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The Intensification of Neoliberalism and Commodification of Human Need – a Social Work perspective

Abstract:

The drive toward the commodification of human society was first explained by Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto as a manifestation of the territorial expansion of capitalist relations across the globe. While this dimension of capitalist expansion continues apace, this paper discuses the further dimension of the way capitalist social relations are intensified in the contemporary period of neoliberal capitalism. This involves reconstruction of subjectivity in the context of the rolling back of the gains from the post-war Keynesian period. We take a critical look at the deployment of terms such as 'empowerment' and 'resilience' in policy discourses and the way these are being used to reconstruct the relationship between the state and citizenry in this period, and the impact this is having on UK Social Work.

Introduction

It was the radical newness of the global thrust of capitalism during the 19th Century that Marx and Engels (1848) sought to capture in the *Communist Manifesto* when they wrote that:

> The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe... All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilised nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. In place of the old wants, satisfied by the production of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. (Marx & Engels)

The world being described here is one where an old established and relatively stable world was being devoured by the onslaught of new capitalist relations. This is a period where, as Eric Hobsbawm (1996) pointed out in *The Age of Capital 1848-1875*, mounting concentrations of wealth were coupled with the massive displacement of populations and social disruption on a hitherto unimaginable scale. At the core of this process of destructive change is the commodification process, which Marx would go on to describe as one of the most elemental features of capitalism in his later work in *Capital* (1867), characterised as the process whereby the 'use value' of goods, services, ideas and entities is transformed into the monetary 'exchange' value which drives the expansion of capitalism itself.

The contemporary Marxist economist David Harvey has noted that 'Capital is the lifeblood that flows through the body politic of all those societies we call capitalist, spreading out, sometimes as a trickle and others as a flood, into every nook and cranny of the inhabited world' (2010: vi). In this paper we want to consider the idea that there are separate dimensions to the way capital inserts itself into these 'nooks and crannies' of human life. The first dimension of transformation lies in the way capitalist relations are reaching further and further into parts of the globe where they were previously unheard of; the spatial expansion of capitalism. The world Marx and Engels were describing in 1848 was one in which a rapid expansion of the global market was taking place, largely achieved through imperialism and the ruthless exploitation of labour and natural resources in colonies. [1]. Just as centuries old traditions and ways of life were destroyed in the mid 19th century, so the contemporary political economy of neo-liberalism has been built as it has on the destruction and incorporation of the formerly communist countries of the Soviet bloc and China – the so-called 'end of history' (Fukuyama, 1992) – alongside the creation of huge new zones of capitalist development in the post-colonial world in places like India, Brazil and Turkey. The market has also been expanded through the destruction of the 'state socialism' of the post-war settlement, through privatisation and the retrenchment of state welfare, and it is this which has paved the way toward what we would characterise as the second dimension to this intensification of capitalist social relations. Marx and Engels intimate this when they describe capitalism's expansion through the production of "new wants", but it was a facet of commodification that was in its infancy in 1848. This newer dimension in the relentless expansion of market relations involves the remoulding of subjectivity; the process of aligning of personal desire and aspiration with the demands of market based relations; an expansion of capitalism through the exploitation of psychological need. Stuart Hall argued in 2011 in a piece entitled *The March of the Neoliberals*, that what we are seeing at the moment is nothing less that the construction of a new form of capitalist hegemony whose 'ambition, depth, degree of break with the past, variety of sites being colonised, impact on common sense [and] shift in the social architecture' are utterly profound (Hall, 2011). What we want to focus on in this discussion is the way, as welfare states and social protection systems are dismantled, neoliberal structures have called forth a new social imaginary of 'functional' and 'dysfunctional' people. As well as describing the way this works in general terms, we also discuss the way this has impacted on Social Work in the UK.

