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Community Self-Help

Danny Burns, Colin C. Williams
and Jan Windebank

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Burns, D., Hoggett, P. and Hambleton, R. (1994) *The Politics of Decentralisation: Revitalising Local Democracy*
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Other books by Colin Williams and Jan Windebank include:

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To my wonderful partner Laura and to our children, Caitlin, Nico and Aaron without whom this work would have no meaning.

Danny Burns

To Toby for bringing such joy to our lives.

Colin Williams and Jan Windebank

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Acknowledgements

In writing a book, there are many influential people who, often in unseen ways, help shape the opinions of the authors.

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In the past a great deal of reliance has been placed on altruism as the sentiment which could underpin left-wing collectivist political philosophy. Our central argument in this book is that the notion of reciprocity provides a more powerful underpinning. But in letting go of pure altruism as the basis for social organisation, we want to hold onto the fact that it will always have a powerful place within society. The day before sending the first draft of this book to the publishers Danny was taking his nine-year-old son Nico on a train. During the journey, Nico was violently sick. The sick went everywhere.

Some people looked on with disdain – wrinkling their noses. Most looked on disinterested. Some were loosely helpful – offering newspaper and tissues. But as Danny struggled to ensure that his son was OK, a young woman got down on her hands and knees and helped him clear up the sick. Her hands, like his, were quickly covered in it. We recount this story in graphic detail because its shows so clearly how her instinct to help was immediate and unequivocal, and this natural willingness to help lends powerful support to our arguments for cooperation, even if it cannot be relied on as the basis for organising a whole society. If she ever happens to read this book we would like to thank her for illustrating to us all the continuing power of altruism.

We would also like to acknowledge the financial support we have received from The Countryside Agency, The Economic and Social Research Council, The European Commission, Scottish Homes, and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation to explore in greater detail the contributions of community self-help to community development.

Most of those mentioned here will doubtless take issue with at least some of the ideas between the covers of this volume. Nevertheless, their interventions and inputs have played a large part in helping us to develop our ideas. As always, therefore, the normal disclaimers apply.

Introduction

> The pupil is 'schooled' to confuse teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, a diploma with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something new. His 'imagination' is schooled to accept service in the place of value. Medical treatment is mistaken for health care, social work for the improvement of community life, police protection for safety, military poise for national security, the rat race for productive work. Health, learning, dignity, independence and creative endeavour are defined as little more than the performance of those institutions which claim to serve these ends, and their improvement is made to depend on allocating more resources to the management of hospitals, schools, and other agencies in question.
>
> (Illich, 1971: 1)

In our opinion, this analysis of state service provision by Ivan Illich is as relevant today as it was in 1970. It succinctly captures the ways in which both the state and the market fail to meet the needs of people and communities. It also uncovers the core argument of this book that there is a 'third way' which represents a meaningful alternative to the state and the market (contemporary versions of the 'third way' seem to be little different from conventional social democratic calls for a mixed economy). Our aim in this book is to make a case for this shift away from a concentration on state and/or market provision towards the development of community self-help which will enable individuals and communities to meet their own needs and desires.

We are not alone in our focus on self-help. With the exception of the 'old left' (many of whom who wish to eradicate it – seeking a full-employment society supported by comprehensive formal welfare provision), nearly all political parties have expressed support for some version of self-help. Phrases such as 'breaking the dependency culture', 'challenging the nanny state' abound. However as we will see, advocates of self-help are advancing radically different positions and see it as having quite different roles within a broader economy.

Contemporary political discussion about self-help seems to emanate from three different directions. The first is an essentially pragmatic impetus driven by fears that government will not have the tax base to support an increasingly elderly population. This suggests that a new social contract will have to be agreed upon between citizens and state in which universal welfare provision is not assumed as a citizenship right. The second comes from the radical right that depicts big government as the 'nanny state' and sees state service provision as an inefficient use of tax payers' money. The third advanced by 'New Labour' suggests that long-term state provision has led to a dependency culture which has not only resulted in a lack of enterprise but also a breakdown in responsibility at a local level. This essentially 'communitarian' argument sees citizenship rights as dependent on the performance of duties. These duties may increasingly take the form of collective provision that has until now been provided by the welfare state. In this respect the government talks a great deal about helping people to help themselves:

> In the past year, our comprehensive strategy to help those who can to help themselves, while providing support for those who most need it, has begun to take shape … Tackling social exclusion is not just about handouts, or public spending. It is about giving people, and communities, the means to help themselves. (Blair, 1998: 26)
>
> Old Labour is the idea that you did things *to* people, New Labour is about enabling people to do things *for* themselves. (David Blunkett, cited in Hughes, 1998: 6)

Across all government departments (as well as its extra-departmental units such as the Social Exclusion Unit), policy documents have started to explore how self-help can be used to achieve

their objectives (e.g., DETR, 1998; DfEE, 1999; DSS, 1999; Home Office, 1999; Social Exclusion Unit, 1998, 2000). A clear expression of this tendency can be seen in the decision of the Social Exclusion Unit to set up a 'Policy Action Team' to assess whether community self-help might be developed further as a way of tackling social exclusion (Home Office, 1999). The present government openly espouses the idea of community self-help and views it as integral to its politics (Giddens, 1998, 2000, 2002).

Unfortunately this (and calls from other quarters) boils down to a fairly ill defined notion of getting people to do things for themselves, and most contemporary versions – despite the rhetoric – are barely distinguishable from a call for privatisation. This is clearly seen in policy realms such as retirement planning where there is strong advocacy of personal pension provision. Nevertheless there are some signs of policy taking a turn towards more community-based solutions. In health care, there is in some quarters a discernable shift towards preventative rather than curative medicine – indicated by the gradually increasing profile of public health, and in the sphere of education there is a move towards lifelong learning and informal learning in all of its many guises.

Even the issue of homelessness, once seen as a problem that was solely the responsibility of the state, has witnessed a significant shift in emphasis. The rapid growth of the 'Big Issue' magazine as a partial solution to the problem of homelessness is entirely rooted in a philosophy of self-help. The idea that people might find routes out of their difficulties through the selling of a paper (rather than being handed a set of services or benefits) marks a radical change in approach. In their inaugural review (Big Issue Foundation, 1995–97), they beautifully illustrate the essence of this approach:

> We are totally committed to the idea of self-help. We believe that self-help is the only means of developing self-esteem and independence … By acknowledging and respecting the value and importance of our vendors, we create a distinctive relationship. Vendors will never be 'clients' nor will they be 'service users'… so from day one a Big Issue vendor begins to gain a sense of self-worth, as well as an understanding that they alone can make a success of selling the magazine. This is a vital first step towards gaining control of their lives.

> selling the paper makes you come out of your shell. Unlike begging, where you just sit there, you have to chat and make people laugh. (Sam)

As we shall see in the next chapter there is a long and rich vein of self-help advocacy in both left- and right-wing thought. Many of the foundational arguments can be found in the nineteenth-century writings of Samuel Smiles (1886), Peter Kropotkin (1902) and the Utopian socialists William Morris and John Ruskin. Our advocacy of self-help has its roots in the philosophies of the libertarian left – a position we shall articulate in more detail as the book unfolds.

Before we engage with these issues we would like to reflect briefly on the shape of the book. It is important to be aware of the two parallel tracks that we are following. First, we explore the reality of community self-help as an empirical response to contemporary issues in society. Second, we explore a wider set of normative issues about how community self-help might inform debates about social organisation – either as a third strand which sits alongside the state and the market, or as an alternative to them. With respect to the first of these, one of our central aims has been to bring together as much as possible of the available literature on the subject into a single volume. This is mainly comprised of work on individual aspects of community self-help (such as care, allotment growing, local currencies). While it is inevitable that we are not able to do the authors of all of these individual studies justice, we hope that by bringing these together we are able to demonstrate that there is a clearly identifiable sector which does not conform to the rules or structures of either the state, the market or the community and voluntary sectors.

One of the key implications of our work is a reconceptualisation of the role and function of the State. At times we hint at the shape of a minimal state that would be compatible with the arguments contained within this book, but we are aware that within the confines of these pages we cannot do justice to this issue. The central purpose of this work is to enable a greater understanding of the dynamics of community self-help, and the reasons for promoting and supporting it. We have been concerned not to dilute that focus with an extensive (albeit important) diversion into state theory. This may be the subject of future work.

And so to the structure of the book. The book opens with an exploration of the nature of community self-help and the reasons why it has been advocated. In Chapter 1, we explore its historical roots and the main arguments that have been advanced in its support. Chapter 2 explores the different dimensions of community self-help; the various forms that it takes; its organisational characteristics and its role in society. Chapter 3 assesses the extent of community self-help. The next three chapters explore the different roles of community self-help in society. Chapter 4 considers its role as a springboard into employment, Chapter 5 considers its role as a coping strategy that complements the market and state, and Chapter 6 considers its role as an alternative to the market and state. In the concluding chapters we pull together these strands. Chapter 7 explores the policy implications of our analysis, and Chapter 8 widens the lens to assess the implications for the future organisation of society.

1
Arguments for Self-Help and Mutual Aid

The purpose of this chapter is to draw together the key conceptual and theoretical ideas that underpin arguments in support of community self-help both as a strategy for survival and a model for society. We have organised these around the following key assertions:

> Community self-help is the basis upon which communities survive, thrive and evolve;
> The moral foundations of society are built upon reciprocity;
> The dependency culture is corrosive of society: and
> The state as a welfare provider is in crisis

Community self-help is the basis upon which communities survive, thrive and evolve

One of the strongest arguments for community self-help in general, and mutual aid more particularly, is that reciprocity is fundamental to human development. Whatever the 'nature' of people (individualist, altruistic or otherwise), they undoubtedly live in relationship to each other. They are interdependent and both their survival and their happiness depend on that interdependence. This interdependence is brought about by a web of reciprocal exchanges. They may not be direct but they are tangible and meaningful at a community level. Mutual aid and reciprocity are closely connected.

> the basis of mutual aid is reciprocity, to the extent that relationships – essentially the exchange of effort and

> involvement – are governed by a very loose concept of 'give and take'. (Bishop and Hoggett, 1986: 41)

Self-help and mutual aid place reciprocity in a social context and enable it to be viewed systemically as underpinning social evolution.

To find support for this position we must start in the late nineteenth century with the debates that emerged around Darwin's theory of natural selection. Darwin offered a theory about the ways in which individuals (animals or human) respond to their environment in order to maximise their chances of successful reproduction. The evidential nature of his thesis has been used extensively to undermine collectivist political arguments. Individuals are genetically hard wired to be self-seeking because only the fittest survive.[1] Yet even as Darwin's ideas were beginning to create a paradigmatic shift, an alternative perspective on natural selection was being constructed by Peter Kropotkin. The work of Kropotkin was also evidentially based in sociobiology. His central thesis, which is captured in his 1902 book, *Mutual Aid*, was that natural selection did not necessarily favour the strongest. Instead, he argued that the only way a species can survive in a hostile environment over time is through extraordinary cooperation. It is society that:

> enable[s] the feeblest insects, the feeblest birds, and the feeblest animals to resist or to protect themselves from the most terrible birds and beasts of prey; it permits longevity, it enables species to rear its progeny with the least waste of energy and to maintain its numbers. (Kropotkin, 1939: 60)

Glassman (2000: 393), argues that Kropotkin's theory shows 'how weaker species often survive in the face of stronger, and at times seemingly insurmountable, opposition through sociability' and goes on to say that:

> It would be a mistake to assume that simply because Kropotkin does not advance a Malthusian view of natural selection that the

1. Darwin himself did not see evolution through such a simplistic individualistic lens as did many of his early champions. In Descent of Man he wrote that 'the small strength and speed of man, his want of natural weapons [etc.] are more than counterbalanced by his … social qualities, which lead him to give and receive aid from his fellow-men' (Nowak *et al*., 1995).

> concept is not integral to his theory of mutual aid (Montague, 1955). It might even be argued that Kropotkin's view is the more parsimonious and more elegant model of natural selection. (Glassman, 2000: 396).

Glassman (2000: 397) then highlights an important aspect of Kropotkin's reasoning:

> the fact that ecologies change continuously, often in dramatic and erratic fashions. Change in food sources is only one of a number of possible changes. It is folly to assume that under these circumstances, species are primarily dependent on slow moving genetic variation for survival. It is those organisms that tend towards the formation and maintenance of social organizations that have the greater chance for survival. Those species that find it more difficult to form and maintain social organizations are doomed to decay and eventual extinction.

Not only is this a powerful observation but also is particularly relevant to the sort of communities that we are concerned with in this book – communities that are often at the whim of a fast moving global economy.

There is an increasing body of contemporary evidence to support Kropotkin's views. In this book, we will focus on three of the most important. First, we cite the emergence of game theory (Axelrod, 1985 etc.) which helps us understand the relationship between trust and reciprocity, second, we highlight the work of Putnam (2000) who in developing the theory of social capital shows us how strong participation in group activity leads directly to better outcomes for both communities and individuals. Finally, we revisit the work of Titmus (1970), which illustrated the way in which the giving of blood is seen not primarily as an act of disinterested altruism but as a form of indirect reciprocity.

Game theory has gone through many different iterations but its most well known form is the prisoner's dilemma. This is neatly captured by Nowak *et al*. (1995):

> As originally conceived in the early 1950s, each of two prisoners is asked whether the other committed a crime; their level of punishment depends on whether one, both or neither indicates the

> other's guilt. This situation can be viewed as a simple game. The two players engaged in it have only to decide whether they wish to co-operate with each other or not. In one illustration of the Prisoner's Dilemma, if both choose to co-operate, they get a reward of three points each. If both defect (by not co-operating), they get only one point each. But if one player defects and the other co-operates, the defector receives five points, whereas the player who chose to co-operate receives nothing.

Early versions of game theory appeared to show that the prisoner's dilemma would almost inevitably lead to defection and not cooperation, as the price of cooperating when someone else does not, always seems too high. But this proposition was premised on a game which was played as a one-off. Axelrod's work in the late 1970s introduced a knowledge of the previous behaviour derived from multiple iterations of the game. He showed that the best strategy is what he called 'tit-for-tat' (Coulson, 1998) in which the second player cooperates if the first player does, and stops cooperating if the first player stops. As Coulson points out, 'the implications are significant for widely differing situations including evolutionary biology (where a group of insects, cells or monkeys that decide to cooperate instead of competing will have an evolutionary advantage)'. This would seem to fit with Kropotkin's foundational principle that natural selection is based on group responses to fast moving environmental change. Various strategies have been explored in relation to this game since. Nowak *et al*. in 'The Arithmetics of Mutual Help' simulated an evolutionary system run over millions of years. They concluded:

> there was a definite trend toward co-operation. The longer the system was allowed to evolve, the greater the likelihood for a co-operative regime to blossom. But the threat of a sudden collapse always remained.

They also showed how generating locally based patterns of trust could prevent a cooperatively based system from being undermined by those who break trust.

> Spatial structures in particular act to protect diversity. They allow co-operators and defectors to exist side by side. In a different but related context, similar spatial patterns allow populations of hosts

> and parasites, or prey and predators, to survive together, despite the inherent instability of their interactions.

This conclusion has important implications for neighbourhood regeneration strategies. It also counteracts the view that self-regulation would be a realistic proposition in tight knit local communities with low mobility but not in large mobile communities where people do not know each other. Under their simulation individuals who took advantage of others were not eliminated from the system, but equally they were not able to destabilise a system of cooperation which had been built between other people. Their overall conclusions are instructive:

> Throughout the evolutionary history of life, co-operation among smaller units led to the emergence of more complex structures, as, for example, the emergence of multi-cellular creatures from single-celled organisms. In this sense, co-operation becomes as essential for evolution as is competition …
>
> … Such co-operative strategies may have been crucial for prebiotic evolution, which many researchers believe may have taken place on surfaces rather than in well-stirred solutions. Catalysing the replication of a molecule constitutes a form of mutual help; hence, a chain of catalysts, with each link feeding back on itself, would be the earliest instance of mutual aid [see 'The Origin of Genetic Information', by Manfred Eigen, William Gardiner, Peter Schuster and Ruthild Winkler-Oswatitsch; *SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN*, April 1981].
>
> Co-operative chemical reactions would have been vulnerable to 'cheating' molecular mutants that took more catalytic aid than they gave. Such difficulties were thought to undercut many ideas about prebiotic evolution based on co-operative chains. But Maarten C. Boerlijst and Pauline Hogeweg of Utrecht University have recently demonstrated with computer simulations that self-generated spatial structures akin to those we devised can hamper the spread of destructive parasitic molecules.
>
> Our models, crude as they are, illustrate how co-operation might arise and be maintained in real biological systems. Sophisticated creatures may be drawn to follow strategies that encourage co-operation because of repeated interactions among individuals

> who can recognise and remember one another. But in simpler organisms, co-operation persists, perhaps by virtue of self-organised spatial structures generated by interactions with immediate neighbours in some fixed spatial array. In the course of evolution, there appears to have been ample opportunity for co-operation to have assisted everything from humans to molecules. In a sense, co-operation could be older than life itself. (Nowak *et al*., 1995)

There is a further body of very recent evidence that strongly supports Kropotkin's basic thesis. This can be found in theories of social capital (Putnam, 2000) and the empirical evidence that has followed from it. Putnam's central argument is that those areas that have strong social networks produce better long-term outcomes for both their communities and the individuals within them. He described the generation of community and social networks as 'social capital'. His original thesis was drawn from a detailed study of Italian regions where he was able to show that those areas that had strong cultural societies were those which created strong democracies and vice versa (Putnam, 1993). Putnam then turned his attention to the United States where his more recent work has highlighted a strong relationship between social capital and a variety of social outcomes ranging from economic prosperity, to educational attainment as well as health and quality of life indicators. In his seminal article 'bowling alone' (1995b) Putnam observed how over time in the United States there was a tendency for people to no longer bowl in groups but to bowl alone. This symbol of declining social capital in the United States was problematic because the evidence seemed to show that reciprocating leisure in groups led directly to healthier individuals and healthier communities. This is precisely what Bishop and Hoggett were documenting in their study of mutual aid in leisure. This study which at first glance could appear to be an interesting but only a tangentially relevant study of the English hobby has great significance in the context of Putnam's theories:

> All this emphasis on leisure is very well but it is not the stuff of local action. One often gained the impression that amateur cricketers, caged bird enthusiasts and so on were an interesting but exasperating novelty (if only they would devote their organising energies to really important community issues such as tenants' associations or the fight against cuts). (Bishop and Hoggett, 1986: 121)

The associations themselves have a significant impact, and in this sense they are very much 'the stuff of local action'.

What characterises most of the commentary about social capital – and it is now a huge and growing arena for study – are three concepts: networks, trust and social norms.

> By analogy with notions of physical capital and human capital – tools and training that enhance individual productivity – social capital refers to features of social organisation such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit. (Putnam, 1993)

And relationships:

> Social capital is created when relationships are formed which facilitate co-operation and co-ordination. Most economic activity involves transactions between a few agents. Since transactions create, renew or destroy relationships, social capital can potentially change between each transaction. (Routledge and Amsberg, 1996)

Social Capital is 'an intangible resource which exists in the relations between people [involving] expectations of reciprocity' (Burns *et al.*, 2001: 4). In a practical sense it involves interaction with neighbours, kin and community groups and community networks. Some of the recent social capital surveys, which have been carried out, give an idea of what indicators of strong social capital might look like. These questions from work by Burns *et al.* (2001) provide a taste:

How many neighbours do you know by name?
How many neighbours do you regularly say hello to?
How many neighbours do you consider to be your friends?
How many close friends live in your neighbourhood?
How likely is it that you will run into friends and neighbours when shopping in the local area?
Who would you most likely ask to go for messages if you were unwell?
To give you a lift to hospital or somewhere else important?
To look after your children for a few hours?
To borrow a tool for decorating or gardening?
To keep an eye on your house, feed a cat or water your plants if you were away?
To lend you £50 in an emergency?
If I needed advice about something I could go to someone in my neighbourhood?
I borrow things and exchange favours with my neighbours?

Source: Burns *et al.*, 2001

Others' questions focussed on things like involvement in coffee mornings and sports activities, lunch clubs and mother and toddler groups. All of these have to do with local community self-help and mutual aid. By now, tens if not hundreds of similar surveys have been carried out. The World Bank has a website dedicated to social capital which has collated many of these questions, and in the United Kingdom the ESRC Centre for Neighbourhood Research has been collecting similar questions. The social capital argument essentially says that if you have close friends in your neighbourhood, if you can borrow tools and share childcare, if you are a member of mutual leisure associations such as lunch clubs and mother and toddler groups then you will do better as a community than if you do not. In policy terms, this contrasts strongly with 'human capital' strategies which are essentially about building up the skills of individuals. Putnam also provides biological evidence to support his ideas:

> Finally, and most intriguingly, social capital might actually serve as a physiological triggering mechanism, stimulating people's immune systems to fight disease and buffer stress. Research now underway suggests that social isolation has measurable bio-chemical effects on the body. Animals who have been isolated develop more extensive atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) than less isolated animals and among both animals and humans loneliness appears to decrease the immune response and increase in blood pressure. (Putnam, 2000: 327)

and

> Over the last twenty years, more than a dozen large studies of this sort in the United States, Scandinavia and Japan have shown that people who are socially disconnected are between two and five times more likely to die from all causes, compared with matched individuals who have close ties with family, friends and the community. (Putnam, 2000: 327)

The idea of reciprocity which we are employing here does not have to be direct in the sense that it requires one-to-one reciprocation, but it is direct in the sense that people need to understand the relationship between their act of giving and what they get in return. A babysitting circle is a simple example of a non-direct form of reciprocity where you may meet your social obligations to a person other

than who gave to you. A more complex version would be a Local Exchange Trading Scheme (LETS), where the person returning the gift may not be known to you at all. However, they are known to the community within which you live. Reciprocity does not require equivalence. In other words, a local volunteer may go out and help set up a local football team because s/he enjoys doing it, and the quid pro quo is his/her enjoyment. Alternatively s/he may do it because s/he believes that it will make the young people that s/he is working with more responsible and this will result in a greater sense of security and safety for him/her and his/her neighbours.

> In some cases, like neighbourhood lawn raking, the return of the favour is immediate and the calculation straightforward, but in some cases the return is long term and conjectural, like the benefit of living in the kind of community where people care for neglected children. (Putnam, 2000: 135)

Furthermore, a reciprocal relationship does not imply an expectation of exchange. Rather the belief is that if I give something now, then I will be given to if I am in need at a later date.

One of the most powerful aspects of these emerging theories is the way in which they interact in practice. It is the network structure through which social capital is generated that provides the information channels which enable trust to be generated and perpetuated as understood by game theory. A similar process can be observed in recent economic debates around markets, hierarchies and networks. Here economic actors are able to generate high levels of trust through network structures based on repeated trustworthy relationships.

The essence of Titmuss's (1973) argument is that society needs gift relationships in order to work effectively and that individuals can maximise their individual self-interest through acts of altruism or what he describes as non-quantifiable reciprocity. These may be more sophisticated and less direct than the gift exchanges of traditional societies but they are just as important. He outlines three central propositions:

> First, that gift-exchange of a non-quantifiable nature has more important functions in complex, large-scale societies than the writings of Levi-Strauss would suggest. Second, the application of

> scientific and technological developments in such societies, in further accelerating the spread of complexity, has increased rather than diminished, the scientific as well as the social need for gift relationships. Third, for these and many other reasons, modern societies now require more rather than less freedom of choice for the expression of altruism in the daily life of all social groups. (Titmuss, 1970: 253)

Individuals questioned on why they gave blood almost universally gave an answer which had to do with altruism, reciprocity or a sense of obligation. It may not be the intention of the giver to induce the receiver to make a reciprocal offering but by making the gift a relationship is established and obligations are set up. So while 26.4 per cent of those surveyed gave answers which could be attributed to altruism, and 9.8 per cent directly to reciprocity, for others it was about obligations to those who had given.

> There is in all these transactions an un-spoken assumption of some form of gift-reciprocity; that those who give as members of a society to strangers will themselves (or their families) eventually benefit as member of society. (1973: 243)
>
> What was seen by these donors as a good for strangers in the here-and-now could be (they said or implied) a good for themselves – indeterminately one day. But it was not a good which they positively desired for themselves either immediately or ultimately. (1973: 269)

The reciprocity depicted here relates to a system which is trusted. In this sense it is like a local LETS organised on a larger scale. It needs one further leap of faith (trust). In a LETS not all of those who receive are known to the giver, but they are known to the local community. In a blood doning system there is no knowledge of either recipient or giver. But there is trust that enough people will give in the future to ensure that we could be recipients if and when we needed to. In drawing on Titmus's work it has not been our intention to show that society could be based on altruism, but to further illustrate a point which is central to the argument pursued in this book that the relationship between individual self-interest and the collective interest is intertwined, and this manifests itself most clearly in various forms of

reciprocity. The theoretical and empirical work of Axelrod, Putnam and Titmus strongly support this thesis.

All the arguments explored above are grand theories about the human nature and its relationship to human organisation. They are compelling and stand in stark contrast to the individualist assumptions underpinning 'liberal democratic theory'.

The moral foundations of society are built on reciprocity

Another argument that has been advanced in support of self-help is that it is critical to building the moral fabric of society. This is very important because for the most part society functions on the basis of social conventions and local social norms rather than through the rule of law. Where this breaks down there is often very little the law can do. In this sense social organisation and the moral codes that underpin it can be seen to be largely self-regulated.

So historically, calls for self-help and mutual aid have been strongly linked to the formation of values, and both are seen to be character-building. To put the argument simply, if you have to think for yourself, make decisions for yourself and take actions which have implications for your family and community, then you will inevitably ask questions, think about issues and develop a moral framework within which to live. If, on the other hand, you are simply a recipient of decisions that have been made elsewhere then you will never be put into a position where you have to take moral responsibility. In this sense morality, good character and self-help are inextricably intertwined. A society which does not enable people to construct and develop its values is one which will degenerate into social disorder.

A good contemporary illustration of this can be gleaned from a community regeneration scheme on the Gurnos Estate in Wales (Burns *et al*., 2002). The Gurnos Estate in Merthyr Tydfil is one of the poorest estates in South Wales. Many of its families suffer from fourth generation male unemployment. The area has also suffered badly from vandalism. Some years ago a furniture-making project was set up. The idea was to give young men skills and to provide cheap furniture to a community that could not afford furniture. This project was extremely successful in its own right, but had an interesting side effect. After a while, people started to put some of the

benches that had been made outside their houses. They were not vandalised because the young men that had made them ensured that nobody touched them. This led to a nicer environment and a greater sense of pride in the area. The point here is that because these young men had made the furniture themselves, they placed great value on it and this had an impact on their wider values and the way in which they acted within the community.

The nineteenth-century writer Samuel Smiles talks a lot about personal qualities (Smiles, 1986). Amongst those he sees as important are: perseverance, diligence, conscience, personal integrity, setting an example and good name. What is interesting is the extent to which these concepts are echoed in contemporary debates. Conscience is a call for personal morality and individual social responsibility (there is a strong resonance here with communitarian arguments). Personal integrity, setting a good example and having a good name, all strongly underpin the development of social capital, because these are the things that underpin trust in network relationships. It is not only values in their widest sense that are at stake here, but also what you value:

> That which is put into us by others is always far less ours than that which we acquire by our own diligent and persevering effort …
>
> The best part of every man's education said Sir Walter Scott, 'is that which he gives to himself'. (Smiles, 1986: 194)

Even the contemporary right-wing thinker David Green (1993: 21) – who has set out strong arguments for organised mutual aid as an alternative to State welfare provision – tempers his unequivocal support for the market with a strong belief in personal, social and moral responsibility. Individuals have a responsibility to enable others to gain the means to fulfil their potential. Central to the view of the civic capitalists is their belief that individuals ought to be morally responsible in all circumstances. He argues that 'a free society is superior to any alternative because it encourages people to demand much from one another'. Green (1993: 23) is advocating:

> a vigorous civil society of voluntary associations of every kind in which people work with others to achieve common ends and to promote virtue in one another.
>
> This is the prime importance of voluntary associations. They may provide services better or worse than any alternative, but their chief

> value lies in the opportunities they provide for the development of good qualities in men and women.

His strong emphasis on personal character-building echoes that of Samuel Smiles, and in advocating the historical importance of the friendly societies he points out that the Foresters did not confine their advice to the conduct of society business:

> In your domestic relationships we look to find you, if a husband, affectionate and trustful; if a father, regardful of moral and material well-being of your children and dependants; as a son, dutiful and exemplary, and as a friend steadfast and true. (Green, 1993: 48)

He also points out that the friendly societies gave considerable status and self respect to its members:

> He might have to sell his labour to earn a living, but in the lodge room the member was much more than a wage labourer. He was a member of a fraternity committed to high ideals. In the lodge room there were no bosses. (Green, 1993: 49)

In this respect he is saying that the form of organisation itself imputes certain values. It is difficult to create a culture of equality if provision is organised hierarchically. While this analysis appears blind to the hierarchy of wealth and power that underpins the market, it is nevertheless a point worth making. Equally important is Glassman's (2000: 395) observation that:

> Kropotkin saw the development of complex society as being at odds with ethical and co-operative behaviour. Complex states set up barriers between everyday human activity and how that activity promotes the commonweal. The more complex the society, the more complex the barriers, the more opaque the connections between activity and community.

