

# Using the Democratic Past to End Neoliberalism in Universities: Action Research, Socio-technical Systems Design, and the Global Future

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## **Abstract**

Honouring Werner Fricke means carrying on his work. This essay argues for the applicability of the lessons and strategies learned from the successes of the “socio-technical systems design” and “industrial democracy” movement to the reconstruction of universities as stakeholder – designed and managed organisations. Universities must now conduct research and teach in ways that promote social mobility and solidarity, and prepare new generations to reclaim welfare states from the global inequality and environmental collapse created by neoliberalism. Doing this means fundamental organisational change away from Neo-Taylorism by means of approaches learned in the previous generations of the industrial democracy movement.

**Keywords:** industrial democracy, Neo-Taylorism, neoliberalism, socio-technical systems design, universities

## **Usando el pasado democrático para acabar con el neoliberalismo en las universidades: Investigación-Acción, Diseño de Sistemas Socio-técnicos y el Futuro Global**

## **Resumen**

*Honrar a Werner Fricke significa llevar adelante su trabajo. Este ensayo aboga por la aplicabilidad de las lecciones y estrategias aprendidas de los éxitos del movimiento de “diseño de sistemas socio-técnicos” y “democracia industrial” en la reconstrucción de la universidad como organizaciones diseñadas y gestionadas por los actores interesados e involucrados. Las universidades deben ahora realizar investigaciones y enseñar de forma que promuevan la movilidad social y la solidaridad, y preparen a las nuevas generaciones para recuperar los estados de bienestar de la desigualdad global y el colapso ambiental creado por el neoliberalismo. Hacer esto significa un cambio organizativo fundamental alejado del Neo-Taylorismo mediante enfoques aprendidos en las generaciones anteriores del movimiento de la democracia industrial.*

**Palabras clave:** Democracia industrial, Neo-Taylorismo, neoliberalismo, diseño de sistemas socio-técnicos, universidades.

## Introduction

This essay honours Werner Fricke but not with a retrospective encomium. What has happened in the global system under neoliberalism is so destructive that taking up the cause and approaches Werner has used for decades to improve working life and social solidarity is the most meaningful way to celebrate his work.

I have known Werner since at least 1985. We met during the first meetings of the LOM programme<sup>1</sup> in Sweden and then again, we worked together in the AR training programme that grew out of the LOM experience between 1993 and 1995. Throughout this time, Werner's long experience in both industrial AR and in negotiations with the "social partners", his broad education, and his intellectual rigour made a significant impression on me. I found that, despite our coming to these issues with very different training, experiences, and cultural backgrounds, we both were trying to square the circle between a belief in democratically inspired social research for social change and the need to confront the lack of methodological and intellectual rigour and ambition too common among action researchers. What impressed me most was Werner's belief that doing social "good" requires doing research that meets the highest intellectual standards, not merely having admirable values and interesting stories to tell. From that time on, I heeded calls from Werner to collaborate and he has been generous in encouraging the kinds of dialogues among action researchers that I tried to promote (Greenwood, 2002; 2004).

Industrial and organisational democracy work has a long and, for a time, successful history in transforming industrial and service organisations into team-based, more collaborative systems that produce better results than they did under Taylorism and support an improved quality of working life (Greenwood and Levin, 2007: 13-29). However, these approaches have been rarely applied in analysing organisational pathologies in universities and for promoting processes of participatory social change there (Babüroglu, Emery and Associates, eds. 2000). Attempting to do this has become the focus of my own work over the past decades, though I began doing action research in an industrial context.

Morten Levin and I recently published a book that applies action research as a way to "recreate" universities, both as collaborative workplaces and as key contributors to reinforcing civil society (Levin and Greenwood, 2016). This perspective is strongly influenced by the work of the LOM programme and a succession of industrial democracy and enterprise development programmes in Norway as well. Given this focus, I will develop my arguments about organisational democracy by referring to the academic context I have been working in. However, this work is based on our learning that the LOM and enterprise development approaches and lessons apply, with appropriate modifications, to all organisational systems in both the industrial and service sectors.

