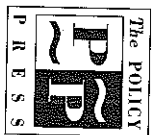# PARTNERSHIP WORKING

## Policy and practice

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Squires, P. and Measor, L. (1996a) *CCTV surveillance and crime prevention in Brighton: Half-yearly report*, Brighton: Health and Social Policy Research Centre, University of Brighton.

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# Partnership – participation – power: the meaning of empowerment in post-industrial society

*David Byrne*

Perhaps never before has the dominant class felt so free in exercising their manipulative practice. Reactionary postmodernity has had success in proclaiming the disappearance of ideologies and the emergence of a new history without social classes, therefore without antagonistic interests, without class struggle. They preach that there is no need to continue to speak about dreams, utopia or social justice....

Weakened religiosity and the inviability of socialism have resulted in the disappearance of antagonisms, the postmodern reactionary triumphantly says, suggesting in his pragmatic discourse that it is now the duty of capitalism to create a special ethics based on the production of equal players or almost equal players. Large questions are no longer political, religious or ideological. They are ethical but in a healthy capitalist sense of ethics....

We, therefore, don't have to continue to propose a pedagogy of the oppressed that unveils the reasons behind the facts or provokes the oppressed to take up critical knowledge or transformative action. We no longer need a pedagogy that questions technical training or is indispensable to the development of a professional comprehension of how and why society functions. What we need to do now, according to this astute ideology, is focus on production without any preoccupation about what we are producing, who it benefits, or who it hurts. (Freire, 1998, pp 83-4)

In this chapter the terms 'empowerment' and 'partnership' will be compared and contrasted. 'Empowerment' will be used as a benchmark against which the claims of 'partnership' will be tested. That is to say 'partnership' will be evaluated according to whether it facilitates, is neutral towards, or has negative consequences for empowerment. The word empowerment will be used specifically in the sense given to it by the Brazilian educator and founder member of the Workers' Party, Paulo Freire. Heaney has summarised this thus:

Empowerment – For poor and dispossessed people, strength is in numbers and social change is accomplished in unity. Power is shared, not the power of a few who improve themselves at the expense of others, but the power of the many who find strength and purpose in a common vision. Liberation achieved by individuals at the expense of others is an act of oppression. Personal freedom and the development of individuals can only occur in mutuality with others. (Heaney, 1995)

'Partnership' does not have this specific kind of intellectual origin. Mayo (1997) reviewed both the dictionary definitions of the term and its meaning in use in contexts of regeneration and community development. She notes that dictionary definitions imply shared interests and that policy makers have tended to focus on something like symbiosis in which the result of partnership is a multiplicative rather than additive outcome – the partners working together achieve more than the sum of them working alone. Mackintosh (1992) suggests a 'transformational model' in which the partners change by adapting towards each other. This is a strange use of the word 'transformation' for anyone coming fresh from reading Freire. For Freire, the purpose of social action is indeed transformation, achieved through 'conscientisation': '... a process of developing consciousness, but consciousness that is understood to have the power to transform reality" (Taylor, 1993, p 52). People act together collectively not to change each other or become like each other but because they are already like each other (Marx's classes in themselves). Through collective action (classes for themselves) they transform the oppressive social structures that block the fulfilment of their human potential.

In the long passage from Freire, which serves as epigraph to this chapter, perhaps the key phrase is 'antagonistic interests'. What are the antagonistic interests in the contexts in which 'partnership' is being proposed as the panacea for the solution of problems of urban social disorganisation and social exclusion? A neat summary runs thus:

There is a crisis at the heart of British Democracy. Freedom and the right to dissent have been curtailed. This arises from the fact that it is in the interests of international capital to turn as many activities as possible into a commodity which can be bought and sold.... The international market is becoming the arena which determines every aspect of the nation's political decision making. (Blunkett and Jackson, 1987, p 1)

David Blunkett was then, as now, MP for a Sheffield constituency and is now Secretary of State for Education and Employment. It is therefore appropriate to conduct the evaluation of partnership as process against the benchmark of empowerment in relation to the form and content of Education Action Zones (EAZs). These are a key programme of Blunkett's department and a good example, because the issues in the selected zones are typically those of marginalisation and 'fourth world' status. Moreover, EAZs are intended specifically to address educational issues and Freire's programme has always centred on education as a key process of conscientisation.

