

Collective learning in and from Social Movements: the Bhopal disaster Survivors

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Abstract

The issues facing social work are those which social movements have raised and made demands on the state to address. Social movements develop their self-understanding of these demands through collective learning based on praxis. Social work services therefore need to be close to social movements praxis and ensure that services are linked to their demands. However, this can raise questions about the role of formally educated classes in supporting social change. In a post-colonial context learning from social movements globally. Cox and Nilsen's Social Movement Process theory provides a useful framework with which to understand these developments. This chapter uses Social Movement Process theory to interpret the experience of the Bhopal survivors' movement, which has emerged demonstrates that a movement made up largely of people with minimum levels of formal education learn collectively to challenge local injustices and to make the connections to wider issues in the struggle against multinational corporations.

Introduction

Drawing on the analytical framework of Cox and Nilsen 2014 (Nilsen 2010, Cox 2018) this chapter argues that social work practice needs to be rooted in the learning which occurs in the praxis of social movements. It is social movements from below, that demand services from the state and other agents, and ultimately challenge the social relations which limit the capacity of such agents to provide adequate services. Social movements therefore constitute "the fundamental animating forces in the making and unmaking of social structures of human needs and capacities" (Nilsen 2010 p. 13). As such, postcolonial social work practice must consider the role that social movements have played in constructing the predicaments we currently face, and therefore might play in moving us to a future in which human needs are met and capacities are harnessed in more socially just ways. Moreover, as Cox and Nilsen argue

within any specific social context, the ways in which we articulate our understanding of our needs and organise our attempts to meet them are determined ... in a ... process of ... *collective learning and praxis*. (Cox and Nilsen 2014 p. 36 italics added)

The argument of this chapter is that an understanding of that process of collective learning and praxis of social movements in postcolonial contexts provides insights for social work globally. The chapter explores the learning process of a significant, long-running social movement from below, largely comprising activists with minimal levels of formal education: the survivors of the Bhopal gas disaster and its aftermath. By the activists' own accounts, the primary source of learning (indeed the only source for many), is their engagement with the survivors' movement for justice.

It is important to locate the author in this discussion. A British citizen, based in Scotland (which has devolved powers over social work, communities and health, but not social security), I initiated the Bhopal Survivors' Movement Study with Indian co-researchers in 2005 and am dependent on the activists in this movement and their allies for the content of this chapter – although I am responsible for the analysis and argument.

An important strand in social work literature and practice has emphasised that the issues confronting social workers today have been raised by social movements converting, in C. Wright Mills' (1959) phrase, private troubles into public issues (Ferguson 2008; Annetts, Law, McNeish and Mooney 2009; Lavalette 2011): poverty; disability; mental health; gender based violence; crime and rehabilitation; child protection; sectarianism; racism; migration. As Annetts et al (2009) argue, welfare states were constructed by movements from below – of poor people, workers, women, migrants, disabled people – making demands on the state and decision makers and creating pressure that had to be resolved by concessions and provision of services.

Social Work and Social Movements in a neoliberal era

To understand the social production of welfare through conflict and struggle requires an understanding of history. Social problems are historically constituted and produced, they are regarded as social problems because collective movements have turned grievances into public policy. And these social movements learn their own role in historical change – their historicity – through reflecting on their political practice (Touraine 1977) : their praxis. Historical processes allow us to understand that investment decisions lead to environmentally damaging externalities, which are resisted by environmental justice movements; that development produces poverty and thus anti-poverty movements; that family structures exploit women which feminists constantly expose; that processes of colonisation lead to racism and neo-colonialism – and that these social processes are challenged by decolonising movements. It is through the movements of the exploited and oppressed that society has learned something of its own contradictions, and has demanded a response through social work.

