

Community economic development and capitalism: A Darwinian struggle of no pity?

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This paper provides a broad qualitative critique of neo-liberal theory and practice that views Community Economic Development (CED) as “gap-filling”. It asks the question, why community economic development at all? By offering alternative visions to the prevailing economic model of a globalised planet, it is hoped that community practitioners will revisit beliefs and ideas that view community engagement and development from the bottom up rather than the top down. That is, to rekindle CED work from a perspective that begins in communities while counterbalancing expectations for unlimited economic growth with the urgent need for a sustainable, moral and planetary economy. As shameless advocates for community first, CED workers empower local knowledge to solve local problems for the socioeconomic and cultural development of both immediate and extended communities.

Keywords: gap-filling; community economic development; intellects/intellectuals, Glass-Steagall Act; Keynesian mixed-economy; neo-liberalism; Marxism

Introduction: A conflict of visions

If skeptics weed and visionaries water, then Paul A. Baran’s paper on, *The Commitment of the Intellectual*, clears and cultivates the ideological terrain by naming the unnameable (Baran, 1961). That is, to distinguish between ‘intellects’ and ‘intellectuals’ on this human project called Capitalism. Both intellects and intellectuals earn a living with their heads rather than their hands yet the orientation of one is different from the other.

The intellect worker’s time and attention is fixated on the particular task in which s/he is engaged, whether it is making money, curing people, building things, teaching, or administering society. As a direct and significant beneficiary of the economic system—Baran argues—the intellect worker is readily—if unconsciously—disposed to endorse the prevailing socioeconomic order. Work is specialised, requiring training and skills obtained through certifications by exclusive professional associations that are narrow in scope yet long on institutional credentials. Specialisation necessitates that expertise situated in specific programs and disciplines foster areas of study that are esoteric to the uninitiated. The language used is largely undecipherable—perhaps intentionally—to the physical workers dutifully cooperating with the procedures, protocols, policies, prescriptions, etc., of the intellect workers who are primarily focussed on maintaining the status quo which has created and now protects existing social values, class,

status and –ultimately, power. In sum, the intellect worker “is typically the faithful servant, the agent, the functionary, and the spokesman of the capitalist system” (Baran, 1961)¹.

From Baran’s perspective, the intellectual seeks to systematically interconnect seemingly disparate, autonomous and disjointed facets of our existence so that they can be understood “as part of the comprehensive totality of the historical process” (Baran, 1961). It is from the viewpoints expressed within the diverse academic traditions that the past and present coupled together make sense. Intellectuals give meaning to the subterranean connections that bind historical episodes together so that the whole of the truth is understood from a multidisciplinary perspective. That is, from the vantage points held by diverse academic traditions to arrive at an approximation and not an absolute notion of the ‘truth’. The intellectual should be regarded as a social critic courageously questioning societal assumptions and traditions with the aim of creating a more humane and rational social order that transcends private self-interests by subordinating them to the common good. Indeed, John Paul Satre –a leading existentialist philosopher of the political Left during the 1960s and 70s—pronounced intellectuals to be the moral conscience of their age, duty-bound to speak out in accordance with their ethics and principles (Scriven, 1993, p. 119)². As a leading American Marxist professor of his day, Baran understood well the role of the social pundit in challenging the post-WWII orthodoxy of mainstream economic theory by providing the intellectual underpinning for alternative perspectives from the Left to be heard and debated not only in the Global South but also in the so-called centres of the developed world³.

Neoliberalism: A constrained vision of humankind

Clearly, Baran’s heretical rejection of self-interest as a determining factor for organising society situates him within the political Left. But, what of those on the other side of the looking glass? William F. Buckley Jr.—former editor of the conservative magazine, *National Review* and host of the popular American television show, *Firing Line*—would passionately disagree with Baran’s

¹ As noted in Baran’s paper, not every intellect worker consciously holds this view. Nonetheless, the capitalist system presents itself as a ‘given’, as a priori, obscuring alternative models of economic sustainability and development. Marshall McLuhan, likens this situation to a fish in water. McLuhan writes, “one thing about which fish know exactly nothing is water, since they have no anti-environment which would enable them to perceive the element they live in” (McLuhan, 2001).

