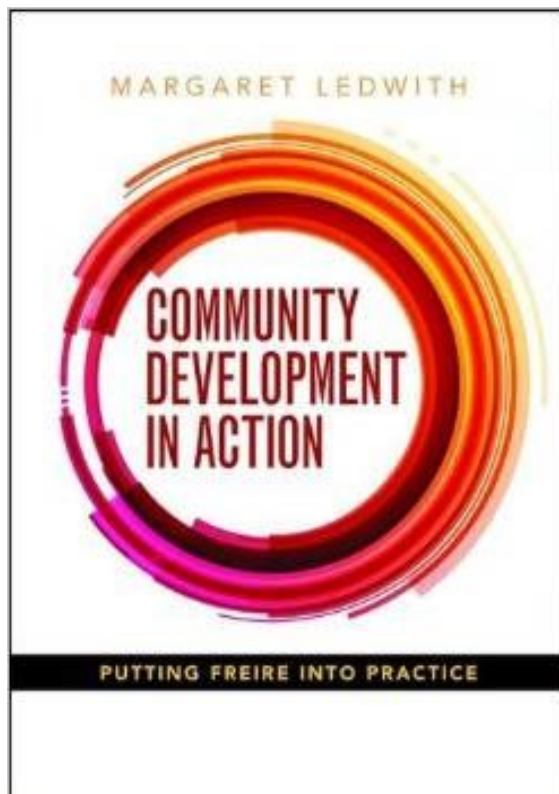# Reclaiming the Radical Agenda: Poverty as a human rights issue

**Margaret Ledwith
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Development and Social Justice
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Who am I?

Transformed by:

- Roger Waters The Wall

- Vietnamese refugees

- Paulo Freire, Antonio Gramsci, feminism

- Participatory democracy in Nicaragua

- Black communities of inner-city Manchester

- Hattersley: 'the forgotten town'

I am interested in stories...

1. Stories of ordinary, everyday life
2. Dominant narratives - tell us how to think
3. Little stories - become collective narratives that change the way we see the world
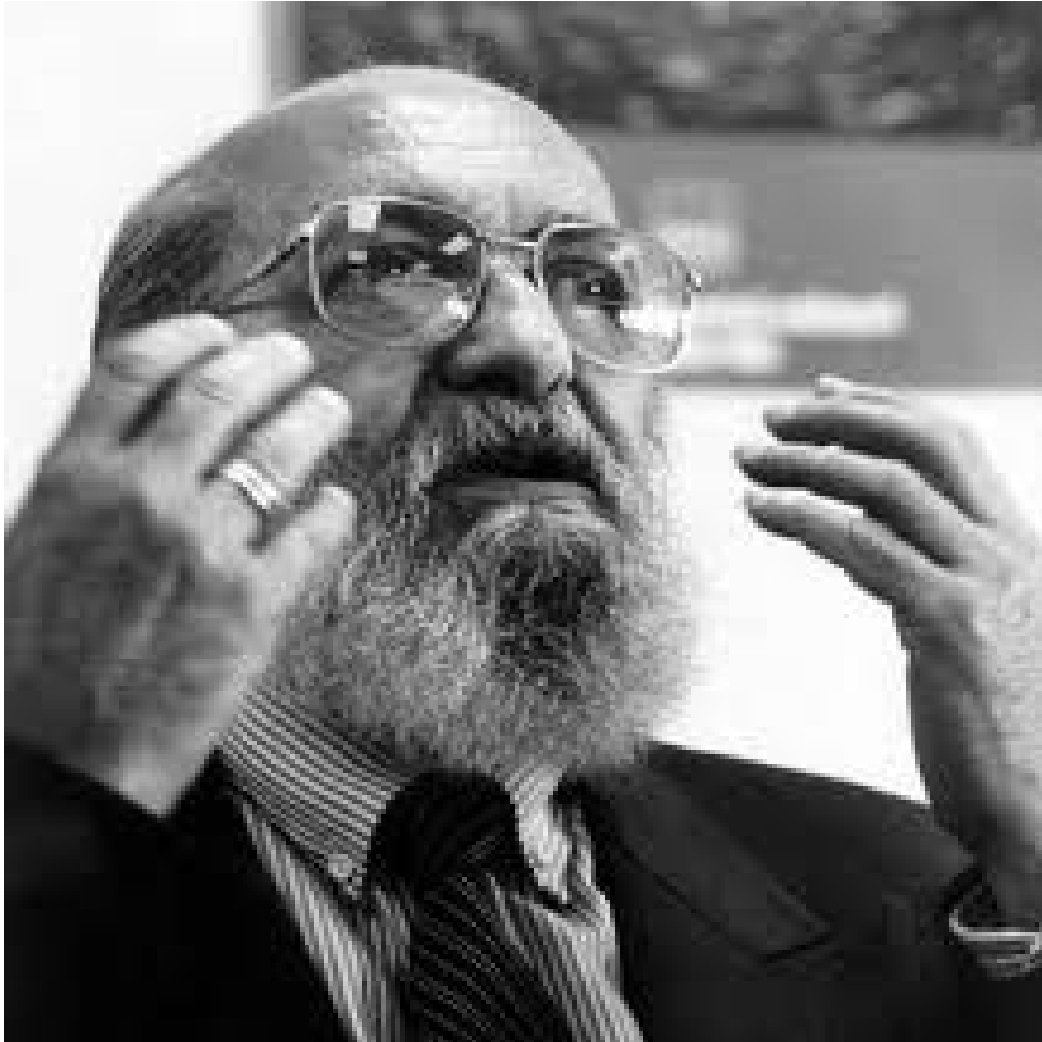4. New knowing = new doing = new being

