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The political dimension of community development:

'A civilisation which is still to be created'

'AT THE PRESENT MOMENT,' SAYS Jacques Ellul, 'we are confronted with a choice — the "Brave New World" of Huxley, or a different civilisation, which we cannot yet describe because we do not know what it will be; it is still to be created.'¹

The creation of this 'different civilisation' — what I call a 'community world' — is what the process of social transformation we know as 'community development' is all about. This process is essentially a political process, not in the sense that it projects our problems and the solution of our problems onto the state — quite the contrary — but rather in the sense that it involves people continually making corporate policy decisions, constantly deconstructing and reconstructing the nature of our common individual and collective lives.

The sociologist Talcott Parsons says: 'The political process is the process by which the necessary organisation [for making corporate policy decisions] is built up. . . the goals of action are determined and the resources requisite to it are mobilised.'² This may, or may

not, have anything to do with the state.

But in order for true community development to take place, this process needs to be 'organised for the people, by the people themselves'. And it will be judged to have succeeded or failed 'by the practical demonstration in all feasible areas that the community [was able to] define its own needs and organise [its own] resources to satisfy them. . .'.³

✧ MOVING BEYOND OUR IDEOLOGY:

'The agenda of love'

For communities to be free to define our own needs in our own terms and organise our own resources to satisfy them in our own way, the political process at the heart of community development must not be controlled by any ideology, not even a community development ideology.

An idea becomes an ideology when the following takes place:

1. *The end is all important.* The idea is the only thing that really matters.
2. *The means are implemented without restriction.* The methods are evaluated only in terms of the maximum effectiveness and efficiency of means for realising the end.
3. *The central idea distorts crucial values.* Notions such as truth and love and justice are slowly but surely coopted, perverted and misinterpreted as means to an end.
4. *The grand cause creates great conflict.* Any friend who is less than enthusiastic about our cause is

considered an enemy in the end and, in the meantime, any enemy of an enemy is considered a friend.

5. *The end justifies the means.* People are expected to continually and uncritically adjust to all the requirements of any means deemed 'necessary' to achieve the desired end, even to the extent of collaborating in the destruction of our own individual and collective lives 'for the good of the cause'.⁴

We need to always remember that. . . those who love community destroy community; only those who love people can create community.

Love is a sacrificial concern for the welfare of others. It is a concern that is not self-righteous, but self-forgetful in its concern for the welfare of others. It is not masochistic, but is willing to make significant sacrifices, spontaneously, to ensure the welfare of others which it seeks.

Love always works towards mutuality. Yet love requires sacrifice in order to create the possibility of reciprocity. Without sacrifice, there is no possibility of reciprocity at all.

Thus, though love always works towards mutuality, paradoxically its potential can only be realised in reciprocal relationships where concern for mutual advantage is not an issue that anyone would fight for, but one which everyone would equally joyfully sacrifice in the interest of the other.⁵

Love is seldom considered 'a political virtue'. But,

as Edgar Brook points out, 'the world languishes because love is being tried so little'. Hence, he joins his voice to the growing chorus of people around the world who call for love to be put onto the political agenda. 'It is imperative,' he cries, that love should not be left out of the process, but 'that it should be admitted to the field of politics. . .'⁶

If it were not only to be put onto our political agenda, but actually put on top of our political agenda, as the starting point for dealing with all the issues we need to deal with on our political agenda, it would profoundly affect the way we do politics.

First, love would remind us that politics is all about people — 'ordinary people and, for the most part, very ordinary people'.

Second, love would help us remember that the practice of due process in politics starts here and now with us. 'If I don't let it start in my own heart, I cannot expect it to start at all.'

Third, love would help us to make sure that we never forget that, while due process in politics may start with us, it can never be consummated without the full, free and frank participation of others, including all those who may oppose us. 'Everybody needs to be understood and involved in the negotiating process.'

Fourth, love would help us to continue to recognise the humanity of our opponents in the midst of disputes and to forgive the enmity that often erupts out of those unresolved disputes. As South African Michael Cassidy says, 'Unless we build [on the basis] of forgiveness, we will lose the day!'⁷

✧ MOVING TOWARDS OUR IDEALS:

'The struggle for justice'

Justice has no independent meaning apart from the meaning love imparts to it. Justice is the concrete manifestation of love in our political economy. Justice involves putting the people at the bottom of the heap on the top of our priorities and treating them in a way that will make them feel more loved and more able to love.