If neoliberal capitalism is reconstructing subjectivity as we argue, how might we understand the way this works? We would like to suggest that Michel Foucault's concept of 'governmentality' offers a useful starting point. While it remains unclear whether Foucault's work was critical or supportive of neoliberalism (see particularly Zamorra, 2014), his lectures on 'Security, Territory, Population' do provide a way of conceptualising the relationship between the reconstruction of personal subjectivity in relation to the structure of state economic and social policy. Foucault defined

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[1] In his essay *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism (2010)*, writing in the aftermath of the First World War, Lenin describes the function of financial capital in generating profits from imperial colonialism and war, as the final stage of capitalist development to ensure greater profits. Indeed, he characterises the war itself as one essentially of competing capitalist interests.

governmentality as a complex form of power 'which has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument' (2009:107–8).   We would suggest that the term 'security' here is most usefully understood not simply as physical security, but as the continuation of a particular 'way of life'. Foucault's comments on the close relation between these 'economic' and 'security' issues has been developed by the sociologist Mitchell Dean in his book *Governmentality (2010)* where he argues that:

> The notion of population is crucial to the definition of the ends of the government of the state. Yet at the same time, government must be an economic government. To govern properly, to ensure the happiness and prosperity of the population, it is necessary to govern through a particular register, that of *the economy* (2010:28-29)

Dean utilises the concept of 'governmentality' to characterise the way people come to accept an ideology which focuses on the centrality of the economy over all other social questions, as the basis of their 'security'. Hence the logic of privatisation involves 'the construction of "quasi" or artificial markets as a solution to the excessive expenditure, rigidity, bureaucracy and dependency of the welfare state' (2010:175). The policy of personalisation of adult social care is an example of this. Rather than being presented simply a negation of the post-war welfarist settlement, this policy is represented as an enhancement of people's personal freedom on the proviso that they accept the market as the mechanism through which these changes will be enacted. In this sense, personalisation is seen to offer as 'opportunities' for the 'right kind' of people. Susan Hoffman uses the concept of governmentality similarly in her research on sex workers. She understands this as a mechanism of dominance which works by conflating the 'aspirations of individuals with market demands' through the promotion of 'self-enhancement techniques' (2013:2). This involves the interpolation of particular forms of subjectivity in which workers (and her case sex workers) make a virtue of seeing themselves as 'marketable'. Hence in contrast to disciplining modes of governance based primarily on 'physical repression or containment', Hoffman argues that this new form of hegemony is based on the idea of freedoms within and obligations to the market at the level of 'personal interests, desires and aspirations' (Hoffman, 2013:2).

The other side to the dismantling of the welfare state as offering opportunities for the 'right sort' of people, is the characterisation of 'wrong sorts' [2]. Pierre Bourdieu speculated on exactly this question when he argued that a key ideological feature of neo-liberal ideology is based on what he calls a:

> '*racism of intelligence:* today's poor are not poor, as they were thought to be in the nineteenth century, because they are improvident, spendthrift, intemperate...- but because they are dumb, intellectually incapable, idiotic'.

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[2] By the terms 'right and wrong kinds of individual' we are referring to the relative ease and flexibility within neoliberal ideology whereby signification practices become much more contingent and therefore open to mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. For example, where 'foreigners' can be interpolated wholly differently as tourists, migrant labourers, refugees and asylum seekers.

As a form of governmentality, what we are seeing here is the construction of a new common-sense in which the rule of the 'brightest and best' is presented simply as a form of rational economic natural selection (2001:34-35). If this seems an extreme characterisation then consider a speech made by the Conservative London Mayor Boris Johnson in 2013. Johnson stated that "Whatever you may think of the value of IQ tests it is surely relevant to a conversation about equality that as many as 16% of our species have an IQ below 85". As well as the idea that psychometric tests offer an entirely unproblematic measure of intelligence, the remainder of the speech demonstrated exactly what Bourdieu wrote about with the implication that those who score lowly on these tests are inadequate people whose inadequacy means they are incapable of adapting to the brave new world of global competition:

> "No one can ignore the harshness of that competition, or the inequality that it inevitably accentuates, and I am afraid that violent economic centrifuge is operating on human beings who are already very far from equal in raw ability, if not spiritual worth" (Guardian 27/10/13)

