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Work and Time - Seeing the Unseen

Katherine Peet

Federation of Workers' Educational Associations

in Aotearoa (New Zealand)

I begin by letting you know where I am coming from!

It seems to me that there are two basic categories of people - those who think the world is basically OK and that our job is to enable people to cope with it as it is; and those who think it is not OK, and needs to change. I'm one of the latter! Within this latter category are those who believe change requires violence and those who believe that it can be achieved through education. Again, I'm in the latter group. In addition, there are those who think the agenda for change should primarily be the responsibility of the powerful and those, like me, who believe the agenda should be heard from the very same people who are experiencing inequity and powerlessness in their daily lives.

It is my analysis that experts must become the guests of the powerless. I like the conclusion of a recent consultation on democracy:

"It is not just voting, but setting the agenda. It's not the tyranny of the majority, but it's finding common ground between different people and groups, and it's definitely not the clever manipulation of people to simulate grassroots support....." [1]

One of the real challenges of educational work is how to get into peoples' consciousness and not just remain talking to the converted. My organisation, the Federation of Workers' Educational Associations in AOTEAROA (which is often called by its colonial name "New Zealand") has supported one way of doing this - through a campaign to argue for the redefinition of "work". We find it raises many deeper issues of socio-structural change.

We in the WEA were pleased to contribute some of our thinking to the theme on "The Changing Role of Work" at the recent UNESCO Adult Education conference which I attended as a delegate of the International Federation of Workers' Educational Associations. For your information, membership of IFWEA is open to organisations committed to a Charter which is summarised in its aim to promote:

"... free and voluntary education work according to the principles of solidarity and cooperation, justice and equality, democracy and freedom".

Another aspect of this campaign to promote a redefinition of "work" has been to acknowledge the **people's wisdom** emerging from this and other campaigns to promote a vision of a just and equitable society.

This peoples' wisdom is not heard by our Government, and needs a home. For this reason, a number of us recently established a Trust for Research and Education for Social Change. We

hope to get financial backing to carry through our dream of having a physical Centre, on land we have already acquired. We have named the Trust KOTARE after our indigenous kingfisher bird. The Kotare is unique in that it has perfect sight, whether in or out of the water, including when it is diving. The Centre would house a library and data base, and enable people to have residential meetings. We are committed to a People's Charter (the current statement of which [\[^{\[1\]}\] I have copies\) which has been articulated](#) through a five year process of gatherings up and down the country. (N.B. An important inspiration for the Kotare Trust has been the Highlander Center, in New Market, Tennessee, USA)

We see a shared vision as the essence of what is needed to avoid *"wallowing in the backwaters, sinking in the mainstream"* [\[^{\[1\]}\] and the paralysis from analysis of all around us that is bad and sad. And that vision which allows us to "navigate new waters" must come from people acting as *"subjects of their own history, not objects at the mercy of events"* \[\\[^{\\[1\\]}\\]. As Manfred Max-Neef puts it:\]\(#\)](#)

"... it requires, in practice, the transformation of the person-object into a person-subject and, in theoretical terms, that the competitive rationale of maximising be replaced by the solidary rationale of optimising. In other words, that the 'homo economicus' be replaced by the 'homo synergicus'" [\[^{\[1\]}\].](#)

The process of working on this vision is what led me to title my contribution to the Economics section of this meeting "Work and Time - Seeing the Unseen". As a country which has been fortunate to experience our first nation peoples' regaining of their language; we have had the privilege of receiving insights into another world view of relationships between work and time. The language of our indigenous peoples is known internationally as *MAORI*. Their word for which the nearest English translation is "work" is *MAHI*. My understanding of *MAHI* is that it includes labours of love. It is about the dignity of the person and decisions made about the personal use of time. It is not just about earning an income - and it is about addressing communal need, not simply individual benefit.

In letting go of our colonial practices we are learning that in every language that is still connected to its land, **"work" and "time" are spoken into being** in ways that English has to a large extent lost. English has become the language of the market place - though why it is called a market **place** I am not sure; the place has no sense of place! Most of the global market-place terminology divorces languages from their specific living contexts.