Love is the ideal. Justice is our attempt to realise that ideal in our community. At best, our realisation approximates our ideal. At worst, it parodies our ideal. The transcendent ideal of love constantly challenges our concrete attempts to realise that ideal in trying to do justice to disadvantaged groups of people, affirming any progress we may make and confronting any compromises we may make along the way.⁸

Love calls us to do justice through *emergency aid*, meeting other people's needs ourselves. 'Some of us avoid emergency aid because we don't want to share our resources to meet other people's needs. We will only be free to embrace emergency aid as an option if we are willing (as love always challenges us to be) to recognise that other people have as much right to what we have as we do ourselves.'⁹

Love calls us to do justice through *formative education*, training people to meet their own needs. 'A few of us avoid formative education because training others to meet their own needs involves a long term rather than short term commitment. We will only be free to embrace formative education as an option if we are

prepared (as love always challenges us to be) to invest the same time equipping people with life-sustaining skills that others have invested in us.¹⁰

Love calls us to do justice through *direct action*, opposing the groups who not only do not help, but actually hinder the process of people attempting to meet their own needs. 'A lot of us avoid direct action because we are afraid of conflict, preferring the support of the power brokers rather than risking their opposition by exposing their exploitation. We will only be free to embrace direct action as an option if we are ready (as love always challenges us to be) to stand for the oppressed against their oppressors, regardless of the consequences.'¹¹

Love calls us to do justice through *model formation*, enabling people to develop a model of the way they want to meet their own needs with, or without, the support of the state. 'Many of us avoid model formation because we would prefer to put the onus for change onto the state, rather than the people, for change. We will only be free to really embrace model formation if we are convinced (as love always challenges us to be) that the only way for people to change their world is to do it themselves.'¹²

Love calls us to do justice through *community development*, enabling people to develop their community in terms of the model of community that they have developed themselves. 'Most of us avoid community development in practice, if not in theory, because we are wary about things getting out of hand — at least out of our hands. We will only be free to truly embrace

community development if we are committed (as love always challenges us to be) to giving people a hand, to build a better world, without any strings attached.'¹³

✧ WORKING FOR LIBERTY AND EQUALITY AND DEMOCRACY:

'Doing the right thing by one another'

The world we envisage, a world in which justice is a way of life, can only be built on the basis of people working for liberty and equality in the context of consensual democratic communities.

In order to ensure justice, we need to practice the regulatory principles of liberty and equality. 'Both liberty and equality are regulative principles of justice. A more just order grants. . . liberty within a framework of increasing equality. But neither is an absolute social norm, neither is a constitutive principle of justice.

'Both are expressions of love finding embodiment in the structures of justice and, in turn, expressing within justice something of the tension between love and justice.'¹⁴

Rawls argues that to guarantee justice:

1. Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all.
2. Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both:
 - (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just savings principle, and
 - (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.¹⁵

Nielsen argues that in order to safeguard liberty from becoming an apology for social and economic inequalities in the name of some inalienable civil right, such as private property, we need to have an unequivocal commitment to work for 'equality of basic conditions for everyone':

First, it means that everyone, as far as possible, should have equal life prospects;

Second, there should be, where this is possible, an equality of access to equal resources over each person's life as a whole, though this should be qualified by people's varying needs. The intent is that this equal access to resources will prevent certain undesirable situations. It will avoid there being the sort of differences between people that allow some to be in a position of control to exploit others. It will protect against one person having power over other persons that does not rest on the revokable consent by those persons.

In situations where it is not possible to distribute resources equally, where considerations of desert are not at issue, the first consideration should be distribution according to stringency of need, second [should be distribution] according to the strength of unmanipulated preferences, and third [should be distribution according to] lottery. . .¹⁶

My friend Allan Halladay, Senior Lecturer in Social Work and Social Policy at the University of Queensland, says that as far as he's concerned: 'There is no basic difference between Rawls' and Nielsen's first principles. Each of these first principles expresses the importance of the equality of self-respect. They both acknowledge the underlying importance of a social order where there is an equal respect for all persons.'