In other words there are a class of people who simply do not have the 'intelligence' to adapt to the demands of the contemporary economic order, and that we should face the fact that these people are in economic terms, worthless. As the 'register of the economy' dominates all other concerns, with austerity as its main driver, we are heading toward a reconstructed Social Darwinism as the basis of the next social policy revolution. It was clear in the last election in the UK that these ideas, rather than being confined to a 'lunatic fringe' are now becoming mainstream thinking in the Conservative Party, and one of the most disturbing examples was the Conservative candidate for the seat of Cambridge, Ms Chamali Fernando, who called for the mentally ill to be required to wear wristbands, as these 'would be helpful to police and legal professionals'. (rt.com 15/4/2015).

Social Work entitlements and the Neo-liberal Social Polity

In characterising the 'march of the neoliberals' Stuart Hall has noted that:

> Neoliberalism is grounded in the "free, possessive individual", with the state cast as tyrannical and oppressive. The welfare state, in particular, is the arch enemy of freedom. The state must never govern society, dictate to free individuals how to dispose of their private property, regulate a free-market economy or interfere with the God-given right to make profits and amass personal wealth. State-led "social engineering" must never prevail over corporate and private interests. It must not intervene in the "natural" mechanisms of the free market, or take as its objective the amelioration of free-market capitalism's propensity to create inequality (Hall, 2011)

This intensification of neoliberalism has many manifestations in everyday practices within distinctive disciplinary loci (e.g. health, education, law, policing, media etc.),

but we want to argue here that this quote and the example above both impact direction on Social Work in the UK. One of the distinctive features of Social Work as a profession is the way it is defined through its engagement with those people who exist within those constituencies most excluded and violated by a neoliberal polity. The embodied suffering and distress of these individuals poses an implicit challenge to the self-improving mission of neo-liberal governmentality. In addition Social Work's social justice mission, however imperfectly this has been practiced, is now at odds with the steady process of neo-liberalisation of the state itself. In this context the ideological role of language becomes crucially important in squaring the circle, and appropriating Social Work's historically progressive language of rights and social justice. Susan Watkins has been one of the few commentators to highlight this essentially appropriative aspect of neo-liberalism, noting that:

> 'Whereas Victorian-era laissez-faire tried to hold the line against a coming world of protectionism, the genius of neo-liberalism has lain in *the destruction and expropriation of existing structures and goods*: privatization of utilities, de-unionization of labour, means-testing of universal benefits, removal of tariffs and capital controls. Its positive constructions have been less charismatic: the WTO, shadow banking, workfare, NAFTA. (Watkins, 2010)

While Watkins' analysis concerns organisational structures, we would here like to extend this to a consideration of the 'destruction and expropriation' of Social Work's progressive language as central to the reconstruction of the relationship between the Social Work and its service users in this period. The key focus of our discussion here will be on the terms 'empowerment' and 'resilience'. Our argument is both of these terms have become hostage to the kinds of neoliberal appropriation of progressive left language associated with innovation, freedom, liberty and change, which Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) discuss in their book *The New Spirit of Capitalism*.

In addition to this, the origins of Social Work in the UK lie within the discourse of statist Fabianism and professional expertise which were central to the construction of the creation of the Welfare State in the UK. Indeed key figures involved in designing the UK Welfare state such as Clement Atlee developed his political outlook within the Settlement Movement based at Toynbee Hall in London (Pullen-Sansfacon & Authors Own, 2012, Lavalette et.al. 2007) pointing to the way in which Social Work has not just been one of the key professions within the overall structure of the Welfare State, but indeed one which played a central role in defining the Welfare state itself. It is significant that Social Work's discourse of 'professionalism' was initially an object of criticism for the Left and only later became incorporated in the neoliberal attack on welfare. We have noted the significance of this in our analysis of the rise of a discourse of Service User involvement over the past 20 years where we have argued that a bureaucratic rhetoric of service user involvement is increasingly being deployed as part of an on-going process where the language of progressive social movements has been emptied of its historical meaning and become a passenger on the vehicle of neo-liberal social policy (Authors Own,

