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RECLAIMING COMMON PURPOSE

adults LEARNING

Concept

The Adult Learner 2000

NIACE
THE NATIONAL ORGANISATION FOR ADULT LEARNING

NIACE (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education) is the national organisation for adult learning in England and Wales. NIACE is a voluntary organisation with a membership drawn from right across the spectrum of adult education provision and from private, public and voluntary sector organisations.

Our aims:

- To represent the interests of all adult learners. We aim to build a learning society by securing access to learning for adults at every stage in their lives.
- To encourage all adults to participate in learning. In particular, we take positive action to involve groups who in the past have had inadequate access to learning opportunities.
- To share best practice by supporting co-operation between institutions and organisations concerned with adult learning.
- To give voice to learners directly through our advocacy work and campaigns.

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- Advocacy
- Campaigns and promotion
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- Information Services
- Publications
- Consultancy, research and development
- Managing grant programmes

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Community Learning Scotland is the national community education agency, acting as a focus and source of advice to Government on community learning and youth issues. Our key functions are:

- to be a national resource centre
- to advise policy and decision makers
- to promote and support best practice

We work with a range of partners in the public, voluntary and private sectors to promote lifelong learning, social inclusion and active citizenship.

Community Learning Scotland's services include:

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- Communications and Public Affairs

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AONTAS is the Irish National Association of Adult Education, a voluntary membership organisation. It exists to promote the development of a learning society through the provision of a quality and comprehensive system of adult learning and education that is accessible to and inclusive of all.

Its organisational structure consists of a Director, Ms. Berni Brady, an Executive Committee and staff.

ORGANISATIONAL AIMS

AONTAS has the following aims:

To promote the importance and value of adult learning and education in Ireland

To participate in the development of adult education policy with a view to both shaping and enhancing formal and non-formal adult education provision at local, regional and national level.

Take a proactive advocacy role in supporting and representing the members of AONTAS and in articulating the voice of adult education learners, providers and deliverers.

Identify and strategically respond to changing needs within adult education by promoting, piloting and lobbying for the mainstreaming of models of good practice.

Build positive working relationships with other relevant organisations nationally and internationally.

Develop itself as a learning organisation committed to embodying the principles underpinning its core values.

CORE VALUES

AONTAS is committed to:

A belief that learning throughout life provides a means by which people can grow and develop, and make an active contribution to the development of their own community and the wider society in which they live

A belief that adult and continuing education plays a key political role in combating poverty, equality and social exclusion

Striving for a system of adult learning and education in Ireland which is accessible to and inclusive of all particularly those who experience educational, social and/or economic disadvantage.

Ensuring that the learner's voice and needs are heard and addressed and the empowerment of those who participate in it.

The principle of praxis whereby through an ongoing process of action and reflection it can grow as a learning organisation and as a model of good practice and a centre of expertise in the field of adult education.

WHO CAN JOIN?

Anyone interested in adult education may apply for membership. See below for profile:

Individuals	*173*
Voluntary	*179*
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Total Membership	**419**

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Community Learning Scotland

AONTAS

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AONTAS PUBLICATIONS

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE:
AONTAS Strategic Plan 1998-2000. Pamphlet. Dublin: AONTAS, 1998

MAKING AN IMPACT:
AONTAS response to the Green Paper on Adult Education. Dublin: AONTAS, June 1999.

INFORMATION PACK
for daytime voluntary adult education groups: a guide to groups wishing to set up their own learning group: Introduction; Starting Out; Premises; Running your own courses; Funding; Resources; Publicity, etc. Dublin: AONTAS, 1996 Price: £10

FROM THE PERSONAL TO THE POLITICAL
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WOMEN'S EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE.(WENDI)
Information Resource Pack Free

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May 1998 - February 2000. Dublin: AONTAS

GENERAL INFORMATION LEAFLET ON AONTAS:
Mission statement, core values, AONTAS activities, staff & Executive lists, etc.

INFORMATION and LIBRARY SERVICE:
an overview of the services offered in AONTAS. - Leaflet. Dublin: AONTAS, 1998 (NEW)

ADULT EDUCATION - TIME FOR YOU
- Leaflet. Dublin: AONTAS, 1995 (no longer in print - see also one-page Leaflet: **'INTERESTED IN LIFELONG LEARNING?'**

DISTANCE LEARNING:
exploring opportunities in Ireland. Dublin: AONTAS, June,1999.

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Selected list of distance education courses available in Ireland. Dublin: AONTAS, June 1999.

LIST OF ADULT EDUCATION ORGANISERS/THIRD-LEVEL INSTITUTIONS:
Contact names and telephone numbers. - Leaflet. Dublin: AONTAS, 1998

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a study of the accreditation needs of community groups/ Mary B. Kelly. Dublin: AONTAS/COMBAT POVERTY AGENCY, 1995. £3.00

COUNTING US IN:
education for adults with a learning disability/Monica McNamara. Dublin: AONTAS, 1998

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a study of the Third Level Allowance Scheme/Margaret Healy for AONTAS. Dublin: AONTAS, 1998

AONTAS NEWSHEET
WOMEN'S COMMUNITY EDUCATION NEWS
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THE ADULT LEARNER:
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AONTAS is the Irish National Association of Adult Education.
It is based at 22, Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin2.
Its website is: www.aontas.com

Editorial

There is a lie at the heart of current political discourse, and it goes like this: we are all stakeholders in the best of all capitalist worlds. When we pull together we all benefit - rich and poor alike. In this version of reality 'the economy' becomes synonomous with 'the market' and with ensuring favourable conditions for business in a competitive global economy: low taxation, low wages, low public expenditure and, for many of course, low expectations. For although we are all stakeholders, some are more important than others and need to be handled with care in case they withdraw their stake. The government feels disappointed and deceived when their erstwhile business partners decide they can do better elsewhere and pull out. We are expected to be sympathetic. Policy is harnessed to the task of resourcing the economy, particularly education policy. As Tony Blair expresses it: 'Education is the best economic policy we have'.

Of course, this view of things cannot actually be sustained, but its discursive force in education policy making has become truly hegemonic. The stakeholding citizen is to be found everywhere in the manifestations of 'Third Way' politics which dominate most second wave democracies - a combination of liberal political values, conservative social values and libertarian economic values in which the 'bottom line calculation' gives priority to the latter. In practice this puts the economy beyond question - and beyond politics. Political economy is replaced with managerial politics. The depoliticisation of economic issues in this way seriously undermines any hope of democratic renewal, for once you uncouple the economic and political spheres a great deal of what is central to politics is excluded from view. Eurig Scandrett (p29), in considering the 'new politics' of the Scottish Parliament, suggests, with a note of irony, that the devolution of political power is possible 'precisely because the state and civil society have less instrumental value to increasingly globalised capital'.

Structural categories such as 'class', like politics itself, have become casualties of the new political correctness. To echo Mrs Thatcher's notorious aphorism, there is no such thing as class, just individuals and families who are socially excluded. Talking about class is deeply unpopular because it implies conflict, barriers, different groups competing against each other for limited resources and opportunities. It requires moral and political judgements to be made about fairness and social worth. These are not addressed by a definition of democracy which means legitimating what exists rather than a dynamic political process of challenge and change about 'the kind of society we live in and the kind of society we want to live in' (Ian Martin p12). The illusion of consensus ensures, of course, that none of this is made explicit even though, according to the pundits, 81% of the public (in the UK anyway) knows that class struggle still exists today. Clearly they believe what they see with their own eyes - the evidence of everyday experience - in spite of all the complexities and contradictions so vividly captured by Jane Thompson (p7).

The tradition of common purpose stands squarely against such obfuscation and spin. It is explicit in its belief that democracy is political and that education should resource the struggle to challenge its limitations and to extend its possibilities. Addressing the European context of democratic renewal, for example, Jane Pillinger (p19) sees a crucial role for adult education in building 'self-confidence, knowledge and skills so that the actors in this process of democratic transformation are at the heart of democratic renewal as actors shaping their personal, economic, social and collective lives'. This is why it is so important that 'common purpose' is reclaimed and re-established: as a corrective to the virtual incorporation of the interests and aspirations of ordinary people in communities which seems to be the outcome, if not the purpose, of much policy.

Drawn into initiatives aimed at tackling social exclusion, educating for active citizenship and promoting lifelong learning, adult and community education has in some ways been de-marginalised - placed at the centre of policy. Yet there is a deep sense of ambivalence about the way in which social purposes are increasingly subordinated to economistic objectives, the pursuit of critical intelligence to job-related training.

But it's not all gloomy. There are also signs that, while many people feel powerless and excluded from any form of decision making in society, others are choosing, perhaps for the first time, to express their active citizenship both in the political sphere and in arenas beyond formal politics. Since many of these groups define themselves in terms of their previous exclusion, they have much to offer to the imagining and making of a more inclusive democracy. In other words, the formal politics of the state could be enriched and envigorated by struggles which go on inside and outside of the state, as Margaret Martin's (p34) article on the POWER women' s project demonstrates.

There is also much to learn from struggles that are not necessarily our own about the complex relationship between vision, political culture and transformation. Paul Nolan (p23), writing about the fragile process of peace-building in Northern Ireland, makes this point particularly strikingly: '[nothing] would make any difference if the key structural changes were not taking place at governmental level, and if the politicians were not prepared to broker an historic compromise. Equally, nothing that governments or politicians could concoct would work if there were not people on the ground working for a more open, inclusive and pluralist society'. Making these connections is an urgent political and educational task.

This collaborative issue of *Adults Learning, Concept* and *The Adult Learner* is an attempt, first of all, to take stock - to assess both the damage and the potential for progressive educational practice. But, perhaps more importantly, it is a call for solidarity - which is very different to stakeholding. In educational terms, solidarity means a commitment to relating learning to collective engagement with common struggles and concerns; to developing curriculum from concrete experience by stimulating 'communal thinking' (Ursula Coleman, p15); to repairing damaged alliances and building new ones; and, critically, to working with people as subjects in politics rather than simply as objects of policy interventions of one kind or another. The space this distinction creates will be essential if the cutting edge of common purpose is to be reclaimed.

Common purpose has to be constantly re-made in light of current changes but also with an eye on persistent continuities. Usha Browne (p38) reminds us of the stark reality of deepening inequalities of wealth and power which seem to be such an enduring feature of 'modern' societies. Her question is: 'Will the socially included ever be asked - and be ready - to pay the real price for a truly inclusive society?' We need to review the relationship between adult education and 'really useful knowledge' in light of 'inclusive rhetoric and exclusive reality' in order to engage effectively in the politics of educational practice in local contexts.

Common purpose is also increasingly a global necessity. As capital goes global it creates common conditions everywhere: de-regulation of the market and tight regulation of social expenditure. This has the greatest adverse impact on those most removed from power - largely poor, black, working-class women in the south of the world. We therefore need an internationalist understanding to identify both what is common about the struggle and what so often divides us. The critical thing is that the agenda comes from the experiences and struggles of ordinary people for, as Jonathan Grossman (p42), reflecting on the struggle in South Africa, argues so forcibly: 'if we do not choose our own agendas, we are simply fitting into someone else's'. So we need to be sensitive to difference, to make common cause not on the basis of sameness but recognising the ways in which structures of exploitation and oppression are inscribed differentially in peoples' lives. But we also need to critique and confront the 'totalising vision of profound hopelessness' embodied in late capitalism which weakens us all. Solidarity in difference is a way of thinking which may help to foster and sustain new alliances, but it also reminds us of the necessity (and the difficulty) of making them work in a common project of achieving social justice for all.

Finally, common purpose education is an historical project - in some cases forged over generations of struggle - which constantly needs to be reworked. It cannot be set aside and certainly cannot be taken for granted. To paraphrase C.Wright Mills, if men and women do not make history, they become the tools of history-makers and the objects of history-making. This collection seeks to put ordinary people (back) in history as active political agents and social actors - as history-makers. People learn in and through struggle. As the Landless People's Movement in Brazil has taught Liam Kane (p46), 'confidence and skill... come from involvement in a movement rather than from sitting in a classroom - the movement itself is the school - but neither is it something which is left to chance. [They take] the educational dimension of their struggle seriously'. As history has consistently shown us, reclaiming common purpose means not only serious educational engagement, but also serious political commitment to working in solidarity with those who are silenced, marginalised or excluded.

Mae Shaw
Jane Thompson
Liam Bane

Returning to the northern city

Returning to the northern city where I grew up, it now looks superficially the same as any other. Stagecoach busses plough through its one-way system. Identikit chain stores, sporting household names, line the high street alongside customised shopping malls, fast-food outlets and multi-story car parks. At night, young men, wearing shirt-sleeves in December, cruise the pubs and clubs in gangs, in search of a laugh, and alcohol and girls. Young women, dressed in short, tight and lacy high-street fashions occupy more space in public places, make more noise than I remember doing, even in the sixties. There are people begging in doorways, holding up bits of cardboard that read 'homeless'. The main picture house, which became a nightclub and a bingo hall for a while, is boarded up and waiting for redevelopment; its redundant Sale notice banging in the wind. An eight-screen cinema and retail park now draws the city's crowds to where the fish docks once made Hull a thriving fishing port, landing cod and haddock by the ton from the fishing grounds off Iceland, before the Cod Wars of the 1980s were fought and lost by the Thatcher government. American-style diners, DIY stores and cheap electrical outlets, staffed by part-time workers, mostly women, compete for conspicuous consumers, offering customer loyalty schemes and interest-free credit.

Beyond the underpass, shabby streets of damp and dingy houses mourn the devastation of an industry that shaped the character of this city. Built on danger, tradition, rivalries and superstition, its women lived stalwart, responsible lives, its men played dangerously and recklessly with other men. This is where, in 1970, I first met Lily Bilocca, who led the demonstrations staged by fishermen's wives against the trawler owners about deaths at sea and dangers in the industry, and where I did my first piece of feminist political action in solidarity. It's where I brought the lads I taught, who wanted to become 'deckie' learners on the trawlers, on careers visits at 7am to watch the catch being unloaded. We got back to school in time for morning assembly with the scent of fish in our hair, on our skin, in our clothes. The whole neighbourhood was drenched in the smell of the sea and the smell of fishing. These days, the smell is gone; and with it the livelihood of a proud community, leaving poverty. This is where Hull Truck Theatre Company and the Watersons folk group performed agitprop and work songs in the local pubs as the industry began to struggle; where the men sat together with their mates, and the women sat with theirs. Back in the city centre, I watch a swirl of litter blow through the station precinct as the last train heading south leaves from platform 6.