Understood historically, the users of social work services are not unfortunate but exploited. However, neoliberal ideology is increasingly framing the users of social work services as in moral deficit, and divides them into deserving or undeserving of social services. This model portrays the deserving service user as an individual consumer who makes rational choices much as consumers of commodities, and encouraged to 'shop around' for the best deal. Meanwhile, the undeserving service user is portrayed as reprehensible, a cause of social problems, which the state is expected to sanction or humiliate. By contrast, social welfare movements have historically reframed users as both subject to injustice and agents of resistance (Ferguson 2008).

The increasing use of coercive mechanisms in social welfare, such as benefit sanctions and denial of citizenship rights, are the most significant causes of destitution in 21st century Britain, whilst across the world, neoliberal austerity has been resisted by a resurgence of social movements (Flesher Fominaya and Cox 2013; Flesher Fominaya and Hayes 2017; Karyokis and Rüdig 2018). Neoliberalism must itself be historically situated. As Harvey (2006) points out, neoliberalism is a project of class realignment, of shifting resources towards a growingly international capitalist class and away from everyone else – workers, the poor, the middle classes. Its emergence from the peak of welfarism in the 1970s was the result of the deliberate policy-mobilisation of a social movement ‘from above’.

In India, the location of the Bhopal case study, neoliberal economic policies were officially adopted in 1991 with the New Economic Programme, but the pressures were building for more than a decade before that. As Vanaik (2018 p. 52) argues:

The decade of the eighties proved critical. ... Indira Gandhi—and even more so her son Rajiv, after her assassination in 1984—turned from dirigisme to deregulation (for domestic and international capital) and repression (for labour). In successive moves, Congress lifted capital restrictions, pushed through the ‘de-licensing’ of the public sector to enable penetration by private capital, introduced tax concessions for business and higher-income brackets, freed up imports of machinery and consumer goods, cut subsidies for public-distribution schemes and brought in laws to crack down on strikes, go-slows and work-to-rule protests.

Even in the early post-colonial period, international capital had been attempting to find inroads into India’s official policy of import substitution. The transition to independence is regarded as a ‘passive revolution’, in which the shift in the balance of power was limited by the interests of capital (see discussion in Scandrett and Sharma, forthcoming). The Green Revolution, a development programme in the 1960s aimed at increasing the production of food through selective breeding of High Yield Varieties of crops, led to increasing dependence on corporate producers of agricultural chemicals on which these crops depend. This also served to strengthen the landowning class within a ruling alliance with urban intelligentsia and industrial capitalists, and dispossess sections of the peasantry, who contributed to the formation resistance movements which were subsequently repressed during the Emergency of 1975 to 1977. However, economic liberalisation increased considerably through the last decades of the 20th century and into the 21st, with Narendra Modi’s alliance of repressive Hindu nationalism with capitalist class interests in the facilitation of large scale inward investment. Social movements from below have been constantly engaged, at times resisting and at other times in retreat from the repression and dispossession that has accompanied these historical processes.

Social Movement Learning

In Cox and Nilsen’s (2014) theory of social movement process, social movements ‘from above’ act to defend and extend the interests of groups that already enjoy privileged access to benefits provided by social structures. Social groups that benefit from the exploitation of land, resources and labour, organise to defend these privileges and extend them through dispossession and

exploitation. Social movements from below moreover, seek access to these social benefits from which they are excluded by exploitation, oppression, disenfranchisement or discrimination. At times this takes the form of hidden resistance, the ‘weapons of the weak’ (Scott 1985); sometimes it emerges into overt protest at a local level or on a single issue; and at yet other times, multiple issues and protests coalesce around common interests in demands for systemic or revolutionary change.

Today’s neoliberal economic reforms have privileged a small fraction of the transnational capitalist class which has benefitted from alliances with different class fractions – local capitalists, middle class consumers - and caused divisions amongst those exploited through depressed wage labour and dispossession, through a very effective hegemonic movement from above. Understood historically in this way enables movements to learn strategies of resistance.