2014:103-104). In similar terms Mitchell Dean has noted the way the critique of the Welfare State from the late 1960s and 1970s onwards was associated with the Left and new movements of 'social and cultural emancipation'. These groups saw the welfare state as 'a paternalist mechanism of social control, relying on a uniform provision that is bureaucratic, hierarchical, sometimes coercive and oppressive… [functioning so as] to reproduce not only capitalist social relations also patriarchal divisions of labour and forms of dependency for women' (Dean 2010:180). Alongside these critiques were there also attacks on professional knowledges which were described as 'systems of exclusion, delegitimizing local, folk and alternative forms of knowledge'. The impact of this combined attack on the paternalist structure of welfare and of the legitimacy of professional expertise was Dean argues 'to make the application and use of expert knowledge dependent upon the 'choice' of those formerly regarded as the clients of services' (2010:181). This is a good example of how a seemingly desirable notion of choice and 'customer-focussed' services becomes a Trojan horse for a neoliberal reconfiguration of 'public provision as markets in services and expertise in which the consumer is sovereign' (ibid 2010:181).

It is important to appreciate this period from the late 1970s in the UK as an important moment in which the hegemony of neoliberalism over a welfarist ideology was established. Though this critique came from the left, certainly elements of those movement, which initially challenged the welfare state, retained a Utopian discourse of personal self-realisation which was very much at odds with the neo-liberal objective instituting 'choice' through privatisation of state welfare. For example, as we argue elsewhere, when we look at the history service user movements themselves, such as the Mental Patients Union, many of these developed out of a Marxist critique of psychiatry as a tool of social control (Authors own, 2014). However as John Clarke points out, this ideological reconstruction of welfare has in effect "de-collectivised" service users from being citizens with entitlements to individuals seeking 'choice' in service provision:

> The imagery of choice both condenses and articulates a variety of desires for public service change and improvement – not all of which are about individualised consumerism. But choice links them as though they could be met through the singular means of empowering citizen-consumers to make choices (2005:450).

Empowerment

The ideological thrust of neoliberalism as we have presented this represents a deepening of commodification through the combination of changes in organisational structures accompanied by changes in personal subjectivity. Services dealing with basic human needs of vulnerable people are now understood within a logic of 'market based' relations, and in the second half of this paper we want to explore in more detail the way these mechanisms work themselves out as well as the possible implications for some of the most vulnerable people in our society. To do this we

are looking specifically at two key linked ideas which have been important in Social Work, namely 'empowerment' and 'resilience'.

The concept of 'empowerment' was developed within progressive social movements of the 60s onwards as means of emphasising the importance of personal and collective agency in processes of social change. As far back as 1991 Mullender and Ward expressed scepticism about the way this term had entered the Social Work lexicon as something of a new 'portmanteau term' (Mullender and Ward; 1991). Their concern was that the term meant different things to different groups. As the neo-liberal framework of governance has gained ground, this older collective meaning has virtually disappeared; to be 'empowered' now has come to mean rejecting statist 'paternalism' and developing the capacity to act 'on your own'; that is within a defined market of consumer choices. As Clarke has noted, the new ideal citizen is one who seeks to be an 'independent agent, rather than a dependant subject' (Clarke, 2005:450), who want to 'decide for themselves' rather than expecting the government to provide for them. This problem with this ideal of the 'empowered citizen' is that it is based on assumptions about individual capacities, wants and needs which are based on an elision of the reality of those new forms of exclusion and division which themselves a consequence of neo-liberalism. For much Social Work practice, this ideal bears little relationship to experiences of work with service users. It is out of this disjuncture that a new distinction between the functional and the dysfunctional, the deserving and undeserving, returns with a vengeance. The social policy analyst Bill Jordan has argued that under contemporary conditions where the gains of the post war welfare state have been so substantially eroded, a new version of what it means to be a 'good citizen' has emerged accordingly:

> In relation to mainstream citizens, the government is trying to nurture and develop certain psychological characteristics – motivation, self-esteem, confidence, entrepreneurship and self-development…to promote a self-improving form of citizenship [which] works on each individual to get them to have the right attitudes toward themselves, and to make the most of every opportunity that comes their way…Self-improvement, through work and in our private lives, becomes a requirement of citizenship (Jordan, 2004:9).

