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Lifelong education

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While the goal of lifelong learning commands a broad policy consensus, it has been widely criticized by adults educationists for its conservatism. This paper explores the origins of the concept in the 1960s and 1970s, and compares key themes with the dominant approaches of the recent period. While there was a turning point during the 1990s, its chief feature was that lifelong learning was less a slogan than a tool for the reform and modernization of aspects of national education and training systems. Its rise has accompanied a wider transformation in the relationship between civil society and state in the western nations. One result is that lifelong learning is becoming one among many factors that are transforming the governance of late modern societies, as the state sheds directive powers both downwards (to individuals and associations) and upwards (to transnational corporations and intergovernmental bodies).

Lifelong learning has emerged onto the contemporary policy scene with the suddenness of a new fashion. Yet it has been around for over three decades. Albeit under the slightly different guise of lifelong education, the idea was widely touted in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and it even briefly won a degree of political favour. What is new about the current debate is the extent to which the goal of lifelong learning now commands a broad policy consensus.

This paper seeks to provide a broader context for contemporary debate over lifelong learning by considering the origins of the concept in the 1960s and 1970s, and comparing key themes then with the dominant approaches of the recent period. Many writers have claimed that this trajectory is a straightforward one: in the 1960s and 1970s, lifelong learning as a concept was humanistic and even radical, but since the 1990s has become increasingly economistic and conservative in its implications (Gustavssen 1995, Boshier 1998). This has an appealing fit with a wider conventional view of 'the times we live in', with its picture of social democracy and radical utopianism battling it out in the 1960s, contrasted with the image of a vicious neo-liberal Right and a vapid 'Third Way' or 'neue Mitte' courting the individualized consumers of the 21st century. In fact, this neat but misleading contrast is distinctly unhelpful. Lifelong learning was never intrinsically a particularly radical concept, nor is it a particularly conservative project in the contemporary context. Its fate displays at least as many continuities as discontinuities.

While there was a turning point during the 1990s, its chief feature was that lifelong learning ceased to be largely a slogan promoted largely through intergovernmental debating chambers, and became increasingly a tool for the reform and modernization of aspects of national education and training systems. In the resulting process of operationalization and implementation, there have inevitably been significant changes in the discourse of which this concept is one defining element. In particular, it

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exemplifies a wider transformation in the relationship between civil society and state in the western nations, with increasing responsibility for security and wellbeing – individual and collective – passing out of the hands of government and into civil society. One result is that lifelong learning is likely to become one among many factors that are transforming the governance of late modern societies, as the state sheds directive powers both downwards (to individuals and associations) and upwards (to transnational corporations and intergovernmental bodies).

Lifelong learning: UNESCO, OECD and the Council of Europe

A number of writers have traced the genesis of the concept back to the intellectual crucible of the late 1960s (Boshier 1998, Knoll 1998). While youth rebellion was the most widely reported feature of this period – along with drugs, music and the hippy movement – these were signs of a deeper questioning of established habit and through which perhaps influenced educational thinking more than any other area of public policy. A number of developments and ideas from that period helped to give the debate its characteristic flavour. Like many 1960s ideas, it drew on the radical thinking of the student movement, the work of post independence intellectuals in the 'Third World' and the post-industrial rhetoric of future-gazers like Alvin Toffler, whose apocalyptic warnings of 'mass disorientation' posed a direct challenge to educational planners (Toffler 1970). With hindsight, we can now see that this was also the high point of terrestrial broadcasting, which allowed new ideas and styles to be shown and discussed in the controlled environment of a public radio or TV studio, a trend celebrated by the media guru Marshall McLuhan in his idea of a 'global village' (McLuhan and Fiore 1967). Taken together, these ideas provided a heady challenge to those who managed and taught in all sectors of education, and were widely discussed in international gatherings such as those held under the aegis of the major intergovernmental bodies. Less widely noted at the time, the phenomenon of the modern academic celebrity also took a leap forward thanks to the combination of cheap paperback publishing, television talk shows and a highly literate audience that writers like McLuhan and Toffler exploited.