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1 LOM is the acronym for the Swedish enterprise development programme "Leadership, Organization, and Co-determination". Based on a network approach linking labour market parties in a combined workplace and enterprise development effort over a 5-year period with a budget of \$9 million, it engaged with some 150 enterprises and public sector organizations and involved over 60 researchers. The aim was to combine improvements in working life and organisation with enterprise development through the collaboration of all the relevant stakeholders (Engelstadt and Gustavsen, 1993).

Given recent political events, 20 years of neoliberal attacks on civil society and the re-emergence of the radical nationalist political right, it could seem that the industrial democracy and enterprise development programmes in Norway and Sweden were naïve about the possibilities for participatory democracy and social solidarity. If we believe that, nothing prevents us from joining a race to the bottom in a global dystopia. The cataclysms of the 20<sup>th</sup> century showed us where the bottom is and repeating that would be a major human tragedy. Like Werner, I choose to believe that professors, academic administrators, and students would be happier, more effective, and make better contributions to civil society if universities were organised as participatory democracies. Currently they are increasingly structured as if they were neo-Taylorist investment banks operating mainly for the benefit of a few senior administrators and their private and public sector allies.

I am not naïve about the situation. I have watched some academic stars climb over colleagues and practice an academic version of the free agency of professional athletes. I have dealt with some academic administrators who are so power hungry that they enforce their will by promoting conflicts over resources within their universities because these conflicts allow them to operate as apparent referees. They really are disengaged, self-interested, well-paid bosses. I have watched students trudging from one department to another and from one professor to another, while receiving “deposits” of unrelated and indigestible bits of specialised information imparted by non-interacting professors from disciplines that do not speak to one another<sup>2</sup>.

Consistent with Norwegian and Swedish experiences, I do not believe that these selfish and organisationally destructive behaviours reveal unchangeable laws of human nature. The root causes of these ills are a combination of organisational pathologies driven by power hunger, greed, the repression of academic freedom, and the imposition of neoliberal meritocratic regimes in academia and beyond. My analysis is inspired by the same democratic intellectual and political traditions that Werner Fricke has worked in for so long. My focus is on universities but, in my view, the current degradation of universities is a key example of the pathologies of neoliberalism when applied to any kind of public or private sector service organisation.

## Power, inequality, and conventional academic social research in the organizational environment of the neoliberal university

Conventional social research approaches fit into and support different power structures and construct social persons of quite different types (Holland and Lave, 2009). For this essay, I focus on the direct relationship between positivism, Taylorism, and authoritarianism and

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2 The elements of this critique are not new or unique as the extensive bibliography in Levin and Greenwood, 2016 shows. Bourdieu made many of these points in *Homo Academicus* in 1988 (Bourdieu, 1988). The difference in our argument comes from the industrial democracy and enterprise development experiences, especially from “socio-technical systems design” (van Eijnatten, 1993). We link these pathologies to the neoliberal reorganization of universities as neo-Taylorist hierarchical, authoritarian systems, something the earlier literature does not engage.

the pacification of academic social research as a silent partner of neoliberalism, specifically in the context of universities as organisations.

Academic social scientists are trained in, and mainly obey, the hegemonic disciplinary structures in their universities. Many of those employed by or in the private and public sector generally view their work as fee-for-service analysis and “decision support”. In both cases, rocking the boat with democratically-inspired social critiques or actively promoting social reforms, even in the flush times of academic, private, and public sector growth after World War II, is rare and is often punished (Ross, 1992; Furner, 2010 [1975]; Price, 2004). The exception was the short interlude in the late 1960’s. The immediate sequel was the neoliberal Thatcher/Reagan counter-attack and the collapse of social democracy as we had begun to know it.