Allan says, 'The difference between Rawls and Nielsen comes in the second principle of justice. Rawls' second principle can be in conflict with his first. It could allow disparities of power, authority and autonomy which undermine self-respect. It suggests that those less well off should accept inequalities if it makes them better off in monetary terms. Nielsen's second principle, however, reinforces his first, insisting that, if the preservation of self-respect is to be the centrepiece of justice, there should be equal access to equal resources over each person's life as a whole.'¹⁷

While I agree with all this, I still have some reservations about the issue of justice being framed in terms of rights rather than in terms of what we used to call 'righteousness' or what we might now call 'rightness'. Though some might say the distinction is merely semantic, I would suggest the difference is very substantive indeed. When we talk about justice in terms of 'our right to have this and our right to have that', we tend to treat justice as if it were just another consumer product that is there for the taking in a consumer society like ours — if, that is, we have the money to buy it.

But justice is not a mass-produced, consumer product; it is a craft product, produced by the masses. Justice is not something, like a nice car, that we can acquire already made; it is, like a good friendship, something that we can only have if we make it ourselves. We don't get it by taking what we consider to be our rights without due regard for our responsibility to others. We get it by giving ourselves to doing what we know is 'the right thing' by one another.

Justice that preserves people's self-respect by doing 'the right thing' by one another is always going to be a struggle: a struggle to empower all those who, hitherto, have all too often been overpowered; a struggle to enable people from every strata of our society to move towards being less autocratic, more democratic and more able to actively seek and actually find the elusive synergy and serendipity of consensus through participatory processes of corporate decision-making in communities, large and small.

Reinhold Niebuhr reminds us that democracy is not a panacea. He describes it, rather ironically, as 'a method of finding proximate solutions for insoluble problems'. But, according to Niebuhr, democracy is nevertheless very important as a process in our struggle for justice because, as he says, '[our] capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but [our] capacity for injustice makes democracy imperative.' According to Niebuhr, 'The highest achievement of democratic societies [is] that they embody the principles of resistance to government with the principle of government itself.'¹⁸

Jacques Ellul warns us not to take any such achievements for granted. 'Experience has shown the state will only retreat when it meets an insurmountable obstacle. The obstacle can only be citizens organised independently of the state. But once organised, the citizens must possess a truly democratic attitude in order to depoliticise and repoliticise [our society in terms of community].'

'All this,' Ellul tells us, 'requires a profound change

in the citizen. It must be admitted that democracy is the exact opposite of our taste for tranquillity. . . As long as [we are] preoccupied only with [our] security and the stability of [our] life, we should have no illusions, we will certainly not find the civic virtue to make democracy come alive. . .

'Democracy,' Ellul tells us, 'becomes possible only through every citizen's will; it remakes itself every day, through every citizen. If we accept the view that democracy is a given fact, everything is lost. On the contrary, it must be understood that democracy can no longer be anything except will, conquest and creation. We must understand that democracy is always infinitely precarious and is mortally endangered by every new progress. It must be forever started again, reconstructed, begun again.'¹⁹

✱ THE 'PEACE' PARADIGM — AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT:

'Let's try another way altogether'

As we consider how we might be able to start to reconstruct our society yet again, with due regard for the liberty, equality and democracy that we hold dear, we need to remember the mistakes we have made in the past so we don't repeat them in the future. Over the last fifty years around the world, we have implemented various economic, social and political models of reconstruction — invariably, with disastrous unintended consequences of one kind or another.

During the 50s and 60s, some of us began to focus our attention on GNP (gross national product) in the

hope that, with modernisation and industrialisation, the political economy would take off and, as a result of the upturn, we would all be able to make so much money that, eventually, it would 'trickle down' from the top to the bottom of society, so that even the poorest of the poor among us would be able to meet their basic human needs.

Some political economies really took off, but the amount that actually trickled down as a result of the upturn was a lot less than anyone anticipated. In most places, the rich were better off, but the poor were worse off after their political economies took off than they were before.

So during the 60s and 70s, some of us began to focus our attention on BHN (basic human needs) in the hope that, through distribution and redistribution, we would be able to share and grow and grow and share the common wealth of the political economy as we went along, so that the rich would have less, the poor would have more and everybody would have enough to be able to meet their basic human needs.