Collective learning, both within social movements themselves and as social movements interact with wider society, constitutes a fundamental component of social movement praxis (Scandrett, Crowther, Hemmi, Mukherjee, Shah and Sen 2010). For Eyerman and Jamison (1991), what is distinctive about social movements is their capacity to make changes to the knowledge, culture and worldview of a society. This is achieved through a ‘cognitive praxis’ in which the practice of political engagement, strategy development, confrontation with adversaries and organisation of alternative forms of social organisation, are all intimately connected to the cognitive tasks of reflection, imagination and theorisation – a learning process experienced through engaging in social movement. New culture and new knowledge is generated from this unique and dialectical combination of theory and practice in trying to change the world. Eyerman and Jamison build on Gramsci’s conception of the organic intellectual and emphasise the role of activists in learning new ways of knowing through struggle.

The literature on learning in social movements has been developed by education scholars such as Griff Foley’s (1999) seminal work. Foley was particularly interested in how this learning occurs, the changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes and analysis which emerges from engaging in social movement activity - learning in struggle. He emphasises the role of reflection in this learning, so that learning is not incidental, but contains a discipline of criticality. He concludes:

Learning is a dimension of human life and manifests itself in many forms;
Education and learning are shaped by economic and political forces beyond participants’ immediate influence;
Emancipatory learning and education are possible, but are also complex, ambiguous and continually contested;
It is both possible and necessary to develop an analysis of this complexity and to act strategically. (Foley 1999 p.130-131)

However, movements from above also engage in processes of cultural praxis in their interests, whether in the form of ‘common sense’ which serves to reify existing unequal relationships, or else through creating division.

Bhopal Survivors’ Movement

The Bhopal survivors' movement is a broad alliance of those affected by the leak of toxic gas and associated contamination from the Union Carbide insecticide factory in December 1984, with some solidarity activists. Union Carbide Corporation, a USA-based multinational, established a subsidiary company in India in the 1960s and built a factory in Bhopal to capitalise on the growing market for insecticides generated by the Green Revolution. On December 3rd 1984, a tank in the factory ruptured and 40 tonnes of methyl isocyanate gas dispersed into the surrounding area, killing thousands (Hannah, Sarangi and Morehouse 2005).

The dominant, ruling class narrative of Bhopal in India is around 'moving on' (Sharma 2014). There is a discourse of catharsis for the Indian new middle class which tells a story that Bhopal 1984 was a tragic accident, unforeseen or the result of sabotage by a disgruntled employee. Compensation has been paid to the victims, the factory site constitutes a monument to the dead and is under the protection of the Madhya Pradesh state administration. The city has become an administrative centre and Indian tourist destination for its lakes and shopping. Union Carbide has been wound up. There have been legislative changes which mean that it couldn't happen again and India is open for business and inward investment. This narrative of course colludes with the interests of the corporation (indeed much of it originates with Union Carbide Public Relations) and with the Indian neoliberal ideology of attracting corporate capital.

This is contested by a counter-narrative, backed up with significant evidence generated by the survivors and their allies, is sustained by the survivors' movement with solidarity movements in India and internationally. The 'accident' was the result of negligence driven by an agenda of corporate productivity, from decisions made in the boardroom in the USA and warnings of risks resulting from their implementation in India were ignored (Chouhan 1994; Hannah, Sarangi and Morehouse 2005). In the early 1990s, a payment to (some) survivors was made on the basis of dubious criteria and crude designations, following a settlement agreed between Union Carbide and the Indian government without consulting the survivors' organisations. Many survivors received nothing, and most payments were inadequate for needs. In 2001 Union Carbide was absorbed into Dow Chemicals (now Dow Dupont) in an asset-stripping exercise, and disappeared behind the corporate veil.

The survivors' movement emerged shortly after the disaster from among those who were exposed to the gas and the bereaved, along with outsiders who contributed their organising and campaigning experience (Sarangi 1998). In the days following the disaster, mobilisation was focussed on providing basic needs, uncontaminated food and water, health and social care, plus recording deaths, illnesses, missing people, losses of livestock etc. This was organised through neighbourhood committees throughout the most directly affected areas. In time, organisations started to form and demands made on the government. The earliest organisation was *Zahreeli Gas Kand Sangharsh Morcha* (Poisoned Gas Event Battle Front, or 'the Morcha') which sought to establish organisation amongst the local neighbourhood committees and the educated incomers. The movement's demands have included punitive criminal sanctions against the company, compensation, provision of healthcare, health research, economic rehabilitation, access to employment and decent wages and conditions, adequate welfare benefits, decontaminating the factory site and access to uncontaminated water.