Jordan notes that these expectations are manifest through things such as education, where we are expected to 'want the best' for our children, through health services, where we are expected to do all we can to maximise our own and our families' physical and mental health, and as workers, where we are expected to make ourselves as employable and flexible as possible. Following Foucault, Jordan calls this new approach to citizenship a "project of the self". Against the universalism of the Welfare state, the new ideal is to be someone who never needs these services, which come to be seen as implying failure or inadequacy. Those who require this help come to be understood not as people whose capacity for self realisation is impeded by particular sorts of structural inequalities, but rather as problematic individuals who need to be 'motivated and instructed in how to get their projects of the self-started' (2004:9). Jordan notes that there is an irony about Social Work's

rhetoric about empowerment, since as statutory agencies have their budgets cut they can barely carry out any preventative or therapeutic work. Under such circumstances, social workers find themselves in something of a double bind. On the hand they are seeking to 'empower' service users toward projects of the autonomy and self-development, whilst on the other, are tasked with 'controlling those deviant and self-destructive aspects of resistance strategies (crime, drugs, benefit fraud, self harm, mental illness)' (Jordan, 2004:10).

Being 'empowered' thus comes to be positioned as an imperative of good citizenship in the landscape of contemporary health and social welfare interventions. Karen Baistow has argued in similar terms that in the current period:

> Taking control of one's life, or particular aspects of it, is not only seen as being intimately connected with the formation or reformation of the self as empowered, it is increasingly becoming an ethical obligation of the new citizenry. Not being in control of your everyday living arrangements, your time, your diet, your body, your health, your children, suggests there is something seriously wrong with your ethical constitution (1994:37).

This ideological reconstruction allows those who experience poverty, depression, poor housing or dysfunctional relationships, to be understood as people who have failed to empower themselves and solve their "own" problems. And if they are unable to do this, then they need professional interventions, often of a punitive nature. It is here that the definition of empowerment within the neo-liberal policy universe takes on a morally regulatory dimension which completely strips away the collective dimension through which the term was developed, which was concerned with a progressive and democratic critique of the state. In a context of the state seeking to divest itself of historic responsibilities for redressing social problems, the appropriated discourse of empowerment becomes a mode of governmentality through which those seen to be 'intelligent' and 'responsible' enough to aspire to this new form of citizenship become the new 'deserving', with those whose circumstances and experiences make this problematic, the new 'undeserving'.

Resilience

If the neoliberal appropriation of the concept of 'empowerment' has functioned to obscure the nature of social and economic power and powerlessness, then the appropriation of the closely related idea of 'resilience', as we will argue, points towards an even more sinister response to human need. Essentially, these terms are linked in one critical way: empowerment is understood as a process whereby socially excluded groups are provided with external 'goods' and 'resources' to enable them to be socially included; resilience is concerned with the internal strengths and capabilities which human beings possess to resist the effects of exclusion.

Most dictionary definitions of resilience tend to focus on an individual's capacity to resist, recover from or even flourish in adversity. Specifically in context of social work, Fraser et al suggest that the term represents an individual's ability to adapt to

'negative life events, trauma, stress, and other forms of risk' (1991:131). It follows that if it were possible to isolate those things that enable people to function despite the adversity, then this would be an important basis for developing appropriate practice interventions. If one aspect of resilience is concerned with 'surviving' then there is also the question of growth and of nurturing resilience or strengths. Indeed, much of the literature on resilience and social work is closely related to what is commonly termed a 'strengths perspective' (see Green, 2002). In particular one finds within the social work literature a curiosity about the kinds of personal qualities of those clients and families that appear to thrive against those that don't given a similar set of material circumstances. Why within family groups with similar high risk-factor or low supportive environments do some follow different trajectories? Why do some manage to survive and even thrive in the same kinds of stress inducing situations whereas others do not? Though this research tends to be rooted in a psychological approach, more recently, we have seen the emergence of psychosocial and ecological models that seek to develop perspectives on resilience that go beyond personal traits to environmental, cultural and in some instances economic factors (see for example Frazer, 2004).