² Noam Chomsky writing in 1967 in an article entitled, *The Responsibility of the Intellectuals*, states, “With respect to the responsibility of intellectuals, there are still other, equally disturbing questions. Intellectuals are in a position to expose the lies of governments, to analyze actions according to their causes and motives and often hidden intentions. In the Western world, at least, they have the power that comes from political liberty, from access to information and freedom of expression. For a privileged minority, Western democracy provides the leisure, the facilities, and the training to seek the truth lying hidden behind the veil of distortion and misrepresentation, ideology and class interest, through which the events of current history are presented to us. The responsibilities of intellectuals, then, are much deeper than what Macdonald calls the “responsibility of people,” given the unique privileges that intellectuals enjoy” (Chomsky, 1967). In sum, it is an ideology of honesty.

³ Of particular note here is the debate that existed with Dependency Theory as articulated by Andre Gunder Frank (Frank, 1966) and Wallerstein’s World Systems Theory (Wallerstein, *The Rise and Future Demise of the Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis*, 1974) on the one hand and Modernisation theorists such as W.W. Rostow (Rostow, 1960) on the other.

epistemological orientation and his appropriation of the value-laden term, intellectualism. Buckley—a graduate from Yale and fervently anti-socialist—was to be the apostle for a post-WWII conservative revival that skillfully fused three strands of American intellectual fundamentalists together: traditional conservatives frightened by the secular mass society surrounding them, libertarians distraught by a Leviathan state that threatened free enterprise and individualism and ex-Leftists alarmed by the perceived threat of international Communism commanded by the Soviet Union (Edwards, 2010)⁴. Unafraid of crossing swords with his intellectual adversaries, Buckley was quick to unleash his rapier wit and quick intelligence in debate with such challengers as Gore Vidal, James Baldwin and Noam Chomsky (Proverbs13i16, Noam Chomsky vs. William F. Buckley Debate, 2006). Championing a blend of conservatism that emphasised order and custom and that particular libertarianism with its evangelical faith in economic freedom, Buckley took on all who challenged his socioeconomic creed. George Nash, a conservative historian of the right-wing movement in the U.S., wrote in *National Review*, “William F. Buckley Jr. was arguably the most important public intellectual in the United States in the past half century. For an entire generation he was the preeminent voice of American conservatism and its first great ecumenical figure” (Nash, 2008), but not the only apostle for 20th Century neo-liberalism to emerge. Buckley became revered as the St. Paul of the modern conservative movement in the U. S.; meanwhile, his brother in arms Milton Friedman became the St. Peter, jealously guarding the golden keys to earthly salvation⁵.

Arguably, no person more embodied the spirit of libertarian conservatism than economics Professor Milton Friedman. In an essay written in the *New York Times* entitled, “The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits”, Friedman declares that corporate CEOs have a contractual obligation to do one thing: maximise shareholder returns on investment. Using profits to improve working conditions for employees or reduce pollution is in fact stealing money from corporate investors who—according to Friedman—have the inalienable individual right to decide how that money gets spent; Friedman calls this ‘taxation without representation’. CEOs engaging in philanthropy or fulfilling any self-perceived social responsibility other than increasing investment dividends are—according to Friedman—immoral (Friedman, 1970). The result is that people—valued as a means to an end—become the organic working parts of a

⁴ The use of the term, Leviathan, refers to the 1651 book, *The Matter, Forme and Power of a Common Wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil* or *Leviathan*, written by Thomas Hobbes. Leviathan argues for a social contract and rule by an absolute sovereign. Hobbes wrote that civil war and situations identified with a state of nature and the famous motto, *Bellum omnium contra omnes* (the war against all) could only be averted by strong central government.

⁵ Canadian author Naomi Klein in her book, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (Klein, 2008, p. 17) writes that, “In the attempt to relate the history of the ideological crusade that has culminated in the radical privatization of war and disaster, one problem recurs: the ideology is a shape-shifter, forever changing its name and switching identities. Friedman called himself a ‘liberal,’ but his U.S. followers, who associated liberals with high taxes and hippies, tended to identify as ‘conservatives,’ ‘classical economists,’ ‘free marketers’ and, later, as believers in ‘Reaganomics’ or ‘laissez-faire.’ In most of the world, their orthodoxy is known as ‘neo-liberalism,’ but it is often called ‘free trade’ or simply ‘globalization.’ Only since the mid-nineties has the intellectual movement, led by the right-wing think tanks with which Friedman had long associations—Heritage Foundation, Cato Institute and the American Enterprise Institute—called itself ‘neo-conservative,’ a world view that has harnessed the full force of the U.S. military machine in the service of a corporate agenda.”

corporate machine that cannot lawfully operate in any other manner. Taking hold of Friedman's ideas on the economy and implementing them into policy, the Thatcher Government in the U.K and the Reagan Administration in the U.S, launched a concerted neo-liberal crusade that challenged and destroyed Soviet communism creating a unipolar world that was to shape world events for the next forty years⁶.