Since its initial emergence, the movement has been through several organisation phases (Sarangi 1998). The Morcha collapsed under pressure of state repression and internal ideological differences. The next phase emerged in the form of trade union organisation of survivors working in economic rehabilitation workshops, of which the two most significant are *Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Udyog Sangathan* (Bhopal Gas Affected Women's Industrial Workers' Union or 'BGPMUS') and *Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Stationery Karmchhari Sangh* (Bhopal Gas Affected Women's Stationery Production Union, or 'Stationery Union'). Some time later, the movement was joined by the children of the survivors, many of them inheriting congenital illness and impairments, as well as others affected by contaminated groundwater from the factory site. The movement has evolved through amalgamation and division, with groups focusing on different priorities, framing of issues, modes of organisation and external alliances. Whilst all groups emphasise anti-communalism, the supporter base of the different groups reflect some differences in religious, caste and demographic composition (see Scandrett and Mukherjee 2011)

In addition to putting demands on state providers and raising petitions through the courts, the movement organised its own cooperative, survivor-led services. The 'people's health centre' administered drugs and kept detailed records of illnesses and treatments (the centre was shut down and records confiscated by the state police). Later, *Sambhavna* Trust was established, a clinic which takes a holistic approach to individual care, combining western medicine with Ayurveda, panchkarma, yoga and other indigenous health systems. The clinic serves survivors of both gas and water contamination, employing survivors and governed by survivors. *Chingari* Trust runs a rehabilitation centre for children of survivors with a range of physical and intellectual impairments. There are economic development programmes established by survivors or with strong links to the movement and, 30 years later, a memorial museum, was co-curated by survivors, researchers and a museum curator.

In an effort to document elements of this social movement process, and in particular the learning which had occurred through praxis, the Bhopal Survivors' Movement Study conducted participatory research with the movement between 2005 and 2009 (Bhopal Survivors' Movement Study 2009; Mukherjee, Scandrett, Sen and Shah 2011; Scandrett and Sharma 2019). In the following, quotations from survivor-activists are all taken from interview excerpts published in Bhopal Survivors' Movement Study 2009 (cited as BSMS 2009).

Social Movement Process: from hidden resistance to militancy

At the time of the gas disaster, literacy levels were low. The 1981 census records 34% literacy for Madhya Pradesh, with female literacy at 19%. Even amongst those women who had attended school, social conservatism restricted their level of education. Bhopal was a rapidly expanding city with migration from rural areas of Madhya Pradesh and beyond, and the Union Carbide factory was situated in the poorer north of the city. The population affected by the gas disaster was overwhelmingly poor, casually employed, with very low levels of formal education, and Hindu and Muslim in equal numbers.

Many of the survivor activists tell of the low level of education and wider social awareness at the time of the disaster. Rehana Begum, one of the founder activists with the trade union BGPMUS, had completed school before the disaster, yet echoes many of the views expressed by many

survivors when she said "We were mostly homely Muslim women who had no experience of negotiating or campaigning and frankly did not have a clue about anything." (BSMS 2009 p. 94) Yet women with little or no formal education were able to develop an analysis of how to take on the state and multinational corporations.