One might be excused for thinking what can be wrong with this idea? But like the notion of empowerment, our argument is, within a new intensification of neoliberalism, particularly following the economic crisis of 2008 resulting in savage attacks on public health and welfare programmes and those most dependent on such services, the idea of resilience takes on new dimensions.   While this concept was once was concerned with a framework for understanding and facilitating human flourishing and development, the new use of the term is increasingly being used to categorise human beings according to their capability to survive in adversity. Gilligan (2011) notes that what some term this new survivalist doctrine of resilience is a focus on:

> … an image of failure as its vision of the future. We prepare against the awful things that may one day befall us and are left prepared. And no more. Planning for survival, striving for resilience, has no vision for flourishing; progress is lost, and hope with it.

In a piece entitled 'Resisting Resilience' Mark Neocleous (Mar/April 2013) offers an anecdote taken from the 'Dear Mariella' advice column in the Observer newspaper in 2012, describing the way that the discourse of resilience has displaced a socio-political analysis of social and personal problems:

> "I'm 24, in a horrible relationship, feeling stuck and alone. I met my boyfriend three years ago while I was struggling to find work after graduating. Not only was he charismatic, ambitious and gorgeous, but supportive, too. I became infatuated. By the time I found out about his angry rages and subtle bullying, I had moved in with him and into a job in his town. I'm sad and anxious all the time, but I have no idea how to leave. I can't afford the landlord's fees for cancelling our flat lease. If I go back to my mum's, I'll lose my job. What would I do during my six-week notice period? All my friends live far away, in

London. I'm so ashamed that I've got myself here … I catch myself wishing I was a teenager again, safe with my family, still with potential. If I could only learn resilience, I feel like maybe the practicalities wouldn't be so daunting".

What would be normally understood from a well-established feminist perspective as a woman trapped a web of social, economic and patriarchal power, becomes internalized and turned into a problem of personal weakness: she must learn 'resilience'. This whole conceptualisation is currently reinforced through magazines and reality TV shows obsessed with offering 'resilience tips', as well as the self-help guides which frequently top bestseller lists in book shops. Neocleous (2013) notes how the idea of 'resilience is central not only to the self-help industry, but also to the wider 'happiness studies' now being peddled by politicians and academic disciplines such as psychology, economics and increasingly social work as well. Ian Ferguson (2008), in his book *Reclaiming Social Work: Challenging Neo-liberalism and Promoting Social Justice* suggests that, in contrast to earlier philosophical discussions about happiness as a valued social good, the current preoccupation with 'happiness' reflects the commodification of human need as a major industry, through concepts of health, fitness, 'body beautiful' (Phipps, 2014). And secondly, of more direct concern to social work are the real effects of neoliberalism associated with individualism and greed, in producing social isolation, depression and human misery in an objective and subjective manner.

Yet at the same time we are seeing a major trend in a wide range of fields, including education, health and welfare where the assertion of psychological explanations for social needs (and in relation to the ongoing influence of the pharmaceutical companies biological) is entirely divorced from any social context. This was exemplified when the renowned sociologist Anthony Giddens made the astonishing claim that 'happiness' and its opposite bear no relation to either wealth or the possession of power (cited in Levitas, 2000). Within the context of austerity, as Spandler (2014) suggests, 'independence is valorised and so-called 'dependency' is demonised. It seems that people are required not to be vulnerable but to be all-capable'. In other words, the quality of resilience is individualised and psychologised, coming to define a social Darwinist capacity for survival that denies the significance of wider social problems, such as psychosis, mental ill health, child abuse and neglect, homelessness, family violence and so on. The danger is that without a social critique capable of resisting these constructions, what on the surface might appear to be 'common-sense' explanations of people's problems and needs, can act to mask dangerous new forms of social misery. Indeed, as Stuckler and Basu (2013) in their book *The Body Economic: Why Austerity Kills?* argue, the cumulative effects of 'economic shocks' such as losing a job, coupled with the removal of social safety nets that are provided by the welfare state can result in dramatic rises in mortality rates. Quoting the example of Greece, they note that 'before 2008 Greece had the lowest suicide rate in Europe. Now that rate has doubles' (xix)