Hull is a city that I hardly recognise these days but which is full of memories. It is half a lifetime since I occupied the upstairs room of my parent's council house where I grew up and lived next door to a man who worked as a stevedore and a woman who was "on the lookout", as my mother used to say. Her divorce was something of a scandal in the neighbourhood - although considering the violence she endured I used to think she weathered it with amazing equanimity. Each morning I used to catch the bus to the concrete and clay comprehensive where I worked as a probationary teacher, built on a bomb site in the middle of rows of 19th century terrace houses, still without bathrooms or inside toilets in the early seventies. I sat beside women wearing headscarves going to work at Mackman's Bakery and men in caps and donkey jackets going to the dockyards and the factories.

My mother's friend Mabel, from our earlier, prefab days, moved in up the road. Her husband Des worked as a foreman at BP so they were able to put some money by. In 20 years they had saved enough for a deposit on a bungalow, and moved out in 1974, beyond the city limits, just before he died without warning from a heart attack. It was a working-class death. Too much overtime, too much drink, too many cigarettes, too much weight. He had never been to church in his life, except to get married, so it was no surprise that the vicar did not know his name and buried him as Arthur. My mother's friend did not object, or put him right. She had lived her life not wanting to make a fuss. She took a part-time job in a dry cleaners after he died and sold the family car. She was of the generation of working-class women - quietly seeking respectability (Skeggs 1997) - who never learned to drive and always thought of cars as "a man's thing". The house they lived in up the road is boarded up, I notice. Surrounded by rubble. Splattered with graffiti. Hard to let property.

No-one wants to live on that estate these days if they have a choice. "Drugs and crime and violence. You take your life in your hands living there", Mabel tells me. "Tried to interest London overspill. Problem families. They weren't that desperate!".

Mabel is well out of it. On the sideboard, a photo of her daughter celebrates her graduation at 39, from the University of Huddersfield, with a degree in Leisure and Tourism. Outside in the front, her grandson is cutting back the roses and taking care to avoid an ornamental wishing well and garden gnomes. "In his second year at College. Reading Sports Studies", Mabel is full of pride. I wonder whatever happened to Political Economy and Sociology. Being 'in the business', of course, I know the answer. "He looks like his grandfather", I say. Inside, the television sound is turned down. She keeps it on for company. Mandelson is giving his resignation speech to the tabloid press, trying to explain why he needs a four-story house in London, that costs half a million pounds, to live in on his own. "Not the sort of Labour Party we supported", Mabel says. I remember she came with me and my mother to a Labour rally in the City Hall addressed by Harold Wilson during the 1964 election campaign. "Do you remember your mother queuing up for his autograph? And how we laughed when he took his hanky out to blow his nose. It had a hole in the corner. At least he wasn't afraid to call himself a socialist". Neither was Mabel or my mother, in those days.

I can hardly bring myself to mention politics when I come to visit now. My parents are not impressed by Tony Blair. They like John Prescott, the local MP. Sometimes I detect the same disillusionment expressed by Mabel about hypocrites and spindoctors, and a sneaking nostalgia for the values of Old Labour. But then my mother is the only person I know who cast her vote for the Conservatives in the election that swept New Labour into power, because, as she said, she felt sorry for John Major and Norma was such a nice woman. She is still the only person I know who has a good word to say the current leader of the Tory party, William Hague. My grandfather would turn in his grave. My mother does not mention Margaret Thatcher much in my presence. "But she was courageous, you have to hand it to her. And she didn't go in for back handers and consorting with millionaires". "Only Denis!" I want to put the record straight.

The journey back from Mabel's to my parent's house takes me through peripheral estates which Beatrix Campbell (Campbell, 1999) writes about, in which the rate of unemployment is well above the national average. I stop to buy some bread and milk in a supermarket that charges the poor more for their groceries than it charges shoppers in more affluent areas, banking on the absence of any competition, and the difficulties and costs of transport, to deliver a captive audience. The rest of the shops are boarded up. Even the pub looks like Alcatratz. A brave attempt at a Drop-In Centre for the unemployed struggles behind window bars and oversized padlocks. I know the women at the checkout well, from somewhere deep inside myself, watching a whole week's shopping slide past along the counter, bought to feed a family of five and costing less than I would spend on a meal for two at my favourite Oxford Bistro. There was a time when my mother used to eat last in our family - once my father and I had finished. She said she wasn't hungry or she had already eaten. I believed her of course and my father did not seem to notice. He cycled back and forward to work everyday. He was the breadwinner after all, though he did not earn very much. If I had the nerve, I would like to join in the checkout conversation, but I do not want to give offence. I wonder whether the women notice my dislocation from this landscape - in my hesitation, my rich clothes, the way I no longer fit the territory as I once did - in the way that most of us can read the subtleties of class within minutes of being introduced. I know all too well the tell-tale signs that help to explain the sometimes look of resignation in their eyes. Women who are getting on with business as best they can, looking more tired and older than they really are. Poorly dressed in styles that are chosen for cheapness and conformity, with part-time jobs as cleaners, care assistants, casual workers on the twilight shift. Used to making ends meet with not enough money. Buying tins of beans and Cornflakes and potatoes. Stretching the stew. Managing kids alone, managing their men, maybe. Strong women with intelligence and dignity. Always ready for a laugh, some gossip, repeated disappointment. Hassling the Council, their landlords, the Social, the Loan Sharks. The kind of women that keep localities like this in tact - without much recognition and usually a hostile press.

In academic circles where I sometimes move, the 'right to recognition' has gathered considerable momentum in recent years, on behalf of minority rights and identity politics, in which cultural discrimination is usually regarded as the key injustice. But when academic feminism talks about diversity, and about the subtleties of language, discourse, style, identity and psychological complexity, it fails more often than not these days, to consider class as a significant source of difference - despite the sharpened class divisions and increased social segregation since the Thatcher years. Shopping in a supermarket that rips you off because it can; heaving bags along a street splattered with graffiti; beside broken fences, abandoned trolleys and boarded-up houses is not a preferential declaration of identity. It is what happens when class divisions have not gone away, even though it is no longer academically fashionable, or interesting, to talk about them. Being working class in neighbourhoods like these, where deep-seated material and structural inequalities persist, does not lend itself to contemporary academic preoccupations with aesthetics, performance, identity and style. Although

identity is palpable. Neither is it simply a matter of presentation. As Annette Kuhn remarks, it is

"not just about the way you talk or dress or furnish your home; it is not just about the job you do or how much money you make doing it, nor is it merely about whether or not you have A levels or went to university, nor what university you went to. Class is something beneath your clothes, under your skin, in your reflexes, in your psyche, at the very core of your being." (Kuhn, 1995: 98).

I pay for the milk and bread and get back into my car - rooted in the memories, the sentiments and feelings of belonging, which were born in blood, drawn from the resources of generations who lived this life before me, and from which education, feminism, a decent job has been my liberation.

On the other side of town where she has now moved with my father, my mother is watching from the window, their house a continuing reminder of where I come from, although I have never lived here. Partly I am reminded of the past by what is missing from the things she chooses to display. But that is another story.

Jane Thompson
NIACE

Two NIACE briefing sheets on **Social Exclusion** and **Emancipatory Learning** written by Jane Thompson, are available free of charge from Information Services at NIACE, 21 De Montfort Street, Leicester LE1 7GE or by calling 0116 204 4261.

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adult education and social change

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Contesting citizenship

"The difficulties of the modern world will not be solved by surrendering politics, but only by the development and transformation of 'politics' in ways that will enable us more effectively to shape and organise human life. We do not have the option of 'no politics'."
David Held

Competing traditions of citizenship

There is lots of talk these days about 'active' and 'inclusive' citizenship. But to make sense of all this, we first have to ask what we mean by citizenship. This question needs to be addressed if, as adult and community educators, we are seriously committed to 'reclaiming common purpose'.

There are two major traditions of citizenship in Western political thought: the liberal tradition and the civic republican tradition. The liberal tradition reflects a definition of citizenship as an individually ascribed political status which is enacted within the formal politics of the state, mainly by exercising the right and responsibility to vote. The civic republican tradition, on the other hand, embodies a collectively asserted construction of citizenship as a social practice which is enacted within the cultural politics of civil society, ie. in social movements and communities. It is important to understand the distinctions as well as the connections between these two traditions of citizenship, and to recognise the symbiotic relationship between them: they need each other if democracy is to be not only a fact of life but also a way of life.

This is perhaps the key challenge of 'democratic renewal' in Scotland today. Scottish civil society has acted decisively upon the state in order to change it; the task now is to bring these two spheres of our lives, the civic and the political, into a new and more democratic relationship (see Crowther, Martin and Shaw, 1999). Essentially, therefore, the contemporary Scottish experience suggests that the debate about citizenship is a debate about democracy, ie. the kind of society we live in and the kind of society we want to live in. Progressive adult education, understood as the education of citizens, is at the centre of this debate, mediating the relationship between people's membership of social movements in civil society and their participation in the politics of the state.

Learning democracy

So, in thinking about the idea of reclaiming common purpose, it is important to remember that a certain kind of adult and community education has always been about contesting and reconstructing citizenship. As such, it reflects the very real historical struggle of ordinary people to extend democracy. Anthony Giddens, the guru of the 'Third Way', did not invent the notion of 'democratising democracy'. This aim is as much part of the reformist or social purpose tradition in adult and community education as it is of the more radical or popular education tradition - although, of course, they take the debate about learning for democracy in rather different directions.

The question is: Where is the evidence of this debate about citizenship and democracy taking place in our work today? The short answer is that there is not much of it. Two discourses of citizenship dominate current adult education policy and practice. Both are fundamentally economistic in the sense that they posit at the centre of our conception of lifelong learning the idea that human beings are essentially economic animals - creatures of the cash nexus. The first discourse constructs the adult learner as worker or producer. Education is the engine of economic competitiveness in the global market; unemployment and the skills gap are the consequence of not getting this right. Adult education is reduced to training for work: preparing people for their roles in production, wealth creation and profit (mainly other people's, of course) - whether or not any real jobs exist, ie. the point being that where there is no work, the discipline of the work ethic must nevertheless be maintained. It is this somewhat blinkered, supply-side view of what lifelong learning means that has tended to predominate in recent policy initiatives (see Coffield, 1999). The second discourse of citizenship constructs the adult learner as consumer or customer. In this case, adult education is reduced to a demand-side commodity which may be bought and sold in the market place - just like any other commodity

And yet, there is another, and venerable, tradition in the history of adult education, embodying a quite different discourse of citizenship, in which the adult learner is treated as a political agent and social actor. This is what Keith Jackson (1995) calls the 'adult education of engagement', and it originated in the struggles of ordinary people to make their own claim to citizenship and to be included in democracy. In a very real sense, they asserted their citizenship as a social practice within civil society in order to claim their right to citizenship within the politics of the state. In other words, they made democracy work. This was as much an educational task as a political purpose. What is now required is to renegotiate and reoccupy the educational space in which this struggle took place - essentially, the creative space between the personal and the political dimensions of our lives, between difference and solidarity. And, in the process, we must be prepared to learn how to do this from feminist theory and practice as well as the experience of other progressive social movements. These movements can help us in reclaiming common purpose because they show us that citizenship is an active cultural process as well as a political procedure and remind us that democracy is a way of life as well as a set of institutions.

The continuing evidence of both the democratic deficit and what Ralph Miliband (1994) calls the 'hegemony of resignation' suggests that we need to 're-invent politics' (see Bauman, 1999) if we are to confront the distinctive malaises of democracy in late modernity. Essentially, what is missing in our lives today is the opportunity to meet as citizens and, once again, make democracy work. The intermediate space between the micro and the macro - or between what C Wright Mills called the 'personal troubles of milieux' and the 'public issues of structure' - has almost disappeared, squeezed in the vice of possessive individualism, on the one hand, and the globalised power of transnational corporations, on the other. The point I want to emphasise is that historically the kind of adult education in which citizens met together to talk and learn and argue and get angry helped to fill precisely this space - and to make it a uniquely creative space. Indeed, it could be said that in a very real way adult learning, often autonomous and self-directed, *constituted* this space.

Linking the local and the global

It is important to recognise that this 'adult education of engagement' exists in most popular histories and cultures - in both the rich world and the poor world, North and South. And yet, in many so-called 'developed' or 'post-industrial' societies it seems to have all but disappeared. Moreover, as we move from the allegedly bounded, modernist 'field of adult education' to the supposedly open, postmodern 'moorland of adult learning' (Usher, Bryant and Johnston, 1997), so, it seems, has the adult educator. This suggests that one of first and most urgent tasks in reclaiming common purpose is to reassert our own agency as educators: our capacity to choose to intervene and act in order to make a difference. Surely we are more than the mere technicians of other people's learning opportunities or the ledger keepers of individualised 'learning accounts'?

This kind of popular adult education is always contingent and contextual because it derives its curriculum from the lived experience of people in communities - often communities of endurance, resistance or struggle. Nevertheless, if we are serious about reclaiming common purpose, we must see that in the era of globalisation such subversive 'knowledge from below' is, increasingly, shared by communities of ordinary people all over the world. This means that the struggle to contest and reconstruct citizenship and to renew democracy must be understood as, ultimately, an international struggle. In our educational work, therefore, we must use the local to step determinedly out into the global. This also means accepting that in the past 'community' education has tended to be far too parochial in its focus and limited (and limiting) in its vision.

Stretching the policy discourse

In many ways, there seem to be depressing continuities between New Labour and the New Right - not least in the economism of their thinking. Nevertheless, we are beginning to talk about things in different ways and to recognise that there is, after all, such a thing as 'society'. For instance, the rhetoric of policy now consistently links the idea of 'lifelong learning' to the ideals of 'active citizenship' and 'social inclusion'. And some recent policy statements - though by no means all - have expressed a genuinely expansive vision of the role of adult education in creating a more just, inclusive and democratic society. In this respect, I would cite, in particular, the Fryer Report *Learning for the Twenty-First Century* and the Osler Report in Scotland *Communities: Change through Learning*. On the other hand, this expansiveness has largely disappeared in the actual implementation of policy, which seems determined to perpetuate a partial and radically diminished concept of citizenship. The Scottish Office's recent Green Paper on lifelong learning *Opportunity Scotland* is a particularly good (ie. bad) example of this.

What is needed now, therefore, is a concerted attempt to put the adult back into adult education by understanding lifelong learning in a way which recognises that people learn to be active citizens in a democratic society. Moreover, we must realise that their capacity for learning and changing has always been the key resource for making democracy a way of life. If we can begin, once again, to see our work in this way and to stretch the discourse of policy in this direction, then we can also begin, once again, to see adult education as an agent of active citizenship and social inclusion in a democratic society.