This is why mutual aid is so important, and why Kropotkin (1939: 183) sees great dangers in the state assuming control over welfare:

> The absorption of all social functions by the State necessarily favoured the development of an unbridled, narrow-minded

> individualism. In proportion as the obligations towards the State grew in numbers the citizens were evidently relieved of their obligations towards each other. In the guild – and in the mediaeval times every man belonged to some guild or fraternity – two 'brothers' were bound to watch in turns a brother who had fallen ill; it would be sufficient now to give one's neighbour the address of the next paupers' hospital

There is a moral process at work here. It is argued that by placing clear responsibility with individuals, self-help leads quickly to mutual aid. Smiles points out in his 1886 preface to *Self-Help* that 'the duty of helping one's self in the highest sense involves helping one's neighbours'. The writings of Samuel Smiles have been used extensively to support arguments made by the radical right, but he is not the unadulterated individualist that he is made out to be. When he writes: 'In so laboriously seeking others' good it might be said that he found his own' (Smiles, 1986: 230) he is putting the collective good before his own. The conclusions of his thoughts are very similar to those of Kropotkin but are presented as moral issues. Smiles' focus on good name, personal integrity and setting a good example puts individual actions into a social context. For him then, the two concepts of mutual aid and self-help are integrally interrelated. This theme is picked up in a recent work by Frank Field who points out that 'self-interest should be distinguished from selfishness' (Field, 2000: 102). He makes the important point that self-interest and altruism can be held at the same time:

> This stance would have been seen as a statement of the blindingly obvious to practically all the participants in welfare's journey during the last century, indeed for much of this. The growth of mutual aid, of co-operation and the spread of self-help organisations, bodies which changed the face of Victorian society decidedly for the better, were all firmly rooted in this understanding of human nature … Those activists and their allies appeared to have the ability to hold at once at least two truths without feeling any inconsistency, or being charged with muddled thinking, or worse double dealing. Those working men and women who changed their own lives, and many of the lives of their fellow citizens, saw promoting self-interest as natural as night following day and

> perceived their noble journey as one which was simultaneously driven by strong altruistic motives. (Field, 2000: 104)

The most significant manifestation of the ways in which these two things are held in relationship to each other is through reciprocity. The link between self-interest and mutuality is also echoed powerfully by Bishop and Hoggett (1986: 127).

> But why on earth should it be thought that if the public combine together to service themselves, their activity somehow or another fails to express direct public commitment? Do we have two 'publics', a real one which does nothing and therefore needs servicing and a not quite legitimate one which presumes to organise in its exclusive self-interest? How is community 'best served'? By being helped to help itself as self-interest transforms itself with little difficulty into a commitment to mutuality, or by being helped to remain helpless.

It is important not to forget that for most of us, to give is in some respects to receive. This poignant quote from a survivor of mental health services makes the point:

> One of the best things about mutual support systems is the wonderful feeling when we can reach out of our own distress and ease another's pain. (Budd, S., 1987 quoted in Lindow, V., 1994: 29)

Green (1999) reinforces this point from a quite different political perspective:

> This tradition of reciprocal obligation treated people as capable of exercising responsibility. It sought to increase their human capital and, by fostering civil society, to increase their social capital so that no one stood alone

In today's 'welfare society', there is some sort of economic safety net. Yet people are isolated and stand alone. This should give us some insight into how we need to respond to social inclusion.

Underlying all these positions is the principle that to be engaged is to be social, and to be social is to gain felt obligations and accountability to the people around you (Fry, 1995). Another interesting variation

on this theme is that receipt of aid often provides encouragement to provide aid to others. Margaret Harris concluded in an interesting article on the work of religious congregations that:

> 'serial reciprocity' is common; that is, people were helped in their own need and then helped others 'when their problems have largely passed or they have come to terms with living them' (Richardson and Goodman, 1983: 42). Their own motivation to care was driven by their gratitude for the care that they had received 'some people actively want to put something back into the community because they are grateful for help they received'. (Harris, 1995)

This brings to mind the way in which hitchhiking works. People may hitch lifts for years, and when they get a car they feel obliged to give something back. Squatters who have been helped to squat their houses often get involved with the local squatters group so that they can give something back to others. All these observations offer insight into how our morality develops in practice. For most of us it is not an abstract phenomenon that is drawn from books, but a set of practices that are built out of relationships. Where the communitarians are right is that morality is intrinsically linked to a sense of responsibility, and responsibility is intrinsically linked to social action.

It is interesting that Kropotkin returns at the end of his book (which has centred on a detailed biological and sociological analysis of how society works) to ethics: 'however it is especially in the domain of ethics that the dominating importance of the mutual-aid principle appears in full' (Kropotkin, 1939: 233). Kropotkin illustrates his point by showing how all the major modern religions have mutual aid built into their foundational principles:

> The higher concept of 'no revenge for wrongs' and of freely giving more than one expects to receive from his neighbours, is proclaimed as being the real principle of morality – a principle superior to mere equivalence, equity, or justice, and more conducive to happiness. (Kropotkin, 1939: 234)

But the essential point here is that self-help leads directly to mutual aid, and more broadly to the formation of values that emphasise social responsibility.

The dependency culture is corrosive of society

Another central issue underpinning arguments for community self-help is that the dependency created by reliance on both state provision and employment relations is corrosive of the creativity and innovation that society needs to develop in order to survive.

At the heart of contemporary arguments about a dependency culture is the issue of welfare benefits. This House of Commons exchange clearly illustrates the way in which the argument has been couched

> Mr. Sheerman: Where have the Government been for the past 17 years? A dependency culture has grown over those 17 years, year on year, and ever more young lone mothers depend on low benefits. Those young mothers want an opportunity culture, not a dependency culture. It is too late for this Government, but the new Labour Government will introduce opportunity, not dependency, for those mothers. (House of Commons Hansard Debates for 25 February 1997 (pt 4))

Frank Field's analysis goes deeper. His critique is not of the government but of the welfare state itself. In his book, *The State of Dependency* (2000), he acknowledges the way in which the welfare state offered the prospect of 'abolishing want', but by undermining the self-help membership organisations it 'laid bare a whole swathe of civil society'.

> The effect of this devastation is now apparent. Beveridge's welfare state has helped sap individual responsibility and initiative. It was no longer an individuals' responsibility to look after himself and his family. It was the State's. (Field, 2000: 54)

His fundamental concerns lie with what he perceives is the nature of the system:

> Once on means tested welfare the pressures work to keep people there. Instead of welfare acting as a springboard to freedom it becomes a trap to long-term dependency. (Field, 2000: 44)

Field's attack on the welfare state is not one with which we would entirely agree, but this should not mean that we dismiss his critique

of centralised welfare. Indeed the central point that Field is making is echoed by Bishop and Hoggett:

> There can be little doubt that in the late nineteenth century most social care was self-organised, either informally though the family or more formally through the same kinds of mutual aid organisations that dominate the sphere of leisure today. The professionalization of health and social care has been built upon the removal of the functions and competencies of families and communities. (1996: 124)

In all of these descriptions, dependency is posed against opportunity. It is seen to breed inactivity and hence restrict possibilities. Implicit in this statement is the belief that 'activity' leads to 'opportunity', and fortune in a sense is about opportunism that is grounded in the skills that have been honed to exploit it.

> fortune is usually on the side of the industrious, as the wind and waves are on the side of the best navigators. (Field, 2000: 76)

A similar view is also expressed by important thinkers on the libertarian left. Ivan Illich makes the point that:

> The poor have always been socially powerless. The increasing reliance on institutional care adds a new dimension to their helplessness: psychological impotence, the inability to fend for themselves. (Illich, 1971: 3)

We support the broad thrust of the dependency argument with three important provisos. The first is that writers like Smiles do not take into account the structural factors which block opportunity. The second is that the problems of dependency may be more serious at the level of the community than the individual. In other words, it is where whole communities are dependent on the state that many of the worst social problems will arise. This is where opportunity is structurally blocked and enterprise cultures do not thrive because people see only the environment that they have always known. The third is that the negative effects of dependency on low wages may be much more substantial than dependency on state benefits.

This latter point is picked up by Dean and Taylor-Gooby (1992: 48) who shift the debate from the state to employment. They point out that:

> Concealed beneath what Marx (1970) referred to as the 'dull compulsion' of the wage relation lie not the 'free' labourers of bourgeois rhetoric, but individuals who are dependent upon the sale of their labour power for the means of their subsistence. And for the reproduction of individual labour power, each individual is further dependent upon the socially determined structure of the modern nuclear family.
>
> Ironically therefore, those who are dependent on collective provision by an impersonal state have become independent of the wage relation and/or the family

What underlies this powerful point is that the critique of the dependency culture applies equally to the market as it does to the state. Mutual aid and self-help are ways out of dependency on both. This is not only important at a personal level, but also in terms of normative theory development, because we are beginning to identify a space which is neither state nor market based and one (as we shall see in Chapter 3) which is as extensive as both the state and market spheres put together.

The state as a welfare provider is in crisis

While it is self-evident that the market cannot meet the needs of those who are employed on low wages, are unemployed or who otherwise do not work, it is widely assumed that the state will fill the gap. But it has never been able to do this comprehensively. First, because historically the most important role of the state within capitalism has been to ensure order and social compliance in a context of social and economic inequality – it's main raison d'etre has never been redistribution. Second, because in many key arenas state activity forms only a small part of existing social provision, support and protection, and third, because state solutions are often highly ineffective.

You could not find a better example of the primacy of social control than the US-prison system. Although the United States has only 5 per cent of the world's population it has 25 per cent of the world's

prison population. Some 1.3 million people have been incarcerated for non-violent crimes. One in three African American men aged 20–29 is in jail, on probation, or on parole as opposed to one in 15 of their male white counterparts. In cities such as Baltimore and Washington at least half of all young black men are either in prison, on parole or on probation (BBC Internet News, 15 February 2000). The problem is poverty, but the state's response is harsh social control not redistribution. Most capitalist states have gone about the process in a rather more subtle way:

> the capitalistic state must try to fulfil two basic and often mutually contradictory functions – accumulation and legitimisation. This means that the state must try to maintain or create conditions in which profitable capital accumulation is possible. However the state also must try to maintain or create the conditions for social harmony. A capitalist state that openly uses its coercive forces to help one class accumulate capital at the expense of other classes loses its legitimacy and hence undermines the basis of its loyalty and support. But a state which ignores the necessity of assisting the process of capital accumulation risks drying up the source of its own power, the economy's surplus production capacity and the taxes drawn from this surplus. (O'Connor, 1973: 6)

Our education system is a good example of the way in which a state service has been designed to deliver the needs of capital.

> we have come to realize that for most men the right to learn is curtailed by the obligation to attend school.
>
> People who submit to the standard of others for the measure of their own personal growth soon apply the same ruler to themselves. They no longer have to be put into their place, but put themselves into assigned slots, squeeze themselves into the niche which they have been taught to seek. (Illich, 1971: 40)

> School sells curriculum – a bundle of goods made according to the same process and having the same structures as other merchandise … the result of the curriculum production process looks like any other modern staple. It is a bundle of planned meanings, a package of values, a commodity whose 'balanced appeal' makes

> it marketable to a sufficiently large number to justify the cost of production. Consumer-pupils are taught to make their desires conform to marketable values. (Illich, 1971: 41)

What is striking about both of these extended quotations is just how closely they resonate with the public sector of today. The current national curriculum is a caricature of the education system Illich was describing in the 1970's. The truth is that:

> Learning is the human activity which least needs manipulation by others. Most learning is not the result of instruction. It is rather the result of unhampered participation in a meaningful setting. (Illich, 1971: 39)

The fiscal crisis which O'Connor describes is at the heart of contemporary policy debates – and raises all those difficult questions such as how we are going to support a rapidly growing number of people aged 65 and over. It is almost certain that the state will not be able to meet this sort of commitment. So people will be forced into private pension schemes, and those that cannot afford to enter these schemes will grow old in poverty – echoes of the US health service. They will have to rely more and more on self-help and communities will need to extend their capacity to deliver it.

But even the current welfare state is not actually providing the universal welfare net which many assume it is. In some areas such as welfare benefits and education, the state is still absolutely central, but this is clearly not the case across the board. Care provision for example is met largely by family, kin and community. Most crime is either unsolved or dealt with at the level of the community. Good health is largely determined by individual nutrition, fitness etc. In January 2001, *The Guardian*, in an article entitled 'police crime detection rates fall to a new low', reported that the clear-up rate for all recorded crime was only 24 per cent. For burglary it was only 12 per cent. Even for most violent crime the clear up rate was only 55 per cent. The only area in which the police appear to have a high success rate is for murder (90 per cent). Furthermore, these figures only relate to recorded crime. Data from the British Crime Survey has consistently shown that less than 50 per cent of all crimes are reported to the police (it has rarely got above the mid-40s). So a clear-up rate of

24 per cent might in rough terms equate to a clear-up rate of less than 12 per cent of all crimes.

Where people are taken out of society (either because they are particularly vulnerable or because they have committed offences) the state is equally ineffective. Outcomes for children in care are appalling. The Government's Social Exclusion Unit recently produced a consultation document, *Raising the Achievement of Children in Care*, which showed that more than two-thirds of children in care leave care at 16 with no qualifications at all, compared with only 6 per cent of all children; less than one in 20 obtain five good GCSE passes, compared with nearly half of all children. The report also pointed out that a quarter of the prison population and up to a third of rough sleepers have been in care. The repeated child abuse scandals in children's homes are further evidence of the problem. According to a Social Exclusion Unit report in 2002, *Reducing Re-offending by Ex-prisoners*, 58 per cent of criminals reoffend after being convicted, committing about a million crimes every year in England and Wales with an annual cost of £1 billion. Young male prisoners are the worst reoffenders with 72 per cent committing further offences.

For many of the most vulnerable in our society state services provide few solutions. Laid before us is the simple reality that communities are already highly reliant on community self-help. Many already provide the support and protection that they need either because it is not available from the state or because it is inappropriate or inadequate.

Conclusion

The evidential basis for the argument that cooperation is as important as competition in evolution is compelling, and it is politically important in the context of the hegemonic capitalist and social democratic position that we have to accept competition as the primary driver of society. This does not mean that individuals do not put themselves, their family and their friends first. The issue at stake is whether they do this through competitive behaviour or reciprocity and the evidence seems to suggest that the most effective way of safeguarding those primary relationships is through reciprocity.

We would argue that there is a strong relationship between the way in which people form their values and their experience of doing things. This is built upon the principle of experiential learning. The more people are engaged, the more they understand the implications and consequences of their actions, and the more likely that they are to develop moral positions. A society which is always once removed from the provision of those things that are necessary for the continuation of human life and human happiness will always suffer the negative problems of alienation. In this sense a moral society depends on direct social exchange.

We believe that there is a very strong case to be made that the 'dependency culture' needs to be redressed. However, when we talk of dependency we must be clear that people are as much dependent on the market as they are on the state, and that this is an equally debilitating relationship. Nevertheless, creative routes out of poverty depend on an entrepreneurialism in relation to the opportunities that may be available, and a good, secure and happy society is dependent upon people understanding that they have responsibilities as well as rights. Furthermore, if the key issue of dependency is not individual dependency but dependency at a community level, then it is vital to look at the way in which self-help and mutual aid work at a community level.

Finally, it is important to recognise that much of what we provide for each other within society is already done through self-help and mutual aid. Many are excluded from market provision, and much state provision is at best ineffective and at worst corrosive of society. So community self-help should not be seen as an off-the-wall radical philosophy. It is for the most part what we do already.

2
Conceptualising Community Self-Help

We have much to say later about the ways in which community self-help is embedded in our society, and its importance to social relations. First, however, we must gain some clarity about exactly what we mean by community self-help. In this chapter, therefore, we begin by looking at the nature of the relationships that underpin such activity. In the first section, community self-help is seen to span a spectrum of activity ranging from work within the household to reciprocal exchange within the community. In the second section, we explore the range of different activities that these different types of self-help relate to. In the third section, the focus is on the organisational characteristics of community self-help - looking at what distinguishes this activity from work governed by the state and the market. The fourth section looks at the different roles community self-help performs within society.

Types of community self-help

Throughout this book we refer to community self-help as those informal activities that are not formally provided by the market and the state. This definition encompasses a diverse spectrum of activities, so following previous studies of informal work and exchange we divide it into three slightly more coherent categories (e.g. Gregory

and Windebank, 2000; Leonard, 1998; Pahl, 1984; Renooy, 1990). These are:

> 'self-help', or what is sometimes referred to as 'self-provisioning', which is the unpaid work undertaken by household members for themselves and each other. This ranges from domestic labour through unpaid caring activities conducted for and by household members to do-it-yourself home improvements;
>
> 'unpaid mutual aid' which is work provided on an unpaid basis by the extended family, social or neighbourhood networks
>
> and 'paid mutual aid' or what is sometimes referred to as 'paid informal exchange' where legal goods and services are exchanged for money and gifts, which are unregistered by, or hidden from, the state for tax, social security or labour law purposes.

Within each of these there remains a great deal of diversity, so we have further categorised the sector as in Table 2.1.

The realm of 'self-help', or what Polanyi (1944) called 'household-ing', includes a diverse array of activities ranging from routine and mundane forms of housework to more creative activities such as do-it-yourself (DIY) - the motives underpinning these contrast significantly with each other so it is important to distinguish between them. In the realm of mutual aid we can distinguish between unpaid and paid. Unpaid mutual aid is where work is exchanged on an unpaid basis within the extended family and social or neighbourhood

Table 2.1 Types of community self-help

Self-help	Routine self-provisioning	
	Do-it-yourself activity	
Mutual aid	Unpaid	One-to-one kinship reciprocity
		One-to-one reciprocity between friends and neighbours
		Organised mutual aid
		Community volunteering
	Paid	Autonomous

networks. There are four types of unpaid mutual aid:

- Unpaid one-to-one reciprocal exchanges between kin;
- Unpaid one-to-one reciprocal exchanges between friends and neighbours;
- Organised mutual groups ranging from economically oriented self-help groups (e.g. LETS, credit unions, Employee Mutuals) to more socially oriented groups (e.g. mutual aid contracts, time banks, hobby clubs); and
- Voluntary activity or one-way giving where nothing is expected in return.

Although there is a tendency in some analyses to further divide voluntary work and organised mutual groups into subcategories (e.g. Burns and Taylor, 1998; Home Office, 1999), we do not consider it necessary here as such activity is used to a very minor extent by households to meet their material needs. Micro-level one-to-one reciprocal exchange between kin, neighbours and friends in contrast is much more heavily relied upon and given the variations in the attitudes towards, and motives underpinning participation in such work, is divided into unpaid kinship exchange and unpaid exchange between friends/neighbours.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to distinguish strongly between mutual aid organisation and volunteering. As Hoggett and Bishop (1986: 39) put it,

> In our conversations with group members, we met very few people who would accept that their involvement in their group constitutes any form of volunteering. Indeed some would vehemently deny that they are *volunteers* because, even if they are virtually full-time organizers of large groups, their motivation is primarily that of personal pleasure in their activity rather than one of offering philanthropic effort and service to other. ... within mutual aid the organisation of the group is nearly always performed by 'some of us' for all of us and not 'by them, for us'. (Hoggett and Bishop, 1986: 99)

But volunteering at a community level should not be seen entirely as a form of one-way patronage. There is often a strong reciprocity at work at the level of the community. Helping out on a local literacy scheme may directly result in less truancy from school, less vandalism and less disruptive behaviour from youth. This in turn might make

the neighbourhood a better place to live in. The reciprocal return is indirect but tangible. Work to help increase people's self-esteem may have equally tangible outcomes. People who were incapacitated by depression may start to put flowers outside of their houses, to keep their gardens tidy, to give mutual aid to other people and so on. This leads to a greater sense of pride in the area. People are less inclined to leave, and others are encouraged to come into the community. This very subtle process can have a major impact on halting the degeneration of communities.

Paid informal work is normally not perceived to be a form of mutual aid (and certainly not a type of work that should be encouraged!). In this book we argue that this is not always the case. Although some paid informal exchange is very much akin to market-like exchange, a good deal is based on non-market motivations and social relations. This is clearly described by Ungerson (1995: 37) in her work on care where she describes systems of paid volunteering as well as symbolic payments to people whom they have known for many years, rather than to strangers working at the 'rate for the job' - money which may come through the benefits system.

Here, therefore, we distinguish two forms of paid informal exchange. On the one hand, there is *'organised' paid informal work* where an employee conducts work 'on the side' for a business. This form of paid informal exchange is market-like so does not come within our definition of mutual aid. On the other hand, there is *'autonomous' paid informal work*, where people engage in paid work mostly for friends, relatives and neighbours. This as we exemplify in Chapter 4 exhibits strong characteristics of mutual aid.

Finally, it is worth reminding ourselves that just as there is a dynamic relationship between individual self-help and mutual aid (which we highlighted in Chapter 1) the following examples illustrate how small scale informal mutual aid can lead to organised mutual aid at the level of the whole community:

> A group of single-parent families on the Croeserw housing estate in West Glamorgan met with the mutual aim of social contact, moved on to setting up coffee mornings and holiday events for children, then took up craft and cookery classes and ended up running a youth club.
>
> The village of Wellow, near Bath, was about to lose its general store, residents combined to take over the shop and it is now being

> run using volunteers on a self-help basis to keep this vital amenity in the village. (Home Office, Priority Action Team report, 1999)

To conclude, our definition of community self-help refers to informal activity which exists outside the state and market spheres. It can be further subdivided according to the social relations within which such activity is conducted - self-help, unpaid mutual aid and paid mutual aid (see Table 2.1).

The range of community self-help activities

Using some of the categories that we identified in the previous section we can map some of the different ways in which community self-help can be applied to a range of activities - domestic labour and care, money and material resources, food and health, housing, security and safety, education and leisure. These of course do not

Table 2.2 Arenas of community self-help and mutual aid

Routine self provisioning	**Do it yourself**	**Direct reciprocity**	**Organised mutual aid**	**Community volunteering**
Domestic labour and care				
Cooking, cleaning, washing, shopping, minor repairs such as sewing	Household DIY, decorating, building, major repairs: for example to car or house, baking bread	Doing jobs for each other, e.g., one family paints the house for another who repairs their car	Local Exchange Trading Scheme	
Care of children, disabled or elderly family and relatives		Informal childcare arrangements, Grandparents exchange care for childcare	Baby sitting circles	Fostering, running a play group, religious visiting
Family support		Friendship	Self-help groups	
Money and material provisioning				
		Lending money, tools or other resources to each other	Micro credit/ credit unions/ local currencies/toy libraries	

Table 2.2 Continued

Routine self provisioning	**Do it yourself**	**Direct reciprocity**	**Organised mutual aid**	**Community volunteering**
Passing down kids' clothes	Making your own clothes (knitting for grandchildren), pottery, furniture	Passing on kids clothes, toys, etc.	Sewing clubs	Knitting, quilting, etc., for community events
Walking		Car sharing	Transport coops/car pool schemes	Hitching
Breast feeding, vegetable gardening	Allotment growing/ crofting, collecting medicinal herbs and wild food, e.g., mushrooms	Seed exchanges	Soup kitchens, local food coops	
Housing				
	Squatting	Repairing each other's houses	Organised support against evictions	Local squatting support group
	Individual self-build	Mutual self-build		Community self-build
	Selling the big issue			Big issue organisation
Security and safety				
	Self-defence/ martial arts training	Watching your neighbours' house	Neighbour-hood watch, community protection, community-based vigilantism	
Education				
Reading/ experiencing/ learning	Home schooling (individual)		Home schooling (collective)	Helping local kids with homework, local literacy schemes
Leisure				
Playing football in the local park etc.	Creating a sports pitch on disused land	Informal playing of sport together	Sports/hobby clubs	Street parties

cover every aspect of community self-help but they should give an impression of some of the activities that are involved and some of the issues that arise from them.

Domestic labour and care

Our starting point is work which takes place in the home. This is both the most extensive work and often the most invisible. A large amount of it can be considered as routine self-provisioning. For the most part we shop, cook and do our own washing; we carry out most minor repairs; we care for our parents, sometimes our relatives or our neighbours, and our children. Less frequently, but significantly, families engage in major DIY projects including decorating, or rebuilding their houses, or repairing their own car. This can border on leisure as many people will repair their own radios, computers or vehicles because this is their enthusiasm. There are also lots of things that we do for each other. We take in our neighbours' post, feed their pets and so on, while they are away. These are not instantly reciprocal, but there is an expectation of reciprocity in the future. If I keep an eye on your house while you are away, I would expect that you would take a parcel delivery if I am not in. Informal childcare works like this also. We look after each other's children with an expectation that ours will be looked after in return. Sometimes the care is reciprocal in a different way. A grandparent who is looked after by his or her children may return the gift by looking after the grandchildren. As we move towards the more organised arena there are a number of ways in which household work can get done through organised reciprocity. LETS schemes, which we discuss in detail later, are designed to organise the exchange of goods, skills and services so that the amount of work done balances out within the community without requiring one-to-one reciprocity. Babysitting circles do a similar thing with tokens as a means of identifying who is entitled to what.

As we demonstrate in Chapter 3, detailed studies show that the amount of work time spent in this arena accounts for more than that spent in employed work. A similar picture can be drawn for care. A survey carried out by Suzy Croft and Peter Beresford in 1986 showed that when asked about where they got their support, the vast majority mentioned partners or family relations, 22 per cent mentioned friends, 19 per cent said that they got no support or did not need it or provided it themselves, and only 7 per cent mentioned social services or other professional support.

While family, kin, neighbours and friends provide most support there is a growing move towards self-help groups. Putnam (2000) citing a major study in the United States by Wuthnow tells us that 'nearly 5% of all the people claimed to participate regularly in a self-help group such as Alcoholics Anonymous' and 'nearly as many said that they belonged to book discussion groups and hobby clubs' (149). Of these people 'nearly two out of five members reported that other members had helped them out when someone was sick'. Wuthnow describes this phenomenon as a 'quiet revolution' in American society (150). This later point is important because it suggests that opportunities for being cared for develop out of social activity - which would further support the social capital thesis that you are likely to be healthy and live longer if you are involved in groups (Putnam, 2000). This takes us into the wider realm of community volunteering. People who are part of religious communities receive support and friendship by virtue of their belonging. Another very important area of community volunteering which is akin to blood doning is the fostering of children. Here local people take in kids for the betterment of society. Unlike blood doning, fostering usually involves local people. The reciprocity involved may be many fold. At the level of society it is about creating a better future for the children within communities - which ultimately betters us all. At the level of the individual it can be as simple as being able to love and to be loved - perhaps the purest form of reciprocity we can imagine.

Money and material resources

People have always provided material goods for each other. This can be as simple as having food on the table when someone comes round. Passing kids clothes down to younger kids within your extended family, to friends and neighbours is commonplace. Making your own clothes and curtains has traditionally been an important part of the self-help arena. It is now less common although still very prevalent amongst older women - many of whom still knit both for their families and their communities (e.g. for jumble sales etc.). Neighbours often share tools and a considerable amount of money may change hands as people loan money to each other and so on.

Food has traditionally been one of the most important arenas of self-provisioning. From the day we are born many of us are breastfed.

Nutritionists recommend breastfeeding for up to two years. This has been in decline but major campaigns by UNICEF and the World Health Organisation have begun to shift that a little. It is currently only the Scandinavian countries where more than 20 per cent of mothers breastfeed beyond around six months. Figures from the UNICEF UK baby friendly initiative show that in 1995 only 66 per cent of mothers were breastfeeding at birth, this had gone down to 56 per cent within a week of birth. At four months it was 27 per cent and at 9 months it was 14 per cent. The 1995 figures for the United States are similar. Around 59.4 per cent of women in the United States were breastfeeding either exclusively or in combination with formula feeding at the time of hospital discharge, but only 21.6 per cent at six months. In countries where there is a strong breastfeeding culture and mothers are supported in their choice to breastfeed the rates are high, for example, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Poland, Romania and Czech Republic (The Australian Breastfeeding Association - reproduced from 'Essence' magazine, Volume 36, Number 4).

Allotment growing is another example of self-provisioning which involves a lot of mutual aid - seeds are swapped; tools are shared; knowledge and experience is transferred. According to figures from the national society of allotments and leisure gardens there are currently 1 220 464 people involved in allotments in the United Kingdom. There are 8025 allotment sites which are made up of 305 116 plots. This represents a significant proportion of the population, and a vast area of land (36 292 acres). Yet the numbers are declining. Between 1970 and 1996 there has been a decline in allotment provision amounting to almost 40 per cent. There are 1650 local groups who are members of the national society. So a key question for us in this sphere is how to halt the decline. There are important policy implications for local government and wider planning regimes here.