In times where public welfare systems under attach the problems of the poor will increasingly become defined in terms of cultural pathology reminiscent of old style

Eugenics [3], which has haunted social work even since its inception in the early 20th century (See Bamford, 2015). Owen Jones work has powerfully analysed the way working class people have been reduced from being 'salt of the earth' to 'scum of the earth' (2012:72). As the welfare state is dismantled before the mantras of neoliberal economic theory, forms of privilege and power come to be justified within a reconstructed ideology of market based 'natural selection'.

Conclusion

In this paper we have sought to highlight the dangers created by the deepening of neoliberal ideology on the one hand and the collapse of traditional social democracy, which is neither able to own neoliberalism nor provide any alternative to it, on the other. Evidence now abounds of the disastrous impact of austerity on children, of whom one in four now lives in a household below the poverty line, and where ever increasing numbers are taken into care or placed on Child Protection Plans (Guardian 23/6/2015). Increasingly human need and misery is either being commodified through the expansion of capitalist markets into arenas such as education, health, welfare and policing, or redefined in terms of individual and group failings or pathology, leading increasingly to a dangerously divided society. In the context of a state which sees itself as no longer responsible for delivering services to a new breed of citizen consumers, and while the collective moral obligation for redistributional justice is declared no longer feasible, the dominant ideology becomes an exhortation to entrepreneurship, where the state's role is to tutor the disengaged masses in the virtues of 'aspiration'. They already know that the rules are set up on such a way that large swathes of the population can never play, let alone win; citizenship in this new Social Darwinist universe has become a zero-sum game.

In seeking to set out the on-going march of the neoliberals, our intention is not to imply that there are no alternatives to this ghastly destructive dogma. If one lesson of history is about the phenomenal power and influence that capitalism has had, another equally important lesson is, as Holloway (2010) reminds us, every system has its 'cracks' and that the very brutality of neoliberalism create new forms of refusal which represent the potential 'breakthrough of another world' (2010:250). We see two things are crucially important for Social Work. The first is that within our profession we have a huge body of evidence about the social costs for the whole of society involved in the destruction of services for children, for people with learning disabilities and psychiatric problems, and for the refugees, whose numbers will only grow, largely as a consequence of wars often initiated by the very countries who now refuse them entry. We must insist through this evidence and the debates we

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[3] Eugenics is a term that was coined by the influential British anthropologist, Francis Galton in the mid 19th Century. It's origins are build an idea that the human race can be improved through infanticide, forced sterilization or genetic manipulation of those individuals deemed inferior (mentally 'retarded' and 'insane', of low 'intelligence', the poor, criminals, etc.). The modern eugenics movement began in the late 19th century in Europe, the United States and Australia with the belief that criminality, imbecility and mental illness were hereditary and therefore should be controlled through forced sterilization or forced removal of "feeble-minded" children.

need to have across society, that we cannot go back to the bad old days where it was common place for women to die in childbirth, for children to die of malnutrition, for victims of domestic violence to be blamed for the violence they suffer, and for those with mental health problems or learning disabilities to be locked away. Secondly we must be organised in unions, professional body associations and service user groups. It is only by engaging in the struggle to defend everything that was best about the old welfare state that we will learn to create an alternative based on the refusal to act as neoliberal subjects, and in that process develop the capacity to rebuild a new forms of democratic and compassionate welfare.

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