To do this, however, a commitment to lifelong learning must mean understanding the symbiotic relationship between learning and living. This has always been the distinctive task and terrain of radical and social purpose adult education. What it is essentially about has never been better expressed than it was in the Ministry of Reconstruction's great 1919 report on adult education:

> 'The growth of social movements which have as their aim the creation of a better social order is not less important than the process of education itself. In some ways, it is more important, for such movements create the background of aspiration and endeavour which is the foundation of more directly educational work, and suggest the questions for which men and women seek in study to find an answer.' Ministry of Reconstruction, 1919

These words, written at a time when many people shared a collective vision of a new, fairer and more democratic society, put adult education at the heart of that vision. As we enter a new millennium, they help to remind us how we can make our own distinctive contribution to the task of reclaiming common purpose.

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Making connections

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to take some steps along the road of what I hope will become an ongoing communal thinking project about the nature and purpose of adult education in the Irish context during the first decade of the twenty-first century. This is not to suggest that a good deal of thinking has not already been done on the matter. However, when we look at the construction of knowledge in almost any field we find that what starts out as insightful analysis of fresh experientially grounded and contextually situated data tends to gradually and almost imperceptibly become the accepted thinking on a subject, as it is validated and welcomed by the relevant section of the international academic community. When this happens a 'canon' is formed, an authoritative and increasingly abstract body of knowledge. This, then, is what is taught and thus passed on to the next generation of researchers and practitioners. Once this developmental point has been reached, further research tends to be conducted within certain agreed parameters: education programmes are designed and implemented in accordance with specific procedural models; and evaluators, who have been trained within the tradition, shape their work and assess the value of programme interventions within one of a number of easily identifiable theoretical frameworks.

This situation has its attendant strengths and weaknesses; on the positive side, there is a body of conceptual knowledge with which aspiring practitioners can engage, an explicit tradition that can be passed on; on the negative side, there is the danger that subsequent experience in the field and the raw data it generates must be pruned to a shape which is in accordance with what in effect has become a 'traditional' paradigm. Thus theory and experience enter into an unequal and potentially adversarial relationship: theory becomes the knowledgeable and superior partner, so to speak, and lived experience which is, by its very nature, messy and paradoxical and difficult to articulate in logically coherent form is relegated to the role of a junior partner who must be trained and evaluated in accordance with a set of established theoretical precepts. Once theory gets the upper hand and wins out in this fashion, the gap between theory and experience, between the academic researcher who is trained, and thus competent, in the articulation of clear and logical analysis and the practitioner who is immersed in the richly textured, implicit, creative but often chaotic world of experiential knowledge both widens and deepens until a radical disconnection occurs. Phisosopher Donald Schon maintains that such a disconnection occurs all too often as professional knowledge develops and that consequently "what aspiring practitioners need most to learn, professional schools seem least able to teach".[1]

What I am attempting to do therefore is to engage in what the phenomenologists would describe as a form of "concrete thinking" which demands that we put the abstract theoretical constructs aside temporarily while we try to re-establish the vital connection with "the origin of ideas in our lived experience".[2] In order, however, to reflect on adult education as it is practised and experienced in an Irish context it is necessary to say a few preliminary words about one particular analytic construct which underpins a great deal of our thinking on a whole range of subjects: the tendency to analyse our experience of by dividing it into two radically independent, opposing, and ultimately conflictual elements. This mode of interpretation is known in philosophical terms as *dualism*.

The Either/Or Mentality

Dualistic thinking is part of the intellectual air we breathe. Although it has manifested itself in the thought patterns of many cultures, it is due to the strength of its articulation in Greek and Cartesian philosophy that we have tended to accept it almost uncritically as an essential analytic tool. We have learned to think in opposites - in bipolar pairs: mind/body, rational/emotional, true/false, right/wrong, public/private, culture/nature, sacred/secular, white/black and inevitably, of course, male/female. We tend to believe that this is how reality itself is structured and are rarely encouraged to stop and think that it may be we, in our quest for clarity, that have chosen to impose such a neat and manageable

classification structure on a reality which is infinitely more complex. Thinking in opposites does help us to order human life and its constituent elements, but we need to be reminded from time to time that it does so at the price of simplification, a simplification which can, moreover, distort and deny key aspects of lived experience. Such distortion is most likely to arise when the pairs of opposites are not seen as equal in value ie. when there is a superior/inferior relationship between them. Then one pole is seen as good, desirable, valuable while the other is viewed in a negative light as something to be avoided. And ultimately when conflict arises, as it must within this analytic framework we are forced to opt for one pole as opposed to the other. This can then lead to serious errors of interpretation which often go undetected because we have neither the cognitive tools nor the intellectual stamina to find our way out of what has become an imprisoning rather than an enabling analytic framework.

What, you may wonder has all this got to do with a communal thinking project about the nature and purpose of adult education? Well it seems to me that, just as with other disciplines[3] the thinking within adult education circles is also vulnerable to dualistic patterns. We often talk about liberal versus radical traditions, individual versus collective learning, personal versus community development, formative/vocational versus transformative outcomes, and education versus adult education as though they were radically independent and opposing elements of our collective experience. If we are analysing our work as adult education practitioners we are, at times, expected to be able to identify ourselves definitively with one pole or other of the dualistic categories listed above. This is one example of where theory and experience meet on unequal ground; and often they find it virtually impossible to connect in any meaningful way because while theory confidently proposes an 'appropriate' analytic framework, experience cannot quite squeeze itself into the right shape to find a 'fit'.

But surely, you might argue, we have to have some way of thinking about and articulating the differences between key concepts and ideas. Distinctions are of the essence. Everything, after all, is not the same. There are crucial and fundamental philosophical and political differences between the liberal and radical traditions of adult education. The focus and the curriculum will be quite different within a learning group depending on whether you are concentrating primarily on personal or community development. Formative education programmes are not the same as adult education courses conducted in the transformative mode. And each of these points is, of course, perfectly valid. There are important distinctions which need to be made if we want to think clearly about such matters. Dualistic thinking, however, does not just make distinctions; it separates to the point of disconnection. Each pair of ideas is split into radically independent elements, one of which must be chosen as opposed to the other. We are not allowed to have bits of both even if our experience tells us that that is precisely what we need. No, says the dualist, we must take up our positions fairly and squarely. We must stand for either one thing or the other.

Towards an Integrated Framework

My own professional commitment has been, and still is, to the constituency of adults who, because their formative education needs were not adequately met within the schooling system, have never really had the chance to explore their interests or develop their potential within a gently structured learning environment. Recent statistics[4] show that many such adults are unlikely to get involved in voluntary or community activities, and even when they do they are rarely in a position to participate equally and autonomously in the strategic activities and decision-making procedures of their organisations, unless their underlying developmental needs are also being addressed. A significant number of the basic and continuing education students who attend the locally managed, community- based adult education centre in the north Dublin suburb where I work were initially motivated to do so by their deep desire to "get involved" in local groups and community activities. They felt, however, that they could not contribute in the manner to which they aspired unless they also attended to their own education particularly in the areas of literacy, numeracy, computer skills, and general knowledge which, in their view, included subjects such as history, politics, social and psychological theories, literature, media studies, and current affairs. They wanted these topics addressed, however, in language which they could understand and in a methodological manner which enabled them to participate actively in the learning process[5].

These forcefully expressed student views together with the insights and concerns expressed to me in recent years by practitioners working with adults in a variety of community-based settings have pushed me to search more and more for a way of thinking about adult education which might, by bypassing dualistic constructs, incorporate key elements of what Jane Thompson characterises as "the radical tradition in adult education" while at the same time accommodating aspects of the "lived material experience" from what tends to be viewed as the more "traditional" end of the adult education continuum.[6] Attempting to find an inclusive framework is an important task, in my view, because otherwise there is a danger that the insights and experiences of a significant number of Irish adults who are engaging creatively in the practices of teaching and learning may be excluded from what is identified as "really useful knowledge" in an adult education context.

I have found it helpful in this regard to think of adult education as a continuum along the following lines:

The Adult Education continuum

Community Development	Personal Development
Critical Social Theory	Professional Responsiveness
Social Transformation & Political Change	Social, Cultural & Economic Inclusion for All

The image is that of a two-way continuum, a road along which it is possible to move in both directions. On the left, community development is the central focus; community development practice is guided and underpinned theoretically by the key concepts of critical social theory; and the goal or mission is to equip and empower participants so that they will become part of a 'critical mass' and so be enabled to work effectively for social transformation and political renewal. Meanwhile on the right, personal development is the central focus - a form of personal development, however, which should not be construed narrowly in terms of competitive individualism; this approach is informed by what I would characterise as an attitude of professional responsiveness on the part of practitioners - a practice which requires adult educators to listen with care and to respond creatively to the developmental needs of students; the goal on this side of the continuum is to provide appropriately structured educational activities which will facilitate the personal and/or vocational development of participants, and so contribute to a climate of social, cultural and economic inclusion for all. Personal and community development as understood within this framework can and do assist each other. Students,

practitioners, and groups can position themselves at any one of a number of points along the continuum according to their experience and needs, their political convictions, and/or their professional knowledge and skills. Students might choose to be involved simultaneously in projects which occupy different positions along the continuum. Or they might 'progress' in either direction depending on their developmental trajectories.

To those who favour dualistic constructs and a conflict mode of analysis the flexibility of movement allowed for within this model may not be particularly appealing. Critical theorists may argue that the goals of social transformation and political change, on the one hand, and social, cultural, and economic inclusion, on the other, are actually a contradiction in terms: that there can be no common ground between the two poles or the continuum; that they must always be in conflict until one side actually wins out over the other. I understand the appeal of this mode of analysis. It is clear and logical and requires adult educators to take stock of their own underlying perspectives and motives But it can also force practitioners to adopt a more extreme position, in operational terms, than they believe to be in the best interests of their heterogeneous student groups. Psychologist Jerome Bruner, after a lifetime's reflection on education issues, concludes that we cannot escape from fundamental contradictions when we attempt to analyse educational aims:

> "As in most revolutionary times, our times too are caught up in contradictions. Indeed, on closer scrutiny, contradictions in such times often turn out to be antinomies - pairs of large truths, which, though both may be true, nonetheless contradict each other. Antinomies provide fruitful grounds not only for strife, but also for reflection. For they remind us that truths do not exist independently of the perspectives or those who hold them to be so...
>
> Recall that antinomies do not permit of logical but only of pragmatic resolution."[7]

With his usual acute insight Bruner has got to the nub of the problem and, I believe, can provide us with a way forward. In the adult education arena we are, I would suggest, faced with a number of antinomies which cannot be logically resolved. Any attempt, therefore, to impose a theoretical framework from above, so to speak, on such a complex, diverse reality as the practice of adult education, will of necessity have to exalt one side of the continuum at the expense of the other. I realise, of course, that this can be justified and even considered desirable from either of two opposing perspectives - the Neo-Marxist class-based conflict model, on the one hand, and the market-driven economic growth model, on the other. But it cannot in my view, be justified in human terms because of the inherent danger that the autonomous development of individual human beings may be sacrificed it the fundamental value of addressing the educational needs of adult students at a personal level is obscured or even undermined.

Conclusion

My preference, in the light of practical experience and the findings of research projects in which I have engaged, is to work for a pragmatic resolution to the adult education antinomies, one which allows people to freely take up their positions along the continuum. Collaborative projects which aim to create a more just social order can then be established according to the principles of partnership. And while participants, practitioners, and academics will, because of their different experiences and perspectives, continue to hold conflicting views on theoretical issues perhaps we can learn to transform our meaning perspectives and so reframe these very disagreements and conflicts, viewing them instead as dynamic, experientially-grounded dialectical forces out of which more connected thinking and inclusive cultural forms may yet emerge.

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2 See Richard Kearney, *Modern Movements in European Philosophy,* (Second Education), Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1994, p. 2.
3 See Mary F Belenky, Lynne A Bond & Jacqueline S Weinstock, *A Tradition That Has No Name,* New York: Basic Books, 1997, pp. 19-38 for an insighful account of how dualism has influenced and distorted theoretical reflection in psychology and human development. Dualistic patterns within philosophical, theological and feminist analysis are also well documented.
4 Department of education, *International Adult Literacy Survey:Results for Ireland,* Dublin: Stationery Office, 1997.
5 See Ursula Coleman, A Case Study of KLAER. A *'Connected' Learning Environment,* Unpublished MA Thesis, NUI Maynooth, 1999.
6 See Jane Thompson, 'Really Useful Knowledge: Linking Theory and Practice' in *Radical Learning for Liberation,* edited by B Connolly, T Fleming, D McCormack & A Ryan, Maynooth: Centre for Adult and Community Education, 1995, pp. 15-26.
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Learning for active citizenship

The debate about new forms of democratic participation and democratic renewal – whether this be in local communities, in trade unions, or in national, European or international movements of democratic transition – is marked by an associated interest in the role that adult education can play in promoting learning for active citizenship. Indeed, the growing concerns about the demise of democratic participation in political and civil life has led to the new adult education initiatives across Europe for active citizenship and democracy.

Redefining democracy and new societal relationships

Today's changing world is marked by transformations in, and redefinitions of democracy and new societal relationships around work, family and community. The fracturing of traditional patterns of work, family and community is associated with a decline in traditional collective organisations (church, trade unions, family, the community). This suggests that issues of democracy are critical to activity at local, national and European levels, and to new forms of democratic activity that are required in an increasingly complex world. This has led to uncertainty and deepening feelings of powerlessness in the era of the global economy, computer technology, biotechnology and global warming, to name of few. The dramatic changes taking place in the landscape of Europe also indicate a growing crisis in democracy represented by disinterest and detachment from formal politics.

First, globalisation and global competition have led to new relationships from local to global levels through technology and the breaking down of traditional political and economic boundaries. This has brought with it conflict and division in the global geography of east-west, north-south. Crucially globalisation lacks democratic accountability. This raises an important question about the role of the nation state and of European and international organisations. The fact that the top 20 multinational companies have Gross Domestic Products (GDPs) three times the average GDP of the UK speaks for itself.

Second, changing household and family relationships have led to a breakdown of traditional patterns, with more women working (and wanting to work) than ever before, and a growth of single person, single parent, single and elderly, and of workless households.

