals.

Community work and the state.

Community work has unavoidably been tied to the role of the state. It has functioned as a mediator between the state and the civil society (Hoggett et al., 2008), and as an instrument to deliver policy (Shaw, 2008). In its early years, community work was predominantly a conservative practice concerned with social control. Within the UK, community work aimed to respond to the concerns of the upper classes regarding social conflict and the spread of diseases. In the colonies, it aimed to maintain the political power of the state and prevent any potential dissent or insurgency (Craig, 1989). In both cases, community work was a combination of paternalistic and charitable approaches that seems to have been more interested in pursuing the interests of the state (and wealthy classes) than in alleviating poverty.

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From the 1940s until the early 1970s, the practice continued to be shaped by the state despite the fact that, in the definition of community work by United Nations, community organisations were recognised as separate from government agencies. During these decades, community work was located as a mediator between `the needs of capitalism for a literate and obedient workforce and the struggles of the working class to improve their living conditions´ (Williams, 1998 cited in Shaw, 2003, p. 18). However, the rise of civil rights movements questioning the effectiveness of the welfare state reframed the role of community work from functioning as a mediator to working as an instrument of social control (Waddington, 1979). During the 1960s, state-sponsored projects, such as the UK Community Development Project, were established to respond to the emergent crisis in social democracy and the perceived threat of disaffection, dissent and conflict (Corrigan, 1975, cited in Shaw, 2003, p. 20). The work within communities served then to characterise poverty as a marginal problem rather than as the failure of the state (Community Development Project, 1977). Community work became a practice to regulate communities, promote cultural norms and bring `deviant´ citizens back into line (Shaw, 2003, p. 19).

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the crisis of the welfare state, and the embrace of free-market values led to a reconstruction of the role of the state. The new state originated under the Thatcher Government regarded the welfare state as a source of dependency and the free-market as the answer to dependency. This influenced the practice of community work that had to shift the responsibility of providing public services from the state to individuals (Clarke & Newman, 1997). However, even when the government claimed to diminish the interventionist role of the state, the actions taken suggested the opposite. According to Ruth Levitas (2012) the state under Thatcher defended economic principles while reducing people´s rights such as free assembly or freedom of movement. (p. 329)

In the current context, community work has continued to be affected by the state and its market driven values. Under the New Labour government from 1997, community work was embedded within a discourse which moved `from government to

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governance´ in which enhancing consumer choices was regarded as a synonym for empowering individuals (Craig, Mayo, Popple, Shaw, & Taylor, 2011, p. 195). Similarly, the current Conservative and Liberal Democrat government has used its idea of the `Big Society´ to justify social cuts and the privatisation of public services (Fraser, 2012). In government discourse, the `Big society´ empowers local people and communities by shifting the power from politicians to the people (Prime Minister´s Office, 2010). As a result, social policy has echoed this new conception of 'empowerment' by promoting the idea of self-help through lifelong learning and asset-based community development approaches. However, despite the rhetoric of 'empowerment', the state continues to maintain an interventionist position by protecting the principles of the market and retaining control of social policies (Kenny, 2002, ps. 293-295)

The role that the state plays in community work is crucial to understand the contemporary relevance of the argument of `working in and against the state´. Yet, we also have to consider the role that ideology plays. Community work is a contested practice that includes a wide range of ideologies, motivations and moral values. According to Hoggett et. al (2008), community work is seen as `more than a job´. It includes a set of values and aims that ranges from political mobilisation to individual feelings of compassion and care (ps. 77-95). In these terms, community work can be committed to helping communities develop resilience, acquiring instrumental knowledge and adapting to the current context, or it can be committed to challenging the status quo by promoting critical thinking and political actions. These different and competing ideological positions imply that practitioners cannot be `the value-free professionals who objectively mediate between the state and the community´ (Shaw, 2008b, p. 147).

Like practitioners, the state itself is not ideologically neutral. Throughout the history of community work, we have observed how the state´s policies have followed specific ideological principles. The consideration that neither practitioners nor the state are free of ideology, involves accepting the possibility that a practitioner's ideological stand could be in strong opposition to that of the state. If in addition, we consider the

fact that practitioners are frequently in the situation of delivering state policies, either by being employed, funded or guided by the state, then it is easy to understand why practitioners frequently find themselves in the paradoxical position of `working in and against the state´. Consider, for instance the words of Pete Alcock and Lars Christensen (1995) regarding local community-based organisations in relation to the state;

> Local community-based organisations are against the state, because they challenge its priorities and working practices; but they are also in the state, because they rely on grant funding to provide the facilities and paid workers which they need to organise and to campaign. (Alcock & Christensen, 1995, p. 118)

If this describes the situation that community workers frequently find themselves in, as seems to be the case, then we can understand why the argument of 'working in and against the state' has remained relevant. However, if community work aims to respond to the social, political and economic context of practice, then practitioners need to be aware of the limitations of that argument of `working in and against the state´ have.

The limitations of `working in and against the state´

The argument of `working in and against the state´ was the response to what many state workers thought of the welfare state as being `part of the hegemonic apparatus …aimed at organizing consent and managing dissent´ (Martin & Shaw, 2000, p. 404). Looking at the history of community work help us understand the relevance of this argument. However, when applied to the current context it presents serious limitations. I will focus on three.

The first limitation is that it is too centred on a narrative of social class and socialist reform. The view of society in class terms fails to recognise the wider culture of politics in which people, organisations and community workers do not necessarily define themselves exclusively in terms of social class. The current political struggle

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includes, besides trade unions and progressive political parties, women´s organisations, cultural minorities, autonomous communities and rights movements. Moreover, the weight given to structure and social class ends up reducing those people who do not define themselves in class terms `to the passive objects of policy as distinct from active subjects in politics´ (Shaw & Martin, 2000, p, 405). As well as defining society in terms of social class, `In and Against the State´ recurrently called for developing a new socialist identity.

> We are socialists. We believe that the struggle for socialism includes a struggle against the state …we must find ways of bringing the struggle for socialism into our daily work (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1980, p, 1)

Yet, in a context in which many people do not identify themselves as socialists, the identification of a progressive movement as necessarily a socialist movement is likely to alienate many potential allies. Hence, it is essential that community work includes a wider cultural and political spectrum in order to effectively involve communities and social organisations when `working in and against the state´.

The second limitation is that it seems to make community workers unable to legitimize their practice when they continue working within the state;

> Best to make what we can of a bad job. In this spirit, community workers lead working-class people to take part in local government participation exercises, schooling them in committee procedure and public speaking, in the hope that they can get a fair deal by stating their case through the proper channels. (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1980)

The original argument was embedded in a narrative of constant dichotomy between the state and the civil society in which community workers were either part of the problem (if working in the state and defending the role of the state) or part of the solution (if working against the state and defending the interest of the working class).

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The view of community work within this dichotomy, leads practitioners to see themselves as the victims of the system rather than as active agents of democracy. Moreover, it prevents them from recognising the value of their practice when it is directly employed, funded or guided by the state (Shaw & Martin, 2000). There are many local community-based projects that would not have been possible without collobaration between the state and communities or without the state´s support and funds (Alcock & Christensen, 1995; Craig, 1989; Hayton, 1995). Thus, it is important that practitioners are encouraged to recognise the opportunities that the state brings as well as to develop creative strategies for working within the state.