Another important example of local mutual aid is micro credit. We discuss this in detail later in this book. In the following excerpt Putnam illustrates its international significance:

> immigrant networks also provide financing to entrepreneurs whether in the form of gifts from family members or loans from rotating credit associations (a rotating credit association is a group, often ethnically based in which members make regular

> contributions to a common fund, which is then made available in whole or in part to each contributor in rotation. Such self-help micro lending arrangements are widespread throughout the world wherever formal credit institutions are unwilling or unable to provide credit to small borrowers). A study of Korean business owners found that about 70% used debt financing to start their enterprises and that of those who borrowed 41% got their money from family and 24% from friends compared with 37% from a financial institution.

Putnam's observations not only point out the significance of micro credit, but also highlight the importance of the relationship between informal and formal entrepreneurialism. This is a point which we stress later in Chapter 4 where we highlight the role of self-help as a springboard into the mainstream economy - particularly self-employment.

Another way in which material goods can become part of a self-help arena is car sharing. At the most informal level this starts with people sharing their cars, and giving regular lifts to each other. A study of young people and transport in rural areas showed that most young people relied on lifts from parents but that this could involve 'organising elaborate cartels, making use of available parents to provide them and their friends with lifts' (Storey and Brannen, 2000).

> Community-based initiatives can play an important role but rely on local initiative and volunteer help. Church groups feature particularly strongly in this role in some communities. The most important source of access to transport, however, is often through friends and neighbours who own a car. Although not formally declared (for fear of attracting the attention of the taxation authorities or insurers), there are many instances of informal sharing arrangements involving the exchange of money or gifts in kind. (Bonsall *et al*., 2002)

Car sharing schemes are becoming more sophisticated and more widespread. As we will see in Chapter 6, some of the more organised schemes have undergone exponential growth in just the last few years. As we move beyond the arena of organised mutual aid towards

community volunteering it is worth mentioning hitchhiking. Here the reciprocal relationship is intergenerational. As a young person I will accept lifts from those who have more income that I do and who drive cars. As an older person and car owner I give back what I received when I was young, and in so doing I perpetuate the community of hitchhikers. It should be noted that while our primary focus is neighbourhood-based community, issue-based communities (such as car sharers) are increasingly becoming the basis for organised mutual aid schemes.

Housing

In the introduction to this book we highlighted the significance of the Big Issue as a form of paid mutual aid. The Big Issue illustrates the complexity of the issues that we are dealing with because it does not easily fit into categories. It involves (for those that are selling the paper) a form of self-help, which is not totally divorced from the market because a product is being sold, but which is largely not market driven (because most people buy the paper to support homeless people). It involves an element of community volunteering in its organisation, and its infrastructure depends on a structure which looks like a formal voluntary organisation.

Squatting is a direct form of self-provisioning. Homeless people who see empty houses, make a decision to live in them because they have nowhere else to go, and because they believe that it is wrong for houses to be left empty when people have nowhere to live. But there is also an element of community volunteering as squatters join local squatting groups. These give support to the next generation of squatters by providing them with tools and knowledge, and helping people to get into and secure empty houses. At any one time there are likely to be around 20 000 to 30 000 squatters in the United Kingdom. Another indication of the extent of squatting is that the 'squatters handbook' published by the Advisory Service for Squatters has sold around 150 000 copies since 1976.

Security and safety

Another increasingly important arena for self-help is community safety. As we can see from Table 2.2 there are many examples of low-key self-help and mutual aid such as self-defence and keeping an eye on your neighbours' house. These can be loosely organised into

neighbourhood watch schemes (although where these are institutionalised with the support of the police we would not consider them to be self-help). If neighbourhood watch exists at one end of a spectrum and community-based vigilantism is at the other then in between there is an arena which we would call 'community protection' where communities take autonomous action in order to protect themselves from actual or perceived dangers.

Education

Home educating is now receiving increasing attention. In the United States it is mushrooming:

> between 1990 and 1996, the number of home-schoolers more than doubled to 1.3 million students. This is nearly 3% of the total school population and more than 20% of the private school enrolment. It equals more than half the total Catholic school enrolment. (Vitullo-Martin, 1997)

Estimates suggest that in Canada in 2000 it accounts for around 1.5 per cent of children of school age children and is growing at a rate of 10 per cent a year (Dowty, 2000).

In the United Kingdom, homeschooling is not as extensive but according to research by Durham University it still represents around 1 per cent of the school age population, and they predict that it will triple within the next ten years (Guardian, 13 August 2000). This represents a massive rise, as 20 years ago home education was virtually non-existent in the United Kingdom.

The DIY version of homeschooling involves taking your children out of school and teaching them yourself. This often occurs because parents are deeply unsatisfied with the education that their children are getting at school. There are of course many examples of direct reciprocity where kids are helped with their homework by an array of different parents and so on. Increasingly however, we are also beginning to see the emergence of community organised 'home schooling' where collectives of parents teach their own and each others children. This is a highly organised form of mutual aid. Finally, it is important to mention that homeschooling parents see themselves as a community and there are highly developed support networks both within localities and at a national level. An example of this is

'Education Otherwise' an organisation that offers support from homeschoolers to other homeschoolers.

Leisure

The arena of leisure is the area where there is a truly comprehensive system of informal, autonomous mutually organised groups. The most extensive piece of work on this area is the work of Hoggett and Bishop (1986). They carried out a detailed study of leisure groups in Bristol and Leicester. What struck them at the outset was just how many hidden groups there were:

> The great surprise came in Kingswood where a list provided by the local authority of 80 groups quickly became 312, at which point we stopped searching

They were further surprised by the range of groups that they found, and it is worth noting that only 37 per cent of these groups were involved in sporting activities. The groups in just these two areas included:

> Basketball, old-time dancing, chess, cats, aerobics, orchestras, football, lapidary, table tennis, skittles, bee-keeping, meditation, antiques, hockey, toy dogs, aquarism, fishing, morris dancing, tennis, flower arranging, bridge, gardening, fuchsias, windsurfing, railway preservation, allotments, war-games, cricket, wine, philately, photography, horse riding, canoeing, women's institutes, micro-lites, harmoniums, net ball, ballroom dancing, guitars, whist, keep fit, judo, wrestling, athletics, brass bands, caving, handball, darts, metal detectors, volleyball, parascending, orienteering, rat-fancying, computer games, point-to-point, family histories, lacrosse, climbing, local histories, industrial archaeology, hand gliding, numismatism, naturalism, snooker, mums and toddlers group, clocks, practical conservation, vintage motor cycles, military modelling, modern sequence dance, computers, rowing, film and video, flok dance, wives' groups, squash, sub-aqua, sailing, weightlifting, motor scooters, handicrafts, bird-watching, choirs, slimming, boxing, aikido, drama, light opera, lace making, softball, macramé, yoga, bowls, gymnastics, shove-ha'penny, upholstery, silkscreen printing, oil painting, rifle and pistol

shooting, model railways, cycling, whippets, dressmaking, swimming, skating, mouse fancying, leek growing, caged birds, aero modelling, pigeon racing, canal preservation, model boats.

The 300 groups in Kingswood had an average of 90 group members. This produced 28 500 people who were active in the area – a very high proportion of the local population of 85 000. In Leicester the level of membership was not quite as high, but nevertheless substantial. Here there were 228 groups with an average membership of 55, so 12 540 people out of a population of 68 000 were involved in groups. Of course some people would have been involved in more than one group and some adjustment needs to be made for that, nevertheless it shows a huge web of interrelationships, and these interrelationships have multiple roles.

They are providing enjoyment and fulfilment for themselves through activity. Their activities may be consumed by the wider community (as entertainment or as hard products such as upholstery), and they will undoubtedly underpin other reciprocal network relationships within the locality. These as we shall see in the next chapter are very important factors in the networks which create social capital. Social capital is built on relationships of trust, and it is often through these social groups that trust is built.

Organisational characteristics of community self-help

So far we have described what we mean by community self-help and what types of activity it involves. In this section (drawing on Burns and Taylor, 1998), we explore the organisational forms that community self-help takes and the ways in which this is distinct from formal organisational relationships.

First, work for the state, private and voluntary sector is carried out through formal employment. Employment is not a characteristic of community self-help which is entirely voluntary and informal.

Second, formal organisations have a direct relationship to the state. They are either statutorily defined in the sense that they are created by government and are required to deliver services specified by government (e.g. a local authority which must provide a social services function and an education function) or they are statutorily

regulated. Charities must be registered with the Charity Commission, cooperatives and voluntary agencies must be registered on the register of friendly societies, companies are registered with companies' house and so on. All of these organisations, including community organisations, are legally constituted. They must have a treasurer, chair and secretary elected at an annual general meeting. They are all either taxable or formally tax-exempt. Organisations in the informal sphere conform to none of these requirements. They are completely outside of any legal framework other than general national law. These forms of activity may operate within clear rules (a LETS) or through generally accepted conventions, but they are only enforceable by peer pressure or by exclusion. They are not enforceable by legal sanction.

A third distinguishing feature is the type of governance. Formal organisations are based on various forms of representative governance. In the public sector, these range from elected councillors and elected school governors to appointees on the Regional Development Agency or the Local Technical College. In the private sector, board appointees are elected by shareholders. Either way, those on the board or committee make decisions on behalf of a much broader body of people that they represent. Community self-help, in contrast, is based on direct systems of governance. These may involve agreed systems of coordination, but they do not involve decision making by one group of individuals over another.

Finally, the social organisation of community self-help tends to be based on informal network structures rather than on formal hierarchies. The importance of the network is central to any theory of mutual aid. Here it is important to note Granovetters' work in the 1970s that highlighted

> The counter intuitive fact that casual acquaintances can be more important than close friends and family for individuals in search of employment. My closest friends and kin - my 'strong ties' - are likely to know the same people and hear of the same opportunities I do. More distant acquaintances - my 'weak ties' are more likely to link me to unexpected opportunities, and those weak ties are actually more valuable to me. (Putnam, 2000: 320)

Table 2.3 sums up these organisational differences between the formal and informal sphere. As with any framework, the categories are crude and there are inevitably overlaps and exceptions. Allotment growing for instance, is an example of community self-help that can be almost entirely autonomous in itself (work can be carried out by the individual, seeds can be kept and exchanged), yet it is still dependent on a tenant-landlord relationship with (for the most part) the local authority. Nevertheless to be characterised as community self-help, activities must meet all of the following definitional requirements. They will:

- not be based on an employment relationship;
- have no formal relationship to the state (e.g. funding or regulation)
- be governed by direct decision making not representative decision making; and
- have an organisational structure which takes the form of a network rather than a hierarchy.

Many community groups meet only some of these criteria. Their employment relationship is based on volunteers, but if they receive any funding from the state, charities and so forth, they must be formally constituted. Some small community organisations which do not receive funding but which are based on reciprocity and solidarity might be considered as forms of community self-help. We have in mind here groups like the Inverclyde Tenants Federation that refused state funding for years on the grounds that it radically constrained what it was able to do.

It is also worth noting that some people carry out community self-help activities as a result of their involvement in formal groups. People who are members of religious groups, for example, often support each other but their support is direct and autonomous.

Key roles of community self-help

Burns and Taylor (1997) saw mutual aid and self-help as having three key roles for people in communities. They could be seen first as a *springboard* out of poverty and social exclusion – perhaps into employment. Second, they could be seen as a *coping* strategy, and finally, they could be seen as an *alternative* to mainstream ways of doing things. In this book, we have adopted these categories to

Table 2.3 Organisational differences between formal organisation and community self-help

		Extent to which organisation is professionalised	Formal relationship to the state	Type of governance	Organisational structure
Formal organisation	State	Paid staff	Statutorily defined	Elected representatives or	Formal organisation
	Voluntary sector and private organisations		State regulated	appointees to committees or boards	
			Legally constituted, taxable or		
	Community organisations	Volunteers	formally tax exempt		Formalised group
Community self-help	Mutual aid	Activists	Informal constitution	Direct decision making and agreed	Networks and informal groups
			Informal rules	systems or	Individuals
	Self-help	Individuals		coordination	
			Some conventions	Individuals	

Adapted from Burns and Taylor (1998).

capture the three distinct roles of:

Community self-help as a springboard;
Community self-help as a complement; and
Community self-help as an alternative and/or a challenge.

In the first of these, community self-help is seen as a way into the mainstream perhaps through networks or gaining skills. In the second, it is a way of getting things done that you otherwise would not be able to afford, but here the mainstream is still the dominant way of organising. Finally, community self-help can be seen as an alternative either because people think that the alternative is better than what is on offer by the state (e.g., herbal medicine) they disagree in principle with the services delivered by the state (e.g., schooling), or they believe that work of this sort is simply more fulfilling – even pleasurable. Various structural explanations can be advanced to explain why people are forced through necessity into a higher level of engagement in community self-help activities, but evidence is emerging that there is a strong element of agency involved in decisions to do so. Confronted by dissatisfaction in their formal employment, many people see self-help and mutual aid as a source of work satisfaction, pleasure and means of individualising the products of consumer society for their own purposes (see Chapter 4).

It is important to be clear that these three categories are essentially empirical. In other words, they describe what is happening on the ground now. Much of the first part of this book is about trying to map that reality, conceptualise it and understand it. In the latter part of the book we build on these to explore different political perspectives on community self-help and draw some normative conclusions.

Conclusion

What should be clear by now is that the type of community self-help that we are concerned with is not an institutional form of mutuality. It is firmly rooted within the household and within local communities. Such activity is seen to cover all non-formal activity that takes place in society. It includes not only unpaid work undertaken by household members for themselves or others in the household

(i.e. self-help activity) but also a diverse array of forms of unpaid and paid mutual aid.

In this respect, the scope of community self-help is quite different to either volunteering or charity. Where charity meets resistance, strategies for building community self-help may offer great potential. Community self-help does not have to be direct, although it can be. Swapping childcare is perhaps the most obvious example of direct exchange. A babysitting circle mediates that exchange allowing you to babysit for one family while receiving reciprocal babysitting from another. The concept of LETS takes this idea a stage further. Now we only have to offer a service of some sort to someone in the community. Reciprocity is regulated through a system of exchange.

Community self-help also has clear organisational characteristics. It is not underpinned by employment relations and has no formal relation to the state. It is governed by direct forms of decision making and is organised through network structures rather than hierarchical structures.

Finally, we have distinguished three clear roles that community self-help plays in society. It can be seen as a springboard into mainstream activity, a complement to it and a deliberate alternative or challenge to it. All of these roles are explored in depth in the following chapters.

3
The Extent of Community Self-Help

Having outlined the scope of mutual aid and self-help, the aim of this chapter is to answer four key questions. How much community self-help takes place in contemporary society? Who engages in this activity? Why do they participate? And what are the barriers to participation?

The conventional answer to these questions is that as economies have undergone what Polanyi (1944) termed a 'great transformation' from non-market to market societies, self-help and mutual aid have become small residual spheres of activity undertaken by those marginalised from the mainstream market economy. There has been a tradition in political economy to argue that 'monetary relations have penetrated every nook and cranny of the world and into almost every aspect of social, even private life' (Harvey, 1982: 373). The goal of making a profit is seen by most political economists as a universal motive underlying all exchange (e.g. Sayer, 1997). In recent years, however, a growing body of literature has questioned the universality of market-oriented activity. Through a detailed examination of alternative economic spaces such as the car boot sale (e.g. Crewe and Gregson, 1998), the horticultural industry (Lee, 2000), local exchange schemes (e.g. Lee, 1996; Williams *et al.*, 2001) and paid informal work (Williams and Windebank, 2001b), researchers have shown that monetary exchanges are not always motivated by profit. Other analysts have (since the 1970s) highlighted how work is more than employment (e.g. Beneria, 1999; Delphy, 1984; Gregory and Windebank, 2000; McDowell, 1991; Williams and Windebank, 1998a). These analysts not only come from a variety of disciplines including

anthropology (e.g. Narotsky, 1997), sociology (e.g. Leonard, 1998; Pahl, 1984), economics (e.g. Thomas, 1992) and geography (e.g. Williams and Windebank, 1998). They also have their roots in a multiplicity of theoretical traditions ranging from feminism (e.g. Walby, 1997) through environmentalism (e.g. Robertson, 1998) to social democratic political traditions (e.g. Aznar, 1987).

Pointing to the persistence of self-help activities such as housework in contemporary society (e.g. Gershuny, 1992; Gershuny *et al.*, 1994) and the degree to which services such as child-rearing (e.g. Windebank, 1996, 1999) and elder-care (e.g. OPCS, 1992) are largely conducted on a non-market basis, they identify a sizeable amount of economic activity outside the market. Thus, while considerable work has undoubtedly shifted into the market sphere, self-help and mutual aid has by no means been eradicated.

Unlike formal employment, which has been subject to regular national and cross-national evaluations of its magnitude and growth, there have been few attempts to investigate the extent and growth of community self-help. This reflects the almost universal assumption that formal employment is the principal form of work in contemporary society. But analysing participation in employment tells us little if anything about how the balance is altering between the sphere of formal work and that of community self-help. Research that has attempted to do this has largely used two methods. These are first, the *time-budget diary method* and second, the *household work practices approach*. While these only focus on a part of the community self-help spectrum of activities (those concerned with household activity) they do enable us to put some sort of measure on the extent to which self-help and mutual aid persist in the advanced economies, and their size relative to employment. In the following section we explore the outcomes of these studies.

How prevalent is community self-help?

The time-budget diaries method

Since the 1960s, there has been an international feminist campaign to have work beyond employment adequately recognised in national accounts. Based on the belief that the way in which work is measured and valued has significant implications for women (Chadeau and Fouquet, 1981; James, 1994; Luxton, 1997), a concerted effort has

been made to integrate measures of women's unpaid work into official measures of economic activity. This campaign has met with considerable success. In 1993, the United Nations recommended that 'satellite national accounts' be developed that incorporate the value of unpaid work. This became an obligation for many advanced economies under the terms of the Final Act of the 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (United Nations, 1995, Section 209: f, g). Although these 'satellite' accounts remain subsidiary they will at last provide information on the size of the non-market sphere. In recent years, the European Commission, and many national governments have developed 'satellite' accounts of the value of unpaid work.

How have they gone about measuring this work? In theory, either the volume and/or value of the inputs and/or outputs of non-market work could be measured (Gregory and Windebank, 2000). In practice, governmental agencies have decided to measure the volume and/or value of the inputs. To do this, time-budget studies have been used (e.g. Murgatroyd and Neuberger, 1997; Roy, 1991). A time-budget study involves research participants' completing time diaries. These capture the number of minutes spent on a range of activities. It is now widely accepted that measuring time use is as useful and accurate in assessing non-market work as money is in measuring paid employment (Gershuny and Jones, 1987; Gershuny *et al.*, 1994; Juster and Stafford, 1985).

Attempts have also been made to put a monetary value on the time spent on such work. Here, three techniques have been adopted: opportunity costs, housekeeper wage costs and occupational wage costs. In each, monetary values from the market sector are used to impute values to non-market work or its products (Luxton, 1997). The opportunity-costs model calculates the income the worker would have earned if s/he had been in the paid labour force instead of undertaking mutual aid or self-help activity. The housekeeper wage-costs approach calculates how much a worker in paid employment doing similar work is paid. The occupational wage-costs approach measures the price of household inputs by calculating market equivalents for the costs of raw materials, production and labour and comparing it with market prices for each product and/or service. An extensive literature assessing the various approaches exists and these methods have become

increasingly sophisticated (Bittman, 1995; Ironmonger, 1996; Jenkins and O'Leary, 1996; Lutzel, 1989; Luxton, 1997; OECD, 1997).

The limitation of all these valuation methods is that they accept existing gender divisions of labour and pay inequalities as normal and unproblematic. The consequence is that valuations of non-market work serve to reinforce these inequalities rather than challenge them (Chadeau and Fouquet, 1981). Childcare, for example, is usually assessed at (low-paid) childcare worker rates rather than rates earned by psychologists, teachers and nurses, with no questioning of why childcare workers are so lowly paid. The end-result is that even if more time were to be spent on self-help and mutual aid than employment, when evaluated in monetary terms, it would be worthless.

An additional problem is that time-budget studies underestimate the time spent on non-market work compared with employment. On the one hand, this is because the time spent in employment is overestimated since the total time engaged in employment is usually counted when much of this time may include meal – and coffee-breaks, associated travel as well as socialising. On the other hand, it is because the time spent in self-help activity is underestimated. This is first, because time-budget studies only measure an individual's time commitment to a concrete activity. They do not capture the time and effort involved in planning and managing activities which often takes place while people are lying in bed, undertaking some other activity in the home or indeed when they are at work in paid employment (Haicault, 1984). Second, there is considerable evidence that unlike an employee's relationship to his/her company, women have to be permanently available to their families so that time not actually spent in the service of the family may still be constrained time (Chabaud-Richter and Fougeyrollas-Schwebel, 1985). Third, there is the argument that much of women's work burden within the household and family derives from their caring duties for other household members. Whilst time-budget studies can capture the practical aspects of this caregiving work, they do not capture its emotional and affective side that either is ignored completely, or indeed, can be portrayed as leisure and socialising (Gregory and Windebank, 2000).

Despite these shortcomings time-budget studies are the only means currently available for understanding how the balance between informal and formal work is changing. Table 3.1 shows the

Table 3.1 Unpaid work as a percentage of total work, 1965, 1975, 1985 and 1995

	1965	1975	1985	1995
UK[a]			48.1	58.2
France[b]		52.0	55.0	57.5
USA[c]	56.9	57.6	58.4	

Sources: [a] Gershuny and Jones (1987), Murgatroyd and Neuburger (1997). [b] Chadeau and Fouquet (1981), Roy (1991), Dumontier and Pan Ke Shon (1999). [c] Robinson and Godbey (1997).

proportion of people's total work time that is spent on unpaid work in the United Kingdom, France and the United States. This reveals that over half of all the time that people spend working is unpaid. Despite a decline in the absolute amount of time spent both in employment and unpaid work, the time spent in unpaid work is declining slower. This means that work beyond employment, is not only larger than employment (measured in terms of the volume of time inputs) but over the past 30 years, it has taken up a greater share of the total time that we spend working.

In the United Kingdom, unpaid work occupied 48 per cent of people's total time in 1985–86 (Gershuny and Jones, 1987) but 58 per cent by 1995 (Murgatroyd and Neuburger, 1997). Non-market work, therefore, not only persists in Britain but it is growing relative to market work. The 1995 Office of National Statistics (ONS) survey uses replacement costs in order to put a monetary value on non-market work. Time spent cooking is assessed on the basis of wages paid to cooks; time spent on childcare on the basis of wages paid to child-minders, and so on. It showed that unpaid work was worth 56 per cent of GDP. If the time spent on unpaid work were valued at the average wage rate for employment as a whole it would be 122 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Murgatroyd and Neuburger, 1997). It could be argued that because these UK time-budget studies were conducted by different organisations using varying methodologies they have a limited capacity to identify longitudinal trends. But these findings appear to be corroborated by other evidence.

In France, three time-budget studies have been conducted by the Institut Nationale des Statistiques et des Etudes Economiques (INSEE)

at different times using the same definitions, methodologies and sampling frame. In 1975, unpaid work was a more time-consuming activity than professional work (covering time spent in employment as well as time travelling to and from work), occupying an average of 31 hours per person per week as opposed to 29 hours for professional work. In other words unpaid work occupied 52 per cent of total work time (professional + unpaid work time) for that year (Chadeau and Fouquet, 1981). A decade later in 1986, it constituted 55 per cent of total working time (Roy, 1991) and by 1995, 57.5 per cent (Dumontier and Pan Ke Shon, 1999). These longitudinal studies identify an important shift in the structure of this advanced economy towards the non-market sphere.

In the United States, the same trend is identified. Studies conducted in 1965, 1975 and 1985 show that unpaid work as a proportion of total work time has gradually increased from 56.9 per cent in 1965, to 57.6 per cent in 1975 and to 58.4 per cent in 1985 (Robinson and Godbey, 1997).

The shift is not entirely consistent across 'western' countries. Between 1986 and 1992 in Canada, unpaid work as a proportion of total work time decreased (albeit slightly) from 59.6 per cent to 59.2 per cent (Robinson and Godbey, 1997).

Nevertheless, well over half of people's total work time is spent engaged in unpaid work, and in some advanced economies, there appears to be shift in the balance of work (at least in terms of the time spent engaged in such activity) towards the non-market sphere. This challenges the assumption that self-help and mutual aid are increasingly marginal and residual activities, and given that more work time is spent in this sphere than in the formal sphere, the tendency to give prominence to formal employment whilst placing all else in one catch-all 'non-formal' category has to be seriously questioned.

The household work practice approach

The evidence of the extent of mutual aid and self-help provided by time-budget diaries is strongly supported by the evidence from *Household Work Practice Studies*. A household work practices approach is an attempt to assess the sources of labour used by households in order to get everyday tasks completed. Pioneered by Pahl (1984) on the Isle of Sheppey, this approach uses a structured interview method

to explore whether and why households use employment, self-help, unpaid mutual aid or some form of paid informal exchange to get various tasks completed in and around the home. Since Pahl's study, this approach has been used in a range of localities including Belfast (Leonard, 1994), Brussels (Kesteloot and Meert, 1999), Southampton and Sheffield (Williams and Windebank, 1999b, 2001a) and five localities in rural England (Williams, 2002).

These studies of household work practices seem to give a fairly accurate picture, as pretty much the same levels of unpaid mutual aid and paid informal work are identified by households as customers and suppliers – suggesting that there is not significant under-or over-reporting (e.g. Leonard, 1994; Pahl, 1984; Williams and Windebank, 2001a). The main problem with this method is that it only examines the sources of labour used to complete household services. It does not analyse the full range of sources of labour used across the whole economy, nor the frequency of participation in each of these tasks. Nevertheless it provides a 'broad brush' indicator of the extent to which mutual aid and self-help persist in contemporary society and the distribution of such work across socio-economic groups.

Much of the analysis that follows in this section is based on a household work practices study carried out by Williams and Windebank (2001a). They conducted 511 interviews with households in two cities: the relatively affluent southern city of Southampton and the relatively deprived northern city of Sheffield. Within these two cities, three neighbourhood types were investigated: a deprived inner city neighbourhood, a 'sink' council estate and an affluent suburb. Examining how these households get 44 everyday tasks completed, Table 3.2 displays the heavy reliance on non-formal work. In lower-income neighbourhoods, formally employed labour was used to complete just 15 per cent of the tasks. The remainder was carried out using the labour of households themselves or friends, neighbours and relatives: 76 per cent through self-help; 4 per cent through unpaid mutual aid and 5 per cent using paid informal exchange. Lower-income urban neighbourhoods heavily rely on self-help in particular and non-formal work more generally, to get tasks completed.

Who engages in self-help activity and why?

It might be assumed that households in higher-income neighbourhoods externalise a good deal of their household services by buying

Table 3.2 Forms of work used in lower-income neighbourhoods: by nature of task

	Doing task (%)	Self-help	Unpaid mutual aid	Paid informal exchange	Employment
House maintenance (last 5 years)	51.1	57.0	8.1	7.9	26.9
Home improvement (last 5 years)	19.2	24.1	7.2	10.1	58.6
Routine housework (last week)	89.2	92.5	1.9	2.9	2.7
Domestic production (last year)	18.6	95.1	2.0	2.2	0.7
Car maintenance (last year)	45.0	55.6	5.9	9.1	29.4
Gardening (last year)	42.7	93.2	2.9	2.0	1.9
Caring (last month)	33.2	85.3	3.4	8.1	3.2
ALL TASKS	46.1	77.9	3.8	5.0	13.3

in formal labour (nannies, cleaners, gardeners, odd-job people, etc.) to relieve them of the need to do it themselves. Superficially, as Table 3.3 displays, this appears to be the case. The Sheffield–Southampton study revealed that of 44 tasks surveyed, 76 per cent were carried out using the unpaid labour of household members in lower-income neighbourhoods and 72 per cent in higher-income neighbourhoods. But this does not mean that they conduct a narrower range of non-formal work. While they are more heavily reliant on formal sources of labour to get work completed, the number of tasks that they conduct using their own labour is actually greater than in lower-income urban neighbourhoods. This reinforces the previous findings in a range of other studies in countries such as the Netherlands (e.g. van Geuns *et al.*, 1987), Canada (e.g. Fortin *et al.*, 1996) and Italy (e.g. Mingione, 1991). It is explained by the fact that

Table 3.3 Household work practices: by geographical area

	% of tasks conducted	% of tasks last conducted using:							
		Self-help		Unpaid mutual aid		Paid mutual aid		Employment	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Southampton									
Lower-income inner city neighbourhood	43.1	14.2	75.0	0.6	3.4	0.8	4.2	3.3	17.4
Lower-income council estate	47.4	15.5	74.5	0.8	3.8	0.9	4.5	3.6	17.2
Both lower-income areas	45.3	14.9	74.8	0.7	3.6	0.9	4.4	3.4	17.3
Higher-income suburb	57.3	18.0	71.3	0.5	1.9	1.6	6.5	5.1	20.3
Sheffield									
Lower-income inner city neighbourhood	49.7	16.6	75.6	0.9	4.2	1.4	6.4	3.0	13.8
Lower-income council estate	48.3	16.8	79.3	0.8	3.7	0.9	4.3	2.7	12.7
Both lower-income areas	49.0	16.7	77.4	0.9	3.9	1.2	5.4	2.9	13.3
Higher-income suburb	53.3	17.1	72.8	0.4	1.9	2.6	11.2	3.3	14.1

Source: Williams and Windebank (2001a, Table 6.2).

the total amount of work carried out in affluent households is greater. Lower-income households are more likely to include people who are sick, disabled, retired and so on. They are less likely to possess the combination of money, tools, knowledge, practical skills and physical ability to do the work (Leonard, 1994; Williams and Windebank, 2001a). The nature of the tasks carried out in these two types of household is also a factor. Lower-income households mostly conduct only essential tasks. Higher-income households carry out more non-routine work such as DIY (Davidson *et al*., 1997; Leather *et al*., 1998; Williams and Windebank, 2001a). So while households in higher-income neighbourhoods conduct a smaller proportion of their workload using self-help, they conduct a wider range of tasks than their poorer counterparts. Their ability to contract out some routine self-help frees up time for greater DIY activity.