Third, unemployment, poverty and social exclusion mean that large proportions of the population are alienated and excluded from civil and political life, resulting in powerlessness, exclusion, division and inequality. Social exclusion is more than the simple definition of exclusion from work so often pursued by the EU and European governments. It is also about exclusion from participation in society, civil and political life. The statistics speak volumes. Nearly 52 million people in Europe (16 per cent of the population) live in poverty (defined as expenditure of less than 50 per cent of the national average household expenditure). A recent study published by Eurostat (the EU's statistical office) found that 23 per cent of households in Britain were defined as living in poverty. This study used a new indicator for measuring poverty based on a common measure of income based on the following definition: "The poor shall be taken to mean persons, families and groups of persons where resources (material, cultural and social) are so limited as to exclude them from the minimum acceptable way of life in the member state in which they live". In addition, two out of three adults in the poorest households in the EU are women and as a result women are over-represented in the groups affected by poverty.

Fourth are new patterns of work emerging from the demise of the traditional full-time male breadwinner model, which has been replaced by the mass participation of women. There is an associated shift from manufacturing to services, a growth of flexible, atypical, part-time, insecure and precarious work. The role of trade unions and partnerships in the workplace and linking these to local communities is a crucial part of the debate about the future of work. This is leading to new questions about positive forms of flexibility designed to promote equal opportunities and the sharing of family and work responsibilities, the creation of new jobs, and improvements in services.

Finally, there are new identities around active citizenship, new communities of interests, new forms of collective action, and new social movements, for instance, around race, disability, age, sexuality, gender and the environment. This is also coupled with more concerns about citizens' rights in relation to their access to services and the beginnings of a rhetoric of user-involvement in, for example, the planning of local government services.

The role of adult education

Given these massive societal shifts how can adult education/lifelong learning be a tool for democratic participation in political and civil life? Democracy and citizenship are central to learning just as learning is central to democracy and citizenship. Put simply, education is the key to empowerment and to power and is central to independence and self-determination. An important element of the learning process is that it can stimulate and support new forms of democratic participation and renewal across Europe. We also live in a volatile world and new democratic settlements are emerging, for instance, in Northern Ireland and Kosovo. In Northern Ireland the empowerment of local communities and the strength of local community development practices are embedded in the European-funded peace and reconciliation programme, based on the notion that democratic settlements require the consent and active participation of people in local communities.

Of equal importance to local democratic activity is the Europeanisation of democracy. Linking local activity to European decision making is one of the biggest challenges facing many local communities whose futures are increasingly tied up with European decision making. For example, European funding has become an important element of the regeneration of local communities that are affected by industrial restructuring.

Linking lifelong learning to empowerment strategies that are geared to tackling social exclusion are critical elements of this new thinking. The growing importance attached to social exclusion by national governments across Europe and in national discourses is a response to the rapidly changing social, economic and political developments in Europe. For example, learning for active citizenship is central to the new EU-funded *Grundtvig* adult education programme and has become an increasingly important part of the EU discourse on European citizenship and participation. In the UK these issues have been addressed in important government reports on lifelong learning including the Fryer Report on lifelong learning, the 1998 Green Paper *The Learning Age,* and the Crick committee on schools learning for the 21st century. The role of active citizenship is given some importance in these documents, although the concept of lifelong learning in the UK is restricted to upskilling for work rather than for participation and empowerment.

Nevertheless, we are witnessing the development of a common purpose or shared vision of lifelong learning that pushes new boundaries and extends good practice already taking place within local communities. This has sparked a new interest in a concept of citizenship as civil participation and empowerment - something that has been largely absent in most European countries. It is based on a new polity predicated on the need to develop practices, which reconstruct mass support for, and participation in, movements of democratic reform and renewal. At the heart of this is a new relationship between participatory and representative forms of democracy and accountability. As a result there must be new opportunities for participating in democratic activity on all issues whether these be welfare state entitlements, transport policy, regional policy, education policy, the rights of asylum seekers, policy to tackle racism, the effect of the Euro on jobs, and more.

The role of adult education is a crucial part of this process. It can build self-confidence, knowledge and skills so that the actors in this process of democratic transformation are at the heart of democratic renewal as actors shaping their personal, economic, social and collective lives. Citizenship is also about giving individuals, groups and communities the practical means to exercise their citizenship. Adult education has a role to play in helping to give people the means to understand, analyse, synthesise and develop strategies for action.

An example of this approach to learning for active citizenship is the project *Popular Education for Democracy and European Citizenship (PEDEC)*. The project is based on the conviction that European developments must be inclusive and participatory whereby trade unions, community and voluntary organisations and people in their local communities can shape their own futures, as actors in rather than subjects of policy changes. PEDEC emerged as a European project for local communities on the basis that the growth in importance of European decision making, for example, through the emerging civil and social dialogue in the EU, the significance of EU enlargement to the east, the need to respond to fortress Europe, and the need to give rights to a growing number of migrant workers who face restrictive policies and practices by their more wealth neighbours. PEDEC has resulted in network of adult education providers, community groups, women's groups, trade unions in the UK, Germany, Ireland and Sweden who share a commitment to developing new forms of active citizenship through active strategies on lifelong learning. It has led to new learning materials (distance-learning, collective learning, on-line learning) on themes such as community, work, democracy, Europe, women, environment - and the formation of the Centre for Citizenship Learning and Action and a web site (www.ccla.org.uk).

What this project taught us is that there are a variety of different methodologies of learning that can meet the needs of learners in different ways. Distance learning may have its merits but it has the effect of individualising learning. Collective and individual approaches to learning have been tested. We found that distance and on-line learning can work but that collective forms of learning are critical to notions of citizenship and participatory democracy (collective learning can have collective outcomes, whereas individualised forms of learning can result in individualised outcomes). For excluded learners collective learning and responses remain critically important.

The role of information technology is of great importance to this debate about active citizenship. Projects that link up local communities via the Internet, for example, communities on-line, suggest that information technology can be a source of democratic activity in local communities. However, it also poses a threat for those local communities who have limited access and resources to go on-line and share in the new information revolution.

Conclusion

There is a growing movement of people who are expressing their active citizenship in both formal politics and in arenas beyond formal politics. New opportunities are emerging than ever before for popular participation in public life based on a growing recognition of the diversity of cultures and interests that are characteristic of modern society. The part to be played by lifelong learning and specifically adult education in promoting democratic activity in all aspects of our social, economic, cultural and political lives cannot be underestimated nor ignored.

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The emancipation of hope

Adult Learning and Peace-Building in Northern Ireland

The date is May 23rd, 1998, the time 2.05 pm. This is the defining moment in the Northern Ireland peace process. The King's Hall in South Belfast is packed with people, and there is a sudden crush toward the makeshift platform at the back of the hall. Everyone is desperate to hear the result of the referendum taken the previous day on the Good Friday Agreement and now, with the counted votes stacked neatly on the trestle tables, rumours of percentages sweep through the crowd. Sudden cheers erupt in the various parts of the hall but it is difficult to decipher cause or meaning in these momentary eruptions. The Presiding Officer, Pat Bradley, clambers onto the platform and taps repeatedly on a non-functioning microphone. Finally, unable to make himself heard any other way he simply stands back and bellows the result. In favour of the Good Friday Agreement, 71.2 per cent! The rest is drowned in a flood of cheering. Peace campaigners, Sinn Fein party members, sober-suited unionists, jubilant loyalist paramilitaries and feminists from the Women's Coalition all turn to hug each other. Victories don't come much sweeter than this, and in a political conflict that for thirty years has been notable for its bitterness, the sweet moments are to be savoured - not just as memories, but as part of a sustaining vision of what is possible and what can be achieved in the future.

The period since the Referendum has proved a difficult and testing time for all, as the coalition of unionists and nationalists that came together to build that "yes" vote first separated, and then shattered on the rock of decommissioning. If the Good Friday Agreement could be seen as the triumph of politics - that is, the ability of people to use party structures to negotiate differences - then the political wrangling over decommissioning would seem to demonstrate the opposite: the inability of unionist and republican leaders to move beyond their zero sum confrontations.

It must be remembered though that the historic accommodation offered by the Good Friday Agreement was not just the result of political elites brokering a deal. The seismic shift it represented was also the result of a tectonic movement from below, from the people of Northern Ireland wanting to come together to close the gap that had torn so many lives apart.

As Kumar Rupesinghe (1999) observes in an international survey of conflict resolution situations: "Political coexistence to be successful requires investment in coexistence at the community level." That investment has been made in Northern Ireland. Amongst the jubilant crowd celebrating the referendum victory in the King's Hall were many from outside the formal political structures, drawn in from the looser networks of civil society: trade unionists, business people, community activists, peace campaigners and representatives of various women's groups, church organisations, and cross-community projects.

The peace process described by the media did not directly include these groups, they were not privy to the backdoor negotiations between the IRA and the British government nor did they not broker any deeds on the key constitutional issues. And yet, as long as there has been a war process, there has been a peace process - not the one of the history books - but a subterranean process of unrecorded activities undertaken by those who worked together throughout the dark days of the Troubles to try to hold the line against barbarism. If Northern Ireland never became another Bosnia, another Beirut, another Kosovo, it is partly because civil society did provide the invisible stitching that held the fabric together. One bright and visible thread is the line traced by adult community education.

Learning and un-learning

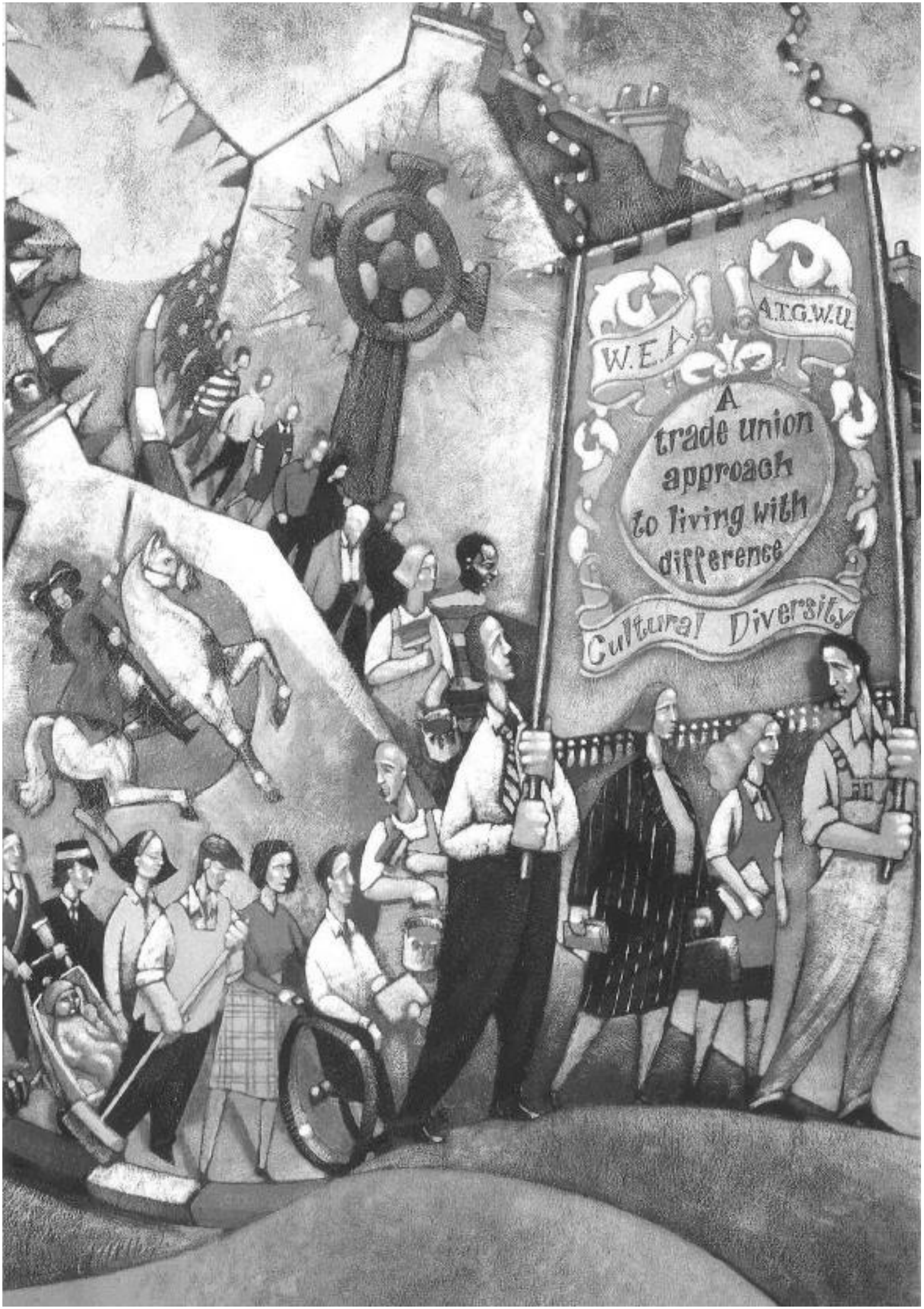
In conflict situations the process of learning have to be linked to the process of un-learning, changing the cultural patterning that leads each side to define itself in opposition to the other, and to ascribe negative characteristics to those from a different tradition. This, in the jargon of community relations work, is "prejudice reduction" and those who work in cross-community exchanges have developed a broad

repertoire of groupwork techniques which allow for the exploration of difference. At one time this type of approach enjoyed hegemony, but the movement of politics has created a new framework for understanding the problem and, by extension, understanding the role that education can play in working towards a solution.

It is perhaps easiest to explain the changes taking place within Northern Ireland by explaining them in relation to changes elsewhere, particularly in relation to the growth of ethnic conflict as the new paradigm in world politics. As Mary Kaldor (1999) argues in her book *New and Old Wars: Organised Violence In A Global Era*, the 19th century and much of the 20th century were given over to interstate wars, but over the past ten years we have experienced a paradigm shift where the most important form of conflict is intrastate. Civil disintegration within state boundaries and the rise of ethnonationalist tensions define the new frontier. When Northern Ireland first appeared on the news bulletins at the end of the 1960s its curiosity seemed to lie in the fact that here was a 17th century religious war being fought out on the streets and housing estates of a modern European country. Thirty years on and, tragically, Northern Ireland conflict no longer appears so strange or atavistic: like Bosnia, Kosovo, the Middle East, South Africa and a hundred other conflict situations, it is a society attempting to prevent its internal differences spilling over into violent conflict.

Crucially, for those working in community relations, the task is no longer to insist on the 'sameness' that could potentially unite everyone; on the contrary, the new project s to recognise and celebrate difference. The critic, Edna Longley, suggested the metaphor of a 'cultural corridor' for Northern Ireland, a space which gives access at one end to British identity and, at the other end, to Irish identity. Both can be enjoyed and celebrated, neither needs to dominate. If, in the past, the crisis of dual identity has taken a pathological form, the task of politics is to create a new framework that allows different identities room to assert themselves in more creative and balanced ways.