Finally, the third limitation is that the original argument of *`Working In And Against The State´* considers the role of the state exclusively as an instrument of oppression and social control;

> It is not possible to separate off a "good" side of state activity and see this as being simply in the interests of the working class (…) the state, then, is not "our" state. It is 'their" state, an alien, oppressive state. (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1980)

However, as Craig (1989) pointed out, the state can neither be the homogeneous entity that systematically opposes the interest of the working class, nor the entity that benevolently provides services in the interests of its citizens. (p, 16). The state is, in fact, ambivalent. It can be an oppressive institution concerned with social control but it can also be an `enabling´ institution that supports democratic and collective participation (Emejulu, 2013, p, 60) For liberals, the state can be a form of community: `a collective enterprise in which citizens jointly achieve the common good of a just society´ (Swift, 2006, p,168). While that liberal vision may be surely surely optimistic the possibility of achieving it should not be rejected out of hand.

In the current context, the promise of governance by the `Big Society is essentially undermining the role of the state by depicting it in direct opposition to the interests of individuals. Yet, what is behind of the idea of governance can be translated as the

government´s technique to `absolve the state of its own responsibility for addressing social injustice´ (Taylor, 2011, p. 293). In failing to recognise the ambivalent nature of the state, the original argument of *`Working In And Against The State´*, equally fails to enable community workers to respond to a context in which cuts on public funding are justified under the banner of reducing the control of the state and increasing the power of people.

`Working for and as the state´

The recognition of the state as ambivalent is extremely important. If the state is considered as an ambivalent institution, community work can support the struggles of communities and citizens over the role of the state rather than merely abandon it to the trends of the market. In this sense, practitioners of community work not only have to work `in and against the state´ but also `for and as the state´.

`For the state´, because within a free-market context, re-gaining the sovereignty of the nation-state as the enabling institution responsible for providing social justice, is decisive in developing, accordingly, strategies and policies of community work. In these terms, community workers can help reconstruct the essence of democracy and the role of the state by activating the voices of citizens and communities. As Martin & Shaw (2000) suggest, community work can help develop the `settlement between the cultural politics of communities and the political culture of the state´ (p, 409).

`As the state´, because community workers should not only be the professionals that promote active citizenship by helping communities raise their voices, but also be active citizens themselves. They can become the `active subjects that shape and influence the exercise of the government´ (Morison, 2000, cited in Taylor, 2011, p. 291). Practitioners as active citizens are, in a sense, part of the state since a democratic state involves and depends upon active citizens. This involves taking an ideological stand. As Habermas (1992) claims, `the institutions of constitutional freedom are only worth as much as a population makes of them´ (Habermas, 1994, cited in Kymlicka & Norman, 1994, p. 353). In these terms, community workers have

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to make the decision of whether to be citizens in `the world as it is´ or be the active citizens for `the world as it could be´ (Shaw, 2008).

Conclusion

The influence that the state has in community work and the role that ideology plays in its practice, unavoidably involves placing practitioners in the somewhat paradoxical position of `working in and against the state´. On the one hand, the practice of community work is tied to the role of the state, since the state is often the employer or funder. On the other hand, the ideologically contested nature of community work makes it almost impossible to avoid a situation in which the focus and aims of practitioners differ significantly from those of the state. In these terms, community work practitioners need to creatively manage the tensions of `working in and against the state´.

However, the social, political and economic changes have reconfigured the context in which community work currently operates. In a context in which communities find it extremely difficult to voice their interests, community work appears as a key actor to regain the role of the state as democratic, egalitarian and just. In these terms, community workers should work `for and as the state´. `For the state´ by including communities `not only as the legitimate expression of active citizenship but also as the essence of democracy itself´ (Shaw & Martin, 2000). `As the state´ by including themselves as active citizens and defending the enabling role of the state as it should be.

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Bullshit Jobs: A Critical Pedagogy Provocation

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> For what and for whom do I study? And against what and against whom?... To the extent that the future is not inexorably sealed and already decided, there is another task that awaits us. Namely the task of the inherent openness of the future . . . It is not by resignation but by the capacity for indignation in the face of injustice that we are affirmed (Freire, 2001:73-74).

I precede the 'provocation' —a word I first heard used by my colleagues Gordon Asher and Leigh French—below with the following caveats. First, I produced this provocation as part of a workshop on Critical Pedagogy that Gordon Asher, Leigh French and I co-organised preceding a day conference on Critical Pedagogies. Second, the provocation that follows, like those of Asher and French, sought to spark off debate; it used David Graeber's rhetorical argument about paid work today, with its explicit use of the 'b' word, to encourage academics at the event to re-contextualise regimes of accountability in the university that they are experiencing and to consider how critical pedagogy could help them do so. Finally, I have been lucky enough to leave full time employment when voluntary redundancy was on offer (being already off work on stress-related sick leave, for the first and last time in my full-time, paid working life). This allowed me to stop being a wage slave and become, instead, as one of my colleagues put it, like Tony Benn who left Parliament to take up politics; I was leaving the university to take up education.

David Graeber's recent (2013) piece 'On the phenomenon of bullshit jobs' observes that during the 20th century, the percentage of people in the US and UK performing 'professional, managerial, clerical, sales and service' sector jobs rose from 25% to 75% of the workforce, in part accounted for by 'an unprecedented expansion of sectors like corporate law, academic and health administration, human resources and

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public relations'. Why has there been such a growth in these jobs? Graeber says first, like many others, that de-industrialisation, coupled with technological, communicational and transportation advances, led to whole swathes of work being dramatically reduced and/or moved South (as was the case with industry). Second, again, not an uncommon observation, there has been a significant increase in service, and, especially, administrative sector jobs. The latter rests on 'the creation of new industries like financial services or telemarketing, or on the unprecedented expansion of jobs in areas such as 'corporate law, academic and health administration, human resources, and public relations' (Graeber, 2013) and in sectors of work supporting the needs of the above sets of workers. Graeber deems these service and administrative sector jobs 'bullshit jobs'—a concise term that emphasises their seeming meaninglessness. He notes that the expansion of jobs in these two sectors occurred alongside the elimination of productive jobs, in which workers interacted with the world and made tangible (even if sometimes virtual) things. Most remaining workers only spend a fraction of their time doing the work they believe they were originally hired to do; more time is spent performing morally and politically dispiriting 'bullshit' tasks. Only a small fraction of this remainder still have the kinds of employment that many of the latter group thought they were initially entering.

Given the mid twentieth century belief that technology would eventually end long working days, why, are most employees 'relentlessly squeezed or exploited' at jobs that require them to spend more time performing work that makes them more visible and accountable to managers? Why are they encouraged to blame their plight on either the few workers with meaningful jobs or on 'a terrorised stratum of the universally reviled, unemployed' [and we might add migrants and precariously employed] whose plight was created by the class that structured the workplace? Graeber (2013) suggests that we consider the elite mentality producing these jobs: "if 1% of the population controls most of the disposable wealth, what we call 'the market' reflects what they think is useful or important, not anyone else".

Graeber concludes his short piece, 'If someone had designed a work regime perfectly suited to maintaining the power of finance capital, it's hard to see how they could

have done a better job. Real, productive workers are relentlessly squeezed and exploited' and are spending more of their time on bullshit activities in these jobs. They are encouraged to feel 'a simmering resentment against anyone whose work has clear and undeniable social value' as well as against the under-, insecurely- and un-employed. I would amend Graeber's argument: It is not just that many people are being made to perform jobs of little worth and much effort whilst a few perform highly satisfying jobs. Even in academia, where he works as I have done, a privileged few are granted time to pursue research. But even amongst these, as well as amongst all others, at least in England, there has been a serious erosion of the sense that one was entering a vocation in the Weberian sense of a calling: they must meet publishing and grant targets individually set for them that enable management surveillance and require them to monitor themselves as well as receive highly favourable student evaluations of their teaching.