The academic silos that straitjacket academic behaviour are not accidental products of history. They are the result of an authoritarian system of management and control to manage and channel knowledge creation and dissemination in socially-passive directions. The positivist and quantitative theoretical and methodological choices that have led the social sciences into a socially-passive role did not take place in an organisational or political vacuum. Despite this, relatively little sustained organisational analysis has focused on these organisational choices. The abundant critiques of the disciplinary sclerosis of academia, the inability to study multi-dimensional systems problems, the constant and unheeded calls for multi-disciplinary research do very little to pin down the causes of these problems (e.g. Krause, E., 1996) and the forces that sustain them.

Decrying the political domestication of the disciplines, and the role of disciplinary territorialism is commonplace. Its history is too long to tell here (Ross, op. cit.; Messer-Davidow, 2002; Madoo Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley, 1998; Price, D. op. cit). Denunciations of the negative effects of disciplinary silos abound (Messer-Davidow, op.cit.) but the explanations for the institutionalisation of these silos are few. In contrast to the critiques of Taylorism in industrial organisations, explaining how we academics came to live in such a dysfunctional organisational system has been little explored. Some exceptions I know of are Christopher Newfield’s, *Ivy and Industry* (Newfield, 2004) and Chad Wellmon’s *Organizing Enlightenment* (Wellmon, 2016).

Another part of this story is told in a less direct fashion in Dorothy Ross’ *The Origins of American Social Science* (Ross, op. cit.). Ross’ history sets the stage by narrating the origins of the various social sciences and history as academic specialties in the US within the broader field of political economy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She also chronicles the domestication of these new social sciences and history by means of often brutal political repression.

Newfield adds the important insight that universities adopted the Tayloristic manufacturing model as their organisational system at the founding of the research universities (starting with Johns Hopkins University). This makes cultural/historical sense, because of the hegemony of Frederick Winslow Taylor’s “scientific management” in both the organisational life of major companies and in the public imagination (Banta, 1993) at that time. In addition, at the time, research universities were basically elite institutions for the children of the wealthy and powerful. The public university systems had yet to really make their mark, and so the Tayloristic model was set by the elite private institutions.

Wellmon's book adds a crucial dimension to the story because it helps explain how a group of smart and educated academics came up with an organisational system that is so dysfunctional. Those of us who are dissatisfied with the disciplinary bunkers, the self-regarding, competitive behavior of the disciplines, sub-disciplines, and the academic departments they spawn have not offered solid explanations for these organisational ills and their persistence.

Understanding this requires starting from the premise that the real world is a complex, dynamic amalgam of interacting open systems. Therefore, dividing the world into non-interactive specialised boxes to study how it works is a fool's errand. Weldon, given this background, explains how and why academia went on this fool's errand, by detailing the problem the disciplines were created to solve.

Simplifying his interesting argument, Wellmon holds that prior to the emergence of the disciplines, the organisational model for knowledge organisation and transmission was encyclopedic. This meant that scholars were not specialised. Rather they attempted to organise and keep track of the broad array of emerging knowledge by publishing encyclopedias of human knowledge. The difficulty was that knowledge generation had multiplied exponentially with the emergence of the print media. Ultimately, the project of keeping track through comprehensive encyclopedias was bound to fail. Wellmon documents the various attempts to make the encyclopedias work and how they increasingly failed to accomplish their goal.

This dilemma motivated the search for organisational solutions capable of handling the explosion of knowledge generation, of organising, documenting, and critiquing knowledge with the requisite training needed to evaluate what was being learned, etc. Not surprisingly from about 1860's on, the solution hit upon was precisely the same one used to organise the emergent mass production system industrial manufacturing: Taylorism. Universities divided the real world into specialised subject areas, assigned each those areas to academic specialists, organized the specialists into separate academic units (the disciplines and departments), and set up a chain of command that forced all the units to report upward toward the institutional apex. The hidden assumption was that this would add up magically to a "universal" understanding of the way the world works and what it all means. This classification of knowledge in silos gave us the disciplines that dominate academia worldwide now. Predictably, the consequences have been negative for both knowledge generation and teaching. These negative consequences are also the reason that the critique and reforms advocated by the industrial democracy movement are relevant to university reform and reconstruction.