That new paradigm required changes at the most fundamental level of government - or rather, governments - because in order to create parity of esteem between the two traditions major constitutional changes had to be sponsored by both the British and Irish governments to allow the complex machinery of the Good Friday Agreement to be put into place. It also required a full-blooded commitment


W.E.A.
A.T.G.W.U.
A
trade union
approach
to living with
difference
Cultural Diversity

to equal opportunity across all levels of public policy in Northern Ireland, and to the implementation of far-reaching human rights programmes. From the politicians it required flexibility, compromise and co-operation - not qualities normally associated with Northern Ireland's political class, but encouragingly in evidence in the Agreement itself and during the first, short-lived period of the Northern Ireland Executive.

Outside the formal political arena, the shift to a new form of politics has been played out in a number of different ways, and for adult education there are three principal areas:

Community

Northern Ireland has a strong network of voluntary and community organisations, and for many of these local-based groups adult education is core activity. The curriculum is, for the most part, blind to sectarian division and includes the usual range of hobbyist and recreational programmes such as music appreciation, aromatherapy and watercolour painting, together with the more targeted, accredited provision now being promoted by New Labour as part of its commitment to widening participation. In these respects, the profile of adult learning follows the same broad contours as community learning in other parts of Britain, and is as distinct from provision in the Republic of Ireland as is the provision in South Wales or North Yorkshire or any other part of the United Kingdom.

In one crucial area, however, Northern Ireland is quite different from Great Britain, the Republic of Ireland or, indeed, anywhere else. Community education is delivered in a context where there is, famously, not one community, but two. The cultural diversity agenda that is now taking shape insists that that reality be recognised which means, in practice, that Irish language classes are supported within the nationalist areas where they are - mainly, but not exclusively - requested, and that explorations of Ulster-Scots identity be supported within the Protestant community.

For some, this strategy simply seems too dangerous. Richard English writing in *Irish Review* comments: "given the overlap between cultural and political loyalties and also the existing levels of polarisation and hostility, cultural diversity is crucial to political conflict. To celebrate it seems, to me, particular."

Those with long experience in community relations work disagree. Professor Mari Fitzduff from Incore, the United National University centre in Derry argues that

all of these small initiatives taken together ensure "a much more positive context for the agreements on cultural pluralism that were made in the Belfast Agreement."

Workplace

The same gear-shift has taken place in the politics of the workplace. For almost thirty years the trade union movement insisted that religion and cultural identity be left outside the shopfloor so that union members could share a common identity as workers; that way, it was felt, the lid could be kept on the pressure cooker of sectarianism. To an extent this worked, and in places like the Belfast shipyard where the line held, there were not the same pogroms as there were in previous periods of Irish history. The refusal to allow any political discussion at all, however, obviously arrested the possibility of developing new understandings, or challenging existing inequalities.

A joint project organised by the WEA and the Transport and General Workers Union takes a contrary approach. The Cultural Diversity project, as it is known, invites members of the union to sit down together in a safe environment to discuss the difficult issues. Why do you feel offended when I play my music? Why do you feel it is acceptable to put up that poster? Why are work duties allocated in this particular way? Such discussion are not just about forcing people to confront their own prejudices, they are about challenging the way in which prejudice is reflected structurally within their organisations.

As Billy Robinson, Director of Counteract puts it, "We are moving from fire fighting to fire prevention." Counteract is the trade union anti-sectarian and anti-intimidation unit, and it has done its share of fire-fighting, being called in to resolve disputes where, for example, a large section of the workforce walks out because another worker insists on his right to wear a poppy. The workforce in this case is mainly nationalist and in nationalist areas the poppy - however inoffensive it might be elsewhere - is a symbol of the British military. To the Protestant worker, the right to wear a poppy is part of his British identity. To bow to pressure on this would be to sacrifice something he regards as precious. There are no easy ways out of this conflict once it has caught fire, and Counteracts way is to promote education and training programmes for management and staff alike with a view to agreeing policies and procedures on flags and emblems. And, along the way, to help each side understand the other a little bit more.

Women's groups

The electoral success of the Women's Coalition directed attention to the fact that something had been stirring in the network of women's groups in Northern Ireland. The strength of that network would have been well understood by adult educationalists for some time: in many ways community education in Northern Ireland *is* women's education. The statistics demonstrate an overwhelmingly female student base but, perhaps more significantly, the freedom that women's groups have enjoyed to travel in and out of each others areas, and to undertake joint projects together, allow for the hope that adult learning and peace-building can go hand-in-hand. At one level - the one that most often seems to appeal to outsiders - this is not so much abut politics, as anti-politics, the belief that women can by-pass the problems of cultural and political identity to create their own neutral zone.

At another level, however, the work of adult education projects like Women Into Politics or Women Seen and Heard, or the Opportunities for Women Learning (OWL) Project run by the WEA is much more about training women to make direct interventions into the key political issues. The Women's Coalition negotiated this space quite deftly, creating an umbrella for women of all traditions while promoting an agenda of inclusion and human rights.

None of this would make any difference if the key structural changes were not taking place at governmental level, and if the politicians were not prepared to broker an historic compromise. Equally, however, nothing that governments or politicians could concoct would work if there were not people on the ground working for a more open, inclusive and pluralist society. All of that came together through the Good Friday Agreement and the referendum that followed. Borrowing a phrase from Seamus Heaney it was a time when "hope and history rhymed". The rhyme and the rhythm have been lost in the stumbling political process that followed the collapsing of the institutions in February 2000; the hope, however, remains.

Paul Nolan
Director, Workers' Educational Association

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Scotland's parliament, civil society and popular education

"the Scottish Parliament should be accessible, open, responsive and develop procedures which make possible a participative approach to the development, consideration and scrutiny of policy and legislation; the Scottish Parliament in its operation and its appointments should recognise the need to promote equal opportunities for all."
Consultative Steering Group of the Scottish Parliament

Scotland has undergone a significant constitutional change. The institution of the Parliament has led to a readjustment of the relationships between state, civil society and social movements, and between these and economic structures. This article addresses the central yet ambiguous role of civil society in Scotland, and the opportunities for educators which this restructuring provides. Responses from community educators has tended to focus on the nation, the citizen or policy. Looking particularly at the policy focused learning, it is argued that there are opportunities and also challenges for popular education, which is politically committed to the collective interests of marginalised groups.

Scotland's parliament and civil society

Scotland's parliament derives from civil society. The Claim of Right, of sovereignty of the people in Scotland, and Scotland's Parliament Scotland's Right (Scottish Constitutional Convention, 1995) were products of an alliance between political parties and civil society. Civil society has provided an evolving political leadership in Scotland

'for 300 years (Paterson, 1998), and the head of steam built up during the 1980s and 1990s meant that even the centralising New Labour party which swept to power in Westminster in 1997, had to deliver.'

The Consultative Steering Group (CSG), appointed from across parties and civil society, recommended open and accountable standing orders, including the requirement for a memorandum to accompany each Bill addressing (among other things) 'the consultative process undertaken... and other possible matters such as sustainable development [and] human rights' (CSG 1998). The CSG also welcomed a Civic Forum (which later emerged from the Civic Assembly) 'and other imaginative social partnership ventures'.

The referendum for a parliament stimulated a higher turnout than the elections for politicians to fill it. The election, under Alternative Vote Plus, led to only marginal interest in the opportunities which proportional representation provides. It is too early to see any political realignment of radical social movements as in many other European countries (Wainwright 1994) though this is certainly an area for further political and educational exploration. Tommy Sheridan's election for the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) probably relies on his charismatic leadership, and it is arguable that the working-class socialist vote in Glasgow could as easily vote SNP, revert to Labour or even switch to another left party. Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party, with a considerably lower profile in Scotland, received a higher percentage vote than the SSP in every region except Glasgow and West of Scotland.

The Green Party's election in Lothian is probably more dependable, but the extent to which they have mobilised working-class or marginalised voters is probably not great. The radically democratic Highlands and Islands Alliance, and the loose alliance of activists of the Civil Rights Movement made little electoral inroads.

After the election the hurriedly negotiated coalition formed a strong executive facing a weak parliament. This allows for the delivery of a policy programme, and (in contrast with the removal of Alun Michael in Wales), limits the opportunities for popular influence.

There have been limited responses to these developments from adult educators. Exceptions may be characterised according to whether the object of education has been the nation, the citizen or policy. Freirean education reinforces the politically overt role of the educator. Educators of a nationalist persuasion (not necessarily in support of independence) have focused on the nation as object of study, and explored Scottish culture and identity. This approach has been important for a critical reconstruction of received notions of Scottishness, and has been closely identified with the movement for devolution. It isn't clear where this strand of education can go now although claims

that devolution constitutes conjunctural change have probably been overstated (Galloway 1999). There may be dangers of descending into disconnected cultural postmodernism, or even to nationalism of a closed or xenophobic nature (Hassan 1999).

The citizen as educational object has been explored by some community educators and by NGOs such as Charter 88. These have often focused on mechanisms to encourage participation in the democratic process, but also as critiques of citizenship itself, the potential of which is explored elsewhere (see Concept special issue 1999, Martin 1999). In local struggles and increasingly within mainstream adult education, there are opportunities to combine skills to access the Parliament, with critical reflection on the nature of citizenship.

Opportunities arising from the policy programme of the Parliament, and its relationship with civil society and social movements, can be explored through two case studies of legislative change; land reform and gay rights.

Land Reform

Land reform was heralded as a major plank of the first tranche of legislation through Bills on Abolition of Feudalism, Land Reform and National Parks. Pressure for land reform has grown recently from the political practice of communities taking collective ownership of land (see MacPhail 1999). Land reform is a concern across liberal civil society, and the Civic Assembly initiated a Scottish Land Reform Convention (SLRC) comprising the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (Cosla) and a wide range of civil groups, from the Church of Scotland and Crofters Union to Shelter and Friends of the Earth, and led by land reformers Andy Wightman and Robin Callander (Wightman 1997, 1999; Callander 1998). The convention is united in support of land reform, but not necessarily agreed on what kind.

Abolition of Feudalism is a cause celebre for the parliament, since parliamentary time in the Commons, and vested interests in the Lords have always denied its passage through Westminster. The Bill does away with the feudal system of land tenure which the rest of Europe abolished in the eighteenth century. However, certain elements have been masked in the technicality, and which, despite poor consultation, the SLRC has raised and subjected to wider debate.

This is particularly true of the abolition of the Crown as Feudal Superior, which in fact abolishes the ultimate sovereignty of the people of Scotland over land, and replaces it with absolute ownership. Without changing the distribution of ownership of land, the Bill removes representation of public interest through land tenure law. Indeed, Lairds could use Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights (which protects the individual's rights to respect for his/her home, private and family life), as a means of preventing future land redistribution. As Wightman (1999) puts it 'Scotland, in one of the first acts of our new parliament, is to be given away to those, who in many cases have inherited their interest from the ancient theft of the land many centuries ago'.

Moreover, the Land Reform Bill will not redistribute land ownership. Its 'community right to buy' provision, essentially would allow communities first refusal to buy land when it comes on the market. However, 'most privately owned land in Scotland has never been exposed for sale (privately or openly) for over 100 years ... [and] ... 25 per cent of estates over

1,000 acres in Scotland have been held by the same families for over 400 years'. Since 'land which is likely to be of appeal will be determined by the communities themselves, but its availability will be determined by the owner' the Bill will not 'greatly empower communities' or 'effect rapid change in the pattern of landownership' as the Executive's rhetoric suggests (Wightman 1999).

Gay Rights

The Ethical Standards in Public Life Bill was targeted by gay rights groups seeking an opportunity to abolish Section 28 of the UK Local Government Act, which prohibits the 'promotion of homosexuality' and presenting gay relationships as a 'pretended family relationship'. Effective lobbying by the Equality Network achieved clear support from the Executive and Opposition. As probably the most vicious piece of discriminatory legislation from the Thatcher period, there was assumed to be a liberal consensus in Scotland against Section 28.

During consultation however, the religious right organised effectively and public representation against repeal grew. What began as a liberal discourse was reframed by reactionary groups towards the protection of children, and played into populist fears. Debate was forced onto the reactionaries' terms with both politicians and campaigners emphasising child protection and defending the family. In the stramash, public figures openly used homophobic language where racist or anti-semitic comments would not have been tolerated. Reactionary groups mobilised people against the repeal, and from a shallow interpretation of democracy were successful (at the time of writing, polls show a majority against repeal). This is clearly not an 'educated and participatory democracy' (Williams 1961), any more than repealing Section 28 would abolish homophobia.

The ambiguity of civil society

In the gradation of superstructures, Gramsci (1973) famously identified civil society as the site in which hegemony is exercised. The devolved parliament has stimulated a renegotiation between superstructural relationships, between executive, parliament, civil society, social movements and community action, and between these and the economic base. Raymond Williams described an educational task in these dynamics, to articulate emergent forms of cultural and economic practice which embody 'solutions which properly belong to political and ultimately revolutionary practice' (Williams, 1973).