However, it would be wrong to see the 1960s debates over lifelong learning as simply the educational expression of radical social movements aiming at transforming the wider structures of capitalism and patriarchy. In educational circles, radical ideas such as deschooling (Illich 1971) clearly related to the emphasis on informal learning across the lifespan, but so did the much more widespread disenchantment with the results of universal state education that were expressed in the Plowden report on inequality and primary schooling, as well as in mainstream social democratic thinking on education more generally.

Writing in the World Yearbook of Education (typical of the transnational character of the debate at that time), Megarry argued that policy makers had lost faith in a simplistic front-end model of education:

> This model rested on a number of questionable assumptions. It presupposed that youth is the best time for learning, and has been associated with the assumption that schools are the best place. Sociological studies of adolescence (reinforced by

> manifest student unrest) in the 1960s underlined the folly of these assumptions. It reminded us of what we should never have forgotten; that with sufficient motivation, almost anyone can learn almost anything – and that compulsion destroys motivation (Megarry 1979: 12).

Also significant was the development of broadcasting, and particularly the extension of television to the majority of the western population, as a medium of public information and education for adults. In Britain, with its strong public broadcasting tradition, senior staff from the British Broadcasting Corporation were closely engaged in both the formal partnership which created the Open University but also the informal networks that helped build up support for the idea of a 'university of the air' (Postgate 1968), a development greeted with widespread interest and optimism outside the UK as well as within it.

No doubt the early slowing down of post-war economic growth rates also had something to do with the rethinking of educational priorities and institutions, as did efforts to tackle strikes and workplace conflict by developing proposals for industrial democracy, which in turn were held to require additional training for worker representatives (Coker 1975, Bullock 1977: ch. 12). Official proposals such as those aired in the Bullock Report in Britain were aimed at giving workers a stake in capitalism, and thus defusing the underlying causes of industrial unrest. But they also placed a new priority upon training for workplace representatives, and Britain was among a number of countries that enacted legislation in these years to guarantee time off work with pay for training workplace representatives.

In fact, discussions of lifelong learning predated the upsurge of interest in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The idea itself can be traced back to the intellectual ferment that followed the end of World War One; influenced by the active debate over the extension of citizenship rights to women and to working class men, as well as by such international developments as the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, an official committee in Britain argued in 1919 that:

> ADULT EDUCATION MUST NOT BE REGARDED AS A LUXURY FOR A FEW EXCEPTIONAL PERSONS HERE AND THERE, NOR AS A THING WHICH CONCERNS ONLY A SHORT SPAN OR EARLY ADULTHOOD, BUT IT IS A PERMANENT NATIONAL NECESSITY, AN INSEPARABLE ASPECT OF CITIZENSHIP, AND THEREFORE SHOULD BE BOTH UNIVERSAL AND LIFELONG (Adult Education Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction 1919: 5, upper case in original).

Subsequently, one of the committee's officials, Basil Yeaxlee of the Young Men's Christian Association, spoke of the growing demand for 'education as a lifelong process' (Yeaxlee 1920: 25). Later, Yeaxlee was to write a full-length study of adult education entitled *Lifelong Education*. In Britain, then, the idea of lifelong education already existed in the aftermath of World War One, albeit in a somewhat rudimentary form and closely associated with the growth of the particular, somewhat narrow provision of liberal adult education. Even this expression of lifelong learning as an aspect of active citizenship, then, should not be misread as unambiguously radical.