Given the differences between self-help in lower- and higher-income populations, it is important to know whether the motives for engaging in self-help are always the same. The research found that in lower-income urban neighbourhoods, economic necessity was the primary motivation for 44 per cent of the tasks undertaken using self-help but for just 10 per cent of the tasks in higher-income neighbourhoods. In higher-income households the work of this sort was carried out through preference either because of ease, choice or pleasure.

Eighteen per cent of all self-help in lower-income neighbourhoods and 37 per cent of all self-help in higher-income neighbourhoods happened because people felt that it was *easier* to do a task yourself than to contract out the work. Trades-people were seen as difficult to contact and even more difficult to persuade to come around to do a job. They were also widely distrusted. So it was easier to simply do the job yourself than to rely on them.

People used self-help in preference to other sources of labour either because the end product would be of a higher quality or because they could individualise the end product. The desire to individualise work accounted for between 21 and 24 per cent of self-help in all types of neighbourhoods. This may be both a manifestation and reflection of popular do-it-yourself television programmes such as 'Changing Rooms', that fuel people's desire to engage in DIY.

Finally a good deal of self-help was conducted simply because people got *pleasure* from doing the work themselves. Fourteen per cent

of all self-help in lower-income neighbourhoods and 32 per cent of self-help in higher-income areas was carried out for this reason. This did not only relate do-it-yourself projects such as decorating or other home improvement activity, there was also a significant minority of people who did routine housework themselves because of the pleasure that they got from it. These were more often than not employed women comparing the outputs of their housework with the products of their employment. As one put it,

> At least you are doing something productive and you can see what you have achieved at the end of it, unlike my job.

Another said:

> Compared with my job, housework's great. You get a real buzz when you look at it when you have finished and see what you have achieved.

Although some non-employed women shared this vision of routine housework as pleasurable, this was mostly confined to older women. For most people it was non-routine self-help that was perceived as pleasurable and this is the reason why it was more heavily cited as a reason for self-help in the affluent suburbs.

So while a greater proportion of self-help in lower-income neighbourhoods is conducted out of economic necessity compared with affluent suburbs, what is striking is that a high proportion of self-help everywhere is conducted through preference. People resist the transfer of this activity to the formal sphere. It is perceived as one of the few realms left in which they can engage in productive activity of a kind that allows them to get pleasure from their work and individualise the product to suit their needs and desires.

Williams and Windebank (2001) also found that multiple-earner households (only 24 per cent of the households surveyed) carried out 28 per cent of all non-market activity whereas no-earner households (who made up 54 per cent of the households surveyed) conducted just 48 per cent of all such activity. This indicates that non-market work is not an activity principally undertaken by marginalised populations. Employed households rely most heavily on this sort of work in both relative and absolute terms. Breaking this down into the different types of community self-help activity, multiple-earner

households undertake 28 per cent of all self-help, 30 per cent of all unpaid mutual aid and 35 per cent of all paid informal exchange. Meanwhile, no-earner households conduct just 49 per cent of all self-help, 43 per cent of mutual aid and 30 per cent of paid informal exchange.

Given that nearly all advanced economies have witnessed the demise of the single-earner household and with it, a polarisation of households into either multiple or no-earner households (Gregg and Wadsworth, 1996), an argument is that it is possible to distinguish two types of household: *work busy households* – the members of which increasingly hold more than one formal job (often lowly paid in these deprived neighbourhoods) and engage in relatively large amounts of community self-help, especially self-help but also unpaid and paid informal exchange, as a coping strategy; and *work deprived households* – who not only lack any formal employment but are less able to engage in community self-help activity of all kinds.

When considering the distribution of self-help and mutual aid however, it is not only the variations *between* households that are important. There is also the issue of who conducts self-help and mutual aid *within* them. Ever since the 1970s, there has been a keen interest in uncovering the gender division of labour (in particular domestic labour) within households (see Beneria, 1999; Gardiner, 1997; Gregory and Windebank, 2000), and it is well known that women conduct the vast majority of domestic work within households. The interesting finding of these more recent studies of self-help and mutual aid is that this gender division of labour extends beyond the domestic sphere to the realm of mutual aid. Williams and Windebank found evidence to support the idea that women conduct the vast majority of self-help and mutual aid. They undertake 58 per cent of all self-help (men do 26 per cent and 16 per cent is equally shared), 66 per cent of all unpaid mutual aid, and 57 per cent of all paid informal exchange. Thus, despite women's increased entry into employment, it is women who still conduct most of the self-help activity *and* provide the social cement that binds communities together. However it is worth noting that whether one is examining self-help, unpaid mutual aid or paid informal exchange, women tend to conduct routine and open-ended work such as housework, caring and emotional support, whereas men engage largely in non-routine and closed activities such as DIY projects and odd jobs such as car repair.

The value of this study is not so much that women are identified as suffering a 'triple burden' (increased responsibility for wage earning, household work and paid mutual aid commitments) but that for some women the only way to escape this burden has been to use other women, employed on low wages or informally, to care for their dependants or to do their housework. In short, the liberation of some women may be at the expense of other women. There is no evidence of significant gender renegotiation of this work. Despite the assertion of some that there is a process of 'lagged adaptation' whereby the gender division of domestic work is changing albeit slowly (Gershuny *et al*., 1994), the vast majority of studies assert that it is a 'stalled revolution' (Hochschild, 1989). The small rise in men's share of the domestic workload is due to their increased contribution to non-routine activities such as do-it-yourself. Routine domestic work especially caring and emotional work, largely remains women's responsibility.

In the discussion above we have largely focused on the self-help element of the Community Self-Help spectrum because this accounts for the large majority of the work. But, we also need to discuss the issues that arise from mutual aid and paid informal activity. We do so in the following sections.

Who engages in unpaid mutual aid and why?

If the persistence of self-help challenges the view that the household is no longer a productive sphere in late capitalism, this is also the case for unpaid mutual aid – by which we mean unpaid work conducted by household members for those who live in other households? If so, who engages in it and why?

To examine the extent and character of unpaid mutual aid in contemporary Britain, we return to the study of UK household work practices conducted by Williams and Windebank (2001a). This reveals that unpaid mutual aid was used to perform 4 per cent of the 44 household services surveyed in lower-income neighbourhoods but just 2 per cent of these tasks in higher-income neighbourhoods. Lower-income households tend to be the principal beneficiaries of unpaid mutual aid and higher-income households are the major donors. This appears to mitigate rather than reinforce the household inequalities produced by the formal labour market.

Williams and Windebank (2001a) found that 70 per cent of these tasks conducted on an unpaid mutual aid basis are provided by relatives, 27 per cent by friends or neighbours and just 3 per cent by voluntary organisations. This is important because it reveals not only that nearly three-quarters of unpaid mutual aid in deprived urban neighbourhoods is composed of kinship exchange, but also that the provision of help by voluntary organisations is only a minor element in community exchange. Despite the high level of participation in voluntary groups in the United Kingdom (e.g. Hall, 1997), very few households receive material aid from such groups. This is reinforced by McGlone *et al*. (1998), examining the British Social Attitudes Survey. Most households went to great lengths to point out that they were returning a favour or expected to return a favour in the future when discussing unpaid mutual aid. As Kempson (1996) has identified in another context, this is because they did not want to be seen as receiving charity and avoid such one-way relationships at all costs.

If voluntary associations provide little in the way of material support to disadvantaged groups, the same cannot be said so far as the provision of social support is concerned. Forty-seven per cent of the households surveyed said that they felt part of a community, group or network, and 85 per cent of these stated that such a community had helped them recently by providing social and/or emotional support. But, this support is not the same across all social groups. Higher-income households tended to participate more in formal networks, associations and groups, while many lower-income households perceived that these groups were for others rather than for them. They relied to a much greater extent on informal one-to-one support both for their material and social needs.

In order to examine attitudes towards unpaid mutual aid, it is necessary to differentiate between kinship exchange, unpaid exchange between friends and neighbours and more formal voluntary work. Kinship exchange, as shown above, is the principal form of unpaid mutual aid in contemporary society. Providing unpaid help to kin is widely acceptable (e.g. Leonard, 1994; Nelson and Smith, 1999; Williams and Windebank, 2001a), and the only factor constraining both the giving and receiving of kinship support is often the fact that many households no longer have kin living close by (Williams and

Windebank, 2001a). Outside of kinship exchange, however, there is relatively little mutual aid taking place. Unpaid non-kinship exchange tended to occur in four circumstances. First, when it was felt to be unacceptable to pay somebody (e.g. when they lent you a saw). Second, when it was felt inappropriate to pay them (e.g. when a colleague from work did you a favour). Third, when payment was impossible (e.g. when somebody refused to be paid because they wanted an unpaid favour from you at a later date). And fourth, when the social relations prevented payment (e.g. when the recipient could not afford to pay and thus had no choice but to offer a favour in return).

If at all feasible paying people, is the preferred option – exchanging money means that obligation to reciprocate favours can be avoided but at the same time, the wheels are being oiled for the maintenance or creation of closer relations through exchange without being 'duty bound'. Seen in this light, the greater prevalence of unpaid exchange amongst lower-income populations occurs because they are more able to draw upon kinship networks, and they do not have the money to pay for help rendered. The norm is still to pay friends and/or neighbours where possible in order to avoid souring relationships if a favour cannot be returned – reflecting the fact that gifts and/or money lubricate unpaid mutual aid in environments where trust is lacking. The implications of this research is that community-based initiatives cannot rely on either charity or voluntary aid, since few wish to accept one-way gift giving. The widespread extension of mutual aid may therefore be dependent on developing tally-systems which build connections between people who do not know each other very well (avoiding the feeling of obligation that people feel when engaging in direct exchange). This highlights the importance of initiatives such as LETS which we explore in more detail in the following chapters.

Who engages in paid informal exchange and why?

Williams and Windebank (2001a,b,c) found that just 2 per cent of all paid informal work conducted by populations of lower-income neighbourhoods is of the organised variety. The rest is conducted 'autonomously' mostly for friends, relatives and neighbours (75 per cent) but also for previously unknown individuals (23 per cent). This means that much of it can be seen as a form of mutual aid.

By and large people do not engage in informal paid exchange for financial gain but with the explicit desire to develop reciprocity and trust. (see Cornuel and Duriez, 1985; Jensen *et al.*, 1995; Jordan *et al.*, 1992; Komter, 1996; Leonard, 1994; Mingione, 1991; Pahl, 1984). Williams and Windebank showed that only 18 per cent of paid informal work was motivated purely by a desire to save money in low-income urban neighbourhoods. Where it did occur, in nearly every case it was firms or self-employed people not known by the household who were employed. When the exchanges were between closer social relations (using the paid informal labour of friends, neighbours, relatives and other household members) the primary motivation was either 'community-building' or 'redistribution' not monetary gain.

If exchange of this sort is a way of cementing and consolidating social relationships, then why does it involve monetary payment? This again has to do with wariness about engaging in unreciprocated exchange (for people other than kin) and the embeddedness of payment in norms of reciprocity. For some there was also a feeling that you can no longer rely on people to return favours (indicating the demise of trust in these neighbourhoods and the replacement of unpaid reciprocal exchange with paid informal work so that payment substitutes for the trust). Hence, if social capital is to be more fully understood, then it appears to be necessary to investigate not only unpaid but also paid informal exchanges.

People who had work done for them, also had strong 'redistributive' reasons for using people they knew (especially relatives) to do paid informal work. Here, children or other relations such as siblings are paid – often as a way of giving them much needed spending money, perhaps when they were unemployed. Using relatives to do tasks in order to give them money was the principal rationale behind 11 per cent of all paid informal work in these lower-income neighbourhoods. As one customer stated, 'my brother was skint and we needed it [decorating] doing so it was natural to ask him'. Or as another put it, 'it was a little job to give him [her uncle] some pocket money'. For most consumers it was a way of giving money to a poorer relative in a way that avoided all connotations of charity, even if this was an intention underlying such exchanges. Anybody wishing to give aid to another household paid them for doing a task to 'help them out'. Little of this work was substituting for formal employment. In the vast majority of cases, the users would have

done the work themselves if the person had not been paid on an informal basis. They were paying solely to give money to the relative in order to help them out. Similarly Williams and Windebank (2001c) found in only half of the cases (51 per cent) that this work was undertaken principally for the money. Even here, it was often qualified with statements like 'I did it for the money but it was only pocket money really and it was a chance to help them out at the same time', or 'I did it for the money I suppose but it was also really a chance to get out of the house.'

Those doing the work also have 'redistributive' motives for carrying out paid informal work for people they know. Many said that they already knew the recipients and had done the work because the person would not otherwise have been able to do it. In the case of this 'redistributive' paid informal work (36 per cent of all such work in lower-income neighbourhoods) two contrasting types of 'redistributive supplier' can be identified. First, there were those with professional craft skills such as plumbers, electricians (who were often employed men) who did work for people they knew well. As these suppliers said 'I helped out because they couldn't afford to do the job any other way', 'without my help, they would have been stuck', 'they have not got any money so the least I could do was help them out'. This work was never offered for free because the supplier was conscious that this would be unacceptable to the family receiving the work. A fee was charged which, although well above what would be considered a token gesture, was well below the normal market price. Second, there were those who were unemployed or early retired (often women). They saw themselves as helping out those who had less free time than themselves. So the 'trade' between 'time rich-money poor' and 'money rich-time poor' people, far from being seen as exploitative in the eyes of participants, was perceived as involving mutual reciprocity. Each partner was giving the resource that they possessed in relatively greater amounts to the other.

In these neighbourhoods, informal work is largely conducted amongst close social relations for redistributive and community-building reasons. It is not exchange based on the social relations that one might find between an employer and employee. As such, much paid informal exchange is better seen as a form of mutual aid than a form of employment.

Barriers to using community self-help

Evaluating who engages in various types of community self-help and why is important because it challenges many of the myths that have grown up surrounding these forms of work. But it is also important to identify the barriers to participation in mutual aid and self-help.

The first barrier is that people often lack the money to acquire the goods and resources necessary to participate (Pahl, 1984; Smith, 1986; Thomas, 1992; Williams and Windebank, 2001a). The result of having little or no disposable income is that a household's access to many of the ways in which it could help itself is curtailed. If you cannot afford paint, brushes and sandpaper, then you cannot paint exterior windows to prevent the deterioration of the fabric of your house. In the study by Williams and Windebank (2001a) 52 per cent of households in lower-income urban neighbourhoods said that they would engage in greater amounts of self-help if they had more money. This was particularly true of jobless households. Seventy per cent of no-earner households perceived money as a barrier to their participation in self-help activity compared with just 43.2 per cent of multiple-earner households. A common perception is that if households had more money, they would do less for themselves. The vast majority of studies show that this is not the case. Only 18 per cent of households in lower-income urban neighbourhoods said that they would engage in less self-help if they had more money (Williams and Windebank, 2001a) – the vast majority said that it would enable them to do more.

A second barrier to participation is that many households have few people that they know well enough to either ask or be asked to do something – they lack social network capital. This particularly applies to jobless households who generally have fewer people to call upon for help (Morris, 1994; Williams and Windebank, 2001a) (Engbersen *et al.*, 1993; Kempson, 1996; Morris, 1994; Renooy, 1990; Thomas, 1992). The long-term unemployed in particular mix mostly with other long-term unemployed. They tend to have relatively few friends or acquaintances in employment (Kempson, 1996; Morris, 1994) and the majority of their unpaid community exchange is between friends and acquaintances (Kempson, 1996; Van Eck and Kazemeier, 1985;

Williams and Windebank, 2001a). They are also less likely to have kin living locally (Williams and Windebank, 2001a).

So, if deprived populations in general and jobless households in particular are to engage in greater levels of self-help and mutual aid, then there will be a need to widen the social networks and social support structures. This is increasingly recognised in the social capital literature (e.g. Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993, 1995a,b). As we have noted earlier this literature argues that the 'strong' ties commonly associated with kinship and close-knit communities may actually be less effective than a large and more diverse network of ties which are developed through other social networks. Thus, Granovetter (1973) writes of the 'strength of weak ties'. Weaker ties might have limits on the claims that can be made on them, but they also tend to provide indirect access to a greater diversity of resources than do stronger more socially homogeneous ties. As Granovetter (1973) points out, 'those to whom we are weakly tied are more likely to move in circles different from our own and will thus have access to information different from that which we receive'. Put another way, diversity represents strength because it provides access to a wider variety of opportunities and perspectives on issues and problems, an idea recently developed by DEMOS (Perri 6, 1997). The problem, however, as Burns and Taylor (1998) point out, is that the reality for many excluded communities is that 'they have neither the dense overlapping networks of yesteryear nor the sparse overlapping networks required in today's world'. In consequence, if self-help is to be facilitated, then both these strong and weak ties will need to be further developed.

Besides economic and social network barriers to participation in self-help and mutual aid, there are also human capital constraints (Fortin *et al.*, 1996; Pahl, 1984; Thomas, 1992; Williams and Windebank, 2001a). As Williams and Windebank (2001a) found, 52 per cent of households thought that they would engage in more self-help and mutual aid if they had more or different skills, greater confidence or were physically able to do so. Many do not undertake self-help tasks because they do not feel that they have sufficient skills. They refrain from engaging in unpaid or paid work for others for a similar reason. It is also the case that people are less likely to ask those without any formal recognition of their skills to do work for them.

Households in which there are the sick and/or disabled engage in far lower levels of self-help than other household-types. Unable to do many tasks as a result of physical disability, these people find themselves less able to help themselves.

Another important factor is that many people who are unemployed, simply lack the confidence to offer to help out others. As Williams and Windebank (2001a) report, many jobless households responded when asked about doing work for other households by saying, 'I don't have anything to offer', 'what could I do' and 'they wouldn't want me messing up their house'.

A fourth barrier to participation in self-help and mutual aid, particularly for benefit claimants who wish to engage in paid or unpaid informal work, is that they feel inhibited for fear of being reported to the authorities and having their benefit curtailed. This applies not only to the conduct of paid informal work but also to the carrying out of unpaid mutual aid. Such fears are perhaps not without foundation given the way in which working informally whilst claiming social security is considered to be a more serious offence than engaging in tax fraud (Cook, 1997; Dean and Melrose, 1996; Jordan *et al.*, 1992).

Indeed, the UK policy approach towards paid informal work, similar to international organisations (e.g. Commission of the European Communities, 1998; OECD, 1994; ILO, 1996) and other national governments (e.g. Hasseldine and Zhuhong, 1999), is to eradicate it by creating a stringent system of deterrence based on increasing the likelihood of detection and prosecution (Grabiner, 2000). Assuming that participants are rational economic actors, it seeks to deter them by ensuring that the expected cost of being caught and punished is greater than the economic benefit of participating (e.g. Allingham and Sandmo, 1972; Falkinger, 1988; Hasseldine and Zhuhong, 1999; Milliron and Toy, 1988).

Until now, the principal issue investigated in relation to this policy approach of deterrence has been whether it can be effective (e.g. Alm, 1991; Hasseldine and Zhon, 1999; Weigel *et al.*, 1987). Little regard has been paid to its impact on peoples lives and on community networks. As we saw above, however, the vast majority of paid informal work is akin to unpaid community exchange in that it is conducted in order to help out others and/or to cement and build social networks. It is already the case that a lack of trust means

that such exchange often needs cash as a lubricant. To increase the deterrents to engaging in such work without putting in place alternatives, will only diminish yet further the community exchange that currently manages to survive in such neighbourhoods.

The final barrier to participation in self-help and mutual aid is that of time. For many multiple-earner households, long hours of employment for low pay result in both little free time and a lack of money to get work done. Indeed, 89 per cent of multiple-earner households in the study by Williams and Windebank (2001a) said that they would engage in greater levels of self-help and mutual aid if they had more time. The complex problems confronted by these households provide many lessons for the current policy approach of employment-led social inclusion. As pioneers of the 'employment is the route out of poverty' model, these households provide a useful exemplar of the problems that arise when this approach is adopted. Earning low pay yet working long hours, many of these households found themselves not only unable to maintain social networks outside of the employment-place but also without the time or energy to engage in self-help activity. The result was that they had to rely even more heavily on formal labour in order to get necessary tasks completed around the home. Somewhat surprisingly, however, many no-earner households (57 per cent) also viewed time as a principal constraint. This is probably because the increasingly strict 'welfare-to-work' regimes, which view seeking employment as a full-time job, mean that the unemployed have less free time to undertake self-help activity.

Conclusion

The arguments advanced in this chapter challenge the popular view that self-help and mutual aid are residual activities usually undertaken by those marginalised from the mainstream market economy for unadulterated economic reasons.

This type of work is not only more extensive than paid work, measured in terms of the time, but it is also growing relative to it. It is often assumed that mutual aid and self-help are either leftovers of pre-capitalist social formations or are new forms of work carried out largely by marginalised populations as survival strategies in contemporary capitalism. In fact, they are ubiquitous activities conducted by everybody.

Community self-help is not a last resort turned to for unadulterated economic reasons. There is a good deal of agency involved in it – a large amount of it is conducted out of choice. For many, having more money would not result in them conducting less mutual aid and self-help. If anything, quite the opposite is the case. Presently, however, numerous barriers prevent their participation in self-help and mutual aid. These barriers are their lack of money, social networks, skills, physical ability, confidence and time as well as institutional barriers such as the tax and benefits system. To tackle these barriers is perhaps one of the most pressing needs of a more inclusive social policy agenda. Whether we wish to develop self-help and mutual aid as a springboard into employment, an alternative to employment or as a complement to employment, all of these barriers remain to be tackled. The ways in which they are tackled will largely depend upon the normative approach adopted. It is to these prescriptions about how self-help and mutual aid should be used that we now turn our attention.

4

A Route into Employment: Community Self-Help as a Springboard

One of the main reasons why community self-help is advocated by policy makers is that it offers a possible route into employment (e.g. Home Office, 1999). This it is argued will reduce social exclusion and will in turn reduce pressure on the welfare state. The aim of this chapter is to critically evaluate both the extent to which self-help and mutual aid currently fulfil this role and their potential to do so. To do this we explore in turn: self-help activities; one-to-one exchanges between kin, friends and neighbours; volunteering and organised forms of mutual aid.

When thinkers and policy makers have prescribed community self-help as a route into employment, they have tended to focus upon more organised forms of mutual aid. Here we show that micro-level self-help as well as other forms of one-to-one mutual aid can also provide an effective pathway into employment. Even if participants do not always see this as their intention when they start participating in such activity, it is often the outcome.

Since the election of New Labour in 1997, there has been a concerted effort to develop policies in the United Kingdom based on the premise that employment is the best (only) route out of poverty. Because they equate social exclusion with unemployment, the thrust of their policy has been to 'make work [employment] pay'. As we noted earlier, the demise of single-earner households (characterised by the 'male breadwinner') has resulted in a polarisation of households

into those with multiple-earners and those with no-earners (Dunford, 1997; Gregg and Wadsworth, 1996; Pinch, 1993; Williams and Windebank, 1995a). Government policy has focused on jobless households to ensure that when they move from benefits to work, they are financially better off (DSS, 1998, 1999; HM Treasury, 1997, 1998). Numerous policies have been introduced to enhance the incentives for individuals to move from welfare into work and social policy reforms have consequently centred first, on reducing poverty and unemployment traps by improving work incentives, and second, on improving the employability of those people who are unemployed. The policies that constitute this approach fall into three broad categories:

- Reforming welfare benefits under the Welfare to Work programmes – this has targeted specific unemployed groups such as lone parents, the young, the long-term unemployed and people with disabilities.
- Modernising the tax and benefits system – this includes for example the Working Families Tax and Childcare credits, alterations to national insurance contributions and introducing a 10 pence starting rate of tax.
- Improving conditions within employment – including the Minimum Wage, implementation of EU Employment Directives, and the Fairness at Work programme.

The new tax credits introduced in October 1999 allow people with children who work 16 hours or more to claim Working Families Tax Credit and Childcare Tax Credit. These are more generous than the previous system of Family Credit. The new tax credits reform the tax and benefits system in a manner that distinguishes between in – work and unemployment benefits – they are paid through the wage packet and not the Giro, and administered by the Inland Revenue rather than the Benefits Agency. The intention is to encourage the unemployed to take low-hours or low-paid jobs and lessen child poverty by redistributing income to low-income families who participate in paid employment. They also see this as a route to a fully integrated tax-benefit system in the future. The Working Families Tax Credit, alongside the New Deals for Lone Parents, the National

Child Care Strategy and the extension of benefit claims and work obligations to both members of unemployed couples (whose children are over 16 years old), thus constitute a new strategy for tackling unemployment in Britain.

At the same time, however, there are also 'sticks' or negative incentives to encourage entry into employment. The principal mechanism here is the New Deals programme (Bennett and Walker, 1998; Gregg *et al.*, 1999; Hills, 1998; HM Treasury, 1997, 1998; Oppenheim, 1998; Powell, 1999). In 1998/99, the New Deals for young people, the long-term unemployed, lone parents and people with long-term sickness and disabilities were launched. For the long-term unemployed (two years and over) and the young unemployed (six months and over, aged between 18 and 24 years), participation in the New Deal scheme is compulsory and non-compliance is subject to benefit suspension or fines. For the first four months of the New Deal, participants take part in the Gateway, an advisory period designed to help them select the most appropriate option from the five choices of subsidised work, voluntary work, vocational training, education or self-employment. Wage subsidies of £60 a week for young people and £75 a week for long-term unemployed, and training subsidies of £750 per worker, are paid to employers and training organisations, and so on. The New Deals for lone parents (whose youngest child is aged five and over) and the sick and disabled operate differently. Participation in the New Deal itself is voluntary, but there are compulsory 'work-focused interviews' to discuss job search strategies (Welfare and Pensions Reform Bill, part iv, section 47, 1998/99 session, HM Treasury, 1997). These schemes contain strong elements of compulsion. But they also provide a broader structure of opportunities than were available under the previous government.

In this context mutual aid and self-help (and social economy initiatives more generally), are predominantly seen in terms of their ability to generate jobs and improve the employability of those who are unemployed (Archibugi, 2000; Community Development Foundation, 1995; ECOTEC, 1998; European Commission, 1996a,b, 1997, 1998; Fordham, 1995; OECD, 1996); enabling skills acquisition and helping to maintain job-related skills, develop self-esteem and maintaining the employment 'work ethic'.

Self-help as a route into employment

Few have considered whether unpaid work conducted by household members for themselves or for other members of their household could act as a springboard into employment. It is usually only considered as a constraint on entry into employment (e.g. women's responsibilities for childcare curtailing insertion into employment). We would argue that this is short-sighted. In Williams and Windebank's (2001a) study of Sheffield and Southampton many instances were identified where such activity had acted as a springboard into employment.

To show this, we start with the issue of childcare. Several women who had previously been employed before having children had taken their maternity leave and then decided not to return to employment before their child reached school age. These women had been at home caring for their own child and having decided to stay-at-home, had started to look after another person's child, usually the child of their sister or sister-in-law, on an occasional basis. They then found that this became a more permanent arrangement as the other mother returned to work and had started to receive payment for their childcaring activity. At this point, some of these women kept the arrangement informal and received 'cash-in-hand' payments. This had enabled them to continue to stay-at-home looking after their own child and at the same time, generate some extra money at this expensive time in their lives to 'tide them over' until their child reached school age and they returned to employment. For a few other women, this decision to stay at home with their children and the subsequent expansion of their childcare responsibilities to other people's children acted as a catalyst for them to formalise their activities. They had decided to register as child-minders and to expand the number of children under their care in their home. In this example, the initial decision of a person to engage in work on an unpaid basis for some other member of the household (childcare) acted as a springboard into employment.