The disciplinary solution was aimed at managing an increasingly complex and diverse array of knowledge and techniques, to make them fit into some kind of orderly academic command and control structure. While this organisational decision might not have appeared to be misdirected at the time, importing the Tayloristic industrial model into academia had nefarious organisational and human consequences. Rather than universities being a community of scholars students, and staff members, this organisational design converted them into an array of separate and often competing constituencies, departments, fields, divisions, and colleges engaged in academic commodity production. Each of these units has to have and defend clear boundaries, a leadership structure, hierarchical internal organisation, a history, and internal quality controls. All the stakeholders were and are disciplined to follow a

meritocratic path in their behaviors, to eschew solidarity, and to follow orders. Organisationally, each of the units so created operate in relation to the other units around them. Professors are managed from above by being encouraged to fight intellectual and political incursions by non-specialists, and to compete for resources with each other meaning that collaboration in studying large system problems is all but impossible.

I want to emphasise here that, as a work organization, this university transformation did not create real Taylorism. Rather it created a simulacrum of Taylorism that Levin and I call “Neo-Taylorism”. Individualised experts in bounded units report upward to a boss (dean), who report upward to a central administration, that reports upward to a board of governors, and perhaps state authorities of various sorts. Resource allocation decisions flow from the top down. Decisions are made by bosses who are remote from the organisational contexts they control. Units are discouraged from co-operating, and any emergent coalitions among them are treated as a threat to the system. Most key decisions about academic life and the all-important allocation of institutional resources are made by people remote from the academic world they dominate, on the basis of poor and even erroneous information. These academic leaders are increasingly parachuted into the universities by executive search services, and are on a purely administrative personal career track, jumping from one institution to another.

We call this simulacrum of Taylorism Neo-Taylorism for various reasons. First, we learned long ago that the Tayloristic industrial commodity production fails when applied to any service organisation where the product is not a “thing” but services and relationships. Universities are service organisations. For the most part, they are not commodity producers but rather service providers that teach, conduct research, and engage in writing. We do not build cars, new forms of elastic for underwear, athletic shoes, or the latest video games. These services we provide do have a market and quality of service matters but the Tayloristic commodity production model does not work in this context. In education, the general service sector, and in the public sector, good quality human services and education, not commodity production, are the goal and product, not commodities (Behn, 2001). A brief look at the empty generalities about what universities do that are regularly produced by the senior administrators and policy makers show that they actually have no idea what their “product” is. Taylorism and neoliberal management without a clear product is “Neo-Taylorism”.

Trying to make this simulacrum of Tayloristic commodity production work has given rise to a mass of accountancy/accountability measures. These pseudo-scientific methods obscure the radical inappropriateness of this design. They allow incompetent leaders to pretend they know what they are producing, and justify the authoritarian exercise of power that is the inevitable consequence of neoliberalism. Since Thatcher and Reagan, neoliberals have tried to convert education and social services into fee-for-service commodity production to make money for the wealthy, and lower the taxes the wealthy pay at the same time (Espeland and Sauder, 2016). They have done so at the expense of universities serving as sites of significant social mobility and as training grounds for the next generation of participants in civil society.

These approaches have been a disaster for students, professors, and social service users and for education in general. The winners have been the accountants, administrators, sponsors of the accountability systems, the private sector beneficiaries of the public goods purloined from universities (that were paid for by public taxes), and the politicians who use

these measures to coerce organisations while they profit from pretending to live in a perfect *laissez-faire* world.

These simulacra have created a set of organisational pathologies. Here my narrative now links back to Werner Fricke and the industrial democracy movement. The industrial democracy movement demonstrated clearly that Taylorism was an inefficient, anti-democratic, and unsustainable industrial system that created a poor quality of work life and shoddy products. They demonstrated that it could be changed successfully to be more democratic and humane, while also being just as or even more productive.