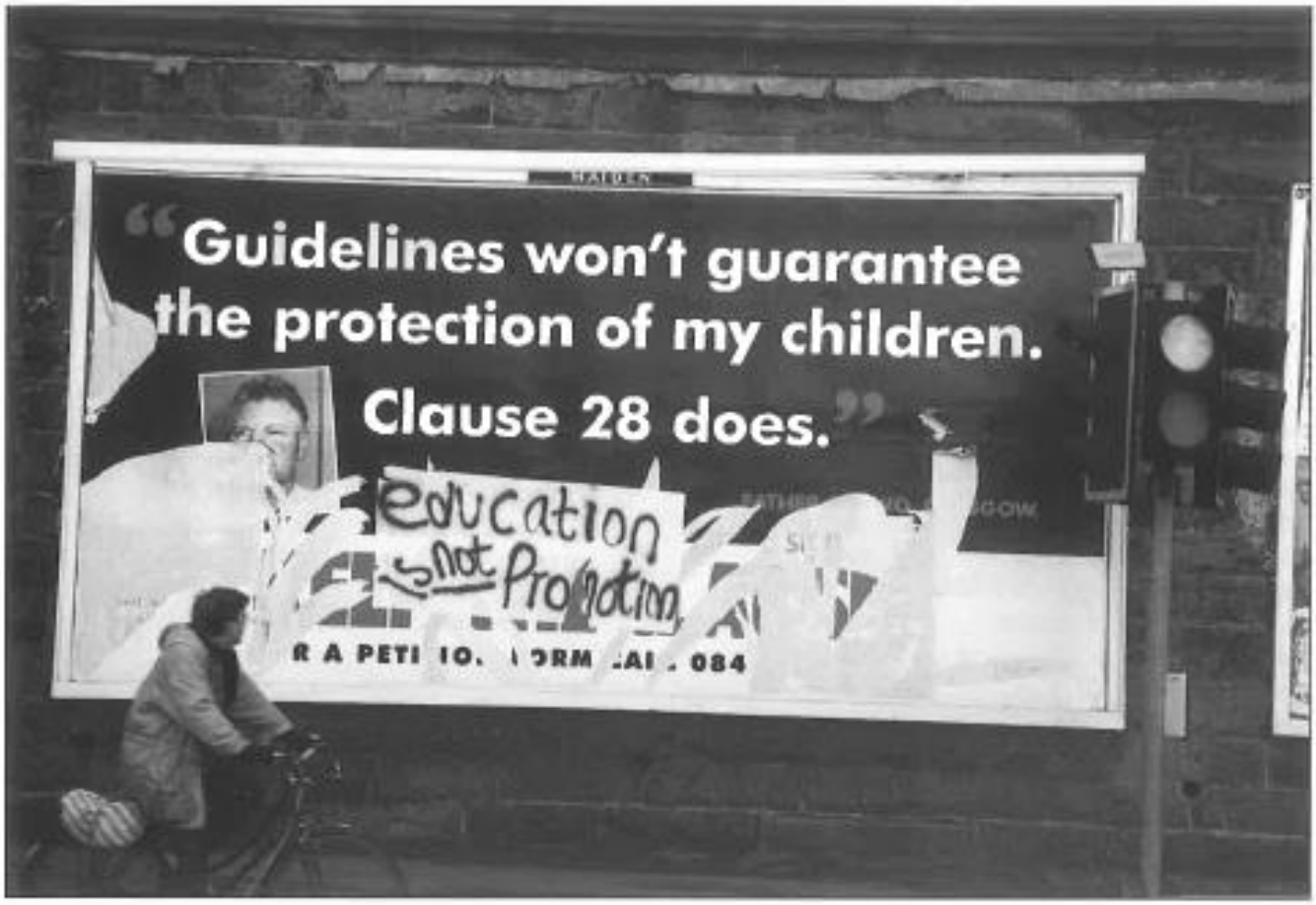
Paterson (1998) however, also identifies Scottish civil society as a conservative political actor, defending its own interests, having provided institutional governance during the indifference of the British state. He cautions against the too-cosy, centre-left consensus between the shared elites of Parliament and civil society such that populist rejection of both could easily come from the far Right.

Section 28 demonstrates the threat of reactionary, residual social movements, which can build support by challenging the largely urban-professional, socially liberal consensus of the New Labour-Liberal Democrat-Nationalist -Civil society elites. The populist Right, having determined the discourse around child protection, has put the popular movements on the defensive, essentially closing off opportunities for critical deconstruction of the hegemony of family. The relationship between superstructure and structural base is complex. Tony Blair's Third Way has attempted to segregate the two and put economics beyond political discourse. It could be argued that devolution is possible precisely because the state and civil society have less instrumental value to increasingly globalised capital. Williams however emphasises the dynamic relationship between structure and superstructure.

The raft of 'land reform' measures in the parliament have incorporated the liberal demands for land reform within civil society into an economic structure where land is commodity, and in which existing landed interests are beneficiaries. Any movement for real land redistribution has thus been marginalised. However, a range of publications, events and other non-formal educational activities have emerged from civil society and been able to open up spaces for a critical exposure of these political objectives.

The social movements of oppressed communities are the constituency of popular educators and there is a creative conflict around the extent of incorporation of these into civil society, and participation in parliament. Participation is clearly not an end in itself and the tactics of participation/non-participation, or of incorporation/opposition will change according to context, the current context being one of flux. The existence of the parliament throws up new places of illumination and also new shadows, and the experiences of those living with and fighting oppression will need to renegotiate these, whether it be taking creative advantage of the opportunities which the parliament offers, or responding to political gaps. The conflicts within the superstructures are an arena of struggle from which educational activity arises.

Eurig Scandrett
Friends of the Earth, Scotland



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The term 'civil society' is used in preference to 'civic society' in order to reduce confusion with the alternative meaning of civic relating to the city. However, the two terms tend to be used interchangeably, for example Civic Forum.

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The POWER story

Background

About fifteen years ago the Republic of Ireland witnessed a new phenomenon, women coming together to form adult education groups. They mushroomed in clusters from Kilbarrack, Coolock, Tallaght and Dundrum in Dublin to counties Offaly, Galway and Kilkenny. Wherever they found helpful adult education organisers or health education officers and basic resources they grew. There even grew were they was no support. 'No crËche, no class' was their cry and they revolutionised the face of adult education. The timing changed from evening to day. The type of class changed from woodwork and flower arranging to personal development and creative writing. The role of the tutor changed from being 'a teacher' to becoming 'a facilitator'. There was always a debate about whether they were daytime education groups or women's education groups but the reality was that it was education for women by women. The women involved in running these classes developed skills and expertise. They became leaders within their communities. However, despite their newfound expertise, invariably they were excluded from the decision and policy making bodies that shaped their environment. This lack of progression was not exclusive to adult education bodies but extended through all sectors of public life. In the North similar developments were happening and were issues of concern among activists in community-based women's centres.

In the mid 1990s community activists from the north and south of Ireland came together to discuss the obstacles to women's participation in public life at a seminar hosted by WERRC (Women's Education Research & Resource Centre). A key proposal from the seminar was to set up a cross-border co-operative project in the area of women's adult education. Community activists from both sides of the border shared similar experiences: leaders at local and community level were predominantly women. However, when it came to the public agencies that shaped policy and made the decisions, men predominated. The idea grew for a tailor made course for women activists to assist them move into public life. For the idea to become a reality women with a commitment to women's rights and social justice were needed. As always the links between like-minded people were crucial. In the summer of 1995 a small group of feminists met to discuss a radically different programme for women activists and so a very unique partnership was formed.

Formation of POWER Partnership

POWER Partnership consists of two women's organisations and two educational institutions, one each from the north and south of Ireland:

- Women's Support Network
- National Women's Council of Ireland
- Women's Education Research & Resource Agency
- School of Social and Community Sciences, University of Ulster

This mix of academics and activists brought a particular synergy to POWER. All the women involved:

Noreen Byrne, Grainne Healy, Marie Mulholland, Joanna McMinn, Eilish Rooney, Ailbhe Smyth and Joanne Vance had expertise and experience that helped POWER develop a special programme for women activists. Developing the programme and securing accreditation took approximately two years. During this time POWER sought funding and with some difficulty put together a complicated funding package. The European Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (SSPPR) through the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust was the main funder of the POWER programme. Other funders included Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, Proteus Combat Poverty Agency and the Department of Education and Science through the Women's Education Initiative with assistance from the European Social Fund. Continuation and capital funding were later secured from Area Development Management and Combat Poverty Agency through the EU SSPPR.

Aims & Objectives

POWER stands for politically organised women educating for representation. The rationale behind

POWER was to support women to become more active in the public sphere of politics. Women had been active in community development for many years, promoting women's equality and participation in their local group or community organisation. The POWER course was designed to support women's political development and place women's participation in community development firmly within a political context. Called A Women's Political Development Programme: Feminist Approaches to Politics, the State and the Economy in Ireland, North and South it was up-front about its agenda and ethos. The course aimed to enable participants to understand the nature and principles of power and politics and to provide participants with information and skills that would allow them to make and create choices. These choices included working within the existing political structures and/or challenging those structures.

Targeting Activists

Unlike many 'off the shelf' courses, POWER had a niche market in mind for its programme. It targeted women who had between three-to-five year's experience in grass roots activism in the community, trade union or women's movement. There was a high level of interest in the programme and POWER recruited almost fifty women who met the above criteria. Due to funding restrictions they were primarily drawn from the north and six southern border counties but women outside these areas were also included. The organisations they represented included community development agencies, women's centres, education groups, trade unions, single-issue groups and youth and farming organisations. The POWER participants were an interesting mix of women with different traditions, geographies, politics, educational backgrounds and ages. This mix proved to be one of the strengths of the programme. When asked what attracted them to the programme the statements:

- *Opportunity to learn about issues or gain new ideas and insights*
- *Opportunity to develop new skills scored first and second. However,*
- *Opportunity to meet women from backgrounds different from my own*
- *Opportunity to meet women from other parts of Ireland*

scored third and fourth. The participants welcomed the diversity of participant's backgrounds on the course and also the unique opportunity to address difference and division.

The POWER Programme

POWER was funded to deliver its women's political development programme twice. Residential centres on both sides of the border were used. POWER tried to move equally between a north/south and an east/west axis and used a different centre for each module. This gave the 'east-coasters' an insight into geographical disadvantage. Another outcome of having a 'roving women's college' was that participants, tutors and organisers visited pockets of Ireland outside their familiar territory. The effect of a prolonged cease-fire meant that participants on the second programme felt more relaxed about travelling across the border. Childcare, travel and student supports were all built in the programme making it a very woman-friendly option.

Each programme was delivered over six modules. Formative evaluation allowed fine-tuning as the programme progressed. Based on active learning principles, the programme encouraged participation and built on the personal and political experience of both participants and tutors. It was designed to place their individual and community-based experience within a wider historical and theoretical framework. This process was supported by the acquisition of appropriate skills. The six modules focused on broad key themes:

- Women and History
- Women, Power and Politics
- Women, Citizenship and the State
- Gender and Economic Issues
- Feminism and the Women's Movement
- Strategies for Practical Action

Each module was built around four major learning axes: skills, information, concepts and activism or political practice. Skills included oral, study and writing skills. Computer skills were also planned but proved impossible to provide within the initial programmes due to logistical problems. However, POWER Partnership was able to partially address this later with support from Area Development Management Limited and the Combat Poverty Agency through the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation. Women academics and activists tutored on both programmes. Because of its all-island approach, POWER was able to call on women with a high degree of expertise. Thus local activists had direct access to some of the best brains in the country.

The programme for the module on Women, Power and Politics is typical. Held in An Teach Ban, Co. Donegal it began after lunch on Day 1. All modules were held mid-week. As usual a briefing session on the module programme and participant's news was followed by an experiential exercise. In this case Joanne Vance used a participatory exercise called 'Spot the Political Party', to identify all the political parties, north and south and then match them with statements on their positions on Northern Ireland. Participants then played 'Spot the Equality Party' with very revealing results. Next came a session with Joni Crone using Boal's image theatre to explore power relations. The use of drama also helped to develop participant's presentation skills. Dinner gave participants a break before a listening exercise that evening. Day 2 began

with a lecture and activity on Theories of Empowerment by Maeve Casey. After lunch Eilish Rooney talked on Women in Politics: Difference Matters and Day 2 closed with a peer session. This session was organised and facilitated by the participants themselves.

The final day began with Joanna McMinn's recurrent session analysing the difference between affirmative and transformative action. In this case Joanna was looking at the 'Five Faces of Oppression' and examining remedies to injustice. These sessions were held in all Programme II modules. They offered participants an opportunity to address social change under the specific themes of the modules. Programme I had only contained one such session. It was part of the final module on Strategies for Practical Action. However, in order to maintain a balance between the learning axes of skills, information, concepts and activism it was evident that more than one session was required. The activism axis was developed into a recurrent session in Programme II. This illustrates the benefits of having ongoing evaluation and a repeat programme.

Normally the module would close at this stage with a feedback session. However, participants had requested a special session arising from the previous module on Gender & Economics. Ruth Toillon gave a comprehensive talk on 'The Economics of a United Ireland' which gave participants the latest thinking and figures. One participant commented: 'I have waited for 10 years to hear these concepts. The figures have been evading me and the analysis was concise. Brilliant.' Getting the balance between experiential learning and academic inputs is always a challenge. As much time as possible was allowed for interaction and participation and this was appreciated by participants 'it is very important to have group participation especially when you have women from different backgrounds - it helps, I feel, to break down the barriers'. The residentials covered 20 hours of contact time so there was an intensity to the programme which made it akin to hot housing. This woman described it well when she wrote ' the content was good but I was tired sitting all day and had difficulty maintaining concentration'. However, the six-week gap between residentials allowed the reading and essay writing to consolidate the learning. One participant wrote: 'I left feeling that I had received plenty of food for thought. Boy do I have lots of digesting to do!'

POWER placed a strong emphasis on oral as well writing skills. A dedicated tutor, Joni Crone (dedicated in both senses of the word) took a regular session on presentation skills. This session aimed at building competence and confidence in oral skills but had an important extra benefit. The subject choice of a participant's presentation was open, as developing the requisite skills was the focus. However, most participants chose to talk about their lives or their organisation. This gave participants a unique opportunity to share: their histories, their successes, their achievements, their disappointments and their pain. These sessions could be very powerful. One woman wrote 'one presentation in particular was so devastating that it affected everyone of us'. Despite the possibility of distress it was a very popular session with evaluation sheets always showing a hunger for more.

When asked what participants liked about a module, a typical response was 'most of all the people I'm with.

Impact of POWER Programme

The impact of a programme like the POWER programme is difficult to quantify, particularly in the short-term. The focus inevitably tends to be on what is measurable. Because it is tangible, the development of writing skills readily springs to mind. Not that the development of writing skills was always willing embraced by participants. Written assignments were an additional time commitment and participants often spoke of feeling guilty about meeting essay deadlines. However, women activists have highly developed juggling skills and the POWER participants managed their guilty feelings and their deadlines as well as everything else. A measure of their success was the high programme completion rate with over 70% of participants qualifying for their certificates. Indeed when asked about taking on any additional responsibilities as a result of the POWER programme report writing received high scores in the final evaluation report. Participation in management committees and preparation of funding applications were other areas that also received high scores. Public Speaking was the area that scored highest of all.

This was hardly surprising as sessions on presentation skills had been embedded into the programme.

It is important to note that the above question was asked of participants from Programme I shortly after completion and participants on Programme II were asked when they were only 2/3rds the way through. These scores give us snapshots. Snapshots are a measurement of something at one point in time. Another moment in time would reveal a different picture. So would a different angle. A tighter or broader focus. Or even another photographer. Getting a more complete picture of the impact of POWER programme is inherently difficult. This is because the POWER programme has a number of innovative elements and can therefore be viewed from different angles:

- all-island dimension;
- feminist ethos;
- accredited learning;
- holistic model;
- residential modules;
- funded women-friendly access and support.

More snapshots are needed. The women behind POWER Partnership had a longer-term aim in mind when they started this process. To do it justice, a retrospective exhibition at some future date would be necessary. To end, perhaps a series of snapshots drawn from the women who participated on the programme may help. Each of these snapshots is partial. Each is unique. Each is valuable.