The triumph of an unfettered global market

Carrying forward the banner of neo-liberal economics for successive conservative governments both in the U.S. and throughout the world, Alan Greenspan—chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve from 1987 to 2006—enabled an ambitious American experiment that freed markets from public oversight. An acknowledged libertarian, he counted among his seminal influences the novelist Ayn Rand, who throughout her writings portrayed the common good as an evil force pitted against the enlightened self-interest of individuals (Rand, 1953)⁷. Given his philosophical assumptions, it is not surprising that Greenspan maintained an unwavering faith in corporations and their investors to act responsibly in a capitalist system of unfettered financial markets. Affectionately known as the Oracle, Greenspan brushed aside criticism from progressive economists by proclaiming that the market alone could moderate financial risks (Napolioni, 2008). Indeed, an examination of his record on financial regulation reveals the depth of his conviction in the free market. A faith, not only anchored to economic health of the U.S. but—more critically—to that of the whole of the globalised world. Confident in his ability to prophesise the future, Greenspan testified on numerous occasions during his long career before congressional committees advocating for, and ultimately winning, the rescindment of a strategic piece of legislation enacted during the Great Depression of the 1930s, namely, the Glass-Steagall Act (GSA). The GSA allowed commercial banks to accept deposits and make loans but it limited financial activities so that banks could not become involved in the selling or trading of securities or underwriting, thus eliminating the trade of risky or speculative financial instruments. Conversely, investment banks could underwrite securities and sell securities but they could not accept bank deposits or make loans to customers. By separating the powers of commercial and

⁶ Francis Fukuyama in his book, *The End of History and the Last Man*, writes, "What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government" (Fukuyama, 1992, p. 45)

⁷ Greenspan notes in his autobiography, *The Age of Turbulence: Adventures in a New World*, "Ayn Rand and I remained close until she died in 1982, and I'm grateful for the influence she had on my life. I was intellectually limited until I met her. All of my work had been empirical and numbers-based, never values-oriented. I was a talented technician, but that was all. My logical positivism had discounted history and literature -- if you'd asked me whether Chaucer was worth reading, I'd have said, "Don't bother." Rand persuaded me to look at human beings, their values, how they work, what they do and why they do it, and how they think and why they think. This broadened my horizons far beyond the models of economics I'd learned. I began to study how societies form and how cultures behave, and to realize that economics and forecasting depend on such knowledge -- different cultures grow and create material wealth in profoundly different ways. All of this started for me with Ayn Rand. She introduced me to a vast realm from which I'd shut myself off" (Greenspan, 2007, p. 51).

investment banks, the GSA was effective in protecting depositors' money until it was repealed in 1999 during the tenure of President Bill Clinton (Kaptur, 2012).

Ironically, just prior to the global meltdown of 2008, Friedman wrote these commemorative words for his old friend and high priest of the conservative movement:

Over the course of a long friendship, Alan Greenspan and I have generally found ourselves in accord on monetary theory and policy, with one major exception. I have long favored the use of strict rules to control the amount of money created. Alan says I am wrong and that discretion is preferable, indeed essential. Now that his 18-year stint as chairman of the Fed is finished, I must confess that his performance has persuaded me that he is right -- in his own case. His performance has indeed been remarkable (Friedman, 2011).

Strongly influenced by Friedman's theorising and Greenspan's guiding hand, capitalism veiled as freedom became the mantra for an internationally deregulated market where corporations—legally beholden to maximise shareholder returns—fuelled corporate self-interest, unabashed investor greed and widespread corruption. On September 15, 2008, the ideological underpinning of the free-trade/globalisation experiment was challenged with the forced bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers and the subsequent global economic meltdown that crashed in behind it creating a financial train wreck of historic magnitude⁸. Four years after the Great Recession of 2008 we can take stock of the financial crisis and the reaction of national governments around the world to spend trillions of dollars of public money to support private corporations that were considered too big to fail as their collapse would have—it is claimed—destroyed the world's economy (Engdahl, 2012). Today, citizens around the world are confronted by government austerity programs that limit, reduce or eliminate Keynesian or mixed-economy social welfare gains made over the past 60 years in favour of increased partnerships between the public and private sectors that allegedly reduce taxpayer costs while fostering innovation and entrepreneurship (Loxley, 2010). Limited access to private capital has motivated governments and international organisations such as the IMF and World Bank to call for strategic governmental investments in the areas of employee re-training, job creation and infrastructure building and rehabilitation as a means to stimulate productive activity and ultimately, economic growth as a means of maintaining—and perhaps optimistically reforming—the capitalist system with the patronage of the state (Bank, 2002).