In the case of universities, because academic knowledge is not similar to manufactured goods, the imposition of Taylorism in academia actually is based on a double error: the application of a coercive industrial model, and the application of this model in a non-industrial service setting. None of what universities do is captured in the concept of a commodity, no matter how much the neoliberals want to believe it is possible and a good idea. Using surrogate numbers to pretend these activities create a “product” (e.g. numbers of publications, prestige of journals and publishers, number of citations) does not work. The experience with these procedures shows that they promote a competitive race to the bottom in which individual students, academics, departments, colleges, and universities all pit themselves against each other in a zero-sum competition, as a way of acquiring resources at the expense of competing individuals and units (Brenneis, Shore, and Wright, 2005).

The most important organisational decisions are made by leaders who do not perform the services involved and increasingly lack the expertise to do so. The key producers of education and the key consumers of education (the students) and the public have little say about how these universities operate. To be blunt, this “accountability” is a fraud. In this segmentary, adversarial system, the main beneficiaries are the well-paid leaders who run the system and their increasing armies of accountants, deans, “deanlets”, “deanlings”, enrollment managers, secretaries, building managers, etc. and the private sector actors who benefit from the stripping of public goods from universities. They are only accountable to themselves and their political backers.

Thus, the Neo-Tayloristic university created under neoliberalism is inherently dysfunctional. Since the dysfunctionality of the Tayloristic model of organisation of industrial production was the driving force behind the emergence and early successes of the industrial democracy movement (Trist, E., and K. Bamforth. 1951; Emery, F. 1959; Emery, F., and E. Thorsrud. 1976. Emery, F., and E.L. Trist. 1965; Herbst, P. 1976; Trist, E. 1981), the two stories link here.

Industrial democracy engaged in the redesign of the industrial workplace into team-based groupings by sub-assemblies and product groups. These changes involved multi-skilling team members to be able to understand and often perform the jobs of other team members, and they converted leadership into a co-ordinating function. Organisational democracy does not rely on the imposition of authority, but on collaborative and solidary team relations. These were the central ways the industrial democracy movement overcame the pathologies of Taylorism.

Industrial democracy work eventually generated what is now called “socio-technical systems design (STSD) (Eijnatten, 1993) and team-based matrix organisations. Hierarchies are flattened, communications increased across what becomes a “matrix organisation”, and

communication with the world outside the organisation occurs in many different locations in the company (manufacturing, sales, advertising). This is the state of the art in successful manufacturing companies and has been for at least a generation. It is a repudiation of the logic and organisational pathologies of Taylorism and it is the reverse of what now is passed off as “business-like” management in Neo-Taylorist universities.

Despite the eclipse of Taylorism in industry, universities, as if caught in a time warp, remain wedded to key elements of the Tayloristic model: hermetic units, hierarchical authority structures, decisions at the greatest possible distance from the context of application of the decisions, and increasingly large and well-paid upper level administrations. It is as if these academic administrators never awoke from Henry Ford’s failed dream, despite the successful challenges coming from Toyota, Nissan, Mazda, and Kia. Ford Motor Company awoke, but Harvard University and the University of Cambridge have not. Instead, disconnected from the actual process of academic value creation and teaching, the combination of neoliberalism and the greedy consolidation of power and money in university central administrations has actually intensified the pathologies of Taylorism. Academic Neo-Taylorism now embodies the worst features of mid-twentieth century industrial mass production.

In a way, the inapplicability of the commodity production model required for Taylorism has given these neoliberal academic bosses an even freer hand to create organisational pathologies. Since they do not know and cannot define what they are producing, they deliver high sounding and non-operationalisable mission statements and “white papers”. Then they deploy their accountants and public relations managers to force their “employees” and “clients (students)” to do as they are told, so the university can pretend to live up to these homiletic mission statements and advertising broadsides. By claiming the mantle of making universities more “business-like”, these university administrators have perpetrated a coup on their institutions, augmenting competitiveness among the units that report to them as a way of consolidating their power, enhancing their personal careers, and inflating their salaries on their way to a position at a better university, a senior executive sinecure in a philanthropy, memberships on boards of directors of wealthy corporations, etc.