The useful phrase 'fourth world' is an explicit analogy with 'third world' and refers to places and lives in metropolitan capitalism that are as marginalised/underdeveloped as those of the 'third world' of the South. Note that here the term 'underdeveloped' is not simply an adjective. It is used in Cleaver's sense (1979) to describe a process through which capital reconstructs metropolitan social relations by creating places and ways of living which have much in common with those of marginalised lives in the third world, and does so in order to facilitate accumulation by capitalists. The implication of this is stark. It suggests a convergence between what has conventionally been thought of as the third world and the first world, with parts of the latter becoming like the former. This is what Therborn has called 'the Brazilianisation of Advanced Capitalism' (1985). In other words, rather than São Paulo becoming like the welfare capitalist Newcastle of the 1960s, Newcastle is becoming like São Paulo.

In practice, in post-industrial capitalism the marginalised are, in fact, a crucial component of the reserve army of labour (see Byrne, 1999) but the term still has value in distinguishing a component of that reserve army by reference to the processes that created it. Freire puts it like this:

'... marginality is not by choice, marginal people have been expelled from and kept outside of the social system and are therefore the object of violence"(1972, p 27). ('People' replaces 'men' in the original in accordance with Freire's own later practice.)

## West Newcastle – a marginalised but partnered place

West Newcastle is a palimpsest of urban projects going back to the Community Development Project (CDP) days of the mid-1970s. Among other things it is the location of an EAZ. That project and its activities illustrate 'partnership' in practice. The four inner west wards of Newcastle have all lost more than 30% of their population since 1971 and all score highly in terms of indices of social deprivation, incidence of crime, and void housing. The schools serving the area have very low achievements in terms of public examinations.

The history of this derives from a combination of deindustrialisation and loss of unionised unskilled and semiskilled jobs, the relocation of both what is left of the old blue collar skilled, and the new white collar proletariats, to new residential areas on and beyond the urban fringe, and the particular dynamics of Newcastle's urban policy over a 40-year period, during which commercial city-centre activities have always been given priority over the provision of adequate and well-delivered public services in working-class residential areas. A key indicator is provided by house prices in this area. The same flat built from the same pattern book at the same time by the same builder will cost £75,000 just two miles away in Jesmond, a middle-class part of the city.

### Education Action Zones – partnership for personal development?

An EAZ is a radical new concept based on a cluster of about twenty primary, secondary and special schools in a local area. The zone is run by a forum of business, parents, schools, the local authority and community organisations. For example:

- businesses can be involved in providing leadership, advice or services to the zone;
- parents can get involved in making sure that the schools in their area provide a high quality service, and that in return the schools get the support they need from the community. (Secretary of State, 1998)

The objective of EAZs is to raise the standards of performance, measured in terms of the conventional indicators of educational success, of children in deprived areas. The purpose is to improve the life chances of pupils by breaking a continuing cycle of intergenerational educational deprivation. In Newcastle this is operationalised thus:

- raising percentage of pupils getting five A–C GCSE passes from 16.5 to 28.5 by 2002/2003;
- reducing percentage of pupils with no GCSE passes from 25 to 5;
- raising attendance rates by 3% per year;
- significant (not defined) reduction of school exclusions by 2002/2003.

Most of the partners in this project are local and include a range of educational institutions, quangos, and Newcastle United Football Club. A major exception is the US-domiciled private corporation The Pacific Institute.