There are many variations on this theme. In another example, rather than looking after the children of kin as the route to developing a childcare business, women who had got to know others at parent- and toddler-groups started looking after each other's children on a reciprocal basis. When some of the parents found themselves unable to reciprocate, gifts had started to be given and eventually cash. At the time of interview, one of these women was about to find

out how she could apply to register as a child-minder. For her, it appeared to be an ideal solution. With a pre-school child herself, she could both provide a forum for her child to socialise with other children of about the same age and at the same time, make a little money without having to leave her child to return to employment. Another mother interviewed who had followed this same route had already reached the stage of formalising this arrangement and become a registered child-minder. For these women what started as a social activity both for themselves and their child (i.e. getting out of the house to meet other parents and toddlers) had become a springboard into employment. This could be seen as particularly significant at a time when there is a national shortage of child-minders.

Childcare, although prominent, is not the sole example of how the decision to conduct activity on a self-help basis can act as an eventual springboard into employment. One woman had read a book on how to make stained glass windows because she wanted to apply the technique in their own home. Various friends and neighbours had then admired her work when visiting and asked if she could do the same for them. From this do-it-yourself (DIY) activity, she had started to develop a micro-business. During this time, she had been registered unemployed and was very fearful of what would happen to her if she were caught. She wanted to formalise this work by taking the 'self-employed' option on New Deal but was afraid of letting the authorities know of her success for fear of the consequences. Many other unemployed people will have similar fears.

One man had an interest in carpentry as a hobby and did a lot of DIY activity around the home. Employed as a furniture remover for most of his life, he was finding the physical work increasingly difficult. When a job arose in the store of the removal firm that involved making boxes in which to put household items for moving people abroad, he had successfully applied for the job. Here, therefore, a skill acquired through DIY activity had been used to acquire a different job. Interestingly, once these skills had been discovered, not only did he get his new job in the depot, but he also received many offers from those working in the company to do additional work on a paid informal basis in his own time. As he put it,

> The Director's daughter wanted some windows replacing so he asked me if I wanted to do it. Then one of the estimators asked me

if I could do some things for him and it sort of snowballed from there.

To acquire the materials to do these jobs 'on the side', moreover, there was an implicit acceptance that he would use wood from the employment place. For him, this was not 'pilfering' as it was wholly condoned by firm's owner as one of the perks of the job for this employee. What had been a DIY hobby not only resulted in a new higher-paid formal job but also a range of work 'on the side'.

The story of a self-employed painter and decorator is also illustrative of this process. He had acquired skills decorating his own home and had so enjoyed it that he also then decorated his parents house and later his brothers. His brother had paid him for the work and one of his brothers' friends had then asked him to decorate some rooms in his house. The painter and decorator's wife, who worked as a secretary in a large company in the city, had casually informed some of her colleagues about this who had then displayed an interest in him doing some work for them. From this, he had set up as a self-employed painter and decorator and now had sufficient customers on a cyclical basis for this to be his sole occupation.

All of these examples show that the decision to conduct work yourself can often act as a springboard into employment through the interests developed and the skills acquired. As we have indicated work of this sort is normally discussed as a barrier to participation in employment. We would suggest that there is a need to recognise the more positive role it plays as a springboard into employment in general and self-employment in particular.

One-to-one mutual aid as a route into employment

One-to-one reciprocal exchanges between friends, neighbours and kin can also act as routes into employment? As we saw in Chapter 3, the vast majority of unpaid and paid exchange between kin, friends and neighbours is conducted for reasons associated with sociability and redistribution. Little is conducted explicitly in order to provide a springboard into employment. However, one of the unintended consequences is that skills are acquired that are later used to enter employment, self-esteem is developed, the employment-ethic maintained and a test-bed is provided for new potential formal business ventures.

As we saw above, exchange with kin, friends and neighbours is often the second stage in the development of skills where skills acquired in the context of self-provisioning are used to do work for others, to develop a market and to test out ideas for self-employed business ventures. Indeed, this second stage is often essential to the development of the business. Without it, a list of contacts cannot be developed, skills cannot be proven to exist and any business venture cannot get off the ground.

In addition to the examples already mentioned (Williams and Windebank, 2001a), we offer two more which are specifically relevant to one-to-one mutual aid. An unemployed person enjoyed painting for pleasure and had done some portrait paintings for friends and neighbours. Through word-of-mouth, his business had then spiralled. He now wanted to formalise this activity but similar to the unemployed woman who did stained glass windows he was fearful of developing it any further, so he continued to do a few jobs for people he already knew, but took it no further. A teenager who had been asked by kin to babysit while they spent an evening out had then been recommended to their friends as a babysitter. The demand for her services slowly spiralled and she had now developed a thriving babysitting service on a paid informal basis for about eight families in the neighbourhood. Although she had no intention of formalising this activity and saw it as a temporary stopgap whilst she was studying at sixth-form, this represents a further example of how mutual aid provided for kin, friends and neighbours could be a springboard into employment.

Volunteering as a route into employment

In Chapter 3, we saw that volunteering often has little, if any, impact so far as meeting the material needs of the disadvantaged are concerned. But if it is ineffective as a coping strategy the same cannot be said about its potential as a springboard into employment. For some, volunteering is a way of demonstrating skills and aptitude for formal employment. We need only think for example of the large number of students who decide to either engage in voluntary activity during their undergraduate studies or immediately following it in order to secure employment. Their hope is that by engaging in such activity, they will display to future employers both their work ethics and

the skills and aptitudes necessary to secure a formal job. For others, although volunteering is not explicitly and deliberately entered into with such goals in mind, the result is that skills and interests are acquired and gaps in the market identified that are later used to set up self-employed business ventures. One interesting example (Williams and Windebank, 2001a) was a young man who had been in the cub scouts as a boy and had cleaned cars as part of 'bob a job' week charity work. He said that he had then had the idea of continuing this activity for the same people each weekend whilst at school. He turned up to people's houses in the vicinity of his home to offer to clean their cars. This had provided him with pocket money throughout school and on leaving school, he turned this into a formal self-employed business. With the money he had made, he put it towards a van along with the equipment to offer a 'valet' service and was now full-time self-employed engaged in the activity that had originally been an activity performed as a charitable act.

So while volunteering is seldom effective at meeting the material needs of lower-income recipients as shown in Chapter 3, it is often an effective springboard into employment for the volunteers.

Organised mutual aid as a route into employment

The above examples provide some important insights into how self-help and one-to-one mutual aid act as routes into employment. Informally organised local groups can also have a big impact. The following sketches show the relationship between informal local groups and the setting up of employment initiatives which are not unsimilar to the examples given in the last section:

> a project in East London was set up by a group of women who wished to go back to college. They set up a child-sharing rota, taking turns to study. Demand grew as other women heard about the arrangement and a community co-operative was set up. The local college was so impressed that it gave the group the contract for the college crèche. (Active Community Unit, Home Office, 1999)
>
> An embroidery group set up for Asian women in Newham, East London, made garments which they began to sell in local shops. In time they set up a tailoring co-operative, and gained contracts from the garment trade. (Active Community Unit, Home Office, 1999)

As we begin to widen our lens we can see how informally organised schemes operating across a whole neighbourhood can have a significant impact as springboards into employment. To illustrate this we examine in turn LETS, time banks, employee mutuals and hobby clubs.

Local Exchange and Trading Schemes (LETS) as springboards into paidwork

Local Exchange and Trading Schemes (LETS) are associations that use local currencies to bring members together to exchange goods and services with each other. To do this, members list their offers of, and requests for, goods and services in a directory. They then exchange these goods and services priced in a local unit of currency. Individuals decide what they want to trade, who they want to trade with and how much trade they wish to engage in. The price is agreed between the buyer and seller. The association keeps a record of the transactions by means of a system of cheques written in the local LETS units. Every time a transaction is made, these cheques are sent to the treasurer who works in a similar manner to a bank sending out regular statements of account to the members. No actual cash is issued since all transactions are by cheque and no interest is charged or paid. The level of LETS units exchanged is thus entirely dependent upon the extent of trading undertaken. People do not need to earn money before they can spend it. Credit is freely available and interest free (see Boyle, 1999; Lang, 1994; Lietaer, 2001; Williams *et al*., 2001). In summary then, LETS can be seen as community-based associations for pursuing economically orientated collective self-help based on not-for-profit and cooperative principles.

Until recently there were only a few one-off studies which evaluated LETS as bridges into work for the unemployed (e.g. Barnes *et al*., 1996; Williams, 1996a,b,c,d). Most studies of LETS have focused on their role as a new type of moral economy (e.g. Lee, 1996), a response to globalisation (e.g. Pacione, 1997a,b), a tool for promoting 'green' politics or sustainable development (e.g. Fitzpatrick and Caldwell, 2003; Seyfang, 1998) or a new social movement (e.g. North, 1996, 1998, 1999; O'Doherty *et al*., 1999; Purdue *et al*., 1997).

However, we are now able to analyse the results of the first comprehensive national study of the effectiveness of LETS as bridges

into work. This involved a postal questionnaire to all LETS coordinators, a full membership Survey of 25 LETS and detailed action-oriented work in the London borough of Brixton and the rural town of Stroud In Gloucestershire (Williams *et al.*, 2001). It revealed that some 303 LETS were operating in the United Kingdom in 1999 (in contrast to the 400–500 often quoted in the press in recent years). Of the 37 per cent who responded to the coordinators survey, it was found that LETS averaged 72 members and had an average annual turnover equivalent to £4668. Extrapolating from this, it can be estimated that there are around LETS members in the United Kingdom who trade the equivalent of some £1.4 million worth of goods and services using local currencies.

Over two-thirds of the members of LETS are women. Membership tends to be skewed towards the 30–59 year-old age group and those who either live in relatively low-income households and/or are non-employed. Just 38 per cent of members were employees and only 34 per cent lived in households with a gross income of more than £20 000.

The membership survey reveals some starkly contrasting reasons for joining a LETS scheme. A quarter of the membership joined for ideological purposes. Only 3 per cent joined explicitly to improve their employability. The remaining 72 per cent saw it either as a 'social' vehicle for building communities, meeting people or helping others (23 per cent) or an 'economic' vehicle for overcoming their lack of money (12 per cent), exchanging goods and services (20 per cent), using skills (1 per cent) or receiving a specific service (9 per cent). 'Social'/community-building reasons tend to be cited by the employed and relatively affluent, and economic reasons by the relatively poor and unemployed.

Given this concentration of low-income households and non-employed people in the membership and the fact that they join for mostly economic reasons, we look first, at the effectiveness of LETS as a bridge into employment and second at LETS, as a seedbed for developing self-employed business ventures.

LETS as routes into employment

A principal reason that UK government departments are currently supportive of LETS is because they are seen as a potential means of inserting people into employment (e.g. DfEE, 1999; SEU, 2000).

The Government's Social Exclusion Unit, for example, when giving Policy Action Team One its terms of reference, explicitly asked them to 'consider whether participation in LETS could represent a useful transition to the open labour market' (DfEE, 1999: 113). In order to shed light on this issue, we here draw upon data collected by Williams *et al*. (2001) to consider three specific facets of this issue. First, we consider the number of formal jobs directly created by LETS, second, their ability to directly act as a springboard into employment and third and finally, their role in indirectly acting as a bridge into employment.

No more than a handful of jobs have been created in LETS as they are mostly run by volunteers. However roughly 5 per cent of members surveyed said that LETS had *directly* helped them gain formal employment. This was because working in the LETS office (administering the scheme) had enabled valuable administrative skills to be acquired which they had then been able to use to successfully apply for formal jobs. This is how this process was experienced by a 50–54-year-old unemployed single woman:

> Coming into LETS I've had a lot of interaction with other people, lots of different people, and it helps me with my confidence. I'm going to learn how to do the directory, and I've been inputting cheques into the computer accounts so I'm learning different things through my LETS work. I think I just enjoy the contact with other people and the fact that I'm getting LETS responsibilities now, it makes me feel that I'm a bit important and getting invited to meetings, it's really good. And writing up messages in the day book, someone put 'good idea, well done' – well it just makes you feel valued and that you are making a contribution … I've been out of work for over two years and I've had problems getting references from previous employers because they say that can't remember that long ago, which is upsetting … so I should be able to get references from the LETS for the work I'm doing, which will help in looking for paid work when I'm ready.

But this sort of role will inevitably only benefit a small number of people as only a few can play a prominent role in administering the scheme. Given that there are 300 LETS, the scope exists for only 600–900 people at any one time to use LETS in this manner. LETS

also improves employability more indirectly and in this way they have the potential to reach a much larger number of the unemployed. Many members felt that the skills that they possessed (that were currently unwanted or unvalued in the formal economy) were being maintained or enhanced through their LETS exchanges. Fifteen per cent of all LETS members said that LETS had enabled them to acquire new skills and this figure rose to 24 per cent amongst the registered unemployed. These new skills were mostly related to computing, administration and interpersonal skills. LETS also boosted self-confidence for many without employment, being able to sell their services through the LETS was a significant boost to their self-worth. As one registered unemployed woman put it:

> I sometimes go through the LETS Directory and I look at what other people offer and it's really interesting because you forget about things that you are able to do, … sometimes I get so depressed that I think I can't do anything and when you look through the LETS Directory and you see all these skills being offered and then you say 'Yes, I can do that too! …' You remember all these things that you in a way take so much for granted that you don't even think that that is a skill, you just take it for granted and you don't use it but if you look through the Directory and you have a lot of time on your hands and you don't kind of know what to do then it kind of wakes you up to the fact, first of all that you're not alone … and secondly it wakes you up to all the things that you can do and that's been very positive.

So, while not directly creating jobs, LETS can provide the unemployed with greater personal transferable skills and self-confidence which can help gain entry into the formal labour market.

It is important to note, moreover, that if LETS are developed as bridges into employment, they do not take away jobs from the formal sector. Just 13 and a half per cent of the goods and services acquired on LETS would have been bought from a formal business if the LETS did not exist. In fact LETS created new economic activity and substituted for 'cash-in-hand' work. Some 27 and a half per cent of the goods and/or services would not have been acquired without the LETS and 39 per cent would have been otherwise acquired on a 'cash-in-hand' basis if the LETS did not exist. LETS, therefore, not only

creates new economic activity but are generally a means of formalising informal work rather than a substitute for formal employment.

LETS as seedbeds of self-employment

If the role of LETS in providing a bridge into employment is indirect, the way in which these schemes act as seedbeds for the development of self-employed business ventures is far more direct. Altogether 11 per cent of LETS members said that their LETS had helped them become self-employed. Forty-one per cent of these people said that this was because LETS had enabled them to develop their client base (cited by 41 per cent of those who were self-employed). As a man aged 35–39 seeking to become self-employed put it in a focus group discussion,

> I was looking to start off as a freelance journalist, at the time, and it [joining LETS] was just another way of generating some work and some contacts and building up experience without having to put in, sort of, the risk of hard currency.

Twenty-nine per cent said that it was because the LETS had eased the cash flow of their business. One single mother on income support who was setting set herself up as a self-employed massage therapist (and had transferred to Family Credit) put it like this:

> I became a LETS member and used the LETS as a source to advertise my services and from this I have managed to go self-employed. All of my customers are coming through the LETS and my business is slowly building up. The LETS has been extremely important in this development both financially and the community support it provides – I get my childcare paid for through the LETS which enables my business development, LETS has enabled my survival. At the moment life is very tight, I'd be desperate without LETS.

Third and finally, the LETS enabled the development of self-employed business ventures by providing a test-bed for products and services. This factor was cited by nearly everybody who defined themselves as self-employed. As one woman said in a focus group:

> We joined as a way of getting into doing things on quite a small scale without having to have this big risk thing of going into it as a small business so I make things – arts and crafts stuff – which

> I can sell through the LETS and sort of get an idea of what people actually like. I found it really useful as a way of getting back into making things again, and it really does boost your confidence being able to sell your stuff. If I'm selling it for money a lot of people don't have that much excess money to spend on stuff, but they've got a lot of excess LETS, so yeah they can buy your things, it's like 'ooh someone wants to buy my stuff, it must actually be alright', so you sort of go back and make more knowing that it is actually okay.

Given that those who participate in LETS find them an effective vehicle for building bridges into employment and self-employment, why have so few people joined them? There appear to be five main hurdles that people wishing to join and participate in LETS have to overcome.

LETS currently cover just 15.6 per cent of the UK land area. So for people in most localities, the principal barrier to their participation in LETS is that they do not exist. Many more schemes need to be created.

If a LETS exists, the next hurdle is whether people know about it. A large share of the population do not. In Stroud, a relatively small tight-knit town that has one of the longest-standing and largest LETS in the United Kingdom (which even has a high street presence), 51 per cent of those surveyed had never heard of LETS. This is comparatively high when compared with the London borough of Brixton, which is perhaps more representative, where 92 per cent of the population had never come across LETS.

If one exists and people know about it, the next question is whether they feel it is something for them. Two-thirds of people surveyed thought that it was not. This was first, because they were either 'money rich but time poor' or had extensive kinship networks that substituted for LETS. Second, because they feared having their social benefits cut, perceived LETS as something for people other than them, or their illiteracy prevented them using LETS cheques. Most of the time, they were correct in assuming that the membership was different to them. Despite the non-employed and low-income households being well represented in LETS, it is mostly a particular type of non-employed person and low-income household. Sixty-two per cent of members hold graduate or above qualifications and 48 per cent support the Green Party.

If a LETS exists, people know about it and feel that it is something for them they may still not join because they do not perceive themselves as having anything to contribute that others might want. This came across strongly in our interviews with non-members. For instance, the elderly and disabled felt that they could do little as did the unemployed. At the advertising stage, therefore, concrete examples are needed not only of what people can get on LETS but also what they can contribute.

If all these barriers to joining and participating are overcome, the lack of clarity by government over how LETS earnings will be treated puts people off (especially the registered unemployed). Sixty-five per cent of registered unemployed members are fearful of the benefit authorities and few people who claim benefits currently belong to LETS. Consequently, this research endorses the current policy proposal of the Social Exclusion Unit in its National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal: a framework for consultation. In key idea 4, this document proposes a pilot study to give 'people new freedom to earn a little casual income or participate in a LETS without affecting their benefit entitlement'. However, this policy shift alone will not suffice. Many additional barriers to participation in LETS will need to be overcome, as highlighted, and this will require a greater commitment to funding than has so far been the case. In sum, LETS are an effective bridge into employment and self-employment but a lot remains to be done if these schemes are to benefit a wider range of people.

Time banks as routes into employment

Time banks, or what are called 'time dollars' in the United States, are a community currency scheme where participants are paid one 'hour' for each hour that they work. They can 'cash in' these hours at any time by requesting an hour's work in return from the system (see Boyle, 1999; Cahn, 1994, 2000; Cahn and Rowe, 1992). The time currency approach began in the mid-1980s when Edgar Cahn developed the idea of rewarding people for each hour of their time spent in community service. By 1998, over 200 time banks and service credit programmes were operating in 30 states in the United States and these schemes frequently have thousands of members. Crucially, and in contrast to LETS, they are professionally managed projects,

requiring around $50 000 a year to run a central office which matches the needs of members with the volunteers available (Boyle, 1999). Unlike LETS, the Benefits Agency in the United Kingdom has also decided that the 'credits' earned through time banks should not be treated as earnings for income-related benefit purposes. Participation in time banks is not seen as remunerative work and entitlement to benefits is not affected. Similarly, these credits are ignored for income tax purposes.

Although such tax and benefit rulings have been made in the United Kingdom and support has been given by the Home Office's Active Community Unit for their development, by mid-2001, there were 15 only time banks operating and 21 under development. These had 400 participants who had earned 9760 hours. So time banks remain relatively small compared with LETS, but there is little doubt that they are rapidly expanding. The New Economics Foundation, who are coordinating their development, aim to have 120 operating by 2003.

Given this growth, the key question here is whether time banks operate as a springboard into employment? The likelihood is that like LETS they will only create a few dozen jobs directly (by employing people to administer them). Their greatest contribution as a springboard into employment will be in enabling skills maintenance, skills acquisition, maintaining a work ethic and building self-confidence. However, focus group research conducted with one of the principal time banks in the United Kingdom (Fairshares in Gloucestershire) suggested that participants tend to view time banks much more as community-building vehicles than as springboards into employment (see Williams *et al.*, 2001). Their potential as springboards into employment will largely be as a by product of their community-building role. One exception to this are those time banks that are currently being created in cities such as Leicester. These call themselves 'skill swaps' and are being explicitly created (at least in part) to enable participants to acquire new skills and to act as a test-bed for their self-employed business ventures. In these schemes, people will earn 'learning credits' for the skills they share with other people and they will be able to use them to buy their next steps up the training ladder. These will need to be evaluated as the pilot projects come to fruition in terms of their potential as springboards into employment and self-employment.

Employee mutuals as routes into employment

One proposal that at the time of writing is still on the drawing board is the idea of 'Employee Mutuals'. These are advocated as a new social institution that might act as a bridge into work for the socially excluded and provide greater security in an age of increased flexibility (Leadbeater and Martin, 1998). They are localised bodies which the unemployed, employed and firms can voluntarily join through the payment of a weekly subscription fee. Building on the concept of LETS, members would earn points on a smart-card from their work for the Mutual that would enable them to 'buy' goods and services from it. As such, they are seen as a 'new institution for collective self-help' which matches local demand for work with local supply. Their aim is to allow people to undertake the many one-off jobs that need doing but that they are unable to afford to do formally. Unlike present-day LETS, however, they also aim to help employers fill vacancies and bring together workers and businesses to meet shared needs for training.

Learning lessons from the problems of LETS in relation to social security benefit rules, the proponents of Employee Mutuals have argued from the outset for special benefit rules to be applied to members of the Mutual. These would make it easier for members to combine income from part-time or temporary work on the Mutual with benefits so as to reduce the insecurity which deters people from engaging in such organisations and making the transition from welfare to work. In return for such preferential treatment regarding the income disregard, jobless members of a Mutual would make a token contribution of 50 pence per week but would contribute at least 15 hours per week of services in-kind. In return, the Mutual would not only offer work but also training where necessary and childcare facilities, job searches and a job placement service, as well as job accreditation and a social life. Although still on the drawing board, the Minister for Employment in the United Kingdom, has advocated their development, It seems likely that pilot Employee Mutuals will be set up in the near future.

'Enthusiasms' as a route into employment

Enthusiasms generate a great deal of work that is normally done by people in their 'leisure' time. It is often seen as more engaging than their paid employment and a great deal of emphasis in these

self-organised groups is placed upon acquiring arcane knowledge and skill through social networks. Hoggett and Bishop (1986: 42) argue that there is often strong resistance to the commodification of either the products, or of the forms of labour involved, which are mainly consumed by the membership itself, but this is not always the case. Enthusiasms often act as springboards into self-employment for their members.

Our first example (Williams and Windebank, 2001a) is of a model railway enthusiast who also had a full-time job. Based on his enthusiasm, he had decided to set up a business importing particular types of model railway train and track from the United States that he bought on the internet and then sold on a stall at model railway exhibitions throughout the country at weekends. He would have gone to these exhibitions anyway and by setting up a self-employed business, he both covered his costs of attending such meetings and provided himself with a means of putting himself at the 'centre' of the fraternity. Interestingly, all of the profits he made from this self-employed activity were 'ring-fenced' or 'ear-marked' in that he spent them on his hobby. His story was that self-employed activity was a common feature in his hobby club. As he put it,

> What you tend to find is that loads of blokes who are thinking of taking early retirement or have already done so tend to set up stalls at the exhibitions and sell specialist stuff.... Although there are some who have shops and use the exhibitions as a way of taking their wares out to us, most of us are not doing it for the money really. We are interested in 16 gauge and do it to raise a bit of cash to fund our addiction. Mind you, for some of us, it turns into a proper business but I am not sure that any of us planned it to be like that at the start

We also came across a retired man whose life revolved around breeding canaries. He had started off with a canary given to him by a friend, and had slowly developed his hobby over the years so that he now kept and bred up to 150 canaries at any one time in a shed in his garden. He sold 'good quality' canaries to fellow members of the local canary breeders club for anything up to £50 and the rest to pet shops for £5 each. He had also set up a business making canary cages,

having first made them as a favour for close friends in the club. All of the money he made from these activities was again 'ear-marked' for birdfeed, 'higher quality' birds for breeding and showing at bird shows, and so on. Again a thriving 'business' had been created which was used to fund a hobby for a man in his retirement.

As with many of the examples given earlier in this chapter these socially oriented forms of mutual aid are being used to acquire skills that then result in micro-enterprises whose profits are used to fund the enthusiasm.

Conclusion

This chapter has assessed the potential impacts of community self-help when viewed primarily (as it is by most mainstream policy makers) as a route into employment. While academics and policy makers have tended to focus upon more organised forms of mutual aid we have tried to show here that more micro-level self-help as well as other forms of one-to-one mutual aid can provide a route into employment and more particularly into self-employment.

5
A Complement to the Market and State: Community Self-Help as a Coping Strategy

In this chapter, we consider the view that rather than being seen primarily as a route into employment, mutual aid and self-help should be seen as complementary to it. Analysts within this tradition argue for a major shift in the balance of the mixed economy (e.g. Aznar, 1981; Beck, 2000; Delors, 1979; Giddens, 2000; Greffe, 1981; Jordan, 1998; Laville, 1995, 1996; Mayo, 1996; Roustang, 1987; Sachs, 1984; Williams and Windebank, 2001a). The scenario that they advance is one in which work in the public (state), private (market) and civil (community self-help) spheres coexist and in which there is a more flexible organisation of work time. They all call for a new balance between employment and community self-help activities and are interested in the way in which self-help and mutual aid as it exists can be developed alongside employment.

For individuals the role of self-help as a complement is two-fold. First it can be seen as a means for people to cope where the state and market can only partially meet their needs. Second it provides the opportunity to partake in 'le travail implique' (personally involved work) which is work with which the individual can identify and which allows him or her to invest part of him or herself in the product of his or her labour Aznar (1987: 69). Aznar argues that when people have time free from their employment they want to engage in an activity in which it is possible to 'invest part of themselves'. We saw this to be the case with do-it-yourself activity in Chapter 3.

Seen as part of an economic system the self-help sector can be seen as a crucial 'safety net' for those who have no access to employment. Active policies are required to harness self-help and mutual aid because full-employment is essentially a myth. In an age so dominated by the ideology of full-employment, to ask whether full-employment can and should be the goal of policy is to risk being classified as some sort of heretic or crank. Yet in May 2000 just 74.4 per cent of the UK population of working age were in employment. Put another way, some 9 million of the working-age population were without jobs (Williams and Windebank, 2001a). The gap between the current situation and the full-employment of the working-age population is a massive chasm (cf. Rifkin, 1995). As we pointed out earlier, the decline of the single earner (male breadwinner) household throughout the advanced economies has resulted in a polarisation of households into those which all are jobless and those which all are in employment (Gregg and Wadsworth 1996; Williams and Windebank, 1995). Indeed, between 1983 and 1994, whilst the proportion of households in the United Kingdom with some people in employment and some without employment fell from 30 per cent to 19 per cent, the proportion of households where all members were jobless grew from 16.0 per cent to 19 per cent and the share in which all household members were in employment rose from 54 per cent to 62 per cent (Gregg and Wadsworth, 1996). So the working-age jobless cannot be dismissed as being largely the spouses of those who are unemployed, they are concentrated in households where all are jobless. These arguments challenge the notion of full-employment.

Another crucial question is whether full-employment is desirable (e.g. Beck, 2000; Gorz, 1999; Rifkin, 1995; Williams and Windebank, 2001a). While for policy-makers employment is seen as the central focus of people's lives, for many ordinary people the priority is a work–life balance (e.g. Cannon, 1994; Coupland, 1991; Gorz, 1999; Williams and Windebank, 2003; Zoll, 1989). People's identities are tied less and less to their jobs. Disaffection with employment is spreading in all countries and throughout the entire working population. Amongst Western Europeans aged between 16 and 34, 'work' or 'career' trail far behind five other priorities in the list of 'things which are really important to you personally' (Yankelovich, 1995). The five priorities are: having friends (95 per cent); having enough free time (80 per cent); being in good physical shape (77 per cent)

spending time with your family (74 per cent) and having an active social life (74 per cent). Only 9 per cent of those questioned (and 7 per cent of young people between 13 and 25) cited work as 'the main factor for success in life' (Sue, 1995). The gulf between 'work' and 'life' thus seems greater than ever. In a sample of upper middle class full-time employees in the United States, Schor (1995) found that 73 per cent thought that they would have a better quality of life if they worked less, spent less and had more time for themselves. Twenty-eight per cent of those questioned had chosen to 'downshift' (i.e. voluntarily earn and spend less) in order to lead a more meaningful life. A cultural turn has taken place that the political world has not caught up with it.

Given the need to look at active ways of encouraging community self-help as a complement to the mainstream, and in a way which supports those most in need to engage, we devote the remains of this chapter to exploring a number of practical schemes which relate largely to the spheres of household work and financial and material exchange.

Community currencies and exchange schemes as facilitators of complementary community self-help

In Chapter 4 we explored in some detail the ways in which different forms of community currency and social exchange could contribute to the generation of formal work. In this section we explore their role as complements to formal work.