In the event, the ferment of ideas represented by the 1919 report was rapidly overtaken by other developments. While the report represented a broadly liberal consensus on citizenship and knowledge – closely associated with the so-called Lib–

Lab tradition of consensual left-of-centre politics in Britain – it did not survive the next two decades, characterized as they were by persistent economic crisis combined with serious labour unrest, both of which were international in character. With capitalism and democracy both apparently in question, this Lib–Lab vision of civic engagement and liberal education was attractive neither to the organized working class nor to an increasingly conservative middle class. And although the education and training of adults were an increasingly important focus for policy and provision, they remained somewhat on the margins of a system whose main purpose remained the socialization of the young. Throughout the 1930s, the central developments came less in the slow growth of liberal adult education, than in the rapid expansion of training programmes for unemployed adults (Field 1992). Following the Second World War, there was renewed interest in adult education, not least as a result of experiences with liberal adult education among servicemen and women, as well as the need for rapid retraining of adults to serve in the armed forces and key industries. This time, the influence on liberal adult education enjoyed a wider, more populist reach than in 1919; among its more lasting practical outcomes were a new generation of residential colleges (Drews and Fieldhouse 1995), the quasi-professionalization of the Worker's Educational Association and university extra-mural departments and the systematic expansion of local authority adult education (Fieldhouse 1995). In vocational training, the experience of rapid upskilling for masses of adult returners was carried over into industrial settings; many of the newly-appointed training officers in industry came with experience in the services or civil service, and they brought with them a background in the design and application of programmed instruction to the acquisition of industrial skills (Field 1995).

While the idea of lifelong learning was produced from the intellectual crucible of the 1960s, only in the 1970s did the idea really start to penetrate the starched world of educational policy-making. The debates of the 1970s were both far-reaching and, in the long term, influential. Characteristically, the debates over lifelong learning tended to be the preserve of educational specialists meeting in the framework of inter-governmental bodies such as the United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). UNESCO in particular fostered a global debate, leading to the 1972 publication of *Learning to Be*, the report of an international committee of experts chaired by Edgar Faure, a former French Prime Minister and Minister of Education (Faure 1972). As a public statement on the principles of lifelong education (more rarely, at this stage, lifelong learning) the Faure report was a turning point. Its essential humanistic concern was with achieving the 'fulfilment of man' through flexible organization of the different stages of education, through widening access to higher levels of education, through recognition of informal and non-formal as well as formal learning, and through what were then new curricular concerns such as health education, cultural education and environmental education. Education, in UNESCO's view, should last the whole life for *all* individuals and not just be tacked on to school or university for a privileged or specialized few. A broad and visionary manifesto, in Joachim Knoll's words, *Learning to Be* served to 'initiate an optimistic phase of international education policy and reform, and also as the beginning of the debate over *lifelong education*' (Knoll 1998: 38, original emphasis).

OECD's contribution was couched more in terms of human capital thinking, albeit laced with a few dashes of social democracy. OECD's ideal socio-economic model at this time would probably have been a pragmatic one, blending the dynamism and openness of the USA with the security and civic virtues of Sweden. In a series of studies, OECD

tried to develop policy instruments for what is called 'recurrent education', the aim of which was to provide governments with practical ways of realizing lifelong education (OECD 1973).

Typical of the OECD instruments was the proposal for paid educational leave (PEL). PEL was deliberately designed to promote what the OECD called 'alternance' across the lifespan between phases of (paid) work, leisure and learning; it was an educational parallel to statutory entitlements for paid holidays (and indeed the German and French terms for PEL – *Bildungsurlaub* and *congé de formation* – could be translated as 'education holidays'). PEL, it was argued, would promote a learning culture for all, helping to promote both increased competitiveness and greater social equality (OECD 1973). Legislation on PEL was subsequently introduced in Sweden and in some German *Lânder* under the control of Social Democrat-led governments; a similar approach was adopted in France in the form of the 1971 law on continuing education. These initiatives were, moreover, watched closely and with some sympathy elsewhere.

Other than PEL, concrete policy developments were relatively rare. Adult educators found legitimation in the new concept and its espousal in such reputable quarters (Gustavsson 1995: 90). And indeed some nations – notably Sweden – expanded their expenditure on adult education. In Britain, the Russell Committee was appointed to advise the government on its policies for adult education; while rather uninspiring in its recommendations, the committee did support the creation of a small number of new agencies to promote particular types of provision such as basic literacy teaching and residential adult education (Department of Education and Science 1973). Yet taken together the cumulative impact of the early debate was muffled and diffuse.