I want to take as an example of the market construct, the term **"employment"**. I want to argue that it is leading to major problems, which I will summarise by the term **"misemployment"**.

[Smoking creates jobs]

Citizens are being redefined as nothing more than **employees, employers, self-employed or unemployed**, at the same time as a permanent underclass of unemployed and employed poor is emerging. The honourable **citizen-producer** is thereby reduced to an increasingly precarious and passive role as a production factor in the market place.

If we acknowledge that everyone's contribution to society includes their "work", we soon realise that this includes functions that are seldom incorporated into conventional economic statistics - community building; caring for the environment; looking after children, the elderly or the unwell; support for social service organisations, visual or performing arts; etc. We then have to acknowledge that the current "employment" society almost completely fails to formally include these vital components of society.

We must also shout from the roof tops that any idea of employment being a fair way for societies to distribute income is profoundly wrong. For both practical and theoretical reasons, we know we cannot rely on the market, which has neither social ethic nor conscience, to distribute income fairly.

This conclusion was confirmed in AOTEAROA in 1992 when community-initiated groups appointed some highly respected citizens to a Committee which toured the country to hear first-hand from people on low incomes. The single major recommendation of the Committee was to establish a **minimum income, as of right**, to enable all to belong and participate in society. Such a universal basic income for all would allow more people to make their contributions to society from a position of reasonable dignity and security. A **Universal Basic Income** would provide security and would enable people to enter "employment" for positive rather than immediate survival reasons. The Basic Income European Network ^[1] [is alive and well in Europe - even a recent OECD report on Economic Flexibility and Societal Cohesion in the 21st Century](#) refers to it.

Other ways of seeing unseen "work" and "time" in AOTEAROA, as in many other countries, are **Local Exchange and Trading Systems** - we call them Green Dollars. Green Dollars systems have been established in many parts of the country.

As we engage with these and other ways of seeing the unseen, we find ourselves revisiting notions of "skill", "wealth" and "wisdom". It is critical in our society to document these learnings.

We in Aotearoa (New Zealand) have been the victim of an ideological campaign by our Government to introduce a market approach to social planning. As an example, our Prime Minister recently spoke of Self Sufficiency as *"the ability of households to meet their own needs through paid participation in the workforce"*, and of Social Cohesion as *"maintenance of society where everyone has the opportunity to achieve through individual effort"*.

As another example, just two weeks ago we received notification of a discussion paper leaked from the Ministry for Education, which proposes that all existing state tertiary education institutions, including universities, would be re-established as profit-making companies. Public and private providers would be funded at the same level.

Detailed documentation of the Aotearoa (NZ) situation has been well done by Jane Kelsey ^[1] [in "The New Zealand Experiment"](#), and by Brian Easton ^[1] [in "The Commercialisation of New Zealand", of which we have copies on the table.](#)

The belief underlying this and the majority of present-day policy development is that our human behaviour is motivated only by individualistic, so-called rational choice and self interest ^[1] [based on the ability to pay for \(commodified\) goods and services.](#)

Our campaign to redefine "work" is not limited to addressing the limitations of this market approach to social planning. It also encourages citizens to address their hopes and aspirations, not merely their role in an increasingly precarious market-place. Expansion and systematisation of the knowledge that emerges from such a campaign could be the foundation for a new democracy in which all people will be able to play a constructive part in strengthening the development of lifestyles which are socially, culturally and environmentally sustainable.

But such systematisation of knowledge must be done with eyes wide open. The way new knowledge is recorded can make all the difference as to how it contributes to new ways of seeing. I'd like to explore one example of this concern. This example relates to incorporating new factors into our System of National Accounts.

In my country we have at last got a question into the 5-yearly Census which records the hours per day spent on all activities, not only those carried out in the labour force. The questions were refined in the 1996 Census and the results are not yet collated, but here are the 1991 results. (I have details available if anyone is interested.)