One of the main vehicles are LETS. Many people in local communities have few people if anyone to call upon for help, or to offer to help (e.g. Komter, 1996; Renooy, 1990; Williams and Windebank, 2000; Williams *et al*., 2001). The absence of kin in the locality means that many LETS members are unable to draw upon kinship exchange (Williams and Windebank, 2001d). Ninety-five per cent of surveyed LETS members had no grandparents living in the area, 80 per cent no parents, 84 per cent no brothers or sisters, 58 per cent no children, 93 per cent no uncles or aunts and 91 per cent no cousins. LETS appear to offer an effective alternative. Seventy five per cent of those asked (82 per cent of the registered unemployed) said that LETS had helped them develop a network of people upon whom they could call for help, 55 per cent said that it had helped them develop a wider

network of friends (68 per cent of the registered unemployed) and 30 per cent deeper friendships. So, the vast majority of LETS members view them as effective at developing 'bridging' social network capital (i.e. bringing people together who did not before know each other). Slightly fewer, but still over a half of all LETS members, also view them as effective in developing 'bonding' social network capital (i.e. bringing people who already know to each other closer together). So, LETS appear to be effective mechanisms for developing social networks which help people to cope.

The LETS also provide a coping strategy, for those without access to mainstream resources, to get by during hard times. Williams *et al*. (2001) reported that 40 per cent of members said that LETS had given them access to interest-free credit (62 per cent of the registered unemployed and 51 per cent of low-income households). Two-thirds of those registered unemployed said that it had helped them cope with unemployment, with around 3 per cent of their total income coming from their LETS activity.

Eighty-four per cent said that LETS had helped them engage in meaningful and productive activity which enabled them to feel that they were contributing to their community. This was not true for everyone. Many disabled and older people who were interviewed (who did not belong to LETS) did not see LETS as something for them believing that there was little that they could contribute.

Despite these benefits the barriers to LETS development outlined in the previous chapter remain. Many unemployed people are fearful of being reported to the authorities, even if they engage in unpaid mutual aid. While only 13 per cent of members overall felt worried about tax liabilities and 12 per cent about reductions in welfare payments, 65 per cent of registered unemployed members were concerned (Williams *et al*., 2001). Unemployed people are particularly worried that trading in LETS will lead to a reduction in benefits and this makes them wary of joining. Ironically, therefore, those who would most benefit from LETS are discouraged from joining, and this leaves them isolated and more socially excluded.

Time banks also offer a means of supporting complementary mutual aid. As we identified in Chapter 4, the idea of time banks was to create a currency to record, store and reward transactions where neighbours help neighbours. People earn time currency by helping others (e.g. by providing child or eldercare, transportation, cooking,

home improvement). They then spend time currency to get help for themselves or for their families, or to join a club that gives them discounts on food or health care. Time currency allows those aspects of people's lives for which the market economy assigns no value to become redefined as valued contributions, and they give society a way to recompense activities that the market economy does not. It empowers people to convert personal time into purchasing power, enabling them to stretch their limited cash further. It also reinforces reciprocity and trust, and rewards civic engagement and acts of decency in a way that generates social capital, one hour at a time. The result of valuing such work is that it can help: harness under utilised human resources; give value and recognition to activities that are currently unvalued and unrecognised; and generate social capital in communities by rebuilding the non-market economy of family, neighbourhood and community. As we noted in Chapter 4, one advantage over LETS is that the Benefits Agency in the United Kingdom has also decided that the 'credits' earned on time banks should not be treated as earnings for income-related benefit purposes.

Mutual Aid contracts also open up opportunities for extending complementary mutual aid. In September 1998, Manningham Housing Association in a deprived neighbourhood of Bradford introduced a pilot scheme to encourage mutual aid amongst its new tenants. Applicants for social housing were asked to fill in a 'social needs audit' of their present neighbourly interactions, the tasks that they could offer their potential neighbours, and the work that they would like to have undertaken for them. The Housing Association then chose 22 tenants whose offers and requests closely matched and asked them to sign a voluntary 'mutual aid' contract before handing them the tenancy. The activities involved include car maintenance and repair, computer training, babysitting and a DIY club. So far as is known, this is the first such pilot scheme in the country. Schemes of this sort could be replicated in the context of many social housing projects both in rural and urban areas

In Chapter 4, we discussed Employee Mutuals, as potential springboards into employment. At present, they are seen more as vehicles for helping employers fill vacancies and bringing workers and businesses together to meet shared needs for training. But they might also provide a useful vehicle for facilitating mutual aid. Tessa Jowell,

the UK Minister for Employment, gave a talk in mid-2001 on these new institutions, and it seems likely that the government may be moving the idea off the drawing board.

Basic income schemes

If mutual aid and self-help are to be taken seriously as a complement to mainstream employment, then consideration needs to be given to how they can be supported by the tax and benefits system.

One idea which is receiving increasing support is the idea of a basic 'citizens' income. For many years, basic income schemes have been advocated as a means of integrating tax and benefits (Fitzpatrick, 1999; Jordan *et al.*, 2000; Van Parijis, 1995). Eligibility would be *automatic* for all citizens and *unconditional*. There would be no tests of willingness to work. Tax allowances and social security benefits would gradually be replaced by a single tax-free sum, guaranteed for every individual, irrespective of labour market or household status. The amount would vary only with age and ability/disability and would operate much like the universal UK child benefit.

The origins of the idea have been traced to Tom Paine, Saint-Simon, Bertrand and Dora Russell, Major CH Douglas and others (Van Trier, 1995). It is now advocated by several eminent economists such as Atkinson (1998), Meghnad Desai, and political philosophers such as Philippe Van Parijis (1995). Among leading UK politicians, only Paddy Ashdown (1988) has given it support, The Liberal Democrats went into the 1992 general election with Basic Income in its manifesto. It is now supported by many backbench MPs in all parties at Westminster as well as being on the mainstream policy agenda in Ireland (Jordan *et al.*, 2000). Among the main advantages claimed for Basic Income are:

- It is neutral between paid and unpaid work, giving better incentives for low-paid employment than tax credits, but allowing choice over how to combine the two;
- It treats men and women as equals, allowing them to negotiate how to share unpaid work in households;
- It combats exploitation, by allowing individuals to survive without relying on dangerous or demeaning work;
- It promotes economic efficiency, by ensuring that low-paid work

is not given a special subsidy (as in tax credits) and hence labour power is not wastefully deployed;

- It promotes social justice, by treating all individuals alike, and giving extra income only to those with special care needs.

But, how can this be reconciled with the notion that 'rights and responsibilities should be balanced'? Advocates of a Citizens Income argue that it would increase incentives to participate in paid labour market activities. People excluded under negative income tax regime would have incentives to take paid work and those in poverty traps would have the incentive to work longer hours and earn more. The net benefit of participation in paid work would be higher for low earners. So, New Labour's value of responsibility and its espoused goals of empowerment and inclusion would be better served (Jordan and Jordan, 2000: 197). If it is unconditional then how could it encourage responsibility and reciprocity? Jordan and Jordan (2000) argue that it is important to distinguish top-down versions of accountability and bottom-up communal ones. It is in one-to-one mutual aid that individuals actually experience the requirement to reciprocate and take responsibility, not in relation to officials. This increases engagement in society and social cohesion.

This proposition connects citizenship to a redefined notion of work – here we mean all the work which needs to be done whether in the paid formal economy or in the unpaid 'economy'. Gorz (1999) argues that security of income is the first precondition for a society based on multi-activity. Unconditionally guaranteeing everyone an income for life will, however, have a fundamentally different meaning and function depending on whether that income is insufficient or sufficient to protect him or her from poverty. Gorz (1999: 83) argues that we must create a society 'which enables all citizens to decide on an ongoing basis between the use-value of their time and its exchange-value', which is to say between the utilities they can acquire by selling their time and those they can self-provide by using the time themselves. The aim is to give individuals and groups increased resources for taking charge of their own lives, further power over their way of life and living conditions.

> The aim is not to enable people not to work at all, but rather to give genuine effect to the right to work: not the right to that work

> you are 'employed' to do, but to the concrete work you do without having to be paid for it, without its profitability or exchange-value coming into the equation. (Gorz, 1999: 83)

However,

> The granting of a sufficient basic income to all citizens must … be inseparable from developing and making accessible the resources which enable and encourage self-activity to take place, the resources with which individuals and groups can satisfy by their own unshackled efforts part of the needs and desires they have themselves defined. (Gorz, 1999: 83)

For Gorz (1999) therefore, like many others (e.g. Jordan, 1998; Jordan *et al.*, 2000; Van Parijis, 1995), this income must be unconditional. Workfare New Deal (or compulsory voluntary work !) (e.g. Elson, 1988; Offe, 1992; Rifkin, 1997) does not recompense the essential work that is already conducted.

For many however, an unconditional basic income does not chime well with the current 'work (employment) ethic' that is so dominant throughout the advanced economies. For this reason it is worth exploring the notion of a citizen's income based on participation (e.g. Atkinson, 1995; Beck, 2000; Williams and Windebank, 2001a).

Active citizens' credits

In Chapter 3, we showed that for most people who engage in reciprocal exchange, their desire is for some form of tally-system. Here we outline a proposal that could not only recognise the contributions of self-help and mutual aid but also reward those individuals who engage in such endeavour – recompensing and valuing work which currently goes unrecognised and unvalued. Williams and Windebank (2000, 2001a) drawing upon the ideas for Citizens' Service (Briscoe, 1995; McCormick, 1994) have argued for the development of 'Active Citizens' Credits' (ACC). The intention of this approach is to provide a means of recording, storing and rewarding participation in caring and self-help activity conducted for the good of their community. Individuals would engage in a self-designed portfolio of work of their choosing for which they would be reimbursed. They could freely choose whether or not to participate in this scheme and would not

be delegated tasks by institutions on the basis that these institutions believe that those tasks need to be undertaken for the good of the community.

Work of this sort would be recompensed by extending the tax credit approach that has taken many advanced economies by storm over the past decade (e.g. Liebman, 1998; Meadows, 1997; Millar and Hole, 1998) and which was introduced in the United Kingdom in October 1999 (HM Treasury, 1998).

Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) lies at the heart of UK welfare state reform. A clear signal of this followed Frank Field's resignation in July 1998 as special Minister for Welfare Reform, when this function moved into HM Treasury and a key architect of WFTC was given responsibility for Welfare State Reform. At present under WFTC, and the Family Credit system, working families with children have been prioritised – a parent working over 16 hours per week is effectively guaranteed a minimum income (HM Treasury, 1998). Families without children, part-timers working less than 16 hours per week and the unemployed are excluded even though they face the same 'poverty' and 'unemployment' traps as working families with children.

So how can the unemployed as well as the rapidly growing number of part-time workers be brought under the tax credit umbrella? One option would be to assess the WFTC on the basis of total household income and carry entitlement to such tax credits all the way down the income scale to those earning nothing at all from employment. The result would be the creation of a guaranteed minimum income. The difficulty with this is that both the unemployed and those working less than 16 hours per week would receive similar amounts to somebody employed for over 16 hours per week. Although exponents of an unconditional citizen's income might support this many would argue that such tax credits should not be paid for doing nothing. Those able to do so should be required to make a 'full' contribution to society to warrant their tax credit/guaranteed minimum income. To achieve this people would have to show that they were:

- working as a full-time employee or self-employed;
- absent from work on grounds of sickness, injury or disability;
- reaching pension age;
- engaging in approved forms of education or training; or

- being an Active Citizen by participating in caring activities, a community group or self-help activity for the good of the community.

Hence, being unemployed but available for work would not be a qualifying condition for tax credits, since people may already be making social contribution under the final category. Similarly, those employed for less than 16 hours could be asked to 'top-up' their social contribution via this final category in order to qualify for a guaranteed minimum income.

The difference between an ACC Scheme and the New Deal voluntary and community sector jobs is that individuals would be given the option of designing their own ACC portfolio of work rather than having to rely on the state and/or market to find them work. This would give people a sense of ownership over their work as a result of their having autonomously chosen to do it. At a minimum, work which would be attributed tax credits should include caring activity for young, elderly or disabled dependants, and any service activity that is undertaken by individuals for the benefit of their communities, such as organising community groups. Against the critique that some of this work would not be regarded by the whole of society as 'valuable', we can only reply that a great deal of employment within the market could be regarded as highly damaging to the environment, society and local communities.

This approach would overcome many of the anomalies that are arising with the introduction of the WFTC, particularly the childcare tax credit. For example, a parent can claim childcare tax credit for a registered child-minder but cannot claim anything if they or a relative provide the care informally, despite the fact that such kin-based care is widely perceived to be of a much higher quality than that which is collectivised in crèches and nurseries (Windebank, 1999). By redefining these people as engaged in ACC not only would these anomalies be ironed out but also work that currently goes unrecognised would be properly valued. An ACC scheme might also represent a way of paying for 'parental leave'. Although from 31 December 1999 unpaid parental leave of up to three months during the first five years of a child's life has been granted, there is widespread recognition that take-up will be limited to the more affluent who can afford such an option. According to the Low Pay Unit, a

new parental leave tax credit for low and middle-income families would add as little as £26 million to the £5bn annual bill for WFTC (Ward, 1999). Under this scenario parents or relatives would receive credit for their activity rather than benefit for their inactive status.

The outcome would be to incorporate the 'care ethic' into the 'work ethic', something scholars such as Lister (1997) have propounded. For this to be achieved, however, it is first necessary to challenge the view that the sole way in which social inclusion is achieved is through paid employment – a perspective which underlies the decision to pay people to look after others children but to discourage people from looking after their own (Hills, 1998), or to extend New Deal to help carers return to employment rather than directly pay them for the valuable work that they currently undertake (Hall, 1999).

More widely, an ACC would recognise the contributions of those who are economically active and making a significant contribution to their community (e.g. unemployed individuals who set up and run community-based initiatives such as LETS and credit unions) so that people who currently find themselves pressurised to give up meaningful productive activity in order to seek employment would be enabled to devote themselves to such work.

One of the main objectives of such a scheme is that paying everybody the full tax credit is unfeasible on the grounds of cost. The only realistic way in which credits could be paid would be according to total household income. While this might be fairer in terms of socio-economic justice and greatly reduce the cost, it might also result in a transfer of resources from the 'purse to the wallet'.

This proposal is another way in which self-help and mutual aid could be harnessed in a manner that tackles many of the barriers to participation in such work. Realising that a basic income scheme is unlikely, this ACC scheme can be seen as a form of 'participation income' (Atkinson, 1998) that fits with some mainstream thinking on integrated tax-benefit systems.

Conclusion

What is clear from this analysis is that mutual aid can be complementary to mainstream employment, and act as a coping mechanism for those most in need. However, it is a very long way from

realising it's potential. In the short term, tax and benefit rules, need to adapt to this growing phenomena so that people are not penalised for engaging in informal work. In the longer term, some form of basic income scheme needs to be introduced which recognises informal contributions to family, kin and community as being as valuable as formal employment. We have sketched out two of the possibilities, but would welcome a far-reaching debate on this issue.

6

An Alternative to the Market and State: Community Self-Help as a Challenge

For many, community self-help is not about getting a foothold onto the mainstream ladder or plugging gaps left by the state and the market, it is about developing real alternatives. In some cases these alternatives are simply coping strategies in response to deficiencies of the state and the market. In other cases they represent serious social challenges to the type of provision that is available. It is hard to see squatting for example as a long-term solution to homelessness. Home and community schooling on the other hand represent a real alternative to the status quo. To explore these issues we return to some of the arenas of community self-help which we outlined in Chapter 2. Within many of these the development of practical alternatives is very embryonic. Others, which we will explore in more detail here, are substantially more developed and can be considered as potential Trojan horses within the mainstream. The areas that we will focus on in this chapter are LETS and alternative currencies; car sharing; food and medicines; mental health; squatting and self-build schemes; community protection and home schooling. But before examining these in more detail we need briefly to place them in the context of new forms of social organisation which are beginning to shape contemporary alternatives to the state.

Organised challenges to the status quo

The initiatives that are outlined here all started at the most informal network level but have grown into autonomous and sophisticated forms of self-organisation. This form of organisation is characteristic

of a new sort of politics which is expressed in action and autonomous organisation rather than through parties or protest. One prominent expression of this new style of radical politics is the 'bund'. As Hetherington (1998: 17) puts it, the bund:

> offers its adherents a form of expressive organisation through which a way of life can be sought among a group of fellow supporters, from whose emotional support a sense of solidarity and group identification can be attained.

Unlike traditional place-based community, the bund is a wholly conscious phenomenon which is freely chosen on the basis of mutual sentiment and common goals (Hetherington, 1998; Schmalenbach; 1977) and which people are free to leave (something which is often unrealistic for inhabitants of many neighbourhood communities). They reflect diverse interests and cover an array of self-help groups, direct action organisations and community/interest groups centred around issues such as food, gender, pets, ethnicity, alternative medicine, local place, sexuality, spirituality, festivals, road protests and dance culture (e.g. Hetherington, 1998; Maffesoli, 1996; Szersynski, 1993; Urry, 2000). Although they are not confined to those involved in radical politics, (since they also form around highly specialised leisure practices) a great many are premised upon 'cultures of resistance, a kind of horizontal extension of the networks of civil society' (Urry, 2000: 142). 'defend[ing] their spaces, their places, against the placeless logic of the space of flows characterising social domination in the Information Age' (Castells, 1997: 358). They tend to be self-organised and members are often resentful of outsiders instructing them on how to act or to manage themselves. In the remains of this chapter we propose to explore some of the different ways in which such mutual organisation has developed as resistance to the status quo.

Local Exchange and Trading Schemes (LETS)

LETS are one of the most prominent types of bund. Grounded in utopian (mostly socialist) visions of the 'good life' and the search for alternatives to employment, local currencies have always been a site for the promotion of radical politics. From Robert Owen's early

experiments to the introduction in 1934 of the Wirtschaftring (Economic Circle) cooperative in Switzerland, they have carried a progressive political message. The radical motto of the WIR system, for example, was 'Free exchange of goods and services without exploitation of our fellow man and without government coercion'.

Although there is a tendency to argue that local currencies are 'complementary' to the mainstream rather than an 'alternative', this is more of a reflection of pragmatism on the part of their advocates than any reflection of their views (e.g. Dauncey, 1988; Dobson, 1990; Seyfang, 1998). History has shown that advocating local currencies as 'alternatives' results in them being banned. Alternative currencies were banned in 1930s in Worgl, Austria as well as in the United States with 'scrip' money (Greco, 1994; Offe and Heinze, 1992, Pacione, 1997a).

LETS emerged from a workshop at The Other Economic Summit (TOES) by Michael Linton in 1986. This 'alternative summit' which was organised by a broad coalition of 'green' groups and individuals ran alongside the G7 Economic Summit. The first LETS in the United Kingdom was set up in Norwich in that year, and the early LETS in Australia (Williams, 1997) and New Zealand (Williams, 1996c) were set up and supported by people who attended this TOES workshop. There has always been a strong connection between LETS advocates and alternative (particularly Green) politics. According to Williams *et al*. (2001), 65 per cent of LETS members would vote for the Green Party if there were an election tomorrow. Twenty-five per cent of LETS members explicitly stated that they had joined as an act of resistance to various mainstream 'others' such as capitalism, materialism, globalisation and the profit motive. A further 70 per cent explained their decision to join as a way of developing alternative means of livelihood beyond employment. It is commonly asserted by LETS members that what is valued is different to that in the mainstream economy and the work conducted through them is seen as socially useful work rather than the useless toil that they identify with employment.

Most LETS tend to be small in scale. They have an average membership of just 72 and members generally wish to keep them relatively small. They argue that if the LETS membership grows beyond a certain size, it will become 'impersonal' and 'lose its identity' and friendly feel. Growth could also jeopardise the 'trust' that is built

within a relatively known cohort of people with largely similar values. By their very nature LETS are based on face-to-face interaction, and there is widespread recognition among LETS coordinators that the more face-to-face interaction there is, the more trading there is. This has led to the setting up of trading events which are also seen a way of establishing and maintaining group solidarity.

In many LETS, people who are not trading are excluded. Individuals who do not conform to the conventions of the group can be sanctioned. If, for example, somebody appears to be accumulating too much debt, then they may be told to reduce this debt before purchasing anything else. In some LETS, this is formalised through the introduction of debit/credit limits. In others when someone earns more than s/he spends on LETS, this is referred to as 'commitment' rather than credit. This close monitoring and maintenance of group solidarity is seen to improve identity and identification amongst those who conform to the mores of the group. This is important in the context of the arguments of Kropotkin outlined earlier, that large open systems mediate against the cooperation needed for effective responses to fast moving change, and that within a global economy it is critical to build self-regulating relatively closed systems.

LETS are also spaces in which people develop enterprises which are congruent with their values and identity. Around about a quarter of all members develop micro-businesses based on their interests, which they believe express who and what they are. LETS are seen to be a safe environment in which they can express themselves without fear of reprisal.

LETS also represent an alternative form of 'self-governance'. Although there are codes of practice, these are often decided at open meetings in which all members can be present and there is no centralised power that sends codes of practices down to the individual LETS. Instead, all LETS are autonomous in their decision-making powers. LETS in the United Kingdom is more a loose network of independent collectives and communities characterised by its institutional thinness. Very little exists in the way of regional networks and at the time of writing, the national LETS coordinating agency which had temporarily ceased to exist was only gradually starting to again become operational.

Despite the moves by government agencies to use them as bridges into employment (see Chapter 5) and by others to use them as

complementary means of livelihood (see Chapter 6), they are primarily viewed by their members as 'acts of resistance'. They are vehicles of continuous place-embedded protest and arguably one of the few such vehicles currently available for constructing alternative means of livelihood beyond employment.

Car sharing

Like many of the community self-help initiatives that we have discussed in this book, car sharing has emerged for two primary reasons. The first is that it can be a cheaper way of gaining access to a car. The second – which links it to the theme of this chapter – is that it is a challenge to the dominance of single occupant cars and the inherent environmental damage that this implies. The idea of widespread car sharing and car pooling is largely aspirational but the speed with which interest is growing at the moment indicates that it could become a significant alternative to both the single and duel car household.

A recent report *Car Share and Car Clubs: Potential Impacts* (Bonsall *et al.*, 2002) highlights some of the key issues:

> [the] receipt of lifts is already a widespread phenomenon in these communities. The question is whether, with some external assistance, the volume and effectiveness of lift-giving might be increased.
>
> The problems are obvious; without a car or access to public transport these people are effectively isolated from mainstream society. Although their parents' generation might have been able to access most key facilities by walking, cycling or public transport, this option is now very rare because of the progressive centralisation of facilities and the withdrawal of public transport services. It is generally accepted that conventional public transport is an expensive way of providing accessibility in sparsely populated areas and that, even where it still exists, its continued provision cannot be guaranteed.
>
> In the absence of conventional public transport, help for these people may come through special provision for essential journeys (school bus or taxi for journey to school, hospital or social services

> transport for visits to health facilities) but generally does not extend to journeys to work or shops. Also, even for essential journeys, the client may not be able to make use of the service if it is not also available to their dependent children or to carer-companions, (we understand that a frequent reason for the exclusion of dependent children and carer companions is that they are not covered by the insurance. As an example of the implications of this restriction we note anecdotal evidence suggesting that inability to make arrangements for dependent children can be a common cause of missed medical appointments in some communities).

It is only organised community self-help that has the potential to meet the challenge that Bonsall sets out here.

Within the United Kingdom, organised solutions for those who are more affluent are emerging fast (and incidentally are another good example of how informal activity has led to enterprises within the mainstream economy). Schemes like *Liftshare* can now link drivers and passengers together online and offer the possibility of setting up local community schemes. (*Liftshare* started in 1999. By 2000 it had a few thousand users which had rocketed to nearly 35 000 by June of 2002. Similar schemes are well established in North America.) Research published by internet job site reed.co.uk indicated, '45% of UK workers would be more likely to work for an employer who offered an easy-to-use car sharing scheme'. At the moment around 5 per cent of the UK population share a car to work but this survey (of 3000 people) suggested that if reliable arrangements were organised by employers, nine times as many individuals would use car share schemes. This would mean that up to 4.7 million less cars on British roads on a daily basis – 16 per cent of the total registered in the United Kingdom. One of the more interesting observations they make over and above the obvious points about reducing environmental pollution and congestion is that such a scheme would strengthen the 'informal network' within companies. But while these schemes represent good value for those who would otherwise have bought a new car, they will usually be more expensive than buying an old car, or doing without one. This suggests an important role for LETS in the informal organisation of transport sharing.

Food and medicines

The issues raised by food production are interesting because they illustrate the way in which both markets and the state have attempted to take over what has for generations been the sphere of routine self-provisioning. It seems almost ridiculous to question breastfeeding as routine self-provisioning. Yet it has become so unroutine in many parts of the world that it could virtually be considered as do-it-yourself (DIY). One of the most striking observations of the report on the 1995 UNESCO survey is that:

> Each year, 75 000 mothers stop breastfeeding in the first postnatal week but only 1% say that this is how long they had intended to breastfeed for. The reasons given for stopping by the great majority relate to problems which could be avoided or solved if they were better supported. In fact, more than 80% of mothers who give up breastfeeding before 4 months say they would have liked to have breastfed for longer.

There are strong vested interests trying to encourage mothers not to breastfeed. The baby milk scandal is the starkest example of this trend. Here some of the poorest women in the world have been offered free powdered milk by a large multinational corporation during the first weeks after birth. The milk is withdrawn once the mother can no longer produce her own milk, and she is then forced to buy expensive powdered milk which she does not have the means to do. Not only does this exacerbate her poverty but can result in the ill-health and in many cases the death of her child as powdered milk requires water, and much of the water available is contaminated. A very similar process can be seen through the introduction by a global biotech company of what has become known as the 'terminator seed'. The essence of this technology is to produce plants which do not reproduce so that farmers are forced to go back to the company to buy seed. By preventing self-provisioning companies open up market opportunities. A further example can be observed in the attempt by major drug companies to patent plants and in the pressure they put on the governments to regulate plant use. The European Union is introducing stringent controls on herbal medicine – presumably under strong pressure from the drug company lobby, despite the fact that plants have been used for medicinal

purposes for centuries and as we pointed out in Chapter 6 virtually no one has died from herbal medicine or vitamin C. Yet thousands if not millions have died or been seriously damaged by drugs.

More broadly, it is possible to discern a shift over time of micro-household activities from the category of routine self-provision to DIY. Because bread is now universally available through the market at relatively cheap prices, what was once a form or routine self-provision has for those who make it, become more of a creative endeavour done for pleasure rather than necessity. The struggle to protect people's right to provide food and medicines for themselves represents a major challenge to big business interests.

Mental health

Viv Lindow's 1994 report *Self-Help Alternatives to Mental Health Services* captures in its very title the challenge to the mainstream. There are probably millions of self-help groups dotted around the world at this moment in time. Most of them would be seen in some way to be complementary to mainstream services. Mental health self-help groups are different. Many ex-users of mental health services consider themselves to be 'survivors' of those services.

> As people who have experienced emotional distress, we have been diagnosed and labelled by psychiatry, our basic freedoms denied, often forcibly and our perceptions invalidated. We are like a colonised people, struggling to be free, to reclaim from psychiatry, ownership of our lives. We are fighting for autonomy. In most true self-help groups, there is this liberation base, and this element of advocacy to some degree or another an expression of dis-satisfaction with the mental health system. (Zinman, S. quoted in Lindow, V, 1994: 4)
>
> The foundation of self-help alternatives is that when people who have been discredited because they are deemed crazy get together, 'something wonderful happens' (Judi Chamberlin). There is a sense of belonging and knowing. (Lindow V, 1994: 5)

Judi Chamberlin (1998: 7) makes a very important point when she says:

> Frequently ex-patients are afraid to face their real feelings about the experience of mental institutionalisation. Family and friends

> tend to react negatively to expressions of anger and hatred toward the hospital and staff, seeing these as indications of illness. Patients often feel the same way and may try desperately to believe that the hospital was a basically helpful and positive experience.

What she is saying is that in the face of the damage done by state services there is no obvious place to go other than mutual support networks. To go to kin, friends or neighbours will often exacerbate the experience of exclusion. Mental health survivor groups are born of necessity.

> To hear that respected members of the group have been locked away and forcibly treated and that they feel this treatment was improper can help someone to reassess what has happened to them. Talking about it freely without someone drugging you or otherwise trying to stop you will be a new and liberating experience for many.

While there are many good examples of self-help groups crisis support is more difficult (Lindow, 1994).

> Alternatives to medical services are one of the universal demands of psychiatric system survivors. I use the word 'universal' advisedly: wherever recipients of Westernised psychiatry meet, many demand alternatives to medical care at times of crisis. (Lindow, 1994)

Lindow documents a handful of formal crisis centres which have emerged through survivor groups in the United Kingdom. These include Brixton Community Sanctuary, McMurphy's in Sheffield and the Oxford Survivor centre. These are all entirely user run but often struggle to survive. She points to anecdotal evidence of more informal set ups 'I was told that there are several runaway houses in the Netherlands.' But she was unable to find details of them.