A moral economy: Balancing limitations

Against this historical backdrop we can appreciate John Friedmann's intellectual foundation and his advocacy of progressive planning and action when he writes, "... as we approach the end of

⁸ The news that Barclays PLC is involved in fixing the London interbank offered rate (LIBOR) which sets interest rate benchmarks from everything to mortgages to credit cards and over \$550 trillion in financial derivatives reveals that international financial institutions refuse to acknowledge but understand Klein's thesis very well -the end justifies the means because those that are too big to fail do not go to jail for their crimes against society (Slater, 2012).

the [20th] century, the social mobilisation tradition is becoming ever more relevant to planning. For there are signs that the system of industrial capitalism is so deeply mired in crisis that it may never recover” (Friedmann, 1987, p. 9). These are prophetic words given the desperate state of neo-liberal policies in the core economies of the United States and Europe and their impact on the peripheral economies of the world system (Frank, 1966). In a world that is increasingly self-absorbed, self-interested and driven to achieve maximum gains at minimal costs regardless of the damage to our environment, it is imperative that we speak of humanist values in planning; that is, to have a value statement and move ‘values to action’. As we live within an economic system that expounds unlimited material growth and perpetual happiness, it is critical to our survival that we develop an idea of the ‘moral economy’ that plans for a balance of limitations⁹.

To reform or to transform, that is the question with which we struggle to answer. Social critics on the Left contend that the current crisis in capitalism is attributable to the accumulation and concentration of capital and means of production into the hands of fewer and fewer people, while those on the Right advocate for the maintenance of a person’s freedom to determine their own futures based on their individual abilities and talents in a Darwinian free-for-all. It is a question of our specific individual understanding of human nature. Baran and his fellow socialist-anarchist colleagues on the one hand, and Buckley, Freidman, Greenspan and the neo-liberal movement on the other, implicitly understood how our normative or positivist positions on the question of morality shift our ideological compass on the idea of right and wrong. Standing together at the edge of Nietzsche’s abyss, we are free to choose: we can look into it as it looks into us; we can throw a rope across the chasm and watch as each individual man, woman and child struggles with the passage; or we can have faith that as individuals collectively subordinating our wills to the good of the community, we can traverse the obstacle and arrive together in peace and prosperity on the other side¹⁰.

⁹ Friedmann writes, “I begin with what I believe to be our birthright to human flourishing. In an essay on the “good city”, I argued that “every human being has the right to the full development of their innate intellectual, physical, and spiritual capabilities in the context of wider communities.” I called this the right to human flourishing and proposed it as the most fundamental of human rights. Philosophical anthropology teaches us that individual human beings cannot be meaningfully described as an abstract concept such as the utility-maximizing “economic man” of neo-classical thought which, when seriously applied in policy discourse, can have vicious consequences. Rather, from the moment of conception until we die, human beings can only be understood as multi-dimensional, socially-related beings or persons who, over the entire arc of their lives, evolve biologically, psychologically and in the social relations that constitute our collective existence. More recently, we have come to understand human interdependence not only societally but also with the natural environment: both are essential to our continued sustenance and flourishing. This anthro-ecological model is essentially one of limits: limited, that is, by the requirements of biological and psychological life, culturally mediated social obligations, the extensive production of use values without which we would not survive and which some refer to as the moral economy, and nature’s capacity to sustain human life on earth at socially acceptable levels of living” (Friedmann, *The Uses of Planning Theory: A Bibliographical Essay*, 2012, p. 8)

¹⁰ Nietzsche belonged to the group of thinkers who rejected the Christian moral foundation, but he was likely alone in dismissing the theories of contemporary biologists. Darwin’s theory, today known as “natural selection,” was essentially that all species on our planet are living by an instinct to survive, and that the fittest of life forms are those that are adapted to their surroundings, while the less adapted go under. Different thinkers have over the years reinterpreted this in many ways, for instance as a social theory applied to economical classes (Social Darwinism)