Key point: 'Seeing' differently changes the world

Community development

- Social justice/environmental justice
- Fair and sustainable world
- Dignity, respect, mutuality…
- Popular education/practical projects
- Critical consciousness
- Challenges power relations
- Collective action for social change

"A crime against humanity!"

"...to die from hunger is not a predetermined destiny... it should be considered a crime against humanity"

Paulo Freire

Nelson Mandela, Make Poverty History, London 2005

"Poverty is not an accident. It is man-made and can be removed by the actions of human beings."

Can we afford the 1%?

WE ARE THE 99%

THAT WILL NO LONGER TOLERATE
the GREED and CORRUPTION of the
1%

- Occupy slogan
- Inequality greatest social threat
- Problem is privilege, not poor
- The Spirit Level
- Future is community

Childhood poverty and wellbeing

'The true measure of a nation's standing is how well it attends to its children – their health and safety, their material security, their education and socialization, and their sense of being loved, valued, and included in the families and societies into which they are born' (UNICEF, 2007: 1)

UK 21/21!

CD in its political context:
The story of 'the welfare scrounger'

- 1980s: escalation of neoliberalism
- Thatcher, Reagan, Pinochet, IMF,World Bank
- Free market: profit over people and planet
- Demonisation of the poor
- Rich got rich, poor got poorer
- UK child poverty escalated 1:10(1979)-1:3(1997)

Why does 7th richest nation starve its poorest children?