In Cox and Nilsen's (2014) 'social movement process', communities develop 'local rationalities', strategies to live within oppressive social contexts albeit without overtly confronting the source of the oppression. As they describe it, local rationalities are "a repertoire of skills, practices and perceptions typically forged in conflictual dialogue with the hegemonic projects of social movements from above" (Cox and Nilsen 2014 p. 75). The first and perhaps most basic forms of praxis in the context of struggle was what Scott (1985) has called the 'weapons of the weak', the everyday forms of hidden resistance in the face of oppression: small acts of sabotage, petty pilfering, 'hidden transcripts' which undermine the authority of the ruling groups at times when direct confrontation is impossible. Furthermore

At times, a local rationality may give rise to or serve as the basis for overt acts of confrontation with and defiance of social movements from above... We propose the term 'militant particularism' for those forms of struggle that can emerge if such a process of extraction and development takes place: when local rationalities are transformed from tacit potentialities to explicitly oppositional practices deployed in conflictual encounters with dominant groups." (Cox and Nilsen 2014 p. 76)

In Bhopal, following the first wave of protests against state negligence and collusion with the corporation, there was a period in which workshops for economic rehabilitation were established by the state or civil society organisations. These workshops provided training and production facilities in tailoring, embroidery, stationery production and were particularly targeted at women, who traditionally had worked in the home, combining domestic labour with piece-work. With the workshops, the influx of moderate levels of largely unaccountable capital to a poor area led to corruption, as managers and bureaucrats found ways to stream benefits from their positions.

In the following extended extract, Rabiya Bee, another of the founding activists of the BGPMUS describes how first she learned and then taught her co-workers how to benefit from the corrupt working practices in the *Swalamban* dressmaking centres established for economic rehabilitation, and then how these weapons of the weak developed into militant particularism as the limitations of such hidden transcripts became evident and militancy developed through industrial and political confrontation.

The whole system at the centre was corrupt. People at the top made money everywhere, they got commissions at every level. There was chaos when tenders for goods were opened; people would find ways to get commission on the smallest things like buttons. So I devised a strategy for the women to make some extra money as well. I taught them techniques to save cloth scrap in a way that they could use it to make some extra money. There were a lot of scams: big spools of cloth for centres would be stolen in transit. When everybody at the top was making money why couldn't we make some money? When the manager interfered I threatened him because everyone in the system was making money

and he had no right to stop us, it was our right. I made sure that I took only as much as the other ladies, I did not take privilege of my position.

When I started working I did not know what a chief minister was. I was poor, looking for a job ... I was 28 years old at that time and I had five daughters. We did not know what a union could do or what it was. When [the owner of the sewing centres] began exploiting us it would make me very angry but I somehow continued to work despite the exploitation because I had a small baby to feed. Soon I raised objections and then they pointed me out to the other women who did not object to this just to isolate me. So I began talking to these women to motivate them to join me. The women slowly began to get my point and we spoke about this more regularly at break time.

Then ideas to make this group stronger were proposed in order to build pressure on [the owner]. A proposal to stop the cutting for a day was presented in one of the conversations and it was accepted because that way the centre would come to a standstill and work to all 300 women would stop. When women began to raise questions, the supervisor of the shed brought this to the notice of [the owner]. She complained that I had organised all the ladies in the cutting unit.

... Then we began getting ideas; the first one was to go to the Chief Minister but we had no idea how to approach him, we had no petition, no banner, nothing. We still went ahead with the plans, we reached the CM's residence and met the security guards who did not permit us to enter the premises. We insisted, so he asked what we were there for and he explained the whole concept of a CM to us. He also explained to us the concept of the union and advised us to form a union.

We took all this information back [, elected the leadership and registered the union]. Then we stopped all work ... and there was a lock-out... Then we took our first rally to the CM's residence. We were underestimated at that time by the Government but they were yet to taste the real power of women. BSMS 2009 p. 63-65

Tactics of surviving exploitative conditions in a corrupt system were developed and shared as 'weapons of the weak', but then gave way to collective action to challenge the corruption and the exploitation. The skills and tactics of political protest were learned from good sense, trial and error, friendly advice, the guidance of trusted sympathisers and a good bit of critical intelligence.