Community economic development re-imaged

But, what is community? It is not as it has been promoted by the neo-classical movement and the international organisations that support its political agenda. Community -viewed from this lens- is about local governance that is given the responsibility to address social justice issues with little or no ability to control capital structures. It is about communitarian individualism or individualistic communitarianism with family and church at the centre providing the bedrock for individual members to seek life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness—or equally—peace, order and good government; it is fundamentally, the *I* in *We*. Community begins as an idea, it is constructed, it is an ideal of ‘what is’ and ‘what ought to be’ and it is a perspective that balances the tensions between sameness and diversity, tradition and skepticism, economic self-interest and the common good, and private property with the public commons (Friedmann, 1987). Community is about social learning and belonging to a common fate (Rubin, 2008). It is tangible to our senses; we can visit our children’s schools, make appointments to the doctor, shop for goods and services and exchange money for investments. Yet, *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* it is not¹¹. It is more the *We* in the *I*, where the philosophical starting point begins with the group and then moves to the individual to examine the question of self.

The conviction that the individual is the center of society has exacerbated pre-existing social and economic disparities within and across communities, and demands increased civic engagement in the democratic process on the one hand, and stimulus for economic self-reliance on the other, as a means of empowering local knowledge to solve local problems for the development of the community. Poetically remarking on the intrinsic motivation of community, Ernesto Sirolli writes that, “[t]he force inspiring our existence can be found in the depths of our souls, and the flowering of our potentiality could become the process where we come to terms with our existence and participate in its wonder” (Sirolli, 1999, p. 22). Sirolli—with his overemphasis of individual motivation and capacity—does not account for the distribution of power from within and from without the community. Communities, both in the so-called developing and developed worlds, are rarely homogenous but composed of competing social classes and groups that

and even pure strength (“Might is Right”). Nietzsche wasn’t satisfied by any of these theories. In his opinion, natural selection didn’t fully explain why we choose to live and what our most basic urges are to strive for existence. He formed his own concept, more existentialist than the pure naturalist science of Darwin and his colleagues, that was coined “the will to power.” The will to power, Nietzsche claims, is the very core of a living being’s struggle to live. Contrary to the material struggle that Darwin outlined, the will to power is not purely about the struggle for survival. Instead, it’s a will to expand, conquer, grow and gain energy which ultimately motivates us to live.

¹¹ *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* was one of PBS’ longest running children’s television shows. The format was based on Fred Rogers (the host) telling real and imagined stories to children. The power of television and its ability to reach beyond the immediate and extend into other domains and time periods allowed Mr. Rogers a captive audience that watched the show as ritual. For the first time in human history, the storyteller who tells the most stories to our children—and at the same time to our parents and grandparents—is not the church or the school, it is the medium of television. that a small group of distant corporations with purposes of their own took over and gave us a world into which our children are born and in which we all live. And the message, “Believe *you*. It is *your* story that is important. It is *your* mind and heart that can make things possible--just because of who *you* are” (fwbh Productions (2012). Yes, Me, You and not We or Us.

possess varying degrees of power according to their access to property. Given the historical imperative of private enterprise, some get less while others get more in a system that nourishes economic competitiveness in the interests of capital, rather than people or their communities. This does not mean that relationships of exploitation dictate community actions on development, but it does suggest that communities are not always united in outlook or approach. Those communities interested in changing the socioeconomic status quo with alternative methods of organisation and production not only face challenges from local vested interests but also from state and non-state brokers exercising power through community surrogates. Intellectual leaders such as managers of corporate subsidiaries, directors of non-profit or for-profit organisations, religious principals with international congregations or local political leaders associated with national parties have contradictory loyalties that influence who benefits and how much when reallocating resources within community (Freire, 1970).

Advocates for Community and Economic Development

Given that the *raison d'être* of global free enterprise, as we have it, is motivated and directed to make money for its investors, it is little wonder that community development is tasked to meet diverse community needs by filling in the gaps left in unprofitable markets of the world economy. Contention however, arises with the role of the community development worker (CDW) in that process. One school of thought argues that the CDW is strictly a neutral facilitator “whose task it is to help people think in a more orderly, systematic and logical manner than they would otherwise do” (Batten, 1974, p. 101), while another school advocates CDW as activists who empower community through education and mobilisation to demand more from political and economic institutions that were seemingly created for the public good. Pulling together local knowledge and experience, CDWs help to situate particular histories and events within the broader context of world history. By assisting community members in their understanding of how and why things are the way that they are, CDWs act as catalysts for change, heightening the community’s awareness of its particular position within the international system. Through this process, the community begins to see itself from a broadened perspective, allowing an alternative view of its needs. As a reallocation of power both within and across communities necessitates attitudinal shifts in how we perceive and act in society, it is incumbent on community developers to throw off the cloak of neutrality and water the seeds of change (Freire, 1970).