[hours 1991].

These time use surveys are built on a long period of campaigning by community-initiated groups and friendly academics. Many of you will know of Marilyn Waring's book "Counting For Nothing", also published in the US under the title "As If Women Mattered". Others have also been working this area for many years.

[Social Work Training Council] and [Cant & Pawson

As a follow-up to these surveys the Ministry of Women's Affairs has been advocating the recording of "unpaid work". This is distinguished from other non-System of National Accounts (SNA) entries by the criterion that if it were not done by the "non-earner" it would have to be purchased from the market sector. The researchers caution against the thought that "unpaid work" might be paid because, they say, much "unpaid work" remains part of the property of the person who produces it.

A further factor in the recording of our National Accounts is that we also have Non-market production groups recorded alongside Market production groups. They are recorded as 13% of the total.

Seeing these activities as "non-market", "unpaid", "property" or, to use Putnam's phrase "social capital", worries me. Describing such activities in "market-speak" does not help us to see that which is unseen. Anne Else's book "False Economy" ^[1] [makes a coherent effort to address these difficulties. My point is that recording activities as simply "market" or "non-market" - "paid" or "unpaid" - denies people the opportunity](#) to navigate new waters and catch a glimpse of a transformed society.

Similar reservations apply to Juliet Schor's best-seller "The Overworked American" ^[1]. [Barry Bluestone and Steven Rose's review of both the critics and advocates for her arguments](#) ^[1] [conclude by asking the question:](#)

"What does this foreshadow for family and community?"

Their response:

"Until the economy provides long-term job security, and rising wages improving material living standards along with more leisure American workers will" (not) "support political action",

reflects the reservations just highlighted. Such commodification of the response to outcomes for family and community, as well as their opposition of "leisure" to "work" does little to break from the misemployment scenario.

To summarise then, what we face is the reduction of the worker to an employee

[employer-worker]

The outcome is summarised nicely in the following slide

[benefit-crime]

Before moving on to some suggestions for a different way of seeing the unseen, I would like to mention a few specific points:

- In the USA, families without a worker with at least a college degree increased their annual employment effort by 12% between 1973 and 1988, but they received 8% less annual income in real terms ^[1][1](#).
- High-low cycles of employment were experienced by 40% of men in the lowest quintile and by 20% in the highest quintile. Swings in employment opportunity are not felt most by high-earners ^[1][1](#).
- Even those employed full-time may not earn enough to sustain their livelihoods ^[1][1](#).
- Of the world's working-age population of around 3 billion, only 400 million are "employed", yet job creation is high on the priority list of governments, world-wide. Even the ILO notes that the linkage between economic growth and employment options is not an automatic one for all groups ^[1][1](#).

Therefore, I suggest a new way of addressing our future is to look not just at employment alone, but at **livelihood systems**. This will require integration of the matrix of interactions between policy, science and technology and investment/finance, with the focus being on augmenting what local people do well. As an example, the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh ^[1][sees:](#)

"... as the essential first step, to help people to be more aware of their skills, not to tell them at first that they are going to receive training. Doing so leaves them seeing themselves simply as tools of production, employed to benefit the one who owns the capital. Lifestyles that do not involve employment (or do so in only a very fragmentary fashion)", need to be brought into the clear light of day. Work and time are critical variables.

Before moving on, I would like briefly to share some resources that are available to underpin such a shift to livelihood systems:

[Understanding the Present World Economy]^[1][1](#)

[Subsidiarity]^[1]

[Awareness of other world views]^[1]

[Gender]

[Environment]

[Equity]

[Sustainable livelihoods]^[1]

As we reinhabit organic, ecological experiences of Time, we become aware of past and future beings as our unseen companions. We also need to develop alternative media - "The Balaton Bulletin" is a good example; in my country we have "Common Ground" and "The Big Picture". If we are to implement a strategy with people committed to our vision, we will need to:

- make the road by walking

- acknowledge that there is no blueprint for the future
- be open and cooperative, and
- always address the questions, "*Who is benefitting?*" and "*Who is losing?*".