Much of the debate about EAZs has centred on the prospect that the actual delivery of educational services might be undertaken by for-profit corporations. This is not the issue with the involvement of The Pacific Institute in Newcastle. The company does not deliver educational services as such. Rather, it deals in training for personal motivation. To quote its website:

> The Pacific Institute is an international corporation specialising in personal and professional growth, change management and leadership development. The guiding principle of The Pacific Institute is that individuals have virtually unlimited capacity for growth, change and creativity, and can readily adapt to the tremendous changes taking place in this technological age.

The mission statement reads:

> We affirm the right of all individuals to achieve their God-given potential. The application of our education empowers people to recognise their ability to choose growth, freedom and personal excellence. We commit ourselves to providing this education through all means that are just and appropriate.

The intellectual foundations of the approach lie in cognitive psychology and social learning theory.

It would be inappropriate to demonise this company, which seems a perfectly straightforward and above-board operation. However, it is necessary to examine the premises on which it works and which are

being imported into the Newcastle EAZ. These focus on individual achievement and social adjustment to change. Empowerment is understood as an individual process in line with the psychological foundations of The Pacific Institute's approach. There is no social analysis or collective objective. This is a profoundly Protestant approach in contrast to the continuing collectivism of the Catholic tradition that gave rise to Freire.

## Social politics and policy – and the 'individualist fallacy'

The 'individualist fallacy' informing The Pacific Institute's version of empowerment is pervasive in contemporary social politics and social policy. This reflects the importance of both possessive individualism as a doctrine in Western political philosophy and the aesthetic endorsement of individual as realised self, characteristic of urban Western elites. In an otherwise excellent critique of the relationship between the 'New Labour ethic and the spirit of capitalism' Rustin asserts that under the kind of new managerialism represented by EAZs: "Education ceases to be defined as the development of the potentialities of the individual and becomes the achievement of measurable competences" (2000, pp 124–5). There is no sense, even in his radical discussion, of education as a collective activity for transformation – the essence of Freire's approach.

An examination of EAZ documentation reveals an interesting set of assumptions about how they will work. Firstly, the partnerships have only local tactical discretion. They do not have the power to specify strategic objectives. Those are laid down centrally and specified in terms of raising traditionally conceived standards through enhancing individual achievement. The discretion of local action forums is confined to modifying methods of implementation. Secondly, the vocabulary always assigns something to pay attention to in any analysis influenced by Freire, assigns very different statuses to business as opposed to the parents and the community. Business will lead. Its methods, obviously superior to those of the traditional public sector, may be adopted to replace current practice. Parents and the community, however, are not seen as 'leading'. Their task is to help, to facilitate, to make the process work, not to determine what the project is to be about.

The recently published *National strategy for neighbourhood renewal: A framework for consultation* (2000) does seem to recognise that issues of control matter. In the foreword to which Prime Minister Tony Blair put his name, it is noted that: "Unless the community is fully engaged in shaping

and delivering regeneration, even the best plans on paper will fail to deliver in practice". However, there is no mention anywhere else in the more than one hundred pages of this document of community involvement of shaping, as opposed to facilitating, delivery of programmes developed externally. (For further discussion of the strategy, see also Chapters One and Two.)

Discussions of 'partnership' often refer to different stake- or powerholders. In their Introduction the editors of this collection distinguish between 'variable' and 'zero-sum' concepts of power and relate the former to the current fad for 'capacity building'. If there is a fundamental antagonism of interest then power is always a zero-sum game because antagonists cannot yield power to the other side without losing their own capacity to determine that outcomes serve their purpose. In an individual achievement frame of reference – in other words if everybody with a potential interest agrees that what matters is that some children will succeed – then there can be collaboration and 'capacity building'. However, if some of the participants challenge this approach, even in ways that would lie within traditional parameters of social reform, then no such accommodation is possible.