It is not that there was any lack of specific policy proposals to supplement the work of OECD and UNESCO. In terms of practical developments, though, relatively little was achieved as a direct result of the debate over lifelong education. In Britain, a new Adult Literacy Resources Agency was created, initially as a unit within the National Institute for Adult Education in England and Wales, and a parallel agency was established in Scotland. A new residential adult college was opened, in Barnsley (though this owed more to the support of the South Yorkshire local authorities than to interest on the part of national government). There were some relatively small scale initiatives in fields such as guidance and multicultural education, and that was about it. The early debate over lifelong education was rapidly overtaken by events, and in particular by the onset of the 1973 oil crisis which precipitated a decade or more of rising unemployment levels in the West, along with a drift away from the consensus around the post-1945 welfare settlement. In Britain, James Callaghan's minority Labour administration was plagued by industrial unrest as well as by rising youth unemployment. Its educational priorities were broadly reflected in Callaghan's 1976 speech at Ruskin College, which called for schools to pay greater attention to the preparation of young people for the world of work. Nor was adult education exempt from these pressures, particularly as the experience of unemployment started to spread from young people to the adult workforce at a time when local authorities found themselves under pressure to reduce spending on non-statutory services. The broadly humanistic ideals that had inspired Faure and his followers were replaced by what the government's left-wing critics called 'the new vocationalism'.

Two factors limited the impact of the early debate upon policy and practice. First, although the debate over lifelong education had some influence on government behaviour, its main power base lay in the world of intergovernmental agencies such as UNESCO, the OECD and the Council of Europe, with the latter tending to talk of

permanent education rather than lifelong learning (Knoll 1998). This location helps explain the content of the concept at this stage. First, for all their self-importance, the intergovernmental agencies were basically without powers. It is notable that only the OECD's proposals appeared to have any concrete influence, possibly in part because its remit was more closely focused on policy and partly because its membership was restricted to a small group of relatively like-minded countries. In so far as UNESCO had any influence on government, this derived in part from its inclusive membership; it therefore offered a forum in which rivalries were played out between the Communist bloc, the advanced capitalist West, and the emerging nations of the South – with each group playing one of its rivals off against the other, and the secretariat serving as a less than disinterested umpire (Hoggart 1992: 152–175; Defarges 1996: 29–30). Policy innovations might be taken seriously by the contenders if they offered something of an advantage over their rivalries, but lifelong learning was just not a big enough stake in this struggle to make much of an impact. While the Council of Europe fostered a number of projects on adult education in the later 1970s, its contacts were largely through national adult education bodies rather than high level policy makers.

The second limiting factor was the changing economic climate during the later 1970s. Lifelong learning as concept was rooted on an economy of full employment. Alternation on the OECD model took as a given the prevalence of waged labour. Once the stable model of waged employment gave way to a more fragmented and turbulent labour market, combined with the shift towards consumerism that characterized the affluent western societies, the early conception of lifelong learning lost much of its appeal. PEL was born at a time when the OECD's member states were toying with the idea of industrial democracy as a way of integrating trade unions into an industrial order that was embarking on a process of technologically-induced adaptation and change. After the large-scale labour unrest of the late 1960s and early 1970s came to an end, and unemployment figures started to rise, talk of industrial democracy faded, and PEL lost much of its impetus (Field 1995). Even in those countries which promoted PEL, the experience took somewhat different directions from those anticipated, not least in the relatively low numbers of participants compared with the total of those who were legally eligible, and in the drift away from continued training and education towards short, consumer-oriented activities such as study tours that were allegedly light on the study side (Nuissl 1988, Rieger 1987). By the late 1970s, then, talk of lifelong learning and recurrent education was confined largely to the professional adult education community, where it acquired an increasingly nostalgic tone.