Education through making connections: building a counter-hegemony

Learning the tactics of the immediate struggle is an important part of the learning process. Cox and Nilsen (2014) describe how, in a social movement process, the limitations of the narrow focus of militant particularism starts to be transcended as interconnected issues are added to the demands. Through "generalisation they can transcend the particular locale in which they emerged and potentially be applied across a spectrum of specific situations and singular struggles" (Cox and Nilsen 2014 p. 79). Within the BGPMUS, Mohini Devi describes how the immediate concerns became connected to a process of wider learning:

To start with it was just workplace issues, and then other things started coming up. For instance, the lack of healthcare came up because people were missing work due to visits to the hospital and we recognised that you need to be healthy to do anything else. With time we understood things better and then people like [Abdul] Jabbar and other educated people joined in who could guide us better and give us suggestions... Issues picked up by the women were never restricted to workplace issues, they were open to the problems that people face overall. For every problem, if you look at it on a larger level, there is a problem that relates all other humans not just the ones suffering in that place and time. This is why our solidarity went out to other campaigns also and likewise got the same back from them. (BSMS 2009, 71-2)

The issue of solidarity with other struggles as both an outcome of a learning process and a means of learning more about the world came up regularly – joining hands to join the dots. The process of learning through struggle leading to a wider engagement in interconnected issues is not inevitable however. Some activists describe how their increasingly critical understanding led to the opposing view, that a greater focus on bread-and-butter issues is necessary. Rehana Begum explains:

The main mistakes [were] to move away from our core demands of employment... Employment is fundamental and the union should have concentrated on this alone. I have seen extreme poverty and I know how much difference employment can make to a person's life. Without employment a person cannot have access to medical care, food, housing, clothes, it is an important issue. So rather than campaigning for healthcare or environment, we should just focus on employment. (BSMS 2009, p. 95-6)

The debates within the movement on tactics and strategy were therefore increasingly based on more sophisticated understandings of wider issues, even if they do not lead to greater agreement. The social movement process is not linear, and informal education is not simplistic propaganda.

Two issues that were controversial within the movement are the value of international solidarity and the role of the educated incomers. In the political context of India at the time, international intervention was regarded with suspicion by authorities, and often also by social movement activists. BGP MUS avoids international links but forges alliances with other Indian movements of the poor. However, for other groups, tactical and strategic alliances with international environmental, anti-toxics and human rights groups has been significant. Some of these groups came together in 2003 to form the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal and for these groups, contact with international movements generates new learning opportunities. Rasheeda Bee, a leader of the Stationery Workers' Union, explains the impact of her contact with international groups such as Greenpeace, and the key educational role of Satinath Sarangi (Sathyu), an educated solidarity activist. Rasheeda Bee tells the story:

There were many people who were falling sick beside the Union Carbide walls and all around it. Why were they falling sick? Most of the women who I knew were from these areas where people were facing new problems. I met up with Sathyu and he told me about the contamination of the water. And after the [Greenpeace] reports in 1999 it was found that the water was indeed toxic. After hearing about the contaminated water, and

from what I had learned over the years, I started to realise that this is about saving the world. I also came to know about the law that says the polluter must pay, which strengthened us all the more because we now knew that we had the law on our side. We found out about lots of things that were happening throughout the world from working with Sathyu. (BSMS 2009, p.113)

In our interview with Rasheeda Bee she goes on to describe how the international connections led to visits to Japan to meet the victims of mercury poisoning from the Minamata pollution incident, and her interventions in the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, critiquing the presence of multinational corporations at the summit and the incorporation of their interests into sustainable development.

The ways in which activists gain informal education through engagement with political struggle is an important lesson. There are opportunities for traditional intellectuals to engage with social movements in order to bring academic knowledge to support their struggle. Sathyu abandoned doctoral research in 1984 in response to the gas disaster, moved to Bhopal and has worked in solidarity with the survivors since. Critical of the vanguardist role of outside intellectuals who provided leadership in the early days of the movement, he established a group specifically to engage with the survivors.