Many universities now have as many or more middle and senior administrators as faculty, a situation that would not survive a quarterly fiscal review in the real industrial sector. Most are stripping resources from their institutions by occasionalising the faculty, subcontracting key functions (buildings and properties, dining, campus store management, investments, etc.), and using their positions to enrich themselves. They are recreating universities as casino capitalist investment funds.

The beneficiaries of this resource stripping are not the universities. Rather than returning the profits extracted this way in the form of lowered tuitions for students, better education, better salaries and working conditions for faculty and staff, these profits are eaten up in increased administrative salaries, signature building programmes, and a variety of business ventures to reap more profits and to cause the institutions to rise in the pseudo-rankings. Many private sector actors have gained windfalls from this process of farming out of university functions to powerful non-university businesses, thereby further despoiling the taxpayers and students whose monies have subsidised these institutions for generations.



This is a dysfunctional approach in any kind of organisation. It is also an incompetent way of organising fields of inquiry and action that deal with what are inherently dynamic, multi-dimensional systems problems. In the case of the social sciences, the result has been a coup by positivism and pseudo-objectivism, resulting in work of little interest to anyone other than the denizens of the disciplines and with little or even dangerous applicability to the external world (such as Milton Friedman's structural adjustment theories). The exception is contract research for power holders who like to use the results of polling, focus groups, and other devices to assist them in selling their products and political designs. The humanities have joined the armies of the "have-nots" and the sciences and engineering exist to the extent they bring in outside monies for research and patentable discoveries to enhance university budgets. The sciences and engineering are tolerated so long as they attract grants and private sector money, and produce applicable or patentable results.

## The past can usher in a better future

I do not believe in the cyclical view of history or myths of eternal return, but I do believe that the past can improve the present when used as a source of tested and successful ideas and strategies. What is more recent is not necessarily an improvement particularly when the recent past has seen the greatest increases in social inequality and ecological destabilisation in human history. There is no doubt that neoliberalism in the public and private sector is ascendant. There is also no doubt that it promotes injustice, inequality, brutality, and environmental destruction on a global plane.

Many of us optimistically have awaited a Polanyi "counter movement" (Polanyi, 1944) in which the social fabric would reassert itself to heal some of the worst depredations of this form of casino capitalism. However, there are few signs of such a counter movement. While there are many protesters against this regime and the documentation of the disasters of the neoliberal system is well developed, concerted collective action against this system is not.

The Occupy movement seemed to offer some hope, but mostly sputtered out in a cloud of rhetoric as business as usual reasserted itself. The most visible collective actions emerging from these global pathologies are, as Polanyi feared, fascist and chauvinistic. They include terrorism, racism, and anti-immigration vigilantism, blaming the dispossessed, and a variety of rather antique and antiquated regionalist and nationalist identity movements that can only be characterised as exclusionary and authoritarian (Polanyi, *op. cit.*). What we do not see is a counter movement based on democratic values and improvement of the democratic welfare state.

This is where I return to Werner Fricke and his generation of colleagues who toiled long and hard in favor of industrial democracy and action research. I do so because we know that the principles learned in the industrial democracy movement and applied more generally in socio-technical systems design offer better ways forward than any other approach currently on the table.

## Action research and universities

Action research, in any of its numerous varieties (Greenwood and Levin, 2007; Reason, P., and H. Bradbury (eds.). 2001; Reason and Bradbury (eds.), 2008; Bradbury, H. (ed.). 2015; Coughlan and Brydon-Miller (eds.). 2014), is always a systems approach. AR is motivated by the values and practices of democracy, justice, and sustainability. This means that AR as practiced in Europe and the US in its heyday was the expression of the promotion of organisational democracy and the democratic welfare state.