The re-emergence of lifelong learning

During the early 1990s, the rise of lifelong learning up the policy agenda was truly remarkable. At first sight, the constellation of intergovernmental agencies and Social Democrat governments may seem familiar, echoing as it does the configuration of the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, there are at least two significant differences. First, unlike the 1970s, one of the intergovernmental bodies had by the 1990s gained decision-making powers, and was in a position to make a real difference to policy. Second, particularly after the European Year of Lifelong Learning in 1996, the concept was absorbed into national level policy debates, and has continued to play a part in legitimating a wide range of policy instruments.

A renewed effusion also poured from the International bodies. For much of the 1980s, international intergovernmental bodies had found relatively little to say on the topic. Tackling unemployment replaced earlier preoccupations as the central task for adult education and training. However, they returned to it in the 1990s with renewed vigour, with key policy texts appearing from UNESCO (Delors 1996) as well as two relatively new players: the European Commission (CEC 1995), OECD (OECD 1996), and the Group of Eight industrial nations (Group of Eight 1999).

UNESCO's proposals can be dealt with relatively briefly. Prepared during the build-up to its 1997 world conference on education, the UNESCO report was drafted by an international commission chaired by Jacques Delors, then the recently-retired president of the European Commission. Its strong emphasis on the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in promoting lifelong learning – an angle that is common to a wide range of UNESCO policy discussions – set it apart from both the OECD and EU positions. Otherwise, in spite of an occasional radicalism of language, it said little in substance that was new or different. What distinguished the report from Faure's work in the early 1970s was its reception; while lifelong learning had been criticized in the earlier period for its orientation towards the industrial nations, the 1997 UNESCO conference welcomed the concept, and sought to connect it with a strong commitment to achieving 'a learning society committed to social justice and general well-being' (UNESCO 1998). There is little evidence here, then, of a move from 1970s radicalism to 1990s neo-liberalism. However, UNESCO is not the force it was even in the 1970s, when its influence stemmed from the tensions between east, west and south. The collapse of Communism (whose visible weakness permitted Reagan to stage a US walkout in 1984), and the breakdown of the 'Third World' grouping through such events as the democratization of southern Africa and the rapid economic growth of once 'underdeveloped' nations, have left UNESCO marginal in the short term and its long term fate uncertain.

By contrast, the European Commission has become a major intergovernmental policy actor. In the early 1970s, although the European Commission responded to Edgar Faure's UNESCO report by commissioning its own policy enquiry, calling for a shift towards a system of 'education permanente', its powers to implement its own recommendations were strictly limited (Janne 1983). During the 1970s, though, at least in fact if not in law the European Commission acquired powers over education policy and it exerted these with increasing vigour during the period 1986–1992, when it was pursuing the creation of the single European market (Field 1998: 35–9). This in itself transformed the prospects for pursuing lifelong learning policies, as these were rapidly adopted by the Commission during the Delors period, not least because they appeared to justify a new balance of authority between Commission and member states in a field that had hitherto belonged, at least in law, to the latter.

Lifelong learning formed one of the cornerstones of Jacques Delors' white paper on competitiveness and economic growth (Commission of the European Communities (CEC) 1994), while the Commission's White Paper on education and training was published under the title *Teaching and Learning: towards the learning society* (CEC 1995). When the Commission subsequently declared 1996 to be the European Year of Lifelong Learning, the idea rapidly re-entered the mainstream political vocabulary.

In concrete terms, little distinguished the European Commission's thinking from that of the other intergovernmental agencies. The central role of lifelong learning had been flagged in the commission's 1994 White Paper on competitiveness (which originally proposed the Year of Lifelong Learning):

> Preparation for life in tomorrow's world cannot be satisfied by a once-and-for-all acquisition of knowledge and know-how.... All measures must therefore necessarily be based on the concept of developing, generalising and systematising lifelong learning and continuing training (CEC 1994: 16, 136).