Riley and Watling in discussing EAZs remark that: "The application process induces authorities and communities into a public confession of inadequacy and, like all confessions, it first absolves the powerful of any role in the creation of the problem" (1999, p 56). Not only are the powerful 'absolved' from responsibility for the creation of the situation, they are given even more power in relation to its resolution. This is an excellent illustration of the implications of urban regime theory (see Judge et al 1995), which argues that democratic mandate and accountability are no longer the basis of the contemporary management of local affairs. Instead, urban policy is determined by the power of actors in often informal coalitions of interests. This inevitably privileges the already privileged.

It is not so surprising that partnerships are to be found in processes of physical redevelopment where large amounts of private capital, supplemented of course by massive public subsidy, are required for new construction. In EAZs, however, the private sector comes in with at best relatively trivial sums of money, but is given power because it represents what is good and progressive. Rustin considers that: "...corporate capitalism is the dominant driving force to which New Labour seeks to adapt British society, and ...it offers it a model style of political leadership for this reason" (2000, p 116). To this can be added the very real potential

for long-term accumulation through the handing of public services to private capital. In the short term this is creating a new politics – the longer-term implications may involve a complete transformation of welfare provision and local administration.

## Empowerment in action

In benchmarking the partnership component of EAZs against the standard of empowerment, there is a real working example to consider as a standard. Freire took on the job of Secretary of Education (equivalent to Director of Education in the UK) for the city of São Paulo under the Workers' Party administration of the early 1990s. Of course scale is different. São Paulo is the second-largest city in the world with a population half as large as that of the whole of England. However, the issues faced were in many respects the same, something which would not surprise Freire after his experience of internal division in the 'first' world in the 1970s and which reflects the real degree of "Brazilianisation of Advanced Capitalism" which has already occurred in places like Newcastle.

Harold Reynolds Jnr, former Commissioner of Education for Massachusetts, specified the problem Freire faced when he: "...confronted again the awful struggles to get the resources to make education work for all children" (Freire, 1993, p 9). Indeed Reynolds went further and argued that:

Public schools in São Paulo and Boston [and Newcastle] also need protection from 'Education Presidents' and 'Education Governors' [and Education Prime Ministers'] who have benefited from selected expensive schools, colleges and universities designed to produce a cultivated elite to manage and govern an essentially static society. (Freire, 1993, p 11)

The flavour of Freire's approach is indicated by the following statement:

... to argue in favour of the active presence of pupils, pupils' fathers, pupils' mothers, security people, cooks, and custodians in program planning, content planning, for the schools, as the São Paulo administration of Luiza Erundina does, does not mean denying the indispensable need for specialists. It only means not leaving them as the exclusive 'proprietors' of a basic component of educational practice. It means democratising the power of choosing content, which is a necessary extension of the debate over the most democratic way of dealing with content, of proposing it to the apprehension of the educands instead of merely transferring it from the educator to the educands. This is what we are doing in the São Paulo Municipal Secretariat of Education. It is impossible to democratise the choice of content without democratising the teaching of content. (1998, p 110)

This is not a proposal for free unstructured learning. On the contrary it demands enormous self-discipline and engagement from all involved in the processes of education because they have to establish both what is to be taught and how it is to be taught. Neither is Freire – a man who began teaching as an adolescent by tutoring his fellow pupils in Portuguese grammar and who was appalled by the common US practice of specifying sections of books to be read by graduate students rather than whole texts – in any way arguing for a relaxation of intellectual rigour in terms of content. What he is arguing for is a difference in purpose.

## Opposition of 'banking education' and 'dialogic education'

Here it is useful to draw on Freire's opposition between 'banking education' and 'dialogic education'. Banking education deposits knowledge in the passive learner and presents a selective rather than global account of reality. The learner is an object, not only of the process of education itself but also as an object being made for purposes external to the learner and the learner's human nature; the teacher is a toolmaker – the learner is a tool being shaped for a task. Taylor (1993) identifies this as an inherently Manichean position. The Manichean doctrine of opposites is a source for dialectical reasoning in Western thought. In Freire, influenced by the young Marx, dialectical reasoning of course also becomes dialectical practice. Heaney defines Freire's conception of dialogical learning thus: "The dialogical approach to learning is characterised by co-operation and acceptance of interchangeability and mutuality in the roles of teacher and learner. In this method, all teach and all learn" (1995).

