

## Day Two of Tragedy of the Market: From Crisis to Commons

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Saturday, January 07, 2012

<http://politicsrespun.org/2012/01/day-two-of-tragedy-of-the-market-from-crisis-to-commons/>

[Tragedy of the Market: From Crisis to Commons](#)

January 6-8, 2012

Vancouver/Burnaby

All panelist [biographies are here](#).

Below are some lessons learned and observations from the sessions.

Friday:

[The opening panel is recorded in the Twitter storify here](#).

Saturday:

Opening Panel

A Global Tradition: History of the Commons

Silvia Federici

- Rebuilding our Commons will allow us to live in a free and self-determined way.
- When we talk about the Commons, we are not talking about small-scale experiments like communes, but whole social formations.
- The Commons involves sharing our resources because nature is not for sale. The principle of common use/sharing prevails. There is also no Commons without community.
- We have to reject the notion of global Commons as proposed by the World Bank because we don't have a global community.
- The Commons has a very democratic character.
- The “public” is regulated and controlled from above. The Commons is controlled, managed and shaped from below.
- So it is obvious that capitalism had to destroy the Commons. And now dispossession is a feature of capitalism, and now neoliberalism is committed to the total marketization and commercialization of all of life.
- Not only Commons in space, but Commons of knowledge is being privatized.
- So in our political and everyday lives, we need to overcome the ideas that capitalism has conditioned in us: the opposition to common interest.

Glen Coulthard

- There can be two ways of looking at self-determination: place-based and relational as well as

sovereigntist and exclusionary.

- Mutual obligation means that as people honour our obligations to the land, the land will provide for us.
- Capitalist accumulation has been an affront to people's relationship with our environment.

Farah Shroff

- An injury to one is an injury to all.
- In many languages we use family words to speak to strangers: brother, sister, uncle, auntie.
- Unity and oneness are founding platforms for creating a commons.
- We also have to remember how we can see the whole in the one.

Reclaiming Knowledge Panel:

Silvia Federici, David Chariandy, Pat Howard, Heather Morrison

- The panellists presented a general overview of neoliberal motivations to privatize public services like education, the corporatization of academic journal production and the challenge of creating a commons within the education system while think past the commons within a context of a mode of production.
- Competitiveness in academia undermines sharing and communal knowledge. Competitiveness is a tactic of enclosure of the Commons.
- How do we work towards keeping knowledge in the Commons?
  - the open textbook movement
  - restoring First Nations languages
  - attending school for knowledge instead of just for a degree
  - bridge the gap between academia and the rest of society
  - resist patenting genes
  - develop alternatives to universities that support the search for knowledge, not producing “university graduates”
  - build a commons in the classroom [without getting fired]
  - be the media, but outside of Facebook [blogs, Twitter, etc.]

## **Autonomous Labour Organizing**

*Dave Bleakney, Susan Lee, Jeff Shantz & Sara Sahulka*

- A review of temporary foreign and migrant worker programs, policies and ideologies. In 2008/9 there were 280k temporary visas outnumbered immigrants seeking permanent resident status leads to a permanent class of precarious workers.
- The Vancouver Compassion Club has been run as a collective for 14 years with democratized leadership and decision-making.
- BC's labour laws were used to force an employer to actually pay undocumented workers who had been unpaid for 5 months.
- Labour unions are sometimes happy to support activists groups without actually encouraging

members to show up to physically support activist actions.

- Unions are the strongest when locals are talking to each other, not following directions from above.
- We need to build more meaningful relationships between unions and activist groups making a difference on the ground.
- Unions used to be more present in our daily lives, contributing to working class culture and community building like bowling leagues and dances.
- Unions need to build structures that allow members to support each other on the ground.
- Union resources can be used to support organizing with anti-poverty groups and equity/justice groups.
- Unions can organize flying squads to support actions from activist groups.
- What models of organizing will help unions do more progressive action beyond just bargaining for wages, benefits and working conditions?
  - Workers need more decision-making at work and in their unions.
  - Workers need ways of supporting all social justice actions in the community.
  - We need to build connections between worker movements and cooperative movements.

## Creating Spaces for Our Movements

### Purple Thistle

- The Purple Thistle is a community space collective that provides space for groups to work on projects and be involved in activist events.

### Kirpa Kaur

- From the Sikh tradition, communal meals were illegal centuries ago because of caste laws, but now the value of that joined space is enriching spiritual/political space.
- Sikh spaces today are generally depoliticized without strong bridges built to marginalized communities.

### Lisa Moore

- Rhizome is a shared living space of diverse communities that can support social justice work and grassroots organizing.
- The space is autonomous and directed by those using it.
- While it is legally structured as a business, it is anti-profit, so it sells food, but it also collects donations.
- The space is for meetings, events, planning meetings, socializing, celebrations, and free stores, with about 250 events/year.
- With concurrent meetings, there is also some unpredictable cross-pollination among participants.
- Any space can be a model to the capitalist norm: they look like a restaurant.
- They are challenging the norms of the market, beyond the pay for food or beg for food model, beyond individual consumption, with pay what you can/feel.
- Shared space builds community because we learn each other's name and empower their presence in society.

- Decision-making is participatory, and since they're a business, any space/organization can do this.

Discussion:

- Space issues became in public conversation because of the Occupy movement, particularly when it comes to who has/controls/needs space.
- Media space is important, particularly in contrast with corporate media.