

Book review: Incite! Women of color against violence, *The revolution will not be funded*

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**Incite! Women of color against violence, *The revolution will not be funded: beyond the nonprofit industrial complex*.
Cambridge: South End Press**

In today's economic climate many non-profit organisations are increasingly fearful of losing funding as states and philanthropic organisations tighten the purse strings. After reading *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* one has to ask, is this necessarily a bad thing?

Incite! is an organisation of radical feminists of colour in the US dedicated to addressing multiple forms of violence experienced by women of colour. In 2004, Incite!, in conjunction with the Women's Department at the University of California, Santa Barbara, brought together a collection of activists and academics from a variety of backgrounds, and each having experiences working in and with the non-profit sector, with the objective of exploring the difficulties of building revolutionary movements. Out of this conference emerged the book under review, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*. Dedicated to exploring the pitfalls of operating within the non-profit system in the United States, the book contains seventeen essays organised into three different sections - the rise of the non-profit industrial complex, non-profits and global organising, and rethinking non-profits and reimagining resistance.

The overall purpose of the book is to assess the impact foundation funding has on building revolutionary movements and to stimulate debate on the subject. While the book does not claim to put forward a singular, unified stance on the subject, it is painstakingly obvious that there are serious implications for organisations choosing to participate in the non-profit system, such as de-radicalisation, collusion, and subtending exploitation. Despite such consequences, there is a diversity of opinion in the collection with some pieces calling for a revision of the problematic system while others argue that groups should opt out all together and return to more grassroots organising and funding.

The target of this book is what the authors term the Non-profit Industrial Complex or NPIC - the symbiotic entanglement of the state, capitalism and the non-profit system. The term builds on existing definitions of similar complex relationships between state, capitalism and society, namely the military and prison industrial complexes. The NPIC, in a nutshell, refers to the

corporatisation, de-radicalisation and co-optation of American social justice organisations by the state and capitalist interests.

Central to the functioning of NPIC is 501(c)3 charity status. This status declares as tax-free any donations made by a corporation, foundation or individual to a non-profit organisation. Groups can avail of said monies by registering for the status (i.e. officially declaring non-profit status). This has proven to be an attractive offer for social justice organisations and wealthy Americans. According