- 1:8 poorest children get no hot meal
- 75,000 children homeless (Shelter)
- 62% poor children have working parent/s
- End child poverty 2020
- 2015: 4,000 more poor children (IFS)
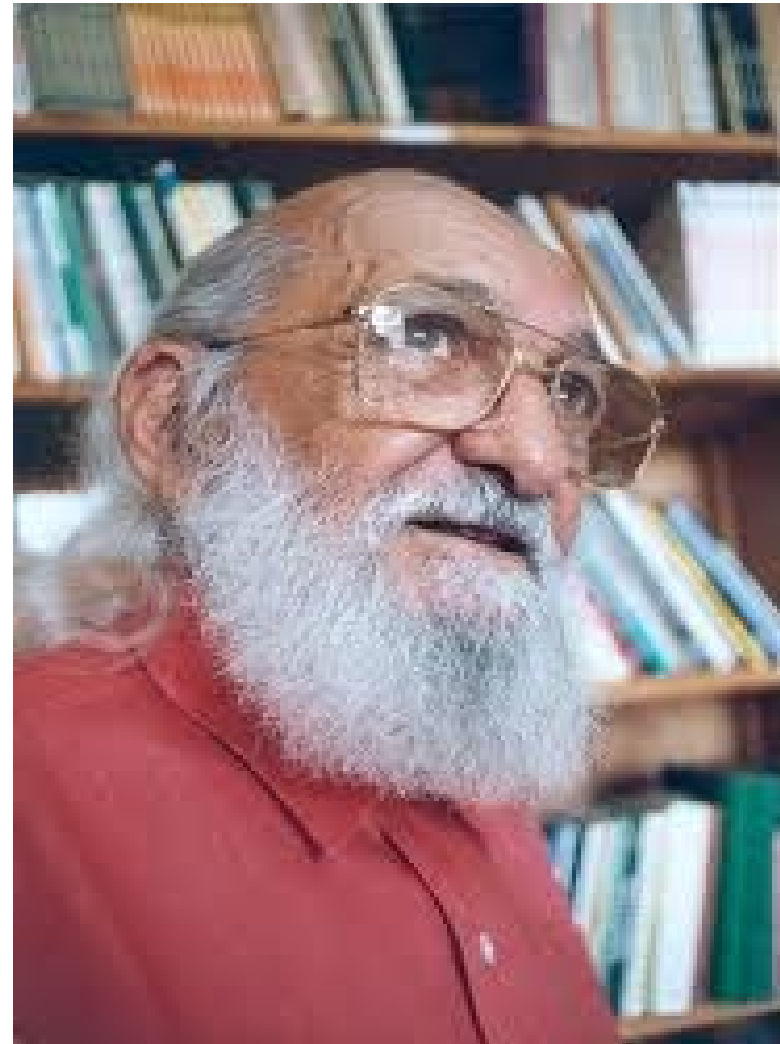- 2020: 5m children trapped in poverty (Save the Children)
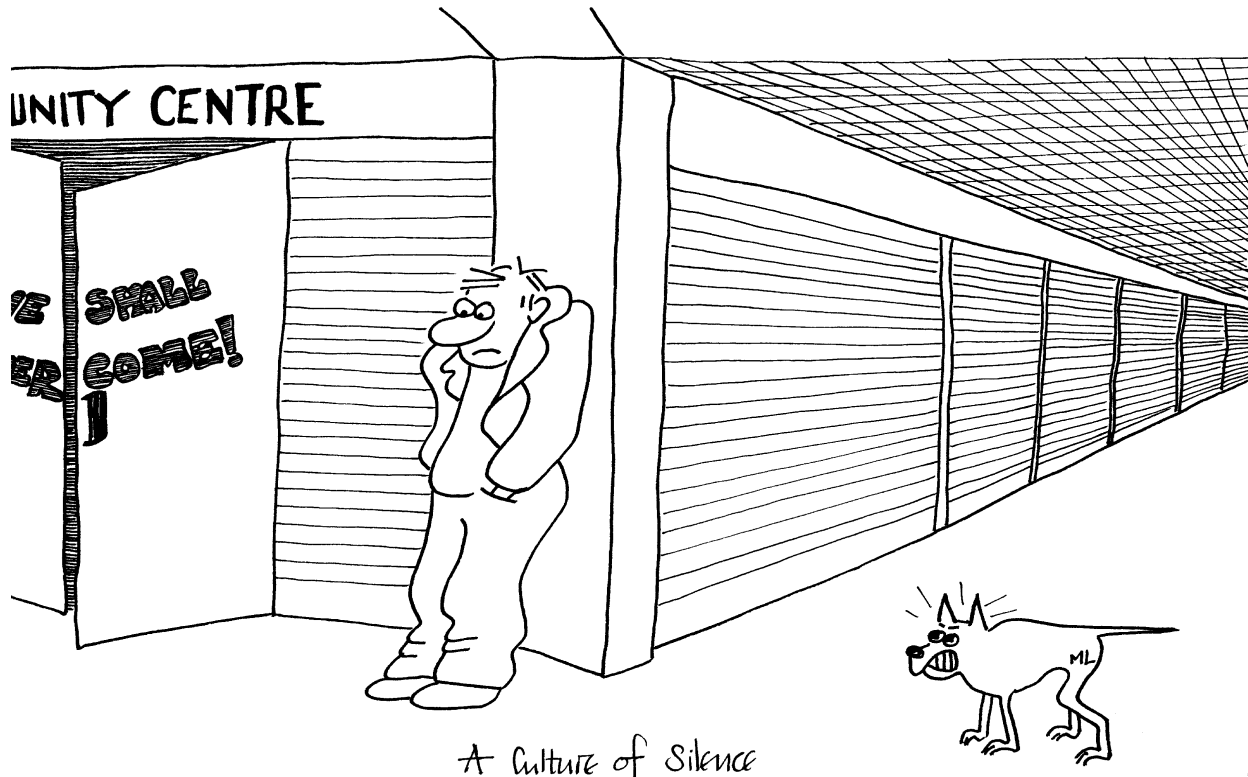
Child poverty in Scotland