But these tasks are not simply meaningless. Nor is it the case, as Prolapsarian (as s/he calls themselves (2013) suggests, that Graeber fails to recognise the valuable work of administrators and support workers. Rather, as the growing literature on new managerialism and accountability suggests, *all* workers increasingly must fulfil these tasks that take them away from the work they were hired to do. With regard to educators, as Ball (2003) notes, these tasks introduce the 'terrors of performativity', about which others, and I, have written[1]. As Ball says, the self becomes a spectacle that requires continuous re-fabrication. Davies and Bendix (2005) further note that the very process of 'performing the new entrepreneurial subject of neo-liberalism – flexible, productive and strategic – requires that one also takes up neo-liberal discourses and practices as one's own' (2005: 82). Taking up these discourses and practices renders one more visible to management plus students, and requires that one internalise and become complicit with these discourses and practices. Thus, the self is partly reshaped to meet the growing demands of producing facsimiles, simulations, taking time and energy from the arguably more important work of teaching, research

[1] Speaking for myself, I sought to understand and share with others, the effects of these regime's impact on my subjectivity, my workload, and relationships with students, colleagues and managers (see Canaan, 2013, 2011, 2008).

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and administration.

Despite these limits, Graeber's analysis helps explain the growing attraction of critical pedagogy: it speaks to the tension between acknowledging that students and lecturers are interpolated by the neoliberal logic and also being aware of, as the Freire quote in the epigraph indicates, an alternative logic. The more one explores this tension, deepening one's awareness of the circumstances producing current work conditions and mind sets, the more fully one nurtures potential alternatives that can be worked towards.

Whilst I was on a full-time permanent contract, I tried to nurture this tension that critical pedagogy offers, especially in my final decade. I sought to rethink module content, outcomes and forms of assessment as well as engender fuller, contradiction-laden dialogues with students. I also was able to reshape teaching and learning spaces when, with student support, I convinced the university to create (from autumn 2007) a space students came to call 'the beanbag room'. This is a relatively open learning space with no pre-designated front, back or sides and with comfortable chairs for pregnant or disabled students and beanbags for the rest of us, placed in a circle on the floor, sitting 'at the same level with one another' as students often remarked in module evaluations. In these spaces I sought to facilitate more dialogical ways of engaging than those that the increasingly constrained and regulated university environment in which I worked encouraged.

Within this space, a colleague and I then (2008-2009) set up and taught an ongoing second and third year undergraduate routeway, Public Sociology. We viewed Public Sociology as what Burawoy calls Critical Public Sociology, impelled by what he and we saw as the need in the current increasingly neoliberalised environment for Sociology to move 'from interpretation to engagement, from theory to practice, from the academy to its publics' (Burawoy 2005:324). This Public Sociology also sought to facilitate student awareness of the need for 'critique', . . . that is to be *"critical of"* as well as *"critical to"* the world it engages, a public sociology that seeks to transcend rather than uphold what exists' (Burawoy, 2005:325).

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We sought to encourage student critique of hegemonic forms of Sociology and question if Sociology was or could be value neutral. We sought to help students consider these ideas by offering them the chance to take these sociological insights elsewhere. Students went on placements outside the classroom, often outside the university. Some explored contemporary issues, working with grassroots, campaigning groups with which they could deepen their awareness of the increasingly iniquitously divided and polarised world in which they lived. Others chose to work with churches or local community groups—often less explicitly challenging of their prior views—than was the case with the first set of students. In the third year students either continued the same project or developed another. In Projects which replaced dissertations, students had to evaluate the degree to which Public Sociology informed their practices. Teaching and learning was facilitated by insights from critical pedagogy, which guided the routeway.

Despite students often finding this routeway 'eye opening' as mentioned in module evaluations, the programme had considerable limitations. I present three: first, our teaching and administrative loads were heavy and our students required greater academic support than had their predecessors before neoliberalisation had so intensified and regulated academic work. We could not find adequate time to overcome these challenges—nor did management acknowledge them . . . a plight undoubtedly shared by other academics as well as teachers. Second, the bullshit dimension of academic jobs consumed much of our energy and time. Finally, students did not necessarily come to classes politicised or wanting to be politicised, especially as the university is increasingly construed as a space of workplace skills development and the neoliberal logic pervades more of our lives. Thus, encouraging students to consider learning for praxis, fusing theory with practice in order to prise open and work to progressively transform the current order was a challenge. This was especially true for these minority ethnic and white working class first generation students, who, understandably, sought to obtain the skills and insights that could help them move up what they perceived as the possible (but uncertain) ladder of social mobility.

These kinds of frustrations contributed to my involvement with other critical pedagogy informed projects, outside the university and in informal education, and to my departure from full-time university work in summer 2012. For the sake of brevity I discuss here one informal project I am involved with, BRE(A)D, Birmingham Radical Education whose motto is 'We shall rise!'. The project is impelled by a similar logic to that which led to the creation of alternatives within and against, and outside and against the, neoliberalised university. They are part of a wider acknowledgement that the supposed crisis that capitalism has been experiencing post the 2007-2009 (financial problems governments created by allowing banks and national banking and other financialised system of banks) seems to be getting off the ground now, but this has taken two years. During this time we held several events with Columbian and Greek popular educators/critical pedagogues and a day event on Freire, but until recently, our efforts lacked momentum. In the interim, however, we have doggedly sought to elucidate our aims.

Our work now has two strands, which we clarified in and through a collaborative discussion. One of my BRE(A)D colleagues, Marion Bowl, first introduced to this discussion Foley's idea of 'learning in social action'. Foley notes that such learning occurs 'informally and incidentally . . . as people struggle against oppression, as they struggle to make sense of what is happening to them and to work out ways to do something about it' (Foley 1999:1-2). Foley further suggests that such learning starts from the assumption that the world in which we live is organised 'in the interests of capital and against' workers' interests. Consequently, it entails engagement with processes of 'emancipatory struggle' against current conditions (1999:131) in order to 'illuminate and give strategic direction to … the education practice' of a campaign or organisation engaged in struggle (Foley, 1999:133).

Marion then noted in our discussion that perhaps BRE(A)D could conceptualise our second strand of work as 'learning for social action', extending Foley's initial concept which could entail 'working with groups of people or individuals who want to know more about why the world is a bad place. What's Neo liberalism? Why is it screwing

up my chances? What is the bedroom tax and why is it important to have arguments opposing that. Helping people to rehearse the political arguments . . . and how they're impacting on people's everyday lives. She further noted that such learning for social action could provide participants in discussions that gave them a kind of 'critical confidence' with which they could 'rehearse the hegemonic political arguments . . . so that they might more fully understand complex policies or political changes and how they're impacting on peoples' lives'.

This discussion helped BRE(A)D clarify the dual edged programme of work we had been envisaging. With regard to 'learning in social action, BRE(A)D are now proposing to facilitate a series of discussions with local campaigning groups, guided by a document I wrote, as an activist, about the need for campaigning groups to reflect on and clarify issues that often underly our work (Canaan, 2014). With regard to 'learning for social action', we are now planning to hold sessions at an adult education college in Birmingham, starting with a discussion of the current economic situation and the supposed need for government austerity packages.

We are unsure where this will take us. Our hope is that it will enable BRE(A)D, at a local level, to 'attack the groundwork' of capitalism, as Joss Winn (2014) put it.

Note

This article is a redrafted provocation from a co-organised Critical Pedagogies workshop preceding the conference, 'Critical Pedagogies: Equality and Diversity in a Changing Institution', Edinburgh University, September 2013

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Bullshit Jobs: A Critical Pedagogy Provocation

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> For what and for whom do I study? And against what and against whom?... To the extent that the future is not inexorably sealed and already decided, there is another task that awaits us. Namely the task of the inherent openness of the future . . . It is not by resignation but by the capacity for indignation in the face of injustice that we are affirmed (Freire, 2001:73-74).