Some political economies opted to share then grow and other political economies opted to grow then share. But regardless of where sharing came in the process, when it came time for sharing, very few of the rich were willing to share voluntarily with the poor. So in many places, ordinary people were no better off than before.

So during the 70s and 80s, some of us began to focus our attention on the NIEO (New International Economic Order) in the hope that, through liberation and revolu-

tion, we would be able to take charge of the political process and make changes in the economic order. These would ensure that the common wealth of the political economy would be shared equally with all so that everybody would be at liberty to meet their basic human needs.

Some political economies took charge of their own affairs and made changes — in some cases, quite significant changes — in the way they functioned. But, as often as not, those who took charge only made changes that suited them and served their vested interests. So in many places, ordinary people were worse off than before.

Because our leaders, who are rich rather than poor, see so much more potential profit to be made in a take-off political economy, rather than a share and grow or grow and share political economy, they are doing their best to lead us back to the beginning of the cycle we have just come through. And because so many of us perceive ourselves as being worse off than we were before, many of us are willing to be led in the hope that, this time round, we will be able to catch more of the crumbs that fall from their table.

But we've been there and done that. It didn't work the first time we tried it. And it won't work the second time we try it. What we need to do is to try another model altogether.

Which brings us, at last, to the PEACE paradigm, an integrated model of development combining five facets: *Participatory politics* and *Equitable economics* with *Appropriate technologies* in *Conscientised communities*,

exercising ongoing *Environmental responsibilities*.

Of this paradigm, Toh Swee Hin says:

The PEACE paradigm upholds development policies which are participatory with the [people who are] no longer powerless and [who are no longer] passively accepting of decisions dispensed from above by elites or experts.

Participation allows the accumulated knowledge of the people to be tapped, rather than ignored, to the detriment of many modernisation schemes.

Social, economic and political structures require radical transformation, so that societal resources are equitably distributed within and between nations.

Technology has to be appropriate, optimising use of local human, material and cultural resources and capable of maximising economic benefits to the poor majorities.

But at the same time, such development should harmonise with, not destroy the environment on which long-term human survival depends.

Above all, 'PEACEful' development embodies the process of conscientisation, whereby the oppressed understand the political roots of their [oppression] and act to liberate themselves.²⁰

It may help us understand the PEACE paradigm if we place it alongside the other models of development, so we can compare it and contrast it with the models of development we have tried so far.

Susan Black, in her groundbreaking thesis, appropriately entitled, *Digging in Our Own Backyard*, does this for us in the tables that are featured, in a modified form, on the next couple of pages:

TABLE I: Models of development

MODEL:	economic	social	political	holistic
TIME	50s, 60s	60s, 70s	70s, 80s	80s, 90s
PROBLEM	poverty	disadvantage	dependence	injustice
SOLUTION	modernisation	distribution	revolution	conscientisation
	industrialisation	redistribution	liberation	transformation
RESOLUTION	wealth	welfare	independence	justice
ISSUE	capital	access	power	love
EMPHASIS	GNP	BHN	NIEO	PEACE
POLITICS	executive	consultative	representative	participatory
ECONOMICS	entrepreneurial	liberal	national	equitable
CONCERNS	exploitation	patronisation	manipulation	nonrealisation

TABLE II: Comparing and contrasting models of development

MODEL:	Economic, social, political	holistic
ETHOS	material	spiritual
	competitive	cooperative
EMPHASIS	separate	integrated
	specialised	generalised
ECOLOGY	opportunistic	responsible
	exploitation	stewardship
ECONOMY	large-scale	small-scale
	growth orientation	equity orientation
POLITY	top down	bottom up
	imposing structures	participatory structures
SOCIETY	outside in	inside out
	centralised processes	decentralised processes
COMMUNITY	old style	new wave
	anachronistic nostalgia	postmodern paradigm

✧ PROMOTING 'PEACE' IN

THE BIOSPHERIC COMMUNITY:

'Turn tears of rage to tears of laughter'

There is a myriad of new wave groups and organisations that have taken PEACE as their paradigm and are promoting the integrated holistic model of development as the only viable policy alternative for the future of the biospheric community.