When a few of us later formed the Bhopal Group for Information and Action we decided we would not be part of any survivors' organisation but would support all organisations from outside. Our role, though limited to gathering and sharing information and advising on strategic matters, became critical for the several survivor-led organisations that sprung up following the demise of Morcha as a mass based organisation. In our relationship with these organisations, which were even less democratic than the Morcha, we did our best to empower the rank and file members and increase their participation in decision making within their organisations. (BSMS 2009, p. 117)

Bhopal Group for Information and Action went on to be a key part of the ICJB, connecting local struggles to international movements. However, Rabiya Bee cautions,

I learnt that an illiterate person becomes a bigger threat [to the enemy] than an educated person. The educated think that they can use their intellect to fool someone but if that person gets an ego about it then he will be brought down by a small person... People who they claim to work for can do without them, they do not need their help nor they do insist on getting help from social activists. People can survive with what they have. People who are not assisted by social activists also survive and people who know how to fight for their rights will do so without any assistance. (BSMS 2009, p. 68)

For the leader of BGPMUS Abdul Jabbar, learning from those with formal education carries a great risk.

For the first 10 years of the movement it seemed like a good idea to involve intellectuals just as they were active in the NBA [anti-dams movement]. Now such people think very lowly of the Bhopal Gas movement, they think it's a nuisance. They never have it in them

to struggle. I feel that they could not connect to the problems of the common man because their experience was all book-based...

During the British rule most of the intellectuals were in important positions in the system and they were the main hindrance to the freedom movement. It has been the same with the French revolution and the Russian revolution. The intellectuals are always with the rulers. So I would say that the uneducated people who do not possess 'literary' knowledge are the ones who can bring justice, much more than the educated.

I learned this important thing from my guru Shankar Guha Niyogi (the assassinated leader of the *Bhilai* miner's union movement in Chhattisgarh). I strongly believe that all the major problems of the world have been created by the educated class. (BSMS 2009, p. 78-9, 85)

Jabbar draws attention here to political superiority of learning through struggle because knowledge is borne of experience. The formally educated, as traditional intellectuals, are in a contradictory position, Their commitment is to the poor who lack formal education, but their experience cannot be the same as the poor's, and their material interests are different. Ultimately there is likely to be a point where interests diverge, the educated will abandon the struggle, and hopefully the movement will be led by the organic intellectuals (Scandrett and Sharma forthcoming).

Reflections for Social Work: from informal collective learning in the Survivors' Movement

Jabbar's challenge about the role of educated intellectuals can be understood dialectically. His comments were given to educated interviewers working on a university-based research project. Jabbar himself has the function of an intellectual in the Gramscian sense: he runs *Swabhimaan Kendra*, an employment skills training project in Bhopal. Sathyu, a university educated 'traditional' intellectual, has spent his life in Bhopal working with the survivors' movement and established These are a few of the direct services provided to individuals, generated by the survivors' movement and retaining accountability to it, whilst building on alliances with specialists.

These initiatives are under fire from Indian neoliberalism which attempts to drive wedges between social movements and the services that are organic to them. With funding denied to campaigning groups, this tends to leave the practice of social work to the corporate sector through CSR, or the Hindutva civil society organisations of the *Sangh Parivar*. The movement from above of neoliberalism is mobilising against progressive and inclusive movements from below.

Whilst the movement has been creative and productive in terms of providing a wide range of services to Bhopal survivors, through a relationship between intellectuals accountable to the survivors' movement, Jabbar's challenge illustrates the tension in that relationship for the possibilities for radical social change which may threaten the interests of these intellectuals. The advanced stages of social movement process includes the potential for revolutionary change, as the realisation of the limits of the campaigns within neoliberal capitalism leads ultimately to

constructions of alternative hegemony. This possibility exists in dialectical tension with the need to provide services and remain accountable to the movement.

This is the nature of social work, operating in the interface of service provision and movement building, seeking to make the services accountable to the movements that have demanded them in the face of neoliberal attempts to isolate need from the social forces which generate them. This is also therefore a challenge for social workers to be educated by the movements as they themselves learn collectively from their praxis.

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