I precede the 'provocation' —a word I first heard used by my colleagues Gordon Asher and Leigh French—below with the following caveats. First, I produced this provocation as part of a workshop on Critical Pedagogy that Gordon Asher, Leigh French and I co-organised preceding a day conference on Critical Pedagogies. Second, the provocation that follows, like those of Asher and French, sought to spark off debate; it used David Graeber's rhetorical argument about paid work today, with its explicit use of the 'b' word, to encourage academics at the event to re-contextualise regimes of accountability in the university that they are experiencing and to consider how critical pedagogy could help them do so. Finally, I have been lucky enough to leave full time employment when voluntary redundancy was on offer (being already off work on stress-related sick leave, for the first and last time in my full-time, paid working life). This allowed me to stop being a wage slave and become, instead, as one of my colleagues put it, like Tony Benn who left Parliament to take up politics; I was leaving the university to take up education.

David Graeber's recent (2013) piece 'On the phenomenon of bullshit jobs' observes that during the 20th century, the percentage of people in the US and UK performing 'professional, managerial, clerical, sales and service' sector jobs rose from 25% to 75% of the workforce, in part accounted for by 'an unprecedented expansion of sectors like corporate law, academic and health administration, human resources and

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public relations'. Why has there been such a growth in these jobs? Graeber says first, like many others, that de-industrialisation, coupled with technological, communicational and transportation advances, led to whole swathes of work being dramatically reduced and/or moved South (as was the case with industry). Second, again, not an uncommon observation, there has been a significant increase in service, and, especially, administrative sector jobs. The latter rests on 'the creation of new industries like financial services or telemarketing, or on the unprecedented expansion of jobs in areas such as 'corporate law, academic and health administration, human resources, and public relations' (Graeber, 2013) and in sectors of work supporting the needs of the above sets of workers. Graeber deems these service and administrative sector jobs 'bullshit jobs'—a concise term that emphasises their seeming meaninglessness. He notes that the expansion of jobs in these two sectors occurred alongside the elimination of productive jobs, in which workers interacted with the world and made tangible (even if sometimes virtual) things. Most remaining workers only spend a fraction of their time doing the work they believe they were originally hired to do; more time is spent performing morally and politically dispiriting 'bullshit' tasks. Only a small fraction of this remainder still have the kinds of employment that many of the latter group thought they were initially entering.

Given the mid twentieth century belief that technology would eventually end long working days, why, are most employees 'relentlessly squeezed or exploited' at jobs that require them to spend more time performing work that makes them more visible and accountable to managers? Why are they encouraged to blame their plight on either the few workers with meaningful jobs or on 'a terrorised stratum of the universally reviled, unemployed' [and we might add migrants and precariously employed] whose plight was created by the class that structured the workplace? Graeber (2013) suggests that we consider the elite mentality producing these jobs: "if 1% of the population controls most of the disposable wealth, what we call 'the market' reflects what they think is useful or important, not anyone else".

Graeber concludes his short piece, 'If someone had designed a work regime perfectly suited to maintaining the power of finance capital, it's hard to see how they could

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have done a better job. Real, productive workers are relentlessly squeezed and exploited' and are spending more of their time on bullshit activities in these jobs. They are encouraged to feel 'a simmering resentment against anyone whose work has clear and undeniable social value' as well as against the under-, insecurely- and un-employed. I would amend Graeber's argument: It is not just that many people are being made to perform jobs of little worth and much effort whilst a few perform highly satisfying jobs. Even in academia, where he works as I have done, a privileged few are granted time to pursue research. But even amongst these, as well as amongst all others, at least in England, there has been a serious erosion of the sense that one was entering a vocation in the Weberian sense of a calling: they must meet publishing and grant targets individually set for them that enable management surveillance and require them to monitor themselves as well as receive highly favourable student evaluations of their teaching.

But these tasks are not simply meaningless. Nor is it the case, as Prolapsarian (as s/he calls themselves (2013) suggests, that Graeber fails to recognise the valuable work of administrators and support workers. Rather, as the growing literature on new managerialism and accountability suggests, *all* workers increasingly must fulfil these tasks that take them away from the work they were hired to do. With regard to educators, as Ball (2003) notes, these tasks introduce the 'terrors of performativity', about which others, and I, have written[2]. As Ball says, the self becomes a spectacle that requires continuous re-fabrication. Davies and Bendix (2005) further note that the very process of 'performing the new entrepreneurial subject of neo-liberalism – flexible, productive and strategic – requires that one also takes up neo-liberal discourses and practices as one's own' (2005: 82). Taking up these discourses and practices renders one more visible to management plus students, and requires that one internalise and become complicit with these discourses and practices. Thus, the self is partly reshaped to meet the growing demands of producing facsimiles, simulations, taking time and energy from the arguably more important work of teaching, research

[2] Speaking for myself, I sought to understand and share with others, the effects of these regime's impact on my subjectivity, my workload, and relationships with students, colleagues and managers (see Canaan, 2013, 2011, 2008).

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and administration.

Despite these limits, Graeber's analysis helps explain the growing attraction of critical pedagogy: it speaks to the tension between acknowledging that students and lecturers are interpolated by the neoliberal logic and also being aware of, as the Freire quote in the epigraph indicates, an alternative logic. The more one explores this tension, deepening one's awareness of the circumstances producing current work conditions and mind sets, the more fully one nurtures potential alternatives that can be worked towards.

Whilst I was on a full-time permanent contract, I tried to nurture this tension that critical pedagogy offers, especially in my final decade. I sought to rethink module content, outcomes and forms of assessment as well as engender fuller, contradiction-laden dialogues with students. I also was able to reshape teaching and learning spaces when, with student support, I convinced the university to create (from autumn 2007) a space students came to call 'the beanbag room'. This is a relatively open learning space with no pre-designated front, back or sides and with comfortable chairs for pregnant or disabled students and beanbags for the rest of us, placed in a circle on the floor, sitting 'at the same level with one another' as students often remarked in module evaluations. In these spaces I sought to facilitate more dialogical ways of engaging than those that the increasingly constrained and regulated university environment in which I worked encouraged.

Within this space, a colleague and I then (2008-2009) set up and taught an ongoing second and third year undergraduate routeway, Public Sociology. We viewed Public Sociology as what Burawoy calls Critical Public Sociology, impelled by what he and we saw as the need in the current increasingly neoliberalised environment for Sociology to move 'from interpretation to engagement, from theory to practice, from the academy to its publics' (Burawoy 2005:324). This Public Sociology also sought to facilitate student awareness of the need for 'critique', . . . that is to be *"critical of"* as well as *"critical to"* the world it engages, a public sociology that seeks to transcend rather than uphold what exists' (Burawoy, 2005:325).

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We sought to encourage student critique of hegemonic forms of Sociology and question if Sociology was or could be value neutral. We sought to help students consider these ideas by offering them the chance to take these sociological insights elsewhere. Students went on placements outside the classroom, often outside the university. Some explored contemporary issues, working with grassroots, campaigning groups with which they could deepen their awareness of the increasingly iniquitously divided and polarised world in which they lived. Others chose to work with churches or local community groups—often less explicitly challenging of their prior views—than was the case with the first set of students. In the third year students either continued the same project or developed another. In Projects which replaced dissertations, students had to evaluate the degree to which Public Sociology informed their practices. Teaching and learning was facilitated by insights from critical pedagogy, which guided the routeway.