The education and training white paper offered the same message. Coming as it did towards the end of the Delors presidency of the commission, its main function was to propose ways of bringing education and training in line with the requirements of the single European market, whose completion in 1992 in many ways marked the high point of the Europeanization processes.

The commission's diagnosis was simplicity itself: the European Union was faced by the threats and opportunities of globalization, information technology and the application of science. If they were going to stand up to Japan and the USA, the EU's member states had to pool some of their sovereignty and resources, in education and training as in other policy areas; this would also help develop a sense of European citizenship and foster social inclusion. That the Commission's definition of lifelong learning is a broad and far-reaching one is not in doubt. However, it has emerged to prominence in tandem with the evolving balance between Commission and member states, in which education policy has frequently been the subject of trade-offs between one player and another (Field 1998). In terms of the development of concrete policy measures, moreover, Barry Hake has rightly noted that the outcomes have been extremely limited (Hake 1998).

With regard to its influence, the OECD stands somewhere between the EU's policy institutions and UNESCO's role as debating chamber. The OECD's function is concerned largely with the critique and development of policy in various areas, primarily but not exclusively relating to the effects of these policies on the global economy. After the collapse of communism, it required a new role in helping prepare emerging economies to survive under international trade agreements (Defarges 1996: 69). Since its membership consists of the world's wealthier nations (chiefly but not exclusively Western), its main audience consists of relatively senior policy-makers, and much of its work results in inter-ministerial debates, the OECD has influence, if not – as does the EU – direct power.

Through the 1980s and 1990s, the OECD pursued the goal of supporting governments in 'encouraging macro-economic stabilisation, structural adjustment and the globalisation of production and distribution', while secondarily paying attention to the preservation of 'social cohesion' (Miller 1997: 24). It was in this context that the OECD convened its 1996 meeting of education ministers under the title of 'Lifelong Learning for All'. Once more, an emphasis on lifelong learning was justified by reference to global competitive pressures and the changes being wrought by science and the new technologies. However, the OECD went somewhat further in its interests than either UNESCO or the EU. Taking lifelong learning to mean 'the continuation of conscious learning throughout the lifespan', the OECD emphasized that this must embrace learning undertaken 'informally at work, by talking to others, by watching television and playing games, and through virtually every other form of human activity' (OECD 1996: 89). This was reflected in the weight attached by OECD to the building of links between informal learning and the formal education and training system. It also clearly linked lifelong learning through to strategies for tackling social exclusion, a topic followed up in a dedicated project two years later (OECD 1998). Unlike UNESCO, then, the OECD appears to have developed its proposals for lifelong learning in

response to what it perceives as the new policy challenges arising from globalization and technological change, as well as evidence of a growing gap between the 'information rich' and the 'information poor'. It resembles UNESCO in that it offers little evidence for the conventional view of a left-to-right trajectory – not least because its ideas never were particularly radical in terms of the established political divide!

The second major development has been at national level, where ideas about lifelong learning have been widely debated among policy makers. Britain offers an instructive example of the speed with which this process occurred. In 1997, the incoming Labour government appointed Dr Kim Howells as the country's first Minister of Lifelong Learning. In the following year, separate Green Papers outlined proposals for Wales, Scotland and England, while an Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning, created in early 1998, produced two wide-ranging reports on future policy developments. All this was followed by a White Paper (*Learning to Succeed*) for post-16 education and training in England, and the launch of a series of initiatives ranging from individualized funding incentives for learners through to the creation of a new framework promoting basic literacy and numeracy. But if Britain's New Labour government was untypical in the range and ambition of its activities, it was far from being alone.

Lifelong learning also formed the focus of policy statements and measures adopted by a wide range of western governments. In Germany, the federal education ministry published a series of reports on lifelong learning by the adult educationist Gunther Dohmen (Dohmen 1996, 1998). Lifelong learning policy papers also appeared from the Dutch, Norwegian, Finnish and Irish governments (Department of Education and Science 1998, Ministry of Culture, Education and Science 1998).