In west Newcastle the proposals are for banking education – for the development of a system that produces more people fit for work in the post-industrial economy typified by the non-unionised, panoptical call centre. Call centre staff need the level of basic education represented by five A–C grades at GCSE but they do not need to be equipped to question the organisation or objectives of the social system of which the call centre is a part.

For any given individual in west Newcastle, reaching the standard of education required for lower-middle-class employment is a real achievement and certainly enhances personal life chances. However, the personal response of such individuals – wholly rational and understandable: I would do exactly the same – is to use their comparatively better and more secure wages to depart as fast as their legs can take them from the poor locales of west Newcastle and relocate to a pleasanter and more stable residential area. In other words, people rise from their community not with it. It has to be said that the output objectives of Newcastle's EAZ are rather realistic even in terms of banking education. They propose achievement levels that are only two-thirds of the current national level. Three quarters of west Newcastle's children will still be educational failures in 'banking' terms.

Freire's programme for São Paulo is described in *Pedagogy of the city* (1993), the first part of which is entitled 'Education for liberation in a contemporary urban area'. He argues both for a relevant education that utilises the experiences of the pupils but is by no means a degraded and inferior education, and for an education that derives its purposes from the objectives of those who are engaged in it. It is plain that the actual programmes in São Paulo, in which the municipal budget was directed towards good basic primary education, were essentially and straightforwardly redistributive. They presented some educational opportunity to the children of the poor.

## Back to Newcastle

West Newcastle is not São Paulo but the tendencies of globalisation are making the two places converge. West Newcastle has had formal state education for all for more than 100 years. That said, it now has a high level of functional illiteracy. Indeed observation suggests that the contemporary young poor are far more likely to be functionally illiterate than their grandparents. This is despite the existence of state primary schools funded on the same basis as everywhere in the city as a whole.

Certainly, in relative terms, west Newcastle's children are in much the same position as the poor children of São Paulo. Moreover, there is no political system that tries to engage those children and their parents in the determination of the form and objectives of educational provision. Most parents in west Newcastle, and all children, have no channel through which they can in any way influence even the 'implementation' agenda

of the EAZ and, as has been pointed out, the strategic objectives are not something that have in any way been determined locally.

What is evidentially absent from partnership in Newcastle's EAZ is any notion that the system should be directed by the people who participate in it. In notable contrast with Freire's ideas, pupils are not even considered as potential partners. Parents and the community are present at least nominally. The parents on the local forum do have some representative accountability in that they are drawn from elected parental governors, even if those involved in the management of the zone are not directly elected to the action forum. There are no mechanisms through which action forum members, supposedly representing it, are even indirectly accountable to it. Local councillors are elected but turnout in the inner west Newcastle wards is below 20%, which indicates the scale of the crisis in the usual mechanisms of democratic representation.

Whether, in fact, west Newcastle is a 'community' is debatable. As in Wacquant's Parisian banlieues, (1993, p 374) we may be dealing with what he calls "an impossible community", by which he means that, rather than affirming collective identity and hence committing to collective action, people deny common status, affirm external negative views of their neighbours, and go for strategies of exit rather than solidaristic transformation. The Newcastle EAZ's methods and objectives would seem likely to reinforce rather than act against the rational pursuit of such personal strategies.

This kind of social intervention is a deeply contradictory process. On the one hand there is no doubt that the logics of contemporary business-led capitalist public policy do want good call centre fodder. On the other, the same logics also require a flexible and threatening reserve army of labour in order to discipline workers. In addition there are the problems of order posed by disorganised neighbourhoods like west Newcastle.