Despite students often finding this routeway 'eye opening' as mentioned in module evaluations, the programme had considerable limitations. I present three: first, our teaching and administrative loads were heavy and our students required greater academic support than had their predecessors before neoliberalisation had so intensified and regulated academic work. We could not find adequate time to overcome these challenges—nor did management acknowledge them . . . a plight undoubtedly shared by other academics as well as teachers. Second, the bullshit dimension of academic jobs consumed much of our energy and time. Finally, students did not necessarily come to classes politicised or wanting to be politicised, especially as the university is increasingly construed as a space of workplace skills development and the neoliberal logic pervades more of our lives. Thus, encouraging students to consider learning for praxis, fusing theory with practice in order to prise open and work to progressively transform the current order was a challenge. This was especially true for these minority ethnic and white working class first generation students, who, understandably, sought to obtain the skills and insights that could help them move up what they perceived as the possible (but uncertain) ladder of social mobility.

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These kinds of frustrations contributed to my involvement with other critical pedagogy informed projects, outside the university and in informal education, and to my departure from full-time university work in summer 2012. For the sake of brevity I discuss here one informal project I am involved with, BRE(A)D, Birmingham Radical Education whose motto is 'We shall rise!'. The project is impelled by a similar logic to that which led to the creation of alternatives within and against, and outside and against the, neoliberalised university. They are part of a wider acknowledgement that the supposed crisis that capitalism has been experiencing post the 2007-2009 (financial problems governments created by allowing banks and national banking and other financialised system of banks) seems to be getting off the ground now, but this has taken two years. During this time we held several events with Columbian and Greek popular educators/critical pedagogues and a day event on Freire, but until recently, our efforts lacked momentum. In the interim, however, we have doggedly sought to elucidate our aims.

Our work now has two strands, which we clarified in and through a collaborative discussion. One of my BRE(A)D colleagues, Marion Bowl, first introduced to this discussion Foley's idea of 'learning in social action'. Foley notes that such learning occurs 'informally and incidentally . . . as people struggle against oppression, as they struggle to make sense of what is happening to them and to work out ways to do something about it' (Foley 1999:1-2). Foley further suggests that such learning starts from the assumption that the world in which we live is organised 'in the interests of capital and against' workers' interests. Consequently, it entails engagement with processes of 'emancipatory struggle' against current conditions (1999:131) in order to 'illuminate and give strategic direction to … the education practice' of a campaign or organisation engaged in struggle (Foley, 1999:133).

Marion then noted in our discussion that perhaps BRE(A)D could conceptualise our second strand of work as 'learning for social action', extending Foley's initial concept which could entail 'working with groups of people or individuals who want to know more about why the world is a bad place. What's Neo liberalism? Why is it screwing

up my chances? What is the bedroom tax and why is it important to have arguments opposing that. Helping people to rehearse the political arguments . . . and how they're impacting on people's everyday lives. She further noted that such learning for social action could provide participants in discussions that gave them a kind of 'critical confidence' with which they could 'rehearse the hegemonic political arguments . . . so that they might more fully understand complex policies or political changes and how they're impacting on peoples' lives'.

This discussion helped BRE(A)D clarify the dual edged programme of work we had been envisaging. With regard to 'learning in social action, BRE(A)D are now proposing to facilitate a series of discussions with local campaigning groups, guided by a document I wrote, as an activist, about the need for campaigning groups to reflect on and clarify issues that often underly our work (Canaan, 2014). With regard to 'learning for social action', we are now planning to hold sessions at an adult education college in Birmingham, starting with a discussion of the current economic situation and the supposed need for government austerity packages.

We are unsure where this will take us. Our hope is that it will enable BRE(A)D, at a local level, to 'attack the groundwork' of capitalism, as Joss Winn (2014) put it.

Note

This article is a redrafted provocation from a co-organised Critical Pedagogies workshop preceding the conference, 'Critical Pedagogies: Equality and Diversity in a Changing Institution', Edinburgh University, September 2013

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Radicalizing Community Practice and Education

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We write this article on radicalizing community practice and education in the midst of an ongoing global economic crisis related to the neoconservative and neoliberal strategies that have dominated the world stage for more than thirty years. As the Scottish referendum recently demonstrated, participatory forms of grassroots social change have become a possibility again. The referendum revealed that making the case for democratic initiatives which recognize the failures of neoliberal policies has become easier in the contemporary context. We are not, however, naïve about the prospects of change. Crises can result, as with the origins of neoliberalism in the 1970s, in simply new forms of a reasserted class power. And crises can, and certainly do, bring about surges in reactionary and xenophobic (usually anti-immigrant) politics and social movements. The lessons we proposed five years ago in *Contesting Community* are timelier than ever. The opportunity exists for the development of new theories and practices in and about community efforts.

And yet, even if the neoliberalism of the post-1980s world is newly vulnerable and more open to contestation, community-based efforts continue to be embedded in a form of global capitalism in which the primary arbiter of social relations, processes, and outcomes is the market. It is certainly not a given that neoliberalism will be replaced. Therefore our central premise remains. Communities are vitally important, but inherently limited, arenas for social change and social change organizations. The

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limited capacity of community remains, as does its centrality. Accordingly, the debate over the place of community development in social change should continue to locate both the possibilities and limits of practice at its core. Below, we advance a series of six proposals to advance theory and practice, and to push debates about the potential role of communities and community organizing in the struggle for progressive social change. We do not see the propositions as utopian. We do not claim to be providing a definitive guide to contemporary community organizing, one appropriate for all types of community organizations in all types of settings. We are not convinced such a guide can be done well, and therefore we have not set out to do so here. Rather we propose steps that have been, and can be, developed and for which there are historical precedents and current examples.

Understand the Importance of Community

Our first proposition is the fairly simple: that in order for people working in communities to realize the potential within communities, they must first properly understand that potential—and its limits. We must understand that communities and local organizations are not inherently Left or Right, progressive or reactionary. In ways similar to how E. P. Thompson conceptualized class as "making itself," community is created through the practices of individuals, organizations, and institutions (Lustiger-Thaler 1994). This is not, by any means, to reject the important limitations placed on communities by their structural context or the language and invocation of community for itself. Rather we would argue that the space is there for people concerned with social change to claim and make, if they are willing, able, and moved to do so.

Community is a central realm in the organization of the larger political economy. It is where we live, and build many—if not most—of our most significant social relationships. And it is also where labor is produced and reproduced, and where political meanings and understandings of the world take root. These are not, by any means, small components of life. Building local organizations based on a sense of solidarity and belonging can be essential steps in the creation of a broad social movement that has strong local roots. Local work in community organizations or

trade unions that looks beyond the traditional boundaries of these organizations creates a base from which larger movements and campaigns can grow. Without the local work, the wider efforts cannot be sustained and will ultimately be without a base of either members or place.

But the analyses and understandings that currently inform most community efforts are problematic. In short, they are both too ambitious and too modest. They are too ambitious because they turn inward, into local efforts that inherently assume community problems are rooted in the characteristics of the community (and the people and organizations that constitute the community). That leads to community organizations promising too much, and thereby setting themselves up to fail, and disappoint funders and others who wonder why community-based efforts "don't work." But they are also, and conversely, too modest, in that they implicitly downplay the potential role community-based efforts can play in changing the larger political economy. In so doing, they lose sight of the fact that while communities may not be able to control the local-level manifestations of larger social problems, they can be a central part of changing the larger-scale social problems in the first place.

Organize beyond Community

Community-based efforts need to understand their work as transcending community boundaries. We see the political potential from community emerging when there is an emphasis on working "within a place," rather than "about a place." The focus of too much of the theory and practice in the contemporary world has been on community as solely "about a place." It is limited by boundaries, usually geographic but sometimes based on identity or specific interest. Local activities are thereby limited to local processes, and there is little interest in going beyond these boundaries.

In contrast to this position, we suggest that an understanding of community should be "within a place." Local work is the starting point, but it is not the ultimate goal. The community as a geographic place serves as a point of entry, but the effective community organization understands that the issues go beyond the local. Therefore community-based efforts must address and confront issues and problems within a

community and create linkages beyond the local. If there are not these kinds of connections, community organizations will not be able to engage in anything beyond working to improve, in a limited way, local conditions.