As a phrase, lifelong learning has in several European nations – generally with Social Democrat parties in power – become a convenient political shorthand for the modernizing of education and training systems. As in the intergovernmental agencies, it is often associated with attempts to increase competitiveness and innovation at a time of intensifying global trading pressures, by promoting investment in human resources across the life span and in a variety of settings. To this extent, it is becoming part of the accepted policy discourse of the western nations. The fact that the rhetoric is rarely matched by results, at least in the short to medium term, is another matter (Field 2000), which should not distract us from the extent to which many governments share a broad consensus on the desirability of political strategies aimed at promoting lifelong learning for as wide a range of the population as possible.

At the same time, though, the strategies being adopted are consistent with the wider moves towards a new settlement between state and civil society. As in a number of other policy areas, such as public health or environmental protection or enterprise promotion, government alone can deliver very little. Participation in a more open, learning-network society requires, according to one German policy adviser, that:

> learners themselves will have to choose and combine learning processes and strike the right balance between available routes of learning in a way that meets their specific needs. In other words, they will be largely responsible for directing their learning themselves (Dohmen 1996: 35).

Lifelong learning is precisely the sort of problem that persuaded governments that the old ways of working were not enough. Individual behaviour and attitudes are at the heart of the new approach – and this at a time when values of autonomy and independence are deeply embedded in our culture.

In so far as lifelong learning is consistent with these values, we can expect individuals to respond positively; equally, where lifelong learning is perceived as a dissonant experience, we can expect individuals to respond with a radical scepticism. As for those who opt out, one recent policy paper in The Netherlands which outlined the contribution of its National Action Programme for Lifelong Learning towards removing obstacles and offering relevant opportunities, went on to insist that:

> This is achieved by involving everyone. However, a chain is only as strong as its weakest link.... All people, young and old, are firstly and naturally responsible for themselves. You have to learn how to take care of yourself, and therefore you must want to acquire the knowledge and skills to do that. Those who do not take part will be reminded of their responsibilities (Ministry of Culture, Education and Science 1998: 9).

Hence one aspect of the commonly-noted trend towards authoritarianism and compulsion, directed increasingly not only at benefit seekers and other marginalized groups but also at professionals and managers in the form of compulsory professional development and regulatory requirement (Coffield 1999: 9–10).

Conclusions

It is tempting to conclude, as some have done, that the semantic shift from 'lifelong education' to 'lifelong learning' marks a sharp turn towards vocationalism and away from emancipation (Boshier 1998). But this is to draw too sharp a line between terms that have often been used interchangeably. Thus in Britain, the Director of the National Institute of Adult Education noted descriptions of the Russell Report as 'an essential first step towards a proper system of lifelong learning' (Stock 1973), while the title of the published version of a UNESCO conference on lifelong learning in 1969 referred also to 'continuing education', itself presented as an English translation of 'éducation permanente' (Jessup 1969). Nor were the ideas of the 1960s always concerned with emancipation rather than economics. In 1969, a respected comparative scholar writing on Edgar Faure's adult education policies for France warned that

> There is a need to counter-balance economic pressure, so that *éducation permanente* does not merely develop more efficient producers and consumers of material benefits, but also individuals of high aesthetic and spiritual sensibility, with the knowledge and social conscience to create and maintain a society capable of satisfying the whole human personality (Titmus 1969: 83).

Proposals in the 1969 UNESCO conference report were similarly not particularly radical, including as they did such suggestions as the organizing of practical art classes by art galleries or holding archaeology courses in museums (Jessup 1969). It is important, then, not to be misled by projecting today's ideological divisions backwards onto the past.