- 20% in poverty/9% in severe poverty
- 50k more by 2020
- Shetlands 10%
- Orkney 14%
- Highlands 19% Eilean Siar 19%
- Glasgow 33%
- London 37%

Paulo Freire

- Education is never neutral
- Stories hold key to theory
- We are all intellectuals and activists capable of recreating our world
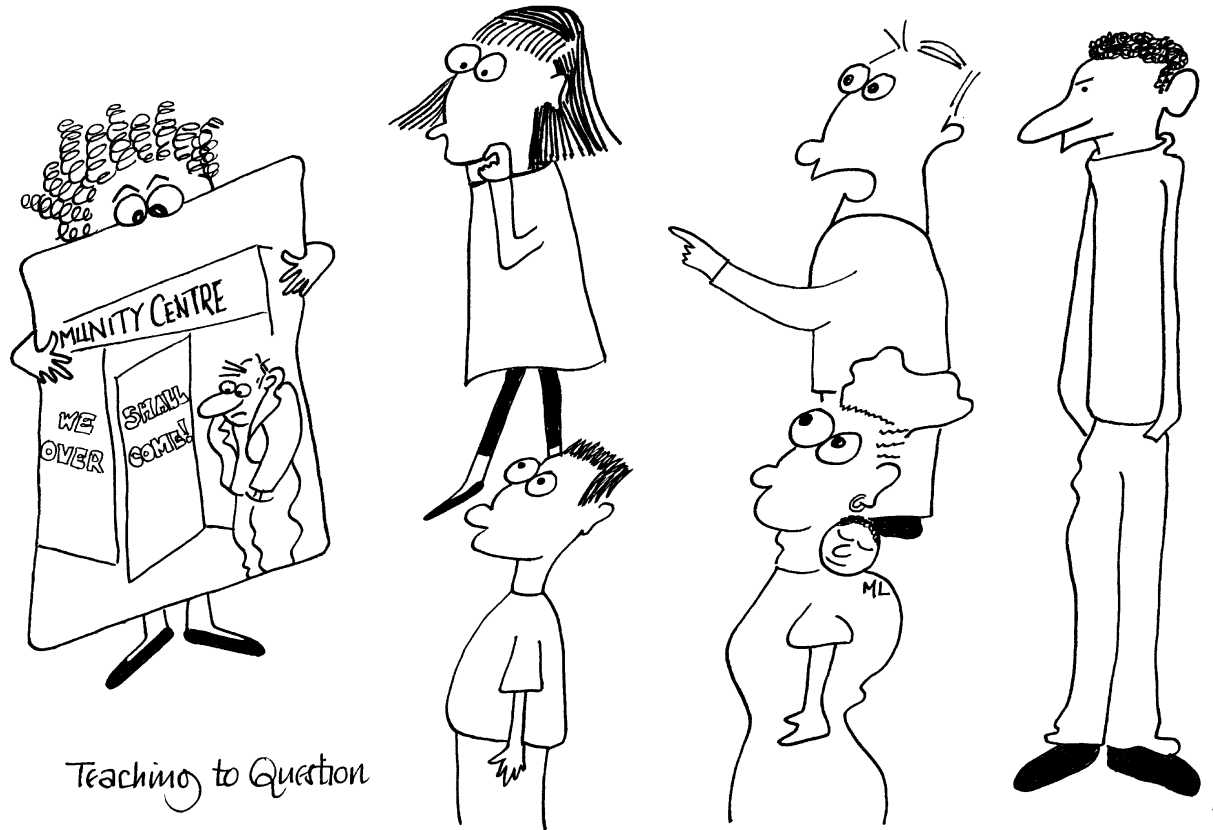
Culture of silence