Community development (CD) casts a wide net; it must look both inward at its grassroots member organisations and outward at key state and non-state institutions to evaluate how responsive they are to the needs of the community. CD embraces the political, social and economic dimensions of community by offering an outlet for community participation in a wide-range of organisations that include social work, urban planning, adult education and political organising. Community capacity is built up through the process of CD as it takes for granted that citizens are capable of leading and shaping their own lives, actively moving their communities in directions that serve the interests and needs of its members, and that through collective action,

accrued victories teach citizens that structural change is possible (Alinsky, 1971). When they are experienced and confident in their abilities, communities can construct organisations capable of producing committed leaders proficient in communicating community strategies and goals to government bureaucrats located outside of the context of the region. The state, it is hoped should act on behalf and for the community's benefit, ideally as a proactive partner responding to community needs, nonetheless, experience shows us that state 'buy in' as a community funding partner is temperamental as it is located in its particular ideology. Certainly, money is a critical utility for CD in its quest to build a more humane and prosperous tomorrow (Sirolli, 1999). Not acting alone in the development field, CD embraces Community Economic Development (CED) as a complementary and concomitant extension of its activities and vision (Shragge, 2006).

Firmly focussed on process, CD asks *how* things are or ought to be done rather than *what* ought to be done. CED however, emphasises content, that is, improving the economic or material conditions of community members. CED (with participation from the state and grassroots' organisations) traditionally acts to mitigate deficiencies in capitalism by locking local programming into established models of development. Given the neo-liberal orientation of current governments, CED often supports public-private partnerships that seek to transfer public services to the private sector ostensibly to, 'downsize government in the name of economic efficiency' (Loxley, 2010). Understood from this perspective, CED—building on its CD foundation—strives to transform the basis of society by creating a more just, more democratic, more eco-friendly and more human-focussed economic system that contemplates the interconnectedness of the historical process and our places within it. Canadian economist John Loxley writes that,

... the absence of a coherent theory of community economic development is a problem for academics and practitioners alike. Without such a theory, all economic initiatives at the local level are seen as contributing both to the community and to development... [w]hat is produced, how, by whom and on what terms are deemed irrelevant, as is the economic, social and political impact of the undertaking within the locality... to many CED activists, and especially those who see CED as providing an alternative to contemporary capitalism and the neo-liberal policies that underwrite it, these questions are crucial (Loxley, 2007, p. 15).

Theory, community and economic development

If CED practitioners are to understand what is really happening at the local level, and to determine if CED is achieving set goals, a comprehensive theoretical framework is required. It should include the totality of the human enterprise with its roots embedded in culture, population, products, organization, and institutions but also in political autonomy and a consciousness of self-sufficiency (Schumacher, 1973). A specialised focus on economics as a singular determining factor in CED not only overlooks the social and political dimensions of the community, but more importantly, does not reveal the permeating nature of mainstream

capitalism in every facet of our modern day lives. A thorough evaluation of CED as an alternative approach demands the construction of a comprehensive theory as a basis of rigorous scientific analysis.

Here, we must ask, why CED at all? Presumably, free enterprise and its corporate decision makers are capable of assessing community needs which—according to Friedman and Greenspan—are the drivers of economic and social progress (Greenspan, 2007). Yet, we know empirically that gaps exist in the capitalist system due to the fact that enterprise operates on economies of scale that are concentrated in specific geographies and that it is, fundamentally, founded on income inequalities. The result is that interspersed islands of marginalised communities exist in the rural and urban areas of both the Global North and South (Wallerstein, 2004). As a gap-filling tool for capitalism, CED poses no threat to the dominant socioeconomic order but rather, acts as an insensible complement to the workings of capitalism as its ‘intellects’ are co-opted by the very system for which they work. It is implicitly understood as a mutually reinforcing relationship that ultimately, neither challenges the relevancy of private enterprise nor the legitimacy of the state as its original supporter and benefactor (Dos Santos, 1970).