We all know that the industrial democracy movement and the welfare state are in retreat under the global neoliberal attack of the past quarter century. Co-determination in many organisations and certainly in universities has been destroyed in most countries and replaced by the casino capitalist model of neoliberal governance. This is not because these neoliberal models are correct, but because they support the interests of the power elites, and because the ideologues of neoliberalism have succeeded in making most people believe that there is no other option (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

We know from decades of practice that action research can liberate knowledge, motivation, and solidarity capable of transforming organizations and working lives in democratic and more sustainable directions. We have Werner and his colleagues to thank for this knowledge. Now it is up to us to find a way to apply it to universities.

Universities are complex work organisations providing a multiplicity of services. Applying action research to universities is a good way to reopen the more general subject of democratic work re-design and organisational change. It also is strategically necessary to take on universities. Universities have now become part of a “pipeline problem” by producing poorly educated, radical individualist, and only apparently skilled “new” proletarians for the global neoliberal system. If universities are not transformed, it is unlikely that we can succeed in transforming any of the other key organisations in our global society in the future, because we will not have a younger generation prepared to take this on. I think this is why the neoliberals have attacked public universities with such fury.

Morten Levin and I have combined our 70+ years of university experience in our book, *Creating a New Public University and Reviving Democracy: Action Research in Higher Education* (Levin and Greenwood, 2016). We lay out this kind of action research process out in, and we believe universities are ripe for a democratic counter movement. The overwhelming costs, dysfunctionality, and irrelevance of what universities do systematically undermine not only, but leave new generations of citizens with a learned incapacity to address the large-scale problems of the global system. Current universities are only good places for a privileged few. The rest of the stakeholders are “zombified” (Whelan, A., R. Walker, and C. Moore, eds., 2013).

Against this zombification, AR is a heterodoxy capable of mobilizing those excluded from the elites. This is because the current organisational system and its associated ideologies are dysfunctional for most students, faculty, lower and middle administrative staff, and parents of students. Put another way, there are many stakeholders who would benefit directly from a democratic change process. We think there is reason to believe that lots of trapped energy for democratic change exists in these organisations. The issue is how to mobilise it.

As the neoliberal movement loses momentum, the world is beginning to find that the current generation of neoliberal business leaders, financial elites, politicians, and academics mostly do not have a clue about what to do to recreate the civil societies, humane work organisations, responsive political systems, and meaningful social goals they have destroyed. They cannot rebuild what they dedicated their lives to destroying for personal profit. Indeed, their recipes are to intensify the neoliberal processes that have led to massive increases in inequality and environmental destruction.

This is where people like Werner Fricke, his colleagues and the people they have mentored in the practices of action research and organisational democracy through these difficult years, can contribute vital elements to a process of democratic social reconstruction. Even though AR, social democracy, and the welfare state are now in retreat, these institutions do not have to be re-invented from zero. We know how they once worked (quite imperfectly) and how they can be made to work again and better. Rather than a being a historical footnote, this network of action researchers can be a key part of the democratic future.

Can action researchers do this? It remains to be seen. For certain, the rather civil, even rationalist tone of the industrial democracy network's approach to action research and STSD from the past decades would have to change. After a generation of presenting reasoned arguments for alternatives to neoliberalism, giving examples of positive outcomes, and designing programmes based on co-operation and collaboration among willing parties, these reformers are now ignored. The time has come to be more aggressive. The neoliberals aggressively took over the world and they have wrecked much of it. We action researchers must now attack them frontally with empirical data, showing the vast majority of stakeholders that the claims about free-market utopias are not only false but have proved to be oppressive and exploitative. We must encourage the 99% to assert their rights to a more humane and prosperous existence. It is time to get past being angry and disillusioned.

We need to get busy. Starting such a movement would be a fitting tribute to Werner Fricke's lifelong efforts.

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