These are the methodologies which will inform our sense of Time. The ultimate realisation is creative, inventive, and innovative use of Time. A mere thing or event gains a sense of value when a person accomplishes it within a context, when it is done for another's liberation [\[^{\[1\]}\]- provided one's own liberation is at](#) the same time being served. The act is transformed in the mediation within the context.

The expectation that we can create a new mode of production based on service and culture and not on destruction and endless consumption implies searching for the wisdom of others, not focussing on their deficits and finding solutions for them. Such reciprocity [\[^{\[1\]} will bring new ways of relating Work and Time.](#)

I stated earlier that "Work" and "Time" are "**spoken into being**"; they are a function of the language we use, not isolated concepts. I argue that we need to "**speak out of being**" the monopoly of a part of our language that has been taken over by the market-driven ideology.

To do this we must address the power of this market-driven ideology, and to respond creatively we must organise. One example of such organising is our Association of Non-Government Organisations in Aotearoa.

[ANGOA]

ANGOA has joined CIVICUS, which is committed to strengthening voluntary action for the public good, outside formal government. Our hope in ANGOA is that we can address the issues raised by David Korten in the last Balaton Bulletin [\[^{\[1\]} by bringing together democratic and sustainability issues and organising amongst those who have a stated commitment to a similar vision.](#)

[Just because you're outnumbered doesn't mean you're wrong]

In Aotearoa we are embarking on a 5-step process, liberating both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples from old colonising practices.

[Five steps]

- * Seeing the Treaty-based approach ^[1][as a whole](#)
- * Planning a process by which society can move from a concentration on individual rights to one based on community ethics
- * Identifying and building on existing strengths and assets
- * Organising production and distribution of goods and services (i.e. economic activity) in a way that does not conflict with these goals
- * Mapping the connections between the parts and celebrating!

What I hope to have presented to you is a sense of Time and Work which requires doing away with policies permeated by the fetish of employment, where people's time has become a commodity. Instead, we need policies to generate both fulfilling work and sufficient income in a sustainable environment. I argue that we need to see the unseen, and organise with those who are committed to our vision!

There is a greeting by first-nation people in my country. It involves sharing of the life-force between the host and the guest by touching noses, symbolising the sharing of breath. Once so greeted, guests are considered part of the community that has welcomed them. The little bit of me that's you that doesn't belong to either of us is there for us both ^[1][. Under such a mantle, time takes on a meaning of readiness and work becomes a way to respond to that readiness. People's needs are met and](#) new ones identified. Connectedness is born and the ideology of individualism, so vital to market reductionism, loses its power.

Can we dare to dream of this!

References

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[18]. "Understanding The Present World Economy" Handbook and Appendix, compiled by Katherine Peet, available from the Mental Health Foundation, Tamaki Makaurau (Auckland), Aotearoa New Zealand

- ii. Roman Catholic doctrine of Subsidiarity
- iii. Rev Maurice Gray “Tikanga Maori / A Pakeha Value Model”, unpublished resource paper in Network Waitangi Otautahi, Otautahi (Christchurch), Aotearoa New Zealand
- iv. Marie Mies, “Women And Work”, The Ecumenical Review Vol.48, No.3, July 1996, quarterly of the World Council of Churches
- v. Enrique Dussel “Theology Of Liberation”.
- vi. Johan Galtung, “The Future Of International Cooperation” Final Dialogue panel at CONFITEA V, July 1997
- vii. “David Korten Takes on the United Nations”, in Balaton Bulletin, Summer 1997 pp 17-21.
- viii. The Treaty of Waitangi (1840), signed by the British Crown and the Chiefs of over 500 *HAPU*, is the founding document of the State of New Zealand Aotearoa as it currently exists.
- ix. This was from a 7-year-old’s response to the concern of his mother being away for 5 weeks, “It will be OK, Mum, because there’s a little bit of me that’s you that doesn’t belong to either of us, and by the way I think that’s God, and we can both have it while you’re away.”