

Hans Lobstein

## Who are the Oppressed?

Very well. Children are the oppressed. Yes, if it comes down to it, I would say children are truly the oppressed. And this could well be where the story starts. Would you like to write it?

This was one of the brilliant questions asked at the AHP Chichester conference. We attended a series of seminars on the Self and Society, to study in some detail the relationship between society, the system, and how it can be improved, and the individuals and their own attitudes and relationships as they may affect this system, or the system them.

I suppose it may be my guilty conscience that this question keeps coming back at me. I work in the social services and we have frequent discussions on the effectiveness of social work. Is it just a palliative to keep the system going, to prop up those who pull the puppet strings: does it really do any good to anyone or does it do more harm than good? And I keep asking myself, really, who are the oppressed? It may well be the social workers themselves, like psychiatrists, working out their own problems.

It certainly isn't the miners or the firemen, or the old lady at the post office in front of me in a long queue, fumbling with her purse and papers, collecting her £23 pension. It isn't, surely, the dog owner who takes his/her dog for a walk and lets it foul my pavement. It certainly isn't the young man from Cambridge who talks about the revolution to come and the high price of the conference which precludes its use by the oppressed. Is it really money that keeps them away? Some groups offer free places taken up by single parents on social security. I have never heard them label themselves oppressed. Perhaps they don't even know it. Or is it the young woman who talks about blacks and women's lib and battered wives? I know three such hostels for battered wives and I know of a timid young woman there who regularly gets beaten up by another woman. They find shelter only to act out what has been done to them, perhaps from childhood on. What can you do? Do you put the aggressive one out on the street, with her children?

I feel oppressed, sometimes, when I am frustrated and cannot carry out all I would like to do. The Councillors, the politicians, are the oppressors, so I am told. But those I know personally mean well and work hard for public good. So who are the oppressors? Will the ones who work for the revolution now be any less oppressive when, if, they get into power? On the contrary.

The National Association for the Care and Rehabilitation of Offenders has a programme called the LINK scheme in which they run hostels for young people who have been given a choice by the magistrates to either go to Borstal or live in such a hostel and go to work. These are sometimes very angry young men who have hardly attended school, joined gangs and formed their own thoughts and feelings of what society is about. Normally, if they work, they would come home disgruntled, eager to get out to join their mates

and whatever they may be up to, using their own initiative, their own power, having been pushed around all day, bossed about, put down maybe all their lives. Many of them come from violent homes and act out what has been done to them. But now they are in this hostel and have their tea and this group meeting after tea. How was the day, they are asked, how did you get on? Oh, this bloody sister, this charge nurse (he is a hospital porter), she keeps telling me to do this and that, and never a word of appreciation. Very well, be the charge nurse, and you be the head porter, and you can be me, in charge here, and may be a policeman and a magistrate. Let's act it all out together. Well, says the new chargehand, get on with the job, no smoking here, get a move on, no slacking. Piss off, says his former self, under his breath. What did you say? Call the police, call the magistrates. Put him in the punishment cell, and they know exactly how to punish and degrade and insult each other. But what startles me is that they are much harder on each other than anyone else in authority is likely to be. They take delight in making the punishments more severe, out of all proportion to the crime. So what's going on? A taste of power before the revolution?

One of the LINK men, that is those who had gone through this course for six months and are now helping new young men through the same experience, comes over to me and sits by me. He can hardly be more than eighteen. He has spotted the difficulty I have understanding their language. He translates for me. I look at him and I cry.

Just one last word about jobs and work and young people. At meetings of parents teachers, local groups, young people, I am often asked, aggressively, why doesn't the government do something about it? Why doesn't the local council spend more money on this or that, why isn't something done about it? And all I can do is throw it right back at them. Why don't you do something about it? Form a local pressure group, find out who makes what decisions, form local co-ownership and co-operative work groups. Only jobs are scarce. There is plenty of work to be done, derelict houses, dirty streets, bad and slow services, overgrown gardens, and much more. Who has the power? What power? How do I exercise my power? How do I find my power? Effectively? Ah, here is the rub. Do I want to know about your power? Do I want to share with you on an equal basis? Who has ever heard of parents, teachers or bosses, sharing their own fears and joys on an equal basis with their children, pupils or employees?

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June Posey

## Travels with Morgana

Infrequently I do fantasy trips with Morgana acting as my guide. It is perhaps unusual that apart from doing a relaxation exercise and leading me into the fantasy, Morgana does not intervene in any way but lets the fantasy unfold. Sometimes this embodies some universal truth which at that time I need to understand. Such seems to be the story of