Housing

Squatting which involves the occupation of empty dwellings by homeless people has a long tradition in both the United Kingdom and around the world. It can be seen in many lights. First, it is a simple coping strategy for those in need. Second, it can be seen as a

complementary strategy for those who have no access to state or housing association housing (because there is so little of it and many low-income people without children would never meet the criteria) or private rented accommodation (because they cannot afford it). For the squatter then it is an alternative where other alternatives are not available. At the most political end of the squatting community there are those that see 'property as theft' and would see squatting as a challenge to the present housing system. For most people it is a self-help solution to a problem. The introduction to *Squatting Today* on the website of the Advisory Service for Squatters illustrates the nature of the issue.

> According to the Empty Homes Agency there are 753 188 empty homes in the UK (April 2001). There is enough empty property other than homes, e.g. offices, to be converted into the equivalent of 700 000 homes. The number of homeless people is hard to define. Do you just count those sleeping on the streets, or include those that are 'sofa-surfing' between friends and family? Under the Housing Act 1996, a homeless person is defined as anyone who does not have a place to live in the UK or abroad, where they have a legal right to stay for at least the next 28 days, or where it is not reasonable for them to stay (e.g. overcrowded or in need of serious repairs). There are probably almost a million people in the UK today who fall within this definition of homeless and many more who are living in poor conditions. This definition of homeless includes squatters (people occupying empty property without the owner's permission) as though they may be able to stay where they are for more than 28 days, they do not have a legal right to do so. The number of squatters has been estimated recently to be as high as 30 000 (in *The Guardian*) but a more realistic estimate would be a little under 20 000 very few of whom are outside England and Wales, and most of those are in London. (Squatting Today www.squat.freeserve.co.uk)

Another arena of self-help housing which has great potential is self-build. At the moment while a considerable number of people buy land and then commission builders and architects to build houses for them, very few people actually build their own houses. But, organised community self-build schemes are growing and their potential can be seen in countries such as Norway, Finland and

Sweden. In Sweden self-build accounts for 26 per cent of building and 45 per cent in Norway and Finland.

> Community Self build schemes are a long way away from the conventional type of self-build which normally involves an individual with money commissioning a house from a private builder with little or no active involvement in the building work themselves. Such schemes, are in fact, more like self-build in the past; communal activity on a reciprocal basis has been a normal feature of many traditional societies

Security and safety

In Chapter 1, we identified a trend in some localities for communities to take local security issues into their own hands. This is a very direct form of self-help and is seen as a strong alternative to the State – where the State does not deliver what local people want or need. A local police force may have a policy of containing drugs within a particular area which is fine unless you happened to live in that area. Who can you call on then? A social services department may rehouse sex offenders within local communities on the grounds that they are likely to be less dangerous if we know where they are. This is probably true, but is not very helpful if you have kids and live on the same street. What do you do? People within communities are increasingly 'taking matters into their own hands'....

Community action against convicted and suspected child sex offenders has become increasingly common in contemporary Britain and has often followed from the decision of national and local newspapers to name convicted paedophiles and disclose where they live. The most notable recent illustration is the violence on the Paulsgrove Estate, Portsmouth, instigated by a group of local residents, against known or suspected child sex offenders living on the estate (Martin, 2001). This followed the decision by *The News of the World*, to publish the names and whereabouts, together with a photograph, of the 100 000 people on the sex offenders' register in the summer of 2000. Other significant community actions against paedophiles include the riot at Knowle West Police Station in Bristol following the release of the murderer, Sidney Cooke in 1998.

Throughout the 1990s there were sporadic incidences of Asian youths attacking white youths and creating 'defensible spaces' or as some would argue 'no go zones' for whites in their local areas. With previous incidences occurring in London and West Yorkshire, the most recent and notable escalation of this type of activity occurred in Oldham, Bradford and Leeds. Against a backdrop of growing poverty and social exclusion much of this activity has been taken in direct response to threats from local whites or National Front supporters. A good example was reported in *The Guardian* under the headline 'Asian riot patrol cleared of weapon offences'.

> A jury yesterday accepted that a group of Asian men who patrolled part of Burnley carrying weapons had acted in self defence against a white mob … last summer they were cleared of a further 12 charges of violent disorder saying they were protecting themselves and their community against a group of whites attacking Asian people, businesses and property … they said they were preparing to defend their community if the white mob attacked. (*The Guardian*, 11 October 2002)

Action against drug pushers has been both individually and community inspired. At the community level, it has tended to take place on council estates where local residents have felt that police presence has been limited and their action ineffective in dealing with drug dealing (Jardine, 2000). The most high-profile example is the organisation, Mothers Against Drugs (MAD) that was set up in 1997 by Gaille McCann, a resident on the Glasgow Cranhill housing estate, along with a group of other women. The impetus for MAD was the death of 13-year-old Alan Harper from a heroin overdose. The tactics of the organisations are wide-ranging and include candlelight vigils, demonstrations, informing police of drugselling and reporting drug pushers to local benefit offices or the gas companies for non-payment. There have been similar but smaller organisations set up around the country, e.g. Knowle West Action Against Drugs (KWADS) in Bristol. The impetus behind these initiatives is an attempt to do something about a problem that the state appears unable or willing to do something about.

Education

Self-provisioning of education may involve relatively small percentages of the population but it still involves a very high number of children and the numbers are rising very rapidly indeed:

> While it is impossible to get an exact count of home-schooled kids in the United States, researchers' estimates confirm the impression of growth. Five to ten years ago, various investigators figured there were 500 000 to 1 million students in home-based education programs in the United States. Now the numbers range from 750 000 to 2 million. Additionally, while ten years ago home schooling primarily involved younger children, more families now home school teenagers. (Cafi Coeh, Jan/Feb 1998 Home Education Magazine).

So why this growing trend? Reasons will vary for parents. For some it is a practical response to the failures of the school system to deal with bullying. For others it is a reaction to the over-controlled central curriculum which is increasingly dominating schools. Some have no alternative as their children have been excluded from schools. And for others it will be ideological. What is clear is that the ethos of home learning is entirely different to that of school learning. It is based on the basic assumption that practise based and experiential learning is far more effective than traditional teaching.

> When I was collecting information from home-schooling families in the late 1970's and 1980's I found that I had to do most of my visits on Sundays. This was because whenever I telephoned to fix appointments, I would find that learners were learning out-and-about in various libraries, museums, exhibitions, gatherings such as auctions, expeditions, sports centres, meetings with adults who offered some learning opportunity and the like. They had already taken on the idea of the community as a source of learning sites. (Meighan, 1997)

The evidence from the first major study of homeschooling which involved a sample of over 1000 children strongly supports this. Paula Rothermel (2000) clearly demonstrated that even in conventional terms homeschooling children largely outperform their peers in conventional schools. She found that 65 per cent of home-educated

children scored more than 75 per cent in a general mathematics and literacy test, compared to a national figure of only 5.1 per cent. The average score for schooleducated pupils in the same test was 45 per cent, while that of the home-educated children was 81 per cent.

> Home-educated children do better in conventional terms and in every other way too. This study is the first evidence we have proving that home education is a huge benefit to large numbers of children. Society just assumes that school is best but because there have never been any comparative studies before this one, the assumption is baseless.

She points out that:

> Family cohesiveness is more beneficial to development than any amount of state imposed caring educational provision. As the revised national curriculum for the Year 2000 comes into existence and target setting for 3 year olds becomes a reality, we are simply looking in the wrong direction. (Rothermel, 2000)

What we see here is a growing phenomenon of people who are unhappy about the education system creating an alternative which appears to work better against all criteria than the mainstream. Clearly it is essential to be aware of the socio-economic bias that may exist in any research on homeschooling, but it is important to note that in Rothermel's work homeschooled children outperformed privately educated children as well as those in mainstream education. This outcome does not of course address our wider concerns that irrespective of exam performance traditional schooling is not actually giving children a good education.

As in the United States home education is legal,[2] but it can be complicated and cumbersome to negotiate the system and deal with the education authorities. Homeschooling has the potential to take off but this is undoubtedly the sort of self-help that governments would not want to hear about! Given that it is accepted wisdom that diverse, context specific, experiential learning is more effective than traditional class based teaching there has to be a reason why

2. SECTION 7 EDUCATION ACT 1996: Compulsory Education states that the parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable (a) to his age, ability and aptitude, and

governments continue to adopt a conventional approach. In Chapters 1 and 2, we highlighted Illich's views on the way in which education is used as a crude instrument of social control. This view should not be regarded as maverick. Winston Churchill makes a very similar point:

> Schools have not necessarily much to do with education … they are mainly institutions of control, where basic habits must be inculcated in the young. Education is quite different and has no place in school. (Churchill quoted in Dowty, 2000: 13)

Our education system is a prime means by which the state ensures control over its citizens and as such homeschooling will always represent a challenge.

Leisure

The way in which Bishop and Hoggett articulate their study of mutual aid in leisure is of enthusiasms providing an alternative to the dead hand of employment. It is what keeps people spiritually alive, and is for the most part much more highly valued than employment:

> The vast majority of workers are not producers when at work, rather they are consumed by work and therefore can only confirm themselves as imaginative, self-determining human beings outside of work. Hence the importance of understanding leisure in its productive and self organising forms. (Bishop and Hoggett, 1986: 122)

Most importantly these forms of leisure are a form of creativity which keeps us engaged in life

> Virtually each one of us, every day, is involved in some form of cultural production. It may be as simple as writing a letter or cultivating a pond in the back garden. The point is that we do it for pleasure rather than out of necessity or obligation, and moreover, the activity involves us as 'tool-using animals' in a process of confronting the given with our subjectivity, our imagination, patience, love and aggression. Out of this something is created

(b) to any special educational needs he may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise. There is no legal requirement for children to attend school. In fact you do not even have to inform your education authority.

> which had never existed before. Over a thousand games of football may be played on a single playing field, yet each one will be different; a thousand children can sit before the same flower, yet each one would paint something new. (Bishop and Hoggett, 1986: 123)

Self-organised leisure is an essential part of our social organisation. It helps us not just to survive but also to thrive, and it provides important lessons and models for other aspects of our working lives.

Conclusion

While there has been a tendency among many policy-makers to view self-help and mutual aid as an intermediary stage in the development of a relationship with the state and the markets, for many people they represent the basis for constructing permanent alternatives to the mainstream economy. As Lee (1995: 1593) puts it:

> The challenge is … to create civil economic geographies based upon local resources, locally controlled … . The challenge is, in short, to construct circuits of power and empowerment beyond the circuit of capital.

Self-help and mutual aid – and the notion of autonomous work, provide the potential for a radical departure from the core tenets of orthodox economic theory and practice.

7
Supporting and Developing Community Self-Help

In this chapter we outline some of the key nettles that must be grasped if policy-makers are serious about nurturing and supporting community self-help. These are that:

- Community self-help must be valued as a major contributor to society in its own right
- Community self-help can only be supported indirectly
- Neighbourhood policy needs to shift from an emphasis on volunteering to a focus on self-help
- Policy-makers need to understand and support the relationship between individual and community enterprise
- The contradictory worlds of informal self-help and formal organisation need to be allowed to develop side by side
- Urgent state intervention is needed to protect self-provisioning.

Over the following pages we explore the implications of these assertions.

Community self-help must be valued as a major contribution to society in its own right

To see community self-help as primarily a springboard into employment, is to ignore what it is most effective at doing – providing alternative and/or complementary means of livelihood (see Chapters 5 and 6). The Government's Priority Action Team report on community self-help says that a fundamental principle underpinning new

policies should be to treat 'effective community involvement explicitly as a positive outcome in its own right' but this appears only to refer to volunteering and or participation in decision-making forums. What we have identified in this book is that it is the contribution of unpaid activity which needs to be valued as a positive outcome in its own right. As Burns and Taylor (1998) point out:

> It is because mutual aid and self-help can provide direct and practical solutions to immediate need that this sector is so vital a response to social exclusion. While there is evidence of such activities in both middle-class and low-income communities, they have different significance in each. For middle class communities mutual aid and self-help may be seen as one strand in a web of choices. For people who are socially excluded and on low incomes they are often the only way of coping where there is no alternative safety net. (Burns and Taylor, 1998)

Recognising this, puts the onus on government to eliminate the disincentives (and in some cases prohibitions) that are built into the system.

We have identified in Chapters 4 and 5 that many people are put off engaging in self-help because they are afraid of losing their benefits. The Priority Action Team report goes some way to noting the problem of financial penalties, but it's response is largely tokenistic:

> Training for benefits Agency and Employment Service Staff should cover both the policies governing volunteering and benefit eligibility and the value of many forms of voluntary and community activity as a rout to employability and employment
>
> The 48 hour rule should be changed where its application impedes community and voluntary activity. At present volunteers must be available for paid employment within 48 hours of getting a job. This discourages potential volunteers from making a commitment to volunteering … we consider that the 48 hour period should be extended to one week for people involved in community and voluntary activity. (Home Office, 1999)

Even viewed at a pragmatic level where the emphasis remains on getting people into employment, there is not a great deal of

difference between 48 hours and a week. The stories that we have taken from our own research, and from the Priority Action Team report itself, show that the process of transforming self-help initiatives into self-employment is a gradual one which may take from six months to a few years or more. To encourage this process requires a more fundamental change in the tax and benefits systems which (a) recognises this work as having intrinsic value to society, and (b) acknowledges the amount of time that it takes for these processes to develop. At minimum this requires that work which is carried out within the community sector should have no bearing on eligibility for benefits.

One small example of the sort of change which is necessary would be to allow those people trading on LETS to enter the 'self-employment' option in New Deal and to recognise their trading on LETS as part of their attempt to become self-employed. People setting out on the New Deals 'self-employment' option could be encouraged to join their local LETS as a means of developing their client base, easing their cash-flow problems and as a test-bed for their products and/or services. This would have the benefit of encouraging the role of LETS as a seedbed for self-employed initiatives without undermining the LETS itself by rocking the boat of mutuality. Another possibility would be the proposal cited earlier from *National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal: a framework for consultation* for a pilot study to give 'people new freedom to earn a little casual income or participate in a LETS without affecting their benefit entitlement'. These sorts of changes are an absolutely necessary (albeit insufficient) condition for the entry of a greater number of registered unemployed onto LETS so that they can use it as a bridge into employment.

Connected to this issue is the way in which government differently values various forms of work. New Labour's position assumes an individual can contribute to society by working as a paid child carer but not as an unpaid mother, 'though both individuals carry out the same tasks and make identical contributions' (King and Wickham-Jones, 1998: 277). This contradiction has been highlighted by many commentators (e.g. Hills, 1998; Levitas, 1998; Lister, 2000). Voluntary work, meanwhile, is seen as a way of improving employability by cultivating skills, self-confidence, self-esteem and the ability to work with others (Levitas, 1998). Why these forms of community self-help should be differently viewed is difficult to discern. This issue must be urgently addressed.

A further issue is education. As we have shown earlier research indicates that self-schooling produces better outcomes for children (including academically) than either state or independent education. In strongly advocating religious schools the government appears to recognise the importance of diversity in underpinning educational development, but in continuing to push a highly centralised national curriculum they completely negate that insight. In line with the arguments that we have made above about childcare Rothermel (2000), proposes financial incentives for parents who wish to take responsibility for their children. Like her, we would argue that learning centres should be freed from any compulsory adherence but also from any imposed curriculum. If education is basically seen by the state as a means of social control then there is little prospect of this changing and it will continue to be a site for resistance. If on the other hand there is a genuine belief in the potential of community self-provisioning then stronger incentives need to be provided by the state to enable this to happen.

A further implication that follows both from recognising the intrinsic value of self-help and also its extent, is that local and national policy needs to be reoriented to reflect this fact. Social care policies for example are largely constructed by social care agencies who carry out a much smaller part of the care function than do individuals, families and communities. Agencies (state or voluntary) who are largely providing residual services still dominate the policy development process. This point can be well illustrated by an observation by two American commentators:

> since informal help is the major source of help with problems for most low income it should be strongly supported. However, the most common approaches to such support – making the informal helper an agent of formal care and making the professional an informal helper – may not be appropriate. (Hoch and Hemmens, 1987)

The idea that formal organisation should be at the centre of decision making, and informal organisation at the periphery is conceptually flawed. They have different roles, and should not exist in hierarchical relationship to each other.

Community self-help can only be supported indirectly

As Burns and Taylor (1998) point out:

> policy interventions are extremely difficult in this area. Mutual Aid can easily be destroyed by attempts to incorporate. The most effective interventions are likely to come though support for mediating organisations in the community and the creation of a benign environment.
>
> A delicate balancing act is needed if mutuality is to be encouraged without being incorporated or suppressed. On the one hand, policy makers may experience mutual aid activities and networks as intangible, volatile and small scale, rising and falling as required and they may therefore see them only as an elusive and frustrating resource to work with. On the other hand, if they do work with them, they run the danger of distorting them. (Burns and Taylor, 1998)

If self-help and mutual aid are to be nurtured, all of the evidence suggests that this needs to be done in a very hands off way. There are essentially two ways in which this can be achieved. First, by creating a policy environment within which community self-help can flourish, which can be done through the types of initiatives outlined in the section above, and second, through indirect investment (which encourages community self-help activities).

'Seeding' community self-help initiatives

As indicated at the end of the last section, one of the strongest tendencies of the state is to attempt to formalise informal activity. It tends not to support things that it cannot control and which do not conform to its rules. But within the arena of self-help it is unlikely that formalisation would be effective (even if was considered desirable). One evaluation of a Danish government initiative to create a household service market called Home Service found that besides 'economic' or cost considerations, strong social norms prevailed that led households to want to do tasks themselves (Sundbo, 1997). This prevented the formalisation of much self-help activity. Similar findings have been identified in England (Williams and Windebank, 2001a).

Governments may wish to harness the third sector and formalise micro-level self-help activity in order to create jobs but this does not mean that they will be successful.

To take the example of LETS. The natural instinct of the state might be to appoint LETS development workers to run them, but this would almost certainly lead to the collapse of their community base and an increasing dependency on the continuing support of the state. It would be rejected by members of LETS as diminishing the sense of collective ownership and opening it up to the danger of incorporation. Our view is that most effective role for the state will be to seed initiatives in areas where they do not exist. The promotion of the idea of LETS, combined with community development support, and maybe, for example, a no strings attached offer of computer equipment and premises could have a significant impact in poor areas where LETS do not exist – particularly if this promotion came through organisations that were trusted like local family centres, religious organisations, housing associations and other community and voluntary sector organisations.

Community development and social capital building

If community self-help is to be encouraged then there needs to be a serious investment in community development and social capital building. Both have the capacity to encourage mutual aid indirectly. Consideration needs to be given to core funding for community workers. Recent investment in community development has been heavily project focused. Projects often run for less than three years. This means that those who have the experience are often looking for their next job before they have got to grips with the job that they are in. Good community development takes years and requires community development workers to have a very close knowledge of their local communities. One of the central roles and skills of a generic community development worker is as a broker into networks (Gilchrist, 2001). This is critical in poorer communities, where 'weak ties' in particular need to be strengthened, and where strong ties can be nurtured for those that come to the communities without kinship and family networks. Effective network development requires long-term stable funding. A number of recent evaluations of community regeneration work have specifically illustrated this need. Burns *et al.* (2001),

for example highlighted the problems of short-term project-based community development expertise in the People in Communities programme for Wales. Burns *et al*. (2002) highlighted a similar problem for the Market and Coastal Towns Initiative in the South West of England. This is beginning to be recognised in recent government reports (Local Government Association, 2002; neighbourhood renewal unit, 2003) but there is little discernable shift towards core funding in practise.

Another important aspect of community development capacity building which can have an important indirect impact on mutual aid and self-help is investment in community buildings. Communities need a hub to build around. Community centres are places where LETS and credit unions can meet; where social networks can be formed through community activity; where allotment seeds can be exchanged and childcare arrangements agreed and so on. Community centres which are run and 'owned' by communities not only provide a hub, but they also provide a neutral space. This allows people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, for example, to feel equally welcome and at home, which in turn enables them to broaden their social networks. But there are still many areas that have no community building at all, and where they do exist they have an ongoing struggle to raise revenue:

> the picture which emerges from the survey is that, for many community buildings, finding the running costs of the building has always been, and continues to be a struggle. Funding came top of the list of major difficulties faced by respondents to the survey. Only a few (10 per cent) felt that this struggle is becoming any easier. Nearly 40 per cent considered that it is getting more difficult. (Marriott, 1987)

This is where volunteering *can* have an impact. Volunteering to support a community building is a way of indirectly supporting mutual aid and self-help which, as we have seen, has a much greater potential to provide support to individuals and families than direct voluntary provision. Similarly, revenue support for staff who are managed by the community is an indirect way of creating spaces within which mutual aid and self-help can emerge. An important vehicle through which community centres can be neutrally and

autonomously managed are Community Development Trusts. Nurturing and supporting these Trusts can be an important part of a regeneration programme, and one which we would explicitly endorse.

There are a number of additional issues which policy-makers should consider when thinking through how community capacity building can enhance community self-help. A particularly important issue is the provision of childcare. Sure Start programmes are beginning to address this need for the under-fours, but many people who have struggled to get engaged in community activity through the Sure Start find that this life line has been cut when their children reach the age of 4. The recent government proposals for Children's Centres do not seem to address this problem. These are being driven by a strong underpinning ethos of getting people who are caught in poverty traps back into work. We would strongly argue that they should be available for those who wish to be engaged in community activity. More broadly we should note that schemes such as Sure Start also have the potential to indirectly support self-help and mutual aid. However, we would strongly caution, that the increasing emphasis on target-driven activity threatens to undermine the huge effort that has been put into work such as nurturing networks of breast-feeding mothers; supporting isolated parents and so on – activities which are critical but hard to measure and to assess in conventional terms.

Neighbourhood policy needs to shift from an emphasis on volunteering to a focus on self-help

There is a great irony in the present governments position. Their adherence to the market is built on a conviction that social organisation and social change cannot be built on altruism, yet their community development strategy is focused almost entirely on volunteering. The Policy Action Team (PAT) report on self-help which has 33 recommendations is only able to offer a handful which relate directly to mutual aid:

> Recommendation 29 – funding intermediary organisations such as Barnardos, NCH, family mediation projects, and faith groups. Recommendation 30 – the development of buddying programmes. Recommendation 31 – support for the development of

neighbourhood endowment funds to be established for the community to allocate as it wishes

The rest of the report is almost entirely focused on volunteering. But as we have seen, there is a limit to how much volunteering is possible in poor neighbourhoods. Furthermore, one of the strongest lessons from our research is that people do not just like to receive. They feel demeaned and devalued by continually accepting 'charity' or being the recipients of volunteering. For them direct reciprocation is often not possible (e.g. exchanging childcare) and they do not have the money to reciprocate financially. This means that schemes which have some sort of tally system, such as LETS, have the greatest potential. They allow for people to ask for what they need, knowing that they can give back to someone in the community.

People in communities get involved in self-help in response to need. This leads directly to mutual activity. Policy-makers need to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the way in which engagement in activities in response to self-interest leads to engagement in mutual activity as we explained in Chapter 1. Otherwise the implication is that poor communities must rely on altruism which in every other arena the governments says is not a realistic foundation on which to build policy. This takes us directly to the next section.

Policy makers need to understand and support the relationship between individual enterprise and community enterprise

One of this key points that we hope that this book has helped to achieve is to understand the relationship between individual enterprise and community enterprise. At present virtually all community funding has to go to formal associations. Giving money to individuals is often seen as putting public money at risk; advantaging some individuals over others and so on. However if the key to strong communities is to get individuals to engage with their communities – both economically and socially, then it is important to give them the resources to do so. There are some examples of successful approaches. A major EC funded programme in Northern Ireland – The Limerick Local Social Capital Programme – has broken with the tradition of not allowing grant monies to go to individuals. So people could ask

for tools which would allow them to build or to garden or a sewing machine or some start up money for a village shop, and so on. These are things that would traditionally be seen as benefiting individuals and so would be unfundable. But they can be crucial to the building of local social capital and would allow people on low incomes to participate in self-help and mutual aid activities more effectively. Readers will remember that in Chapter 3, we showed that while people in lower-income groups got a slightly higher proportion of work done through community self-help, the volume of such work was significantly lower than that of higher-income groups, and the reason for this is that they often did not have the basic equipment which would help them to engage. The potential is to substantially increase the level of engagement if some of these barriers were reduced.

A further example of the way in which nurturing the self-interest of individuals can lead to community activity can be seen in this cameo from Bristol Care and Repair:

> Bristol Care and Repair had been trying, without success to involve users on its management committee. The situation was not turned around as a result of a planned strategy from the organisation but through an opportunistic piece of short term seed funding provided by comic relief for sessional support and material resources for about 10 women to start up a quilting group. The women soon became immersed in quilting and established a very robust network through this artistic activity. As a spin off some of the group became involved in the management committee of Bristol Care and Repair. (Burns and Taylor, 1998: 18)

Building on the success of this initiative Bristol Care and Repair sought money to develop another eight arts initiatives. This is a good example of how funding can be sought to develop spaces within which unpredictable things can be seeded. Care and Repair did not know that one of the outcomes would be a greater engagement in their committee, but they trusted that investing in the individual needs of their clients would produce positive (if unknown) outcomes. This is a very graphic example of the way in which Putnam suggests that the generation of social capital occurs.

The contradictory worlds of informal self-help and formal organisation need to be allowed to develop side by side

We have identified a strong relationship in this book between activity in the informal sector and formal sectors, but they cannot easily be integrated. We pointed out that in contrast to the community, voluntary and state sectors, the arena of community self-help was characterised by a non-hierarchical form of organisation, a lack of formal employees, no funding or regulation by the state and direct rather than representative decision making. Taking these factors into account we would already argue that the distance between formal community organisations and the self-help arena is substantially greater than its distance to the state. But there is a further factor which significantly complicates matters.

This is that the ethos of self-help organisation is in many respects quite contradictory to formal organisation – however community based. Formal organisations are structured around systems of accountability, probity and representativeness. Community self-help comes from a completely different starting point. As Burns and Taylor (1998) point out that:

> the assumption of a seamless web between mutuality and formal systems is misconceived (Hock and Hemmens, 1987). Indeed there may be fundamental contradictions in the roles that each play. The field of community care provides an example. Informal care depends on reciprocity and the character of personal relationships; professional systems are supposed to be detached. (Burns and Taylor, 1998)

To be a professional means to be independent and unbiased; to prioritise according to a system; to avoid being drawn into personal relationships; to operate within systems of probity which ensure that recipients of jobs and services are not related in any way to the providers of jobs and services and so on. It is quite the opposite in the world of self-help where the focus is on encouraging networks of support; extending opportunities to those that you know; building trust by nurturing personal relationships and so on.

In the formal sector an individualised conception of accountability and representativeness is dominant – where accountability is seen as the ability to show an audit trail between an individual and a set of activities, and representativeness is seen as the ability to show a direct link between an individual and the views of a community. But communities do not work like this. In the first place, even in areas which appear homogenous there are always multiple communities so there is no realistic possibility of anyone being representative – and in the second place, community networks are built on trust, and formal systems of accountability are seen by communities as undermining trust. So if individualised notions of accountability continue to be pushed obsessively by this government then there will be no room for the informal sector. In broad terms this means that policymakers need to trust that higher levels of unregulated mutual activity will lead to better outcomes than the lower levels of regulated community activity which can be attained through volunteering and formal community groups. This would open up the possibility of funding for initiatives such as the Limerick Social Capital project. What we are outlining is a collective understanding of accountability which requires us to view community as a system which has a collective intelligence rather than as a series of individual exchanges. This will not be an easy nettle to grasp for a government which is set on a course of centralisation and control of the 'public sphere' through regulation. Ironically though, it accords closely with their espoused communitarian philosophy which sets the growth of individual and collective responsibility against the scourge of dependency – a responsibility which is only likely to be learned through engagement in informal community activity.

Voluntary and community organisations are bound by the same guiding principles as the rest of the formal sector. There is no easy half-way house between them and self-help activities, so the key challenge for society is to learn to live with the contradictions not to try and eradicate them, and in the process eradicate the very lifeblood of communities.

Urgent state intervention is needed to protect self-provisioning

One of the clearest messages from this investigation is that although direct state help can undermine community self-help initiatives,

state policy is important. There is strong international evidence that car sharing schemes and self-build thrive in environments where incentives are provided by the state, and initiatives are seeded by the state, albeit through intermediary organisations. Burns (1985) showed how local government policy on squatting (in the early 1980s) had a major impact on the numbers of squatters and where they were distributed (in London boroughs which had a strong eviction policy squatting declined). Similarly support for self-provisioning (e.g. breastfeeding) has been substantially boosted where it has been advocated by the state.