It is perfectly true that the injection in west Newcastle of large public order resources and some innovative, indeed rather dialogical, policing practices have led to a relative decline in burglary rates. However, the situation is still so extreme that an important part of Newcastle's 'Going for Growth' strategy involves the wholesale demolition of 4,000 social housing units in an effort to redefine the social status of the whole area. The objective is to attract middle-income households back into the area. Here we have a good old-fashioned contradiction. Banking education can lead to personal mobility but personal mobility increases the potential for anomic disorder among the residuum, among those left behind. This is the short-term problem. In the medium term there is the likelihood of

other order problems consequent on the technological redundancy of the white-collar factories typified by call centres. EAZs are an explicitly short-term policy.

## Is empowerment possible?

A note of caution is in order. Page reminds us that when we talk about empowerment we should remember that:

... social work techniques of this kind may prove to be more beneficial to facilitators and educators who wish to cling on to the vestiges of a personally rewarding form of 'radical' practice rather than to those disadvantaged members of the community for whom the promise of a better tomorrow appears to be as far away as ever. (1992, p 92)

Certainly it is easy to mount critiques of the application of Freirian ideas in practice (see Facundo, 1984). However, it is notable that such critiques precede Freire's own active engagement in social politics through the Workers' Party, with its genuinely transformative objective of social change, and relate largely to a very partial application of his approach in community projects that did not engage at all with the structural character of the societies within which they are embedded.

More seriously, any effort at collective transformation in the contemporary UK must confront the alternative programme expressed in its extreme form by Margaret Thatcher in her assertion that there is no such thing as society, only individuals and families, and endorsed in a modified form by Tony Blair and his wife when they succeeded in modifying Labour's entire educational policy in order to facilitate the educational achievement of their own children. The Blairs may well believe that there is such a thing as society but it comes a poor third after individual and family.

This is a common contemporary position for people looking at the educational prospects of their own children in the UK. The introduction of parental rights in terms of choosing the schools that their children attend means that an important part of the management of domestic life lies in facilitating access to 'good schools'. Balls et al (1995) have shown that there are two approaches to 'parental choice'. Firstly, there is an overwhelmingly working-class fatalistic localism in which people accept their local schools. Secondly, there is a middle-class cultural form to which many working-class people subscribe, of active organisation of

choice in order to maximise performance potential. The third strategy, purchasing private education, requires very substantial resources. In Newcastle, private secondary education requires payments per child per year of about £8,000 from taxed income.

Parental choice is a big issue in west Newcastle. People in the western suburban fringe of the city send their children to the Northumberland schools beyond the city boundary, freeing places in their local schools that are taken in a kind of domino effect by families from the working-class inner west wards fleeing *their* local schools. Gateshead's City Technology College's catchment area extends into west Newcastle and this high-achieving institution selects part of its intake by interview from the children of the area.

In a social context dominated by these kinds of practices, one must admire parents in places like west Newcastle who make a commitment to the improvement of standards in their local schools and send their children to them. That said, the proposed achievement targets set for west Newcastle's schools are meagre. Certainly only a tiny proportion of children attending those schools will ever achieve the educational performance levels necessary for entry into the university in which I teach and which is only 20 miles from their home. What is being offered is banking education for individual mobility but for the overwhelming majority, even of the minority who 'succeed' – the target is for only two thirds of the national average level of five A–C GCSEs achievement – mobility will be very short range. Most, of course, will still 'fail' to reach even that standard.

The social structure that generates poverty generates its own shabby educational system to serve it; and while it is useful to attack the symptom, the disease itself will continually find new manifestations if it is not understood and remedied. The solution to poverty involves, of course, the redistribution of income, but more than that, it requires the redistribution of effective social power. Self-confidence, no less than material welfare, is a crucial lack of the poor, and both can only be won by effective joint action. More contentiously, it seems to us that educational provision alone cannot solve even the problem of educational poverty, if only because in this sphere there are no purely educational problems. (Coates and Silburn, 1970)

In nominal terms, subject to the vagaries of resource allocation among local authorities, there has been very substantial change in the educational

system in the UK since that passage was written. There is almost universal provision of at least nominal comprehensive secondary education. Funding on a formula basis is supposed to allocate equal resources to all children in the state system, although even at its highest level this is still less than a third of that available in the private system from fee income and charitable status. What has manifestly not been redistributed is power, other than the consumer power of individual households in exercising 'parental choice'.