Traditionally, the economic theory of CED has focussed on export-led growth as a strategy as it allows producers of varying size to produce for a much larger market. By exporting primary resource goods (such as oil, minerals, agricultural products, manufactured goods etc.) and services (such as tourism, consulting and financial investing, etc.), the community looks outside of itself for its socioeconomic prosperity. Economic benefits are gained through jobs in the local refinery, farm, manufacturing plant, and office services that—during the ‘good’ times—meet the needs of those in the community who are employed or retired. The financial crash of 2008 nevertheless, provoked significant structural adjustments in the world economy, altering the role of private enterprise and the state in the lives of everyday people. Now, as the global economic system attempts to recover, alternative strategies for economic development are advanced that look inside the community for its prosperity. Convergence or community-based economic development begins with local resources to meet local needs. Similar to ‘gap-filling’ projects, it requires the community to provide financial supports or subsidisation for small scale projects; it differs however with current economic orthodoxy in its call for collective ownership. Collectively owned enterprises are expected to be more committed to the democratic ideals underlying CED and to support purchasing, hiring and re-investing in the local communities given the bottom line is people and not money. Profits would be equitably shared amongst workers. Finally, collectively owned enterprise makes sense simply because the current economic model, has largely failed to make democracy out of capitalism. CED as convergence is a strategy of transformation to a just society with limitations (Friedmann, 1992).

Drawing from socialist and anarcho-syndicalist critiques of capitalism, CED can be understood as an alternative vision for organising the economy and society¹². This view

accepts the shortcomings of capitalism held by the “CED as-gap-filling” group and adds to them the lack of economic democracy in capitalism (given private ownership of capital), its patriarchal autocracy and its tendency to recurrent crises and abuse of environmental limits to growth. The second view would argue, however, that CED could not thrive within a system with such fundamentally different values and operating criteria, even on a gap-filling basis (Loxley, 2007, p. 10).

If the goal of production is to meet local needs and demands then community-based economic development offers an alternative to the prevailing economic crisis in mass production and consumption. Seen as a viable alternative to the dominant system, CED would discontinue compensating for deficiencies in the capitalist system and would instead seek to replace them with workers’ and other forms of cooperatives in a gradual, sustained and peaceful process of transition to transformation aimed at creating community-based economic development built on autonomous working communities.

Conclusion: We are all gardeners

A garden is both aesthetic and pragmatic at the same time. It fills the senses with a dazzling cornucopia of colour and smell and it offers up its bounty to fill our stomachs for the day’s work ahead. A garden requires a gardener to sow the seeds and reap the harvest, and to water and to weed so that the gardener’s vision is realised. We are all gardeners. Our visions of what can be are mediated by what came before and our skepticism of what shall come. We can choose hope or despair in the same way that we choose to believe that the nature of humanity at its core- is pure or rotten. It is to stake out a position on the question of right and wrong, on good and bad, and hold one’s ground in this long and violent confrontation that has bloodied both winners and losers. Yet, the question remains, unifying and splitting our communities. We must know its different names so that we are aware of our actions and their greater meanings. Those on the Left speak of the common good while those on the Right offer self-interest. What we do know is what we have, and what we have is a world system devouring the planet in an insatiable quest for greater and greater profits to feed a smaller and smaller group of people perched at the top of the economic pyramid. We are told that they are strong and we are weak, that it is a Darwinian struggle with no pity. Well, I for one refuse to believe that. I have faith that when history is seen as a process, it becomes clear that absolutely nothing was ever built with the sweat of one person, that community is about Us and not I, that community development offers a means to that end, that community economic development brings back to the garden the fruits of our

¹² Based on worker solidarity, direct action and worker self-management -Anarcho-syndicalism- sees workers’ organisations as the force for societal transformation. See <http://eng.anarchopedia.org/index.php/anarcho-communism>. It turns its back on traditional socialist parties and strong centralised states.

labours. Once we understand this, then we can begin to see beauty and purpose in our lives once again.

Author Biography

Stephen Colley has been working in community development for the past 18 years. Graduating with a B.A. in political science from Brock University in 1993, he embarked on a 10 year ethnographical adventure that took him from the south to the north of Mexico. He taught social science and English at local high schools while working with indigenous social groups such as Café Mam for fair trade coffee production in the highlands of Chiapas. For the past five years, Stephen has worked in the field of community economic development for the federal government while undertaking a master's degree in adult education/community studies.

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