- For the Women, Power and Politics module essay entitled: My name is ..., I am a woman, I am an Irish Republican and this is my story... one women wrote:

  We have a right as women to political representation. I see myself as a part of the conflict, so therefore I see it as my right to be involved in the decision making for the future of this country. I realise that the women in the North of Ireland are not united, that our socio-economic and political backgrounds are apart and under these labels are differences of age, class, sexuality etc. but I believe that only when we address these issues can political progress be made. I never had a conversation with a loyalist woman before I was given a chance to attend the Women's Political Development Programme. At the beginning of the programme I sensed that we were both wary of each other, but by the end of the programme we held a mutual respect for each other. This was only gained through talking and listening to each other's points of view.

- Speaking at the National Forum on Adult Education in Dublin Castle another participant said:

  Before doing the course I was often 'put down' by being told I was a feminist. Now I ask what type of feminist do you think I am?

  Am I a
  liberal
  radical
  psychoanalyst
  social/Marxist
  post modern
  post structural

  Usually I get no reply

- When asked how to describe the course for the second programme intake, a participant wrote:

  The WPDP (Women's Political Development Programme), although a structured course to educate and encourage/impel women towards political representation, is an exercise in development - personal and intellectual. The education is not just limited to the classroom. The skills, tools and knowledge imparted are invaluable to any woman at any level/stage in her life - regardless of background, creed, gender, race or sexual orientation. I came from a divided society and I ended up sharing a room with a woman from 'the other side' - we shared stories and experiences and have broken down a barrier in the process - that's what it's all about!

Margaret Martin
Co-ordinator with the POWER project.

Inclusive rhetoric, exclusive reality

Legacies

The New Labour Government elected in the UK in May 1997 proclaimed that it was committed to fighting poverty. Indeed, Tony Blair has said that a clear reduction in poverty, in particular child poverty, would be a major test of his Government's success. A number of policies are already being put into place to implement this aim, and welfare reform is also on the Government's agenda.

The Government's concern with poverty and social inclusion may be seen as a reaction to the explosive growth of poverty and inequality in Britain over the 1980s and 1990s - a legacy of large-scale industrial change, rapid and constant technological advances and Conservative Government policies over that period.

Context

Figures for 1996 (the most recent available), the year before Labour came to office, show that since 1979 the number of people in the UK living in poverty (defined as half average income) increased from 5.0 million, or 9 per cent of the population, to 14.1 million, or 24 per cent of the population.

A recent OECD report showed that, between 1991 and 1996, 38% of the population spent at least a year below the poverty line. One highly significant issue to arise from any analysis of income data is the worrying extent of child poverty. 4.6 million children in the UK - more than one. Some of the poorest areas in UK are to be found in Scotland, there is also a high incidence of rural poverty. However, the evidence that exists suggests that the overall patterns of poverty in Scotland are similar to those found elsewhere in the UK.

Accompanying the growth of poverty, in this period, was an emphasis on perspectives that widely portrayed and increasingly accepted poverty as a problem of the poor. Several interlinked strands reinforced such attitudes: there was a denial of poverty - it was argued that 'poverty' referred to situations where people lack basic necessities, and this was rare in Britain. Rather it was said that what existed in this society was inequality which could be found in all countries, affluent as well as poor, and this was an inevitable or even necessary aspect of economic life. The Child Poverty Action Group noted: *"Poverty is a term which is rarely heard on the lips of policy makers... The debate... has been characterised by bland euphemisms... terms which obscure the reality of deprivation, poverty and hardship"*.

Commentators on both Left and Right have talked of an 'underclass' of those who are alienated from society's norms, a group similar to the Victorian idea of the 'undeserving poor' - people who are described as feckless, unwilling to work, characterised by lone parenthood and criminality. Some of the solutions proposed to the problems posed by the underclass were brutal, and all contained elements of coercion.

It was argued that the Welfare State had displaced the family as the main provider of welfare, making traditional self-dependence redundant and removing choice and control from individuals. In particular, the benefit system discouraged people from seeking work, and allowed them to become dependent on state handouts. The dependency culture, critics argued, was economically and morally harmful to recipients, taxpayers and economic growth.

Acres of news print showed 'them' living the good life on benefits while 'we' worked ourselves to the bone. Buses displayed "Shop a Scrounger" adverts, and newspapers featured "Stuff a Scrounger" headlines. The Cold War was over: replaced by the enemy within. A huge monolithic beast, with an insatiable appetite which corrupted by stealth. There was a war against welfare, and no politician could be seen to be failing to do his/her bit in the War Effort. We became familiar with the language of machismo: a Politician's gotta do what a Politician's gotta do - "Honey I shrunk Welfare today!"

That is the background to the current arguments on welfare reform, family policy and work.

Work Primacy

The New Labour Government has declared: *'We will*


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build the welfare state around the work ethic: work for those who can; security for those who cannot.. No-one would disagree that work is a central plank in any effective anti-poverty strategy. However, the current preoccupation with work as the only route out of poverty does raise some concerns.

This emphasis on paid work means that too often the unpaid work of parents and carers is dismissed: it remains invisible, and as the state withdraws as a provider, these people are increasingly expected to take on responsibilities without resources or support. This results in contradictory government policies, for instance, how do we square New Deal's insistence on work with the dictats coming from the Home Office - calls for vigilant parenting; threats of fines if we fail¢ Difficult though it is for policy makers to accept, sometimes the demands of caring and those of employment are irreconcilable. This is not a call for women to return to home and hearth but a reminder that dismissal of unpaid work lays an extra burden on those who do it.

Moreover, the preoccupation with work creates tunnel vision. Take the case of childcare: in current thinking, child care seems to have only one purpose, to free the parents to go out to work. What about the needs of the child¢.

There will also always be people who cannot work, for example due to illness There will also be those who are genuinely unable to find work: even with the economy doing well there are unlikely to be jobs for everyone. And as work insecurity increases (a seemingly inexorable process unrelated to economic cycles) more people are going to be passing in and out of work. What should be the strategies to deal with the continuing poverty these people will face¢

Dependency

To its credit, the Government has not overtly stigmatised groups or individuals perceived as belonging to the "underclass". However, Government, and many in civil society, accept the language and reasoning of the 'dependency argument'. this comes in two forms, dependency on benefits is created because of (a) system 'cock-ups' which create 'poverty traps' whereby people in work are worse off than those on benefits. The solution in this case is to ensure that people on benefits are never as well off as those in work. Or else (b) dependency is created because a generous benefits system provides little incentive to work. The solution in this case is to ensure that benefits are not generous. It is the fear that people are being weaned off the work ethic by dependency on benefits that underlies so much of the debate on social security.

Such arguments are not new: the distinction between deserving and undeserving poor, and the principle of 'less eligibility' whereby state relief and the conditions to receive it are always worse than the worst paid job have influenced state provision, since the time of the Poor Laws. In addition, a major aim of both Conservative and Labour Governments since 1979 has been the reduction of the social security budget. This has led both of them to argue that benefits dependency also adds to the 'tax burden'. It is an argument happily adopted by the media, despite the fact that Britain spends proportionately much less on welfare provision than any other OECD country.

Benefits

A number of policies have been introduced in order to decrease the social security budget and encourage people off 'benefit dependency'. Increases in benefits have been tied to prices rather than to average incomes, which have risen faster than prices. Also, restrictions on eligibility for benefits have been tightened and the use of means-tested benefits expanded. Since 1979 people who rely on benefits have seen their incomes decline relative to incomes in society in general. Far from providing 'the good life', life on benefits is a mean and meagre existence.

A recent OECD report noted that without the safety net of benefits the numbers of people living below the poverty line in Britain between 1991 and 1996 would have been higher - with one in three people experiencing poverty on average. Yet there is little support for a more generous benefit system, nor is there any recognition that an adequate benefit system, far from creating dependency, provides a springboard into work.

The fact is that social consensus on the objectives and principles of the Welfare State has broken down. There has been a growth of the 'them and us' mentality, which has been fostered by the ideologies of the last two decades. Attitudes to taxation perhaps best reflect this mood. Taxes are the money we pay for transport, sewage, education, health, women's centres and local government as well as social security. These are basic amenities, but we don't all use these amenities to the same extent. Some of us need very little healthcare, others a lot. In a consumerist society this is increasingly portrayed as 'us' having to pay for 'them'. The concept of redistribution in this context can easily be made to take on the overtones of highway robbery.

Politicians walk warily around these issues. Few are prepared to make the argument that taxes are our investment in Society, now and for the future. Consequently there is also little interest in establishing a acceptable minimum standard of living, perhaps because, as Will Hutton notes: *'the resulting figures would immediately create a political momentum in which benefit levels and tax credits were set not by what Government feels it can afford, but by some index of human need'* . then again perhaps politicians simply feel that the electorate is not

interested in nor prepared to bear the cost of collective provision.

We have today not an envy of the rich but a resentment of those in poverty. One commentator has pointed out: *"Aid for the poor is criticised more than any other form of government expenditure"*. Research shows that while there is strong support for increased spending on health and education, services which benefit everyone, there is a great deal of ambivalence on greater spending on benefits. The persistent vilification of those in poverty has seeped into our culture, our thinking and our morality.

Such a legacy turns the spotlight on those of us who are well off, comfortably off or 'managing OK'. Are we J K Galbraith's 'contented majority' - interested only in our own well-being? Will the socially included ever be asked to - and be ready - to pay the real price for a truly inclusive society?

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Reclaiming a progressive tradition: a view from South Africa

The progressive tradition

In 1987, delegates at the Congress of South African Trade Union's (COSATU) Education Conference discussed a vision of education. Among other points, they argued that education should discourage individualism, competitiveness and careerism; be directed against racism, sexism, elitism and hierarchy; promote a collective outlook and working-class consciousness; be linked, as part of the struggle for socialism, to production "in a creative, liberating way" as opposed to entrenching exploitation; build working-class leadership of the struggle for a transformed society. Education should be a way of ensuring maximum participation and democracy; it had to serve the needs of workers and their allies; and develop an understanding among the working class "that their struggle forms part of the world struggle against oppression and exploitation".

It might seem easy to have made that sort of list which I am sure has been made in many places at different times. But this vision of what workers' education should mean did not come easily - it was forged over generations of struggle.

In 1988, I worked with a group of workers struggling for reinstatement after being dismissed for participating in South Africa's then biggest ever stayaway. Over six months, the workers met each weekday to maintain and take forward their struggle. This created the possibility - and necessity - of a range of activities in which lines between politics and education and organisation were not demarcated because it was the **connection** that mattered. Above all else, the workers created a situation in which they had the time and the context to sit and talk and listen and share dreams as a guide to what had to be quite immediate and concrete action. The struggle for re-instatement was imposed on them; it governed what was happening. But they also had the time to develop a much wider agenda - and the context of sharing in which they were the acknowledged creators. The situation gave me the opportunity to watch, talk with and listen to a group of workers who were making their own history, and to whom I had to account. Out of that situation, we wrote a record of their struggle together. It is infused with a spirit of collectivism. We wrote a letter of solidarity to workers in Namibia. The General Meeting sent delegates to other strikes to carry messages of support. It seemed as if every 'worker education' organisation in Cape Town came to 'do education'. We discussed the Match Girls' strike of 1888; designed posters; made tea; decided on slogans; tried to tackle sexism. We heard reports from and gave mandates to lawyers, and cooked and cleaned. Had there been goats nearby, I think we would have herded them in the afternoons. At the time I wrote: "(W)e have approached workers, knowing and acting as if they have expertise. We have focussed our education work on their experience and what they know. We have seen the consequences of this: pride and confidence in seeing their own words and their own experience and feelings portrayed as knowledge to be shared by others. And we have seen that this in turn promotes a search for knowledge and development and growth and progress." I have not changed my mind since then.

The dismissed workers represented what was happening to a greater or lesser extent amongst many workers in South Africa at that time. It was reflected in processes and programmes of subversive education tightly woven into the worker's movement. You qualified for entrance through willingness to be part of the collective in struggle. You progressed to "higher certificates because you were there", participating in the collective that was moving. Workers searched themselves, memory, each other, history, experience in other countries for ideas and knowledge. Nothing and no-one fell outside the intellectual embrace and the critical scrutiny of workers who built the confidence together to break through the ways in which the society around them trivialised their knowledge and denigrated their capacities. We had to share and find and develop and use knowledge drawing on each other and all possible resources. Education had to challenge elitism and break through a gender, racial and hierarchical division of labour to allow access to socially useful skills; experiential knowledge had to be affirmed and respected; workers had to be allowed the resources

to develop talents and the opportunities to nurture them. There was a deeply **inclusive** spirit - the demands of the time ended with **for all**: re-instatement **for all** the dismissed workers; jobs **for all**; a living wage **for all.** Together these and other features made up a subversive tradition of worker education - directly and explicitly politically challenging to both apartheid and the capitalist system which it protected.

Part of the core of the development of a progressive workers education movement was the broader political context in which workers, their knowledge, what they did, their social weight - were all affirmed. Individual workers had places to bring their individual experiences and thoughts and **share** them. If they contributed and met needs, they were appropriated as the thoughts of hundreds and thousands. This created an alternative way of seeing who is the prominent individual and another way of defining individual prominence. It created the possibility of individual prominence for the ordinary worker in specific situations - not only the richest, or the best trained, or the best known or the most powerful. It is an individual prominence which depends for its existence on the collective and the individual as part of the collective. Without that context the knowledge of millions of ordinary workers in many different situations would have been wasted. There was a vision of the future based on the **alternatives** being created in the present. It was a vision of the time in which collectives of ordinary workers could control the decisions affecting their own lives and the resources created with their own labour. We called it by the name of socialism. It was a totalising vision and it is impossible for me to believe that the struggle could have moved so far, nor that it can move decisively further, without it.

The Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch has said that to be human is to have utopias. He argued that thinking means venturing beyond. Trotsky has written of the way in which revolution is characterised by ordinary workers interfering. All of this was there to be seen, as collectives of workers confronted the range of issues which confronted them and acted together to make and change history. Is this a romanticised version of what happened? Partial? Yes. This was a struggle in the context of a brutal state of emergency in an exploitative, violent, patriarchal society. I am talking about possibilities which were created in struggle exactly because workers confronted those harsh realities every day. They were searching for alternatives, trying to venture beyond, trying to build something else - despite all of this, against all of this.