A Freirian approach to the issues being confronted in EAZs would have to begin with the transfer of control of strategic objectives to the parents and children in the schools. Note that Freire's description of empowerment is prescriptive, take it or leave it. Empowerment for that social being had to be collective – it could not be about individual success while others were left to fail. That given *a priori*, then how empowerment would be achieved was up to the people concerned.

Of course Freire, like the political party he helped to found, had a view of the social order which was based on a fundamental notion of antagonism. The interests of business and poor working-class – or indeed even affluent working-class – people are not the same. The poverty of the poor working class and the general insecurity of the whole of the working class are preconditions of the prosperity of business through accumulation in flexible capitalism. Freire had learnt this himself in the process of being transformed from a liberal Christian social reformer to an adherent of liberation theology. He had no problems with this account of social reality because the exploited poor had taught it to him. He was their pupil in these matters. This means that there are no 'liberal' solutions to the issues being addressed by EAZs.

## Conclusion

Is empowerment possible? The answer would seem to be: not through partnership, because that at best attempts to reconcile irreconcilables and at worst, which means usually in practice, offers the objects of policy, at the very most, some role in influencing the implementation of strategies that have already been decided on. This is incorporation, not partnership.

What might empowered education look like in west Newcastle in the early years of the 21st century? Well, it would be education for change, not for stasis. Moreover, it could not be developed in isolation from other programmes of social change and could not be developed merely in the zones of the poor and deprived without any attempt to address the

character of the relationship between those zones and the areas of residence of both the middle masses and the affluent and privileged. Of course it would be education that addressed achievement, but it would also be education that addressed the realities of everyday life. This is much easier said than done! Indeed even as a teacher in a relatively privileged university, I find it difficult to raise issues of criticism with undergraduate students. It is not difficult to do with my MA students who are mostly employed professionals studying on a part-time basis. They have established careers. My undergraduates increasingly want banking education geared to achieving the magic 2:1 and a decent career opportunity. Insecurity is rife even at that level. Perhaps the very uselessness of banking education for most in places like west Newcastle means that a different approach might be easier, although there is no justification whatsoever for imposing segregation on the poor in the interests of their collective future.

Poor people in places like west Newcastle need no instruction in the reality of the system in which they live or in their contemporary powerlessness in the face of it. They neither need nor want tinpot Lenins arriving with a party programme to explain their degradation to them, although making available a language for describing the origins of that degradation is a valid task. What they lack above all else is a sense of capacity for achieving change.

Here the relationship with the middle masses is crucial. Transformational change is always something that is initiated by the upper sections of those suffering from domination and exploitation. Neither liberals nor Leninists have any love for those groups – the aristocracy of labour in Leninist jargon – too stroppy, independent and self-directed for real elites, but the field marshals of the revolution were always the sergeant majors of the old regime. The poor are a disciplining army for the 'middle masses' in contemporary, flexible, post-industrial capitalism. Indeed, the poor and 'middle masses' are not really separate categories because through the life course many people move back and forth between these two statuses. This means that there is really a common interest between middle people and the poor in challenging the form of the contemporary social order. This common interest is the absolutely necessary foundation of any sort of transformational politics today.

Partnership will address none of these realities. This is not merely a matter of the exclusion of the poor from any kind of determinant influence in directing the policies of partnership organisations. That is a symptom. The cause is the irreconcilable difference of interests that exists between exploitative flexible capitalism and those exploited by it.

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