> Where there is little support for breastfeeding mothers and where most of the information about infant feeding comes from the formula companies, the rates are much lower. (Williams, 2000)

Breastfeeding rates in Norway are among the best in the world. There, mothers receive a year's maternity at 80 per cent of pay or 46 weeks at full pay. Mothers who work and breastfeed are entitled to a two-hour break every day. Since 1970 the Norwegian Government has supported the right of a mother to breastfeed her baby and has encouraged mothers to breastfeed. Only two companies market infant formulas and they comply with the voluntary agreement by not promoting their products. The Norwegian Health Service is not flooded with promotional materials from formula companies; all mothers are aware of the benefits of breastfeeding and have access to support groups (Williams, 2000). In the United Kingdom, initiatives like Sure Start are beginning to make a difference. In Bristol the Hartcliffe, Highridge and Withywood Sure Start for example have achieved an 8 per cent increase in breastfeeding within 6 months of developing a support network for local women. Across the spectrum of self-provisioning activities the extent to which either the government of local councils are prepared to offer support is mixed. Some councils, for example, are selling off allotment land for development, while others have invested strongly in advocating use of allotments for people to grow their own food. The broad message however is that government still has a lot to do to create the conditions within which self-provisioning can flourish both domestically and more critically internationally.

As we identified in Chapter 6 there are powerful market interests ranged against self-provisioning. The state could and should play a major role in protecting its people against them. Responsible citizens

will do what they can to protect self-provisioning by acting as consumers and not buying the products of these companies but while they may stop the action of a company here and there, without the support of government their impact will be relatively easily contained. If governments do not act on these issues there will soon be no safety net at all for those that cannot buy what they need to survive.

Conclusion

The central message of this chapter is that there are three important roles for the state with regard to community self-help. First, it needs to create a more permissive environment within which self-help initiatives can flourish. Second, it can play an important role in supporting and funding intermediary organisations to provide developmental support and advocacy for self-help initiatives (but as indicated this needs to be indirect) and finally it must act quickly to challenge those vested interests which are attempting to snuff out self-provisioning in the pursuit of profit.

8
Community Self-Help in Visions of Future Political Organisation

Self-help in contemporary political philosophy

In this book, we have shown that with the exception of much of the old left, there is widespread support across the political spectrum for the cultivation of some version of community self-help. But significant differences exist in what activity is supported, why it is supported, who should be encouraged to engage in such activity and the role it is seen to play in work and welfare provision. In this concluding chapter we start by pulling together these threads and analysing how community self-help is conceptualised in alternative visions of the future.

To achieve this, we first outline six alternative visions of the future of work and welfare as illustrated in Table 8.1. To understand these we here take each in turn, starting with the Old Left vision of the future of work and welfare.

An Old Left vision of the future of work and welfare

For the Old Left, the future of work and welfare lies in the creation of a full-employment society and/or comprehensive formal welfare provision for those excluded from the formal labour market. The negative side effects of free market capitalism, such as poverty and social exclusion, are to be mitigated through state intervention in the

Table 8.1 Six visions of the future of work and welfare

Economic vision	Welfare vision	Approach towards community self-help	Role of community self-help	Political ideology
Full-employment	Universal formal welfare provision	Repressive	A vestige of pre-capitalist social formations that needs to be eradicated and is a hindrance to the achievement of its economic and welfare objectives	Old Left
Full-employment	Welfare provided through the market	Laissez-faire	A means of perfecting capitalism. Self-help is seen as the safety net for those excluded in lieu of the welfare state	Neo-liberalism
Full-employment	Welfare provided through mutual associations operating within the market	Laissez-faire mediated by mutual association	A means of perfecting capitalism. Mutual organisations provide an insurance-based safety net for those who cannot buy all that they need in the market	Civic Capitalism
Full-employability	Mixed economies of welfare	Selectively Enabling	A means of perfecting capitalism. Self-help complements public and private sector provision by providing an additional tool for creating jobs and improving employability	New Labour Communitari-anism
Full-engagement	Mixed economies of welfare	Enabling	A means of perfecting capitalism	European Social Democracy

Table 8.1 Continued

Economic vision	Welfare vision	Approach towards community self-help	Role of community self-help	Political ideology
			Self-help complements public and private sector provision (a) by providing an additional form of work that can enable the achievement of a full-engagement society and (b) as a third prong in the welfare delivery equation	
Post-capitalist economy	Associationalism	Enabling	A post-capitalist means of organising work and welfare that represents an alternative to formal (public and private sector) modes of provision	Post-capitalist radical left/ ecology

market sphere. It is the state that has the obligation to provide public goods that markets cannot deliver (or can only do so in a fractured way). Citizens should not have responsibility for finding their own solutions. A formidable government presence in the economy, and other aspects of society as well, is seen as normal and desirable.

Given this vision, it is of no surprise that the most vociferous opposition to self-help comes from the Old Left. With few exceptions, thinkers within this tradition argue that fostering the capacity of people to help themselves is nothing more than a bid to reduce welfare costs and part of an ideological swing from a rights-based welfare system to one founded on duties or responsibilities. As Eisenschitz (1997: 160) puts it, 'Self-help legitimates the disengagement of the state from welfare pointing towards the informal economy as a replacement.' The inevitable outcome of advocating community self-help is a dual society. Those marginalised from the formal labour market will be cast into reliance on a second-class sphere of activity

whilst capitalism focuses upon reproducing those of most use to itself (Amin *et al.*, 2002). Community self-help needs to be opposed because it runs counter to the desired goals of full-employment and a comprehensive formal welfare 'safety net'.

A neo-liberal vision of the future of work and welfare

Akin to the Old Left, neo-liberals adopt the goal of full-employment and view entry into the formal labour market as the route to an inclusive society. However, the manner in which this is to be achieved is very different. Regulating the market is not the solution but the cause of the economic-ills befalling society. The way to achieve progress is to liberate the market from 'external interference' by giving market forces free reign (e.g. De Soto, 1989; Minc, 1982; Sauvy, 1984; Stoleru, 1982).

It is thus market-led economic growth that is to provide welfare, not the welfare state. So while the Old Left view the welfare state as a necessary institution for the functioning of modern welfare capitalism and a pre-requisite for efficiency and growth as well as individual self-realisation, neo-liberals see it as interfering with individual freedoms and the ability of the market to optimise the efficient allocation of scarce resources. It is seen as destructive of civil order, especially duties and obligations associated with the family.

While neo-liberals support the principle of self-help, they see no need to intervene to foster it. Deregulating the economy and dismantling formal welfare provision will provide all the incentive that is required. For these theorists self-help represents the people's 'spontaneous and creative response to the state's incapacity to satisfy the basic needs of the impoverished masses' (De Soto, 1989: xiv–xv). As Sauvy (1984: 274) explains, such work represents 'the oil in the wheels, the infinite adjustment mechanism' in the economy. It is the elastic in the system that allows a snug fit of supply to demand that is the aim of every economy. If such activity is left to operate unhindered, then the family and civil society would be able to provide this snug fit.

Civic Capitalism

A more community-based version of this position is that of David Green who describes himself as a civic capitalist. He draws his

inspiration from the nineteenth-century-friendly societies and the idea of localised mutual insurance which underpinned them. He describes the way in which friendly societies evolved from local social gatherings into sophisticated organisations to which members paid a regular contribution. This gave them an agreed entitlement to benefit if they were too ill to work. Out of these, federations emerged to alleviate the problem of small societies running out of money, and these in turn grew to the point where the system as a whole was working to the benefit of millions of people:

> It is common to think of private charity as the primary alternative to the welfare state, whereas mutual aid associations provided security and even medical services for far more people than did charities. When national insurance was first enacted in Britain in 1911, over three quarters of those covered by the scheme (some nine million out of 12 million) were already members of mutual aid societies (Green, 1999: 18)

Green's argument is that they provided all the services that enabled individuals to be self-supporting:

> If illness or injury struck, the friendly societies provided both a cash benefit and medical care, usually through the participation of each societies own doctor, who was typically paid a capitation.
>
> If the breadwinner died young, the society ensured that widow and orphans were provided for. Independence could also be threatened by old age, and again the societies provided support though not in the form of a pension. Typically members tried to keep working as long as possible with the fall-back of sick pay as age took its toll with the friendly society nursing home as a last resort.
>
> Thus, every member and his family was covered against the main dangers to independence: illness or injury, early death, old age and temporary loss of job (Green, 1999: 22)

The localised nature of these processes and the smallness in scale are important. Green sees face-to-face accountability as being crucial.

> The success of the friendly societies was the result of the face to face involvement of members in the local branches which

> administered benefits. The members knew who was paying. It was not an anonymous 'them' but the members themselves. Members felt that they had a real stake in the organisation and their sense of belonging not only discouraged manipulation of the system, but also created a genuine sense of fraternity. (Green, 1999: 23)

The central weakness in his proposition (which he goes some way to acknowledging) is that while the friendly societies were very well used (he estimates that by 1910 there were 6.6 million members of friendly societies as against 2.5 million members of trade unions and 2.5 million members of cooperative societies), their membership was heavily skewed in favour of particular sections of society. Women were not members, and it appears that few of the very poor were members. Green points out that some dockworkers were members and low-paid railway workers joined in large numbers, but these were exceptions.

> There were many who ranked among the low paid, particularly those in irregular or seasonal work, who found it difficult to keep up contributions. (Green, 1993: 69)

So friendly societies were a solution for the 'respectable poor' who had a regular wage, but not for those who were unemployed, very low paid, or employed in unstable jobs. While we are concerned in this book to explore possible future welfare systems we are particularly concerned to explore the role of mutual aid and self-help for those who are the most socially excluded. It is precisely those who are most 'dependent' who would be excluded from his scheme.

A communitarian vision of the future of work and welfare

For communitarians in general, and in the UK New Labour in particular, entry into employment is seen as the main route to a more inclusive society. Given this employment-centred approach, there has been some confusion and debate over why self-help is advocated and how it is viewed (e.g. Burns and Taylor, 1998; Jordan, 1998; Jordan and Jordan, 2000; Levitas, 1998). Superficially, it appears that community self-help has little role to play.

The significance of self-help lies in their understanding of the Labour market. New Labour has recognised the significant and intractable gap between current employment participation rates and full-employment (Williams and Windebank, 2001a,b). So the goal of full-employment has been reformulated 'to realise Europe's full employment potential by working towards raising the employment rate to as close as possible to 70% by 2010 …' (European Commission, 2000: 15). As Amin *et al*. (2002) conclude, 'full-employability' has replaced 'full-employment'. New Labour does not believe that the private sector can be relied on to deliver this in an era when productivity increases have been uncoupled from employment growth. Neither, moreover, can the postwar corporatist welfare state model be relied upon to spend its way out of economic problems. The 'fiscal crisis' of the state, widely predicted in the 1970s (Habermas, 1975; O'Connor, 1973), has become firmly established.

As a result, New Labour has turned to the more formal and organised end of the spectrum of community self-help viewing it as an additional means of job creation and improving employability. We pointed out in the last chapter that the formal community sector is not in fact where the vast majority of community self-help is taking place. We also highlighted the paradox that much of what they describe as self-help is in fact volunteering which, as we demonstrate, is both practically and philosophically a much weaker basis on which to construct effective local policies. Nevertheless this position is being explicitly advocated in the urban and neighbourhood regeneration policies being developed by the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) and the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU). Here New Labour articulates support for community-based initiatives but only in the context of deprived areas and as a stepping-stone back into the formal economy (Amin *et al*., 2002).

These forms of community self-help are fostered in economic policy only in order to provide work for those excluded from employment in the private and public spheres, or to improve their employability (see Chapter 5). In the realm of welfare policy, New Labour does however see community self-help as a complement: 'self-help is a complement to, not a substitute for, effective public services' (Home Office, 1999: vi) capable of providing the many welfare needs currently unmet by formal public and private provision. Community self-help is brought into the equation as a third prong

that can be harnessed to create 'mixed economies of welfare' (Giddens, 1998, 2000, 2002). As Giddens (2000: 55–56) puts it,

> The 'design options' offered by the two rival political positions were ministic – they looked either to government or to the market as the means of co-ordinating the social realm. Others have turned to the community or civil society as the ultimate sources of social cohesion. However, social order, democracy and social justice cannot be developed where one of these sets of institutions is dominant. A balance between them is required for a pluralistic society to be sustained.

Or as the UK Prime Minister, Tony Blair (1998: 14) puts it,

> The Old Left sometimes claimed that the state should largely subsume civil society, the New Right believes that if the state retreats from social duties, civic activism will automatically fill the void. The Third Way recognises the limits of government in the social sphere, but also the need for government, within those limits, to forge new partnerships with the voluntary sector … 'enabling' government strengthens civil society rather than weakens it, and helps families and communities improve their own performance.

We should reiterate however that while they see self-help as complementary in the social sphere, this is not the case in the economic sphere. Here, their approach remains embedded in an ideology of formalisation and there is a fine line between their rhetoric of cultivating various forms of community self-help as a means of job creation and improving employability, and the old left approach of repressing community self-help.

A European social democratic vision of the future of work and welfare

As we indicated in the introduction to this book New Labour's 'third way' is by no means the only alternative to old left and neo-liberal thinking. If anything, it is a watered down version of a more radical 'troisième voie' (third way) that has bubbled under the surface of mainstream European social democratic thought for some decades (e.g. Delors, 1979). Although the welfare agenda in this radical

European tradition is similar to New Labour in that it argues for mixed economies of welfare, its economic vision, especially in relation to the role of community self-help, differs significantly. In European social democratic thought, the view is that the future of work needs to be unshackled from an employment-focused vision (e.g. Archibugi, 2000; Delors, 1979; Gorz, 1999). Or as Beck (2000: 58) puts it:

> the idea that social identity and status depend only upon a person's occupation and career must be taken apart and abandoned, so that social esteem and security are really uncoupled from paid employment.

Although employment is viewed as one route to an inclusive society, it is not considered the only, or the best, route. From this viewpoint getting a formal job in order to earn money to pay somebody else to provide a good or service is seen as a far less direct route to meeting need than community self-help. Thus a new balance is sought between employment on the one hand, and community self-help on the other, where the aim is a 'full-engagement' society rather than a 'full employment' society. This mixed economy is thus not advocated solely in the realm of welfare provision, it is also applied to the organisation of working time (e.g. Aznar, 1981; Beck, 2000; Delors, 1979; Greffe, 1981; Jordan, 1998; Laville, 1996; Mayo, 1996; Roustang, 1987; Williams and Windebank, 2001a). Rather than relying purely on job creation, European social democrats seek to encourage complementary means of livelihood – 'complementary social inclusion policies' (e.g. Beck, 2000; Williams and Windebank, 2001a; Williams *et al.*, 2001). Recognising that community self-help cannot entirely substitute for those excluded from employment, it is advocated as an additional means of livelihood (e.g. Beck, 2000; Gorz, 1999; Rifkin, 1997; Williams and Windebank, 2001a). This requires active intervention. Just as there is intervention in the formal economic sphere to prevent the socio-spatial inequalities that arise when the market is left to operate unhindered, likewise without intervention socio-spatial inequalities in community self-help (highlighted in Chapter 3) will persist and the poor will be unable to mitigate their circumstances through their community self-help activity. The objective is not to 'colonise' (Heinze and Olk, 1982) the realm of community self-help by incorporating it into the formal wage system (as in

New Labour's economic discourse) but to foster it as a separate but complementary means of livelihood.

A post-capitalist vision of the future of work and welfare

While neo-liberal, communitarian and radical social democratic visions of the future of work and welfare all view community self-help as a way of perfecting capitalism, the two approaches considered here (those of the post capitalist radical left and the radical greens) view it as a means of challenging capitalism. The post capitalist radical left offer at least three reasons for seeking to reduce the dominance of employment in the lives of all citizens and to develop alternatives. First, they maintain that employment is structured in a manner that is stultifying, alienating and leaves those in jobs with little energy to compensate for this outside their hours of employment (e.g. Archibugi, 2000; Aznar, 1981; Gorz, 1985, 1999; Laville, 1996; Mayo, 1996). Second, employment is seen as having become structured in such a manner because society has lost its way (Gorz, 1985; Mayo, 1996; Robertson, 1985). What were once means to an end (e.g. economic growth, having a job) have now become ends in themselves. Third and finally, they believe that the present-day crises surrounding employment (e.g. achieving full-employment, increasing flexibilisation) are not problems to be overcome but opportunities to rethink the current organisation of work.

Aznar (1981: 39) articulates this as follows:

> any society which proposes that its citizens spend the whole of their time, energy and empathy engaged in an activity which cannot, by its very nature, soak up this energy, is fundamentally perverse.

This is reinforced by Gorz (1999: 72) who argues that,

> The imperative need for a sufficient, regular income is one thing. The need to act, to strive, to test oneself against others and be appreciated by them is quite another. Capitalism systematically links the two, conflates them, and upon that conflation establishes capital's power and its ideological hold on people's minds.

These theorists see mutual aid and self-help playing a crucial role in responding to this crisis of work. They have started to articulate

the notion of a different type of 'autonomous' work which is creative, controllable and socially useful, and which has a purpose for the person performing it other than the earning of a wage (Windebank, 1991). This argument can be characterised by two positions. The first articulates a vision of autonomous work that is very close to existing forms of mutual aid and self-help. The second takes this a step further calling for a complete redrawing of the boundaries which divide various categories of work from one another.

In the first scenario (which is rooted in a socialist tradition), the desire is to bring about a society in which mutual aid and self-help would play a major part. Here the state would retain an important role in organising the essential work on which a society as a whole relies for the production of its staple goods (Gorz, 1985, 1999; Granstedt, 1980). Gorz (1985) for example, calls for a new balance between three types of work: heteronomous work; small-scale cooperative and communal free enterprise; and autonomous household-based activity. The ADRET collective (1977) argues that a pattern of organisation for work should evolve where each person would perform an average of two hours a day of 'constrained work' (which could be translated into so many days a week, months a year, and so on, according to individual tastes and circumstances). In conjunction with such work, there would be an absolute ceiling placed on the amount of goods and services produced in this manner. Such a new organisation of work could not come about within a productivist/growth economy fuelled by the capitalist profit motive. Thus, the market would be replaced for the most part, by the State which it is argued, would organise heteronomous work.

The second scenario (which is rooted in a libertarian and ecological tradition) sees changes in work patterns coming about through piecemeal initiatives. The autonomous sphere would develop as a result of civil society nibbling away at the domains of the formal market and State (e.g. Lalonde and Simmonet, 1978; Lebreton, 1978). They suggest that growing autonomy on the part of individuals to work according to their own needs and desires (instead of according to those of industry) will result in a more diversified society and economy that will be more ecologically viable. 'Autogestion' therefore, is essential to environmental protection since it would allow society to become less concentrated and less ossified, more diverse and flexible and as such, in keeping with and more responsive to the

needs of the biosphere. For these theorists, therefore, encouraging autonomous work is necessary not only to provide a more fulfilling life for individuals but also for ecological reasons. The way to develop the autonomous sphere is for civil society to develop community self-help initiatives that replace those currently conducted by the market and the state.

In radical ecological thought, a large body of literature exists that seeks to replace formal economic activity with community self-help in order to foster sustainable economic development (e.g. Dobson, 1993; Ekins and Max-Neef, 1992; Henderson, 1999; Mander and Goldsmith, 1996; Robertson, 1985). Here, socialism is seen to be a spent political force. The quarrels between neo-liberals and the old left were simply over the best way of boosting productivism and realising greater materialism for the majority of people. The advent of New Labour's third way grounded in employment-centred social integrationism continues in the same vein, merely introducing a further alternative to free-market capitalism now that socialism is dead. For radical greens, the differences between all of these approaches are differences that make no difference. The pursuit of greater materialism and enhanced productivism displays how what were originally means to an end have become ends in themselves in these approaches (e.g. Capra and Spretnak, 1985; Dobson, 1993; Mander and Goldsmith, 1996). For them, there is a need to recapture the ends. To achieve this, a reconsideration is required of first, the relationship between people and nature and second, flowing from this, the direction of society (e.g. Devall, 1990; Eckersley, 1992; Goodin, 1992).

Their argument is that ecologically sustainable development can only occur if a more small-scale decentralised way of life based upon greater self-reliance is pursued (e.g. Ekins and Max-Neef, 1992; Gass, 1996; Henderson, 1999; Lipietz, 1995; Mander and Goldsmith, 1996; Robertson, 1985). The development of community self-help thus resonates with their desire for more localised, self-reliant and sustainable economic development which is less destructive towards nature (e.g. Douthwaite, 1996; Ekins and Max-Neef, 1992; Gass, 1996; Gibson, 1996; Henderson, 1999; Lipietz, 1995; Mander and Goldsmith 1996; Goldsmith *et al.*, 1995; McBurney, 1990; Morehouse, 1997; Robertson, 1985; Roseland, 1998; Trainer, 1996). They believe that global problems can only be resolved by acting in a local manner (e.g. Mander and Goldsmith, 1996). Hence rather than pursue the

end of economic growth through open economies and export-led development policies, their objective is to ensure that the basic needs of all are met through largely self-reliant, relatively closed economic systems (e.g. Ekins and Max-Neef, 1992; Robertson 1995; Morehouse, 1997). For 'strong' sustainability theorists employment is seen as having a tendency to promote open economies. Mutual aid and self-help are seen as an alternative. This is often interpreted outside this deep ecology approach as a desire to return to some pre-industrial past based on self-sufficiency. But most ecologists do not seek for everything to be produced locally, nor do they seek an end to trade. They simply seek to forge a better balance between local, regional, national and international markets (Douthwaite, 1996; Porritt, 1996). They also seek to gain greater control over what is produced, where, when and how, so localities are less dependent upon the foibles of the global economic system for their future well being. In other words, they seek self-reliance, not self-sufficiency. Far from reducing living standards, they argue that it makes economic sense for a locality to seek to increase its net income and wealth, environmental sense to reduce unnecessary degradation and resource consumption and social and political sense to consider more directly meeting the needs and wants of citizens.

The ecological challenge to the employment relations is not only grounded on a critique of global economic growth. It also embodies a critique of what we value and why. Capra (1985: 245) argues that in the industrial paradigm 'Work with the lowest status tends to be that work which is most "entropic", i.e., where the tangible effort is most easily destroyed.' Self-help in the form of routine domestic work, which is repetitive and leaves no lasting impact, is an example. Conversely, 'high status jobs involve work that creates something lasting' (e.g. nuclear warheads). For him, the opposite should be the case.

Uniting all these radicals is their wish to put an end to, or at least considerably reduce the domination of 'heteronomous' work, by which they mean those productive activities over which individuals have little or no control. Some with leanings towards the Old Left argue that this can be achieved by the state taking control of heteronomous production and designating the boundaries between the autonomous and heteronomous spheres. Increasingly, however, changes are sought through piecemeal civil society initiatives that

will nibble away at the domains of private and public sector provision. These radicals thus overlap considerably with a second separate but interrelated stream of thought seeking to cultivate community self-help as an alternative to the market.

A sustainable, libertarian, equitable society?

So what should we make of the different versions of self-help articulated above. The Old Left view is untenable for many reasons, but in the context of this book we would want to stress that it fails to get to grips with the arguments about dependency and about the deep-seated failures of the state which we articulated in the Chapter 1 of this book. But, at least the egalitarian sentiments of the Old Left have something to offer. Neo-liberalism does not even offer this. It patently fails to provide any serious safety net to those who are poor – everyone is exposed to the ravages of the market, and large numbers of people suffer extreme deprivation as a result of the structural inequalities that it imposes. Community self-help in this context can only be seen as a basic survival mechanism – not even a real safety net. And as we have seen the market is steadily eroding the capacity of individuals and communities to provide for themselves, colonising for profit even the most fundamental forms of self-provisioning – the giving of milk to a child, and the growing of food from seed. Civic Capitalism at face value appears to mitigate some the harsher aspects of pure Neo-liberalism. It softens the blow of the market and seems to offer some sort of safety net. Green offers a helpful perspective on welfare for those that see the state as the only possibility for social welfare provision. Many will not know that the Friendly societies formed a fairly comprehensive welfare net for millions of people. Mutualised institutions of this sort may have some part to play in providing support to those who are in work, are reasonably paid, and who have some job security, but the evidence is unequivocal that they never worked effectively for those who were really poor and socially excluded, nor did they have anything to offer women and those who worked in the home. We have offered a more detailed critique of the communitarian project in Chapter 7. Its main weakness of the communitarian project in the short term is that it does not recognise the importance of community self-help as a strategy in itself. In the long term, because it is fundamentally a pragmatic

amalgam of state and market, it will never escape the issues of dependency that it seeks to resolve. Similarly, as long as it values work in the home and community less well than formal work, the gender equality agenda that it espouses will remain pie in the sky.

Thinkers such as Gorz offer some important insights. The idea that citizens should each have to do a element of 'constrained' work in the interest of society, combined with 'autonomous' work which is both fulfilling and creative has some potential but needs to be considerably developed. The radical ecological argument puts the issue of sustainable development centre stage and challenges us to think about ways of organising work which are not based on destructive economic growth. Their weakness is that they remain over-reliant on the notion of closed local economies which in an age of global communications is probably unrealistic. The normative challenge for us is to explore how relatively closed local economic systems can exist within a complex open global economy. LETS have great potential here, because they retain the value of work within local communities. The ecological argument also needs to meet the challenge of equality – while state service provision may be ineffective, there is surely a role for a minimal State in ensuring a basic income for all of its citizens.

So given the issues raised above, what might we learn from the arguments developed in this book about the *shape* of a future society?

At the deepest level we have explored some issues which pertain to human nature itself. The evidence we advance leads us to a straightforward conclusion. An effectively functioning society cannot be built on the basis of pure altruism, but it can be based on the idea of cooperation and reciprocity. In this respect the work of Axelrod (and other game theorists) and Putnam in particular provides strong support to the basic thesis of Kropotkin. The idea of splitting 'self-interest' from 'collective-interest' is highly damaging. Our work strongly suggests that these exist in relation to each other. To act in the world in the interest of yourself and your family is to engage in relationships with others, and by engaging in relationships with others moral sensibilities and social bonds are built which lead directly to actions in the collective interest. Robust political philosophy and the social policy which flows from it must be based on an understanding of this relationship. If reciprocity is seen to be the basis of cooperation, and cooperation is the primary evolutionary principle which enables

survival in fast-moving systems, then some thought needs to be given to the giving side of the equation. Our research revealed a strong resistance to receiving without being able to give in return. It tells us that the truism that people do not like being the recipients of charity is more deeply ingrained than we might suspect. This suggests a limited role for volunteering and charity as direct means of tackling social exclusion. People who are socially excluded need to be enabled to give back as well as to receive. Again LETS have a great deal of potential in this respect because they are based on tally systems. Yet one of the practical lessons that we learned from our research on LETS was that many people did not have the resources to participate. Those with more money benefited more from these schemes than those with less. So tools, and skills and training and self-confidence will be just as important as a basic income in the process of transforming the welfare economy.

At the level of social policy an important conclusion is emerging. The distinction between paid and unpaid work is false and outdated. Welfare systems need to be based on the principle of social and economic participation rather than engagement in the formal economy. It is a nonsense that a mother or father has to go to work to pay for someone else to look after their child when the work is the same whether they do it or someone else does. Accepting the logic of this position would mean completely rethinking the way in which welfare systems worked. There is clearly a great deal more work to be done here.

One of the great challenges of our time is to increase citizen participation in civil society. This is extremely difficult to do where there is overdependence on the state or the market. So steps to challenge dependency are important. Radical libertarian thinkers like Hayek and Nozick on the right of the political spectrum argue for a minimum state which is largely there to ensure property rights, and so on. Our view is that serious thought needs to go into exploring the shape of a minimum state whose central task is to ensure a basic minimum welfare provision. If we adopted similar principles to the Active Citizens Credits scenario that we discussed earlier then the major philosophical problem highlighted by the political right – the free rider problem – could be significantly ameliorated. In essence this argument is that there is always a disincentive to contribute towards 'public goods' because someone else is providing them for you.

This feeds into a frequently articulated concern that those who do not contribute to society should not receive the economic rewards that society can provide. That is all well and good if everyone is able to gain and benefit from decent (if any) employment but patently they are not. When Beck (2000: 60) claims that 'Only when every man and woman has one foot in paid employment, and perhaps the other in civil labour, will it be possible to avoid a situation where the "third sector" ... becomes a ghetto of the poor', he shines the spotlight on what is now required. By concentrating on how this might be achieved, the seeds of a new future could be planted that would see the 'third way' truly become a radical departure from the past. If a universal income was based on your contribution to family, community and society as well as to the formal economy then everyone would be contributing. This would be a better foundation stone on which to build a just and sustainable society than anything that mainstream politicians are contemplating now.

Endnote

This book has tried not to offer a prescriptive vision of a society based on self-help. What we hope it has done is first, to articulate the importance and extent of self-help in contemporary society, and second, to support our strongly held view, that community self-help needs to be put centre stage in future visions of social and economic organisation. While community self-help can be seen as a 'safety net' for those struggling to survive within global capitalism, or as a route to full employment, its real potential lies in a recognition of its own intrinsic value as means of exchange which simultaneously provides for individual need and encourages the development of social responsibility.

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