Integrated into community practice must be an analysis of the context of a community organization's work. And fundamental to this analysis is an understanding of the limits of local work and the need to build an analysis that connects local work with wider social, economic, and political forces. Community organizations need to understand their work in a larger context in a threefold manner. First, given that the conditions in communities are the products of larger-scale social forces and processes, there are real and significant limitations to what can be achieved solely through a focus on internal community-scale issues. The scale, in short, is insufficient to solve the problems because the problems themselves exist due to processes that operate at larger scales. Second, in a politically hostile or reactionary context, internally focused social reform can seem like revolutionary work. But unless organizations are outward-looking, insofar as their efforts have a focus that includes and goes beyond the local, they are often just providing modest relief that legitimizes the larger system. That is, by staying within the community, the larger system remains unchallenged. The cliché of "think globally, act locally" is an extremely disempowering one because it discourages action beyond the local. Third, and emerging directly from the first two, is the problem that focusing community-based work solely on the level of the community enables—encourages, even—a blaming of the victim of larger-scale problems. That is, if community-focused work is predicated on the ability to solve problems locally, then the inability to solve those problems locally (which is inevitable, since those problems are not themselves rooted in any individual community) becomes a very useful way for critics to blame poor and marginalized communities for their own poverty and marginalization. Thus not only are the larger institutions of the private and public sectors let off the hook, but the communities themselves become the object of blame for failures evident within those communities.

Emphasize Conflict and Power

If community organizations must remain focused on processes and structures that occur beyond their community, so too must they maintain a full range of strategies and tactics to draw upon in their work. If their goal is make things better in their community, then a proper understanding of the causes of the conditions in their community must include a recognition that social change is needed to ultimately make things better. And for social change to happen, conflict over power must be a key orienting direction of community organizing. The most successful efforts in the United States, past and present, understand that conflict is central to their practice. This does not mean that all or even most of their activities are confrontational, but rather that conflict is part of an analysis, an overarching strategy, and a tactic to obtain desired results.

Conflict defines the opposition. It defines who benefits from the current set of power relations, and thereby is in a position to deliver the changes demanded. It also means understanding what is necessary to mobilize against those who are in positions of power. The specific tactics can vary from street-level actions to lobbying officials, but at the core there is a we/they dynamic in place, at least on the specific issues being contested.

Conflict is also expressed through an analysis of social issues. For example, organizations must understand that power relations and structurally rooted interests are central, and problems emerge because of unequal power relations. Therefore, political education and analysis is a key part of their activities. Organizations need to be asking questions of who benefits and why, when issues are confronted. Organizing is a means of challenging structural power, whether it is based on class, gender, race, or sexuality. We recognize that stating things so starkly and nakedly is decidedly unfashionable, and that much of contemporary academic and community work masks analyses of power, runs away from conflict, and turns to partnerships in unequal power relations in the name of pragmatism. The idea of power relations being transformed and made more equitable through organizing disappears in both how these groups act and how they analyze power. But this, we would argue, is a

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fundamental reason why the gap between those who are in positions of power and those who are not has grown so dramatically in the last thirty years.

The challenge for oppositional organizations is to sustain this stance over time, that is, to keep their vision over the long term. Many organizations have a conflict perspective in their origins, just as many originate as part of a social movement, but this dimension is lost over time—particularly in a political economic context that is fundamentally hostile. For example, it is argued that by 1975 the decline of dissent and conflict in the neighborhood movement of the 1970s led to their becoming instruments of conservative politics.

The significance for contemporary practice is clear. Conflict against enemy targets that further economic, political, and social injustice is not something to be discouraged or feared.

Organizers and community organizations should be angry over what Piven and Cloward (1979) referred to as the "new class war" of the past thirty years. Ernesto Cortes, lead organizer for the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) in the American Southwest, likes to note that people should be angry about injustice, and by anger he refers to the Norse origins of the word, angr, which means "social grief." That is, anger which is not individual anger or rage but collective anger over what has been done to society, anger over a social problem or injustice. Community efforts in our current context need to keep this conflict perspective, need to understand the legitimacy and importance of social anger, need to keep putting pressure on a system not used to such pressure.

Unite Community and Social Movement Efforts

Community organizing efforts and social movements are almost always treated as different species, both in the literature and by practitioners. We think a critical element in moving toward a new theory and practice of local work is recognizing their common origins and elements, as well as seeing them as parts of the same overall social struggle. Social movements almost always start out as local efforts but, if the

conditions and issues are right, they metamorphose into movements that are far greater than the sum of their parts. Similarly, local efforts often start out as parts of or offspring of social movements, but a change in conditions or problems in the movement usually encourage more local effort. The two clearly take on different forms and appearances, and play different roles in the struggle for social change. Because we see them as highly interconnected, we propose that outward-looking community efforts should consider movement-building practices as well as building connections with existing, broader social movements. And social movements, if they seek greater and more long-term success, must understand the need for an active base in local communities in order to contest power effectively and to bring demands for social justice forward with the possibility of victories. Our study of community organizing in the US, UK, and Canada underscores how critical community and movement efforts are to each other.

This is not to suggest that the relationships between social movements and local community organizations are not complex and filled with tensions. There is a built-in strain between much contemporary community-organizing and movement-building practice, which we do not want to downplay. But there has always been a dialectical relationship between social movements and community organizations. History shows us that local organizing gives birth to, galvanizes, and sustains social movements, such as the labor, civil rights, women, or gay movements. There is not a logical progression for grassroots work to simply evolve into larger efforts; usually they just remain local. But when connected to a social movement, that dynamic can change. Historically, social movements begin in local social-movement organizations such as an organizing committee, but truly burst onto the scene on a larger scale. These larger-scale interventions fuel local efforts, providing more power, sparking and giving confidence to an oppositional imagination, legitimizing claims and grassroots work, and sustaining and galvanizing community efforts. Relatedly, local/community efforts often start out as social movements, whether the "backyard revolution" of the 1970s that followed on the heels of the antiwar and student movements (Boyte 1980, Fisher 1994), or the origins of local feminist consciousness-raising groups as a product of both the New Left and civil rights movements (Evans 1979).

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Problems ensue when community and movement efforts ignore each other. The "anti-corporate globalization movement" emerged in the 1990s with many groups and smaller movements coming into the streets. It was filled with potential. The year 2000 was even dubbed "the year of global protest" (Bello 2001). The movement was undercut by the repression associated with September 11, 2001, along with the shift of some of the organizations toward anti-war efforts. Nevertheless, the failure of the movement to be a current force, despite the widespread crisis of global capitalism—a crisis that the movement's critique of global capitalism largely predicted—results in part from the movement's failure to work extensively with community organizations and plant local roots (Axel-Lute 2000, DeFilippis 2001b, Fisher and Shragge 2001). This was certainly true for Occupy Wall Street and a primary cause for it being, thus far, more a moment than a movement.

Critical Analysis and Political Education Are Important

For community organizations to be part of a wider, larger-scale, and longer-term movement for social change, social analysis as well as its dissemination through political education are critical. Both contribute to understanding that the specific gains made and the struggles organizations undertake are part of something larger, but so is the broader political economy that structures organizational choices. Within the neoliberal context, there has been a tendency for community organizations to back away from making demands not only on corporations that engineer neoliberalism but also on the state. Economic globalization has profited the few at the expense of our communities, especially poor and minority communities. At the same time, community efforts have become an active ingredient of state policy, and neoliberal policies reduce the role of the state in certain spheres through the use of community initiatives. The Community Organiser Programme in England is an excellent example of such intention. Thus the analysis of the relationship between community, corporations and private capital, and the state becomes of critical importance. The implication of contemporary theory and practice is that community organizations 'deresponsibilize' both the state and the market. In so doing, the importance of state intervention to either regulate the market or provide programs to improve social and

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economic conditions is lost from view. One of the consequences has been to reduce demands on the state for improvements and greater regulation of the market from community organizations.