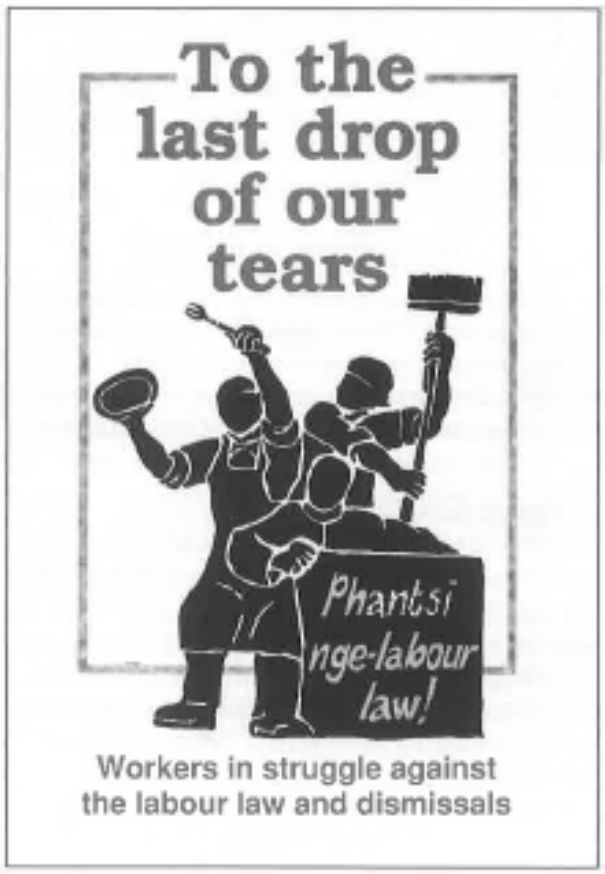
Changes, continuities and challenges

Since that time, the movement of resistance in South Africa has secured many changes which not long ago were considered beyond reach. Specifically in relation to workplace education and training: there is major funding through the Department of Labour; for its own reasons and sometimes as a result of consistent pressure, capital is putting resources into workplace education programmes; there is a new education and training levy; a new National Qualifications Framework includes recognition of prior learning and foregrounds Adult Basic Education and Training; people with "struggle histories" are in key decision-making positions.

It seems like a situation in which social needs can be addressed, with whatever limitations of resources: not simply the need to extend formal training and education to those denied, them but also the need to create spaces for the previously wasted and denied knowledge, and suppressed potential of millions of the most 'marginalised' and 'vulnerable'. There are several people in the workplace-learning industry now who have come out of that history. Like progressive worker education activists across the world, they based themselves on sharing, affirmation and respect for already existing knowledge and a belief that educational processes and knowledge should be directed towards meeting the needs of "the poorest of the poor". They became involved in the workplace-learning industry to promote the values that we fought for in the past and dreamed of seeing realised in the future. In important senses, we are in that future. Immense changes have been won. It is impossible to minimise the size of those changes exactly because to do so would be to minimise the size of the obstacles and the size of the achievement of workers and their allies in overcoming those obstacles. Yet so much of the lived experience of ordinary workers is characterised by continuity of what they struggled to change. None of the changes would have happened without a movement of struggle which could draw on the knowledge of millions of people, give them a place where they could bring and develop that knowledge, and the context of respect which allowed them to use it and share it in the struggle for a collective alternative. But can we say that those values are guiding and framing the workplace learning industry in its everyday activities?

Time will tell. But it is people who make and give life to policies, not time. And time has already told us that when progressive goals are subjected to the overriding drive for profit, they are undermined and obstructed, not advanced. We can see it in the continuities of poverty, unemployment and deeply structured inequalities which are how millions of people across the world experience globalisation. Together with apparently progressive changes is going the insistence on a 'neo-liberal' policy framework to which they are increasingly subordinated - a framework which revolves around exactly the capitalist notions of productivity, international competitiveness, individualism and careerism that the COSATU education delegates warned against. We are seeing the development of a workplace-learning industry infested with the values of the market. The progressive tradition is being submerged, its historical existence even denied.

It is not unusual now to hear calls to revisit earlier worker education and draw on its traditions. But it is also not unusual to meet a desire to avoid 'totalising visions' and just get on with work on the ground. In a sense, it is the cry of the refugee from post-modernism seeking to escape its cynicism and take some refuge from incredulity about everything. Much as some of us might like to get on and do things without totalising visions, if we do not choose our own agendas, we are simply fitting into someone else's. If we do not challenge the competitive individualism and hierarchy which dominate, we end up at best conforming and more often endorsing them. If we adopt the principles of the market at one point, we undermine our capacity to struggle against their consequences at another. We end up with a notion of progress which both rests on "the best educated" and reduces its message to the rank and file to simply this: to be respected, acknowledged, affirmed as a rank and file worker, you must rise out of the rank and file. If there is any use for collectivism and solidarity, it is to provide the avenue through which you can rise beyond it through competitive individualism. Others would add: you are lucky to have a job anyway. This is itself a totalising vision of profound hopelessness - indeed the totalising vision of late capitalism imposed on millions of people and confirmed in every day experience across the world. A progressive worker education challenges each and all aspects of that.



Workers in struggle against the labour law and dismissals

The strong person is not someone who makes a nice story that is not true.
The strong person is the one who can see the truth and still be there in the struggle.

Reclaiming and sharing to build

The sounds of the dismissed workers were beautiful sounds - the sounds of ordinary workers collectively learning, teaching, sharing, asserting, demanding, asking, interfering, challenging - becoming what they could become. It created a context in which impossible things were made possible - and whatever remained apparently impossible started to seem less so. We made each other brave enough to dream and hope of something different; we were emboldened to say no. Like millions of other workers in similar situations, they have given us a legacy which we can claim and must reclaim. In the height of the struggle there was a blossoming of collective vision which went far beyond the constraints of everyday life: it was born in the struggle against them; it had to venture beyond them exactly because they were intolerable.

Of course those of us who had the chance to be part of a time with more hope wish for that to happen again. But we must make sure that we have the ears and eyes which can also see the hope in struggles which are new and renewed. Then what was once built in struggle is rescued as a legacy to be used moving forward. I do not mean to suggest that it is educators who can decide the course of history; but we can decide what we do and don't do. There must be papers and conferences in that struggle but it will live and move finally only as a struggle against all aspects of the pervasive market politics of 'neo-liberalism'. The task then is to reclaim the link which made education progressive only to the extent and only because it was organically connected with collective struggle and the needs and interests of ordinary workers. We are challenged to reclaim the courage to dream; to stop apologising for the vision and hope which guided our work. Remembering and sharing memories of a progressive tradition is a necessary part of the struggle to reclaim it. Reclaiming it has to become a useful part of the struggle to do more - to build on it.

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Popular education and the Landless People's Movement in Brazil

'In the world of football, Brazil are the oppressors and Scotland the oppressed. In two weeks time, when they play each other in the world cup, if Paulo Freire had been alive he would surely have been supporting Scotland?'. When I, a humble Scot, proposed this theory in São Paulo, in May '98, at a public celebration of the life and work of Freire*, three hundred Brazilians immediately yelled back 'no way!'. It was different, though, when I went to an MST (Landless People's Movement) 'encampment' in Porto Alegre: a large group of male and female football aficionados were emphatic that they wanted Scotland to win, though this had nothing to do with our 'third-world' footballing status. 'If Brazil do well in the world cup', they argued, 'the president will bask in the glory and land will disappear off the political agenda. We've worked too hard for that to happen'. Football-mad Brazilians supporting Scotland? This was a memorable example, for me, of the advanced levels of 'critical consciousness' reached by members of the MST.

Another was my visit to the town hall in Porto Alegre where 'experts' were busy debating the future of Brazil. I was surprised to see the public gallery packed with MST members from the nearby encampment. When the official speeches were over, dressed in their red and white T-shirts and traditional, baseball-style hats, proffering great humility and respect, these ordinary people, of whom many were illiterate, stood up and debated fearlessly, in public, with a host of eminent politicians and academics before going home to their makeshift, plastic bin-bag tents. Confidence and skill of this nature comes from involvement in a movement rather than from sitting in a classroom - 'the movement itself is the school' - but neither is it something which is left to chance: taking the educational dimension of their struggle seriously, the MST is now at the forefront of developments in popular education in Latin America. This article gives a brief background to the MST, highlights aspects of its educational practice and considers its relevance to educators in the UK.

Background on the MST

Several of the poorest peasant organisations in Brazil joined together in 1984 to form the 'Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra' (the 'Landless Rural Workers' Movement'), commonly known as the 'MST': with a membership of around 300,000 families it is one of the largest social movements in Latin America.

Though some 32 million Brazilians are undernourished, the one percent of landowners who own almost half of Brazil leave much of their (fertile) land idle. Against this background, the MST has three main aims: (1) 'Land': its redistribution to those who are willing to live and work on it (an aim legitimised in the Brazilian constitution when land is not 'fulfilling its social function'). (2) 'Agrarian Reform': land is of limited use without the support of other reforms like training, access to credit and a national plan geared towards need rather than profit (3) A 'just society', without which there is little likelihood of meaningful agrarian reform. Accordingly, the MST supports the campaigns of other marginalised groups and attempts to engage the whole of Brazilian society in a dialogue about the country's future.

When the government fails to redistribute land, which is lying idle, hundreds of MST members intensify the pressure by occupying the land and setting up 'encampments'. Lasting anything up to four years, encampments offer a precarious existence to their inhabitants - landowners often take violent reprisals - though they are a valuable experience in collective, democratic organisation. When the MST is successful in legally acquiring land, encampments

become 'settlements' and the challenge is then to prove by example, in the co-operative way settlements are run, that viable, alternative models of rural development are possible. The better settlements manage to do this - sometimes in spectacular fashion - but given the lack of wider agrarian reform it is a constant, uphill struggle. The MST also organises major campaigning events, such as long, countrywide marches to the capital, which offer thousands of MST members a chance to explain their case to the public.

Popular Education in the MST

There are many dimensions to the MST's work in popular education. To highlight a few...

- An education sector was set up in 1987. Quoting thinkers like Freire, Gramsci, Marx and Mart', it developed its own philosophical and pedagogical principles, the first being 'Education for Social Transformation', where education should work for 'a new social order whose principle pillars will be social justice, democratic radicalism and humanist and socialist values' and should 'prepare people to take action as "subjects" of change' (MST, 1996: 6).
- Specific educational demands arise out of the everyday needs of the movement. The encampments stimulate demand for literacy skills (so that people can read what newspapers say about them), organisational and communication skills (to increase effective participation in the running of the encampments) and a need for trained schoolteachers. Settlements typically seek training in technical, agricultural and marketing skills - to help with economic survival - and skills of co-operative self-management.
- The MST runs its own teacher-training courses - but with a difference. Encampments and settlements firstly choose those who should be sent on the courses. In the residential part of the training, reflecting MST aspirations of co-operation and democracy, students are organised into a large co-operative from the start: 'Encouragement, welcome...and that was when, handing over the educational plan for the course, the animator looked us firmly in the eye and said: get organised!' (Caldart, 1997:69). In conjunction with the co-ordinating educational team - some three to six persons - students are expected to take collective responsibility for managing all aspects of educational and domestic tasks such as deciding on timetables and curriculum, participating in collective forms of assessment, organising the cooking and cleaning and running commercial activities for subsidising the course. Through regular dialogue, the co-ordinating group's job is to help students analyse difficulties as they arise and research the educational needs of their particular encampment or settlement.
- Courses on co-operative management and sustainability are based on a similar format of experiential learning, though the demands for economic self-sufficiency are greater. Ironically, the curriculum tends to mix conservative buzzwords like 'markets', 'enterprise' and 'business studies', on the one hand, with the revolutionary ideas of Marx and Guevara, on the other.
- Leadership training for the most committed activists 'always has one foot in school', involves considerable travel to acquire a broader, national perspective on the MST struggle and includes the organisation of campaigning events in which participants are supervised and assessed.
- The relationship between MST and state education is more complex than might be expected. Though it is completely independent of - and is primarily an opponent of - the state, the MST recognises its limitations and supports all campaigns for a properly funded (but politically progressive) national state system of education for all. Some progressive regional authorities even give official recognition to MST teacher-training courses and state-trained student teachers are sometimes sent to see the innovative work being done in encampments and settlements. Sympathetic educationists and academics from the state sector also perform an important advisory role within the MST though it is clear that their job is to serve and not to dictate. The popularity of MST education materials means that they are also widely used in state schools.
- With MST labour, natural materials and financial help from international solidarity organisations, the MST is currently building its own, uniquely designed, residential national education centre. **

Conclusion: Lessons for the UK?

Inevitably, political perceptions affect any research into a movement such as the MST: for me, in considering the merits of its work in education, its strength lies in a combination of three factors. Firstly, hegemonic within

the MST is a radical political culture which links the particular with the general, makes a structural critique of capitalism and aspires towards the transformation of the whole of society: it is not a single-issue campaign working in isolation from other struggles. This culture is important in framing the type of questions pursued within the educational context. Secondly, in actively promoting the principles and practice of popular education - imaginatively adapted to a changing social context - I believe the MST makes genuine efforts to promote democracy and participation, not feed people a 'party line' from above (as has often happened in other left-wing organisations). This combination of open-ended educational enquiry and the politically and culturally radical environment in which it takes place is powerful. Thirdly, the education work is tied to a specific struggle which has the advantage - through the 'carrot' of a piece of land - of offering tangible benefits to its protagonists, a strong incentive for participation. The struggle for land and, when acquired, the attempt to work it successfully, inevitably leads to a questioning of wider, political realities and increased motivation to learn.

The contextual difference between Brazil and the UK is immense and it is difficult to see any immediate, specific lessons for the practice of popular education in the UK. There is no British equivalent of a 'popular movement' to compare with the MST nor a single-issue campaign with similar potential (as 'land' in Brazil) to highlight flagrant social injustice, offer immediate, tangible alternatives and engage society in wider political debate. However, in providing a vision of the possibilities in popular education, the MST is at least a powerful source of inspiration and a stimulus towards creative thinking. It forces us to consider how we can better relate radical adult education to political movements and how we might be more challenging of the state. In a time when governments declare the class war over and educational discourses dance euphemistically around issues of social injustice, I personally find it refreshing to encounter such a large-scale educational project which refuses to play make-believe. Contrary to much fin-de-siècle preaching on the demise of radical alternatives, the MST shows that the vision of a radically better world continues to be a great motivator for change and that the role of popular education is as important as ever: I think this is a heartening message for all educators and activists working for change. On a different note, sadly, I cannot see the day when Scottish football supporters will ever be required to shout for the opposition: it would hardly make any difference, would it?

* At the closing ceremony in São Paulo University of a three day conference run by the Paulo Freire Institute.

** Anyone wishing to help in this campaign should contact Ana Maria Justo on email at: "Escola Nacional Florestan Fernandes" <enacmst@iconet.com.br>

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