A Culture of Silence

Becoming critical:
'Questioning answers not answering questions'

Creating critical dissent dialogue:
Questioning taken-for-grantedness of life

Dialogue : Conneted Knowing

Challenges for social justice practice

- Bridge gap between thinking/doing
- 'Re-experiencing ordinary as extraordinary' (Ira Shor,1992,122)
- 'See' world critically in order to act critically!
- Praxis: unity of action/reflection

Henry Giroux: War on Youth, 2013

- Human detritus

- Poor young people no longer hold society's dreams

- But hide its nightmares in culture of cruelty

- Neoliberal narratives define youth as the problem!

- Assault on children indicates deep moral and political crisis

Profit over people and planet: a story of disposability

A story of human detritus!

- This assault on children indicates deep moral and political crisis (Giroux, *War on Youth,* 2013)
- High levels of child poverty not about economic growth
- About choices of who to privilege and who to discard!

Social abjection theory: Imogen Tyler

- Theory of **power, subjugation and resistance**
- Neoliberalism more than free-market rule
- Form of social and cultural control
- State power produces dialectical relationship of subject-object, power and disgust
- Hardens public opinion against undeserving, undesirable and disposable
- Stigmatisation legitimises inequalities as personal pathologies
- Public consent for policies that increase inequalities
- Govern *for* the market *against* the people

Caricature of the 'chav'

Class politics central to neoliberal project, reformulated in caricature of 'chav'. By 2002, 'chav' the common term for disadvantaged, particularly young, white people.

Child poverty: accepting the unacceptable!

- Neoliberalism = profit before people and planet
- Privileges privilege, punishes poverty
- Politics of disposability
- Future community not profit
- Lower ceiling not raise floor

Critical Living Praxis: changes history

- **Living systems theory:** wholeness/ connectedness/balance/co-operation
- **Sustainability theory:** links political/economic/social ideas to ecology/environmental justice/ ecofeminism/sustainable development

- Integrated life on earth
- Transforms: *knowing+doing=a unity of being*

Conjunctures: Stuart Hall 2013

- Social/political/economic, ideological contradictions condensed in crisis

- Market fundamentalism global common sense

- Crisis is opportunity for change:
  - Another version of same
  - Modified version
  - Transformative social change

Critical questions

- How do you think CLD can best challenge the taken-for-granted contradictions that lead us to accept the unacceptable?

- Does Tyler's notion of social abjection help us to 'see' more critically?

A good question to end on!

"History knocked on your door, did you answer?" (Melanie Klein, 2015)