Clearly, one of the barriers to long-term change, in addition to the basic power relations inherent in the system, is the pragmatic and adaptive strategy of community work, which, without naming a radical politics, undermines a longer-term and more fundamental social change. Fisher (1994) talks about ideologies that shape community practice which cover the political spectrum—reactionary, conservative, liberal, and radical—as a way to name the underlying beliefs of different organizing efforts. Community organizing needs to name its politics and name the problem. And community organizations, when working on and often achieving specific and short-term gains for particular people, too often do not convey a broader and longer-term perspective on organizing. They fail to adequately ask and answer basic questions such as: What is the organization's vision? What are its politics? Who and what do they see as the fundamental problem, and what, more or less, is the overall solution?

Given the current political-economic context, it is important for organizations to build an analysis of political economy and how it relates to the structures of economic inequality and inequities, growing poverty and unemployment, middle- and working-class downward mobility, and related issues. Properly understood, we would argue that the causes of these problems are rooted in the exploitative dimensions of contemporary capitalism, and the state enables, produces, and reproduces the political-economic system. Even our focus on neoliberalism runs the risk of obscuring the fact that what makes neoliberalism so damaging to poor and politically marginal people is that it is a nakedly ruthless and unregulated form of capitalism. Historically, analysing problems and structures and proposing alternatives has been the forte of the Left, although this is less so for community organizations, many of which, in the United States at least, still think they must be "non-ideological." It is well past time to break free of the limitations imposed on community organizations by the goals of being non-ideological and non-political, and for them to take their place in the great

tradition of examining the world as it is, and using that analysis to imagine and help create a better world.

Make History

History is made by ordinary people in multiple ways and at multiple scales - that is, both by the powerful, who make most of the decisions, and those who choose to make history by challenging their received world (Flacks 1988). We agree with new social movement theorists that since the 1960s the local geographic or cultural community is the dominant means and the primary locus of contemporary history making. People make history when they challenge the existing power and when the times are right. But those right times are few and far between, and they do not last very long. Community organizing has a critical role to play in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada. The current moment is filled with potential, but only if people learn and act. The future of democracy and the wider egalitarian project depends on both an oppositional imagination and effective organizing. Mary Ellen Lease, in a similar historical moment, working with American agrarian populists, is said to have challenged her fellow history makers to "raise less corn and more hell". It was an idea and strategy in the finest traditions of democratic dissent. It would do us all well to heed the varied lessons of the past, understand history better, and seek to become the history makers feared by those who have narrowly controlled the forces of history for more than a generation.

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Informal Learning Experiences of Young People During the Scottish Independence Referendum

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In the aftermath of the independence referendum of September 2014 we decided to conduct research on how people learned and educated themselves informally leading up to the vote. Given the range of information and issues people faced, particularly over the final six months of the process, hearing how people made sense of it all is clearly an area of interest – particularly for academics, community educators and politicians.

Through an online survey conducted in December 2014, we asked people a series of questions to ascertain, amongst other things, how and where they gained information, how they interacted with that information and how they utilised social media (if they did so). The survey makes no claims to be representative – indeed the returns are skewed towards Yes supporters but it can highlight the educative processes some groups of people engaged in. In particular we wanted to know what the most important factors were in their final decision, if they changed their voting intention and whether or not they are more politically aware post-referendum and if this has influenced their engagement in democratic life. Due to the overwhelming response we received (1345 returns) we are slowly working our way through the data. The first cohort we have analysed is young people aged 16-24 (86 fully completed returns), to try and make sense of their responses. The findings are extremely interesting.

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Of these 86 returns from young people, when asked their position one year before the referendum 37 were decided Yes voters, 17 were No and 32 undecided. In relation to factors influencing their decision, our Yes voters prioritised political autonomy and equality, whereas No voters were more concerned about the economy and identity issues. In terms of main sources of information, unsurprisingly perhaps, young people stated that the Internet was critical. They particularly valued undertaking active Internet searches for critical information and assessing arguments, as well as that gathered from both personal and campaign groups' social media sites, as the following quotes indicate:

> I used the Internet for news stories on risks, unknowns, opportunities (on either side), as well as for technical detail such as the Barnett formula.

> I found the Internet the best as it allowed me to access and compare information from both sides on the same topic.

> I used social media, newspapers, news coverage (although it was very biased), online articles, talking to people to do my own research and decide for myself. The more I looked into it the more I changed my mind…

Reassuringly, for those who value the interpersonal and dialogical nature of political discussion, young people also stressed the importance of debate and interaction with friends and family when formulating their voting intention. This was true for both Yes and No voters. Only for female No voters did more traditional forms of media (TV & Newspapers) score particularly high and this was a very small sub-sample (12) so it would be unwise to extrapolate anything from it.

Antipathy to the traditional forms of media was palpable amongst Yes voters. The BBC and newspapers were the targets of much hostility, with many citing the

necessity of the Internet as an important counterbalance to traditional media sources. For example:

> The bias shown by some news sources has completely changed my opinion on them and damaged the credibility I used to view them with. Especially some of the larger ones such as the BBC and Sky. The newspapers were pretty damned biased so it was hard to know what to trust. I used to trust the BBC to be unbiased...Never again.

> I found that the media was very biased in their display of information and did not explain everything clearly. I therefore chose to do my own research.

We asked the cohort how highly they rated a range of social media sites and text messaging and e-mailing in terms of sharing information. Interestingly, Yes supporters were more positive about Facebook and Twitter than their No voting counterparts, who were much more ambivalent about these media. The first three quotes below highlight the deliberative sharing of information, and the last one, how social media use might be experienced negatively:

> Things are brought to light on social media and can be shared through friends. The internet allows personal up to date research.
> The internet and social media enabled the sharing of views, which helped me reason my choices.

> Sources and discussion on social media were the most useful as people were free to have their say and it was really interesting what you can learn from other people's opinions and experiences.

> Each side picked and chose sources or accounts they agreed with, campaigns became bubbles, leading to hostility in public when

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> talking/being approached by the opposite side as they could not comprehend disagreement.

The trolling of celebrities such as J.K. Rowling, after she financially backed the No campaign, led to mainstream media highlighting the negative aspect of social media during the referendum. Nevertheless, 43% the young people surveyed here felt that it had a positive impact, whereas only 27% reported it was negative. Indeed, many of the young people argued that the information gathered through digital sources helped how they discussed politics offline:

> …because that…is where a lot of people get their information from and so when it's being discussed offline people actually kind of have an idea what is being discussed.

> If anything people talk about politics face-to-face more now. I don't know if social media had anything to do with it. Maybe people felt more confident putting their ideas forward on social media which consequently put their ideas out there for others to challenge when they met in person.

> I think social media had a great impact on stimulating discussion and do not think it affected discussion on the referendum in person. If anything it increased the discussion in person. The only down side

> I think may be that it could have caused more animosity.
> People actually spoke far more about politics because of social media.

Another interesting development is perhaps the notion that young people are using their social media pages, particularly Facebook, differently post-referendum. In this respect, the impact of the referendum has been to reduce the distance between

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personal and political issues. Nearly 40% of respondents indicated that they are now more likely to share stories and news pertaining to politics than previously:

> I am constantly posting articles that I have seen from newspapers etc.

> I now share political stories that interest me.

> I already posted a lot about politics! But I think I have started using the 'share' function more...