Radicalism was certainly present in some early conceptions of lifelong learning and lifelong education. Perhaps the best known and most consistent exponent of a radical view of lifelong education was Ettore Gelpi, an Italian who worked for some years with UNESCO's lifelong education division. For Gelpi, writing in the 1970s, lifelong education was fundamentally concerned with conceptualizing an alternative perspective on global education (Gelpi 1979). Similarly, Paul Lengrand related lifelong

education to awareness of global issues that transcended particular human societies, such as human rights, justice and equality (Lengrand 1975). R. H. Dave, an Indian working for the UNESCO Institute for Education, also took a broad view of lifelong education as educating 'an individual for the conscious and continuous enhancement of the quality of life, his own and that of his society' (Dave 1973: 11, gender specific language as in original). For all these writers, then, lifelong learning had a broad and long term social purpose. Yet this was not spelled out in detail, and its radicalism was surely subordinated to a profound humanism. By today's standards, it was also underpinned by considerable optimism and certainty – even at times dogmatism – about such universal goals as justice, equality and the good life. Nor is it entirely absent from today's debates, whether in a broad sense as manifested in the 1997 UNESCO conference cited above, or in the more attenuated and constrained form offered in the concerns for inclusion and cohesion of the OECD and European Commission.

What has changed – and profoundly so – is the political and cultural context in which lifelong learning policy is now developing. In its evidence to the Russell Committee, the then newly-formed Society of Industrial Tutors (SIT) noted the steady expansion in 'liberal adult education' for 'men and women in industry and commerce' as evidence of 'a huge area of potential students who are waiting for adult education', with lack of resources posing the 'only barrier' (SIT 1970: 4, 7). Less than three decades later, the SIT itself was dead, along with the debates that had animated its members over method, content and purpose in liberal education for trade union members and officers. A number of key changes had taken place in the meantime. Some of the underlying socio-economic trends have already been referred to above, but there have also been significant shifts in political culture. First, the labour movement had been transformed. From functioning as a democratic movement of active members who collectively determined policy, albeit often in profoundly flawed ways, the movement increasingly comprises a series of professionalized organizations, providing services in exchange for regular subscription payments. Trade union membership is increasingly confined to a public service sector ghetto, Labour Party membership to the university-educated middle class, often also employed in the public sector (Seyd and Whiteley 1992). While the same is also true of the Conservative Party and many of its equivalents outside Britain, parties of the right have rarely had the same organic relationship with adult education movements as parties of the left. Second, the political culture of the intelligentsia had been transformed. In strong contrast to the 1960s and 1970s, by the 1990s there was no significant sub-group of intellectuals seeking to ally themselves with popular movements in seeking a thorough-going social transformation. Rather, the focus of political resistance appears to have shifted away from social movements whose activities are located in the public space to a series of individual attempts at authenticity and autonomy – essentially privatized struggles in which the 'enemy' may be a loved one or even, in tackling change to the body or spirit, one's own self.

To see lifelong learning as simply a form of disguised conservatism laced liberally with vocationalism is, then, to miss the extent of the changes that are taking place. In a learning society, the fact that individuals are treated as though they can acquire and understand the implications of new information about their well-being becomes in turn a *justification* for reducing the resources that are made available through public services. Although this can amount to a form of 'structural discrimination', it is one which largely passes unnoticed and unchallenged. By individualizing the characteristics which justify employees and others in treating people differently, the trend towards lifelong learning also helps fragment the excluded, and encourages a search for individual

solutions. And this pattern is reproduced through other areas of public life, as the welfare state switches its focus from 'passive support' to 'active strategies of insertion' – the most significant of which include training, so that individuals can acquire the skills and knowledge required for them to take active responsibility for their own well-being. Lifelong learning does not solely serve to reproduce existing hierarchies and inequalities, but may potentially create and legitimate new ones. It therefore poses new and frequently contradictory challenges, both to the policy community and to the increasingly fragmented community of practice that promotes and encourages learning throughout the lifespan. These challenges – which are typical of the unanticipated tensions arising from both the new governance and 'Third Way' policies – were not anticipated by the 'founding fathers' of lifelong learning.

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