What is more, the activity of posting and commenting was deliberative and educational rather than being simply passed on. From the cohort analysed, a significant proportion stated that they had critically engaged with material from the respective campaigns and had decided to change their voting intention as a result:

> Throughout the referendum I spent a lot of time reading all the information and got a better understanding not just on that topic but political parties in general and this has meant I have become more aware of what is happening in the world. Since the referendum I still keep up to date with what is happening within different political parties and at Westminster.

> Having a better understanding of the country's political policies has allowed me to make better judgements. With something as big as independence it was imperative to know the facts.

> Nearer the time of the referendum I was interested in hearing what both campaigns had to say and this changed my mind.

It is hoped that this level of critical engagement – which sweeps across the entire youth cohort will leave a 'participative footprint', meaning that this generation will

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now be critically engaged with the democratic process. When asked if they felt that they were more interested in politics as a result of the referendum, 56% stated that they were, with only 7% saying they are now less interested (disgruntled yes voters, primarily!). As a result a number indicate they have since joined a political party, they are posting more information online and a small minority have become active in community and campaign groups. If the referendum leaves any legacy, then perhaps this is the most important a generation of politically aware, critically engaged, activated young people. This is a very welcome outcome.

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Talk Scotland

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Introduction

The concept of a *Talk Scotland* campaign was originally put forward by WEA Scotland in a paper which outlined the aims and actions of an impartial public education campaign which would be accessible to all of Scotland's people, in the run up to the Scottish Independence Referendum. The plan was to set up a consortium of partners who would undertake a range of educational work: produce materials and resources; host online discussion and learning; run a media campaign; and fundraise to support all of these activities.

In the end these proposals did not materialise in the way they had been envisaged across Scotland, but in Edinburgh, through the wider Community Learning & Development (CLD) sector much of the ambition of the original *Talk Scotland* idea was realised.

An initial meeting was called by the Edinburgh WEA tutor organiser in June 2013 which brought together about 25 people who were already involved, or interested, in undertaking educational work around the Referendum – including CLD workers, libraries, voluntary organisations, community schools and tutors offering courses. There was discussion about the range of activities which might be organised under the Talk Scotland theme, both targeted and open to all, and whether members of the group might come together to jointly organise some large scale events. In the end, as most people were busy with Referendum- related activities in their own work contexts, it was agreed that the most useful role for the group would be twofold:

a) information sharing about activities and how best to publicise these

b) putting together the wide range of resources that people had researched, developed and written, and the courses and activities that had been run, and having these all available in one place for people to share

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The group continued to meet every 6 – 8 weeks for almost a year and was a valuable forum for sharing information about events and activities; for people talking in detail about courses they had run; bringing information about resources that people had either put together themselves or had found useful elsewhere eg in libraries, online.

Talk Scotland then became an umbrella term for a wide range of CLD sector activities, adult education classes, workshops, public events, work with young people and adult learners that were organised to inform and engage people in the run up to the Referendum. These included the following:

Active Citizenship Group Seminars

The Edinburgh Active Citizenship Group is a partnership of workers in the City of Edinburgh Council, the Voluntary Sector and Edinburgh University which organises regular, large-scale, free public seminars around issues of interest or concern, creating a public space for education and debate with academics, policy makers and media personnel. The group organised four seminars around the Referendum and people's visions for a future Scotland, which attracted between 70 and 100 people. Two other events were organised jointly with other organisations – one an intergenerational debate with a local youth project and the other with Edinburgh University after the Referendum looking at 'what next?'

Classes and Groups for Adults

The first course to be run, which was called *Talk Scotland* was offered from scratch and tutored for the WEA by Colin Campbell. This course was about encouraging people to have a vision about the sort of Scotland they would like to see and also about issues around democracy, the history of Scottish Politics and understanding the workings of the Scottish Parliament. All the materials used were written up as a resource pack for other tutors to use.

At the same time, Alex Wood was running the first of his Roads to Referendum courses in two of the community high schools in the city. This course also looked at the historical background to Scottish politics and culture: broad concepts such as nationalism, national independence; internationalism and globalisation and their

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impact on Scottish politics; the implications of both an independent and a devolved Scotland. This was picked up by the *Scotsman* newspaper when Tax Payer Scotland argued that tax payers 'money should not subsidise political education classes'.

Both these courses were offered as part of the Council's city wide Adult Education Programme, which people pay a fee to attend, and were extremely popular – with students in one class continuing to meet to discuss the issues after the 8 week course had finished.

Referendum Events for Literacies Learners

Two half day events were organised in the city centre for literacies and ESOL learners. Learners did preparatory work in their groups, then came together for a morning to learn about the context of the Referendum: constitutional history; devolved and reserved powers; how to vote; and to discuss what kind of Scotland they would like to see. Key issues were prioritised and the second event included speakers from Yes and No campaigns to address the students' issues from each perspective.

Work with Young People

Political and critical literacies work with young people.

Will Golding was employed for 6 months to work with young people from 16 – 25 using a critical literacy approach, and to develop resources. This included exploring democracy and active citizenship in relation to issues of importance to the young people, and the Referendum. One of the activities was "A' dinnae dae politics" which offered a range of sessions for young people to choose from. Will also ran over 20 Referendum events in youth clubs, for youth forums and ran upskilling sessions for youth workers and developed an extensive range of resources

Callum MacLeod, based at Broughton High School organised a wide range of events for school pupils, including mock elections, film screenings of *Better Together* and *Yes Scotland* videos, information stalls, a poster competition, debate, question time, a visit to the Scottish Parliament and a drama project as well as collaborating with school staff to integrate Referendum education into the curriculum.

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He has also started up a participation newsletter for children and young people in North Edinburgh called *The Charger*.

Gavin Crosby, the Youth Work Strategy Implementation officer:

- was involved with the Edinburgh Youth Work consortium in training youth workers across the city in democracy education.
- helped develop a lesson plan 'Democracy on the Move' about decision making, registering to vote and the impact of political decisions in daily life – which can be used by workers with a small amount of training.
- encouraged youth workers to get young people to register to vote, and created a 'branded' registration form which could be used to record the impact of the push to get people registered.
- supported the Scottish Youth Parliament who were also rolling out the resources developed in Edinburgh on registration and reasons to vote - 'Aye! Naw! Mibbe!.

A range of other Referendum and political education initiatives also took place in local communities. These included:

- *People and Power* classes on Scottish political history for people in north Edinburgh;
- *People and Power* events at North Edinburgh Arts – including films, plays and discussion about the Referendum issues.
- The Adult Learning Project held a co-investigation to engage local people in political dialogue in the build up to the Referendum.
- *Write Around Our Referendum* – a 6 week course exploring writing around the theme and discussion in South West Edinburgh.
- Ladies Referendum Coffee Morning in Leith.
- 4 week Road to Referendum course at South Side Community Centre.

A particularly interesting piece of work was undertaken with homeless and vulnerable men through CRISIS Skylight. The men worked with a tutor to discuss the

Referendum from the starting point of issues of concern to them eg benefits, sanctions bedroom tax. They decided to tackle these through humour and comedy, writing their own material, and planned to present comic sketches to homeless people to encourage them to take part in the political process and develop confidence. The group won the Outstanding Achievement Award at the 2014 Edinburgh Adult Learners' Week Achievement Awards. City Libraries came on board by theming book groups around the Referendum, holding a debate and producing a resource list of relevant materials.

Resources

Many of the above activities resulted in the development of some excellent resources and the *Talk Scotland* Group collated all of these, as well as other relevant articles, literature, teaching packs and links to useful online resources. They were all downloaded and are available for anyone to access and use at www.upskilling.org.uk/home/talk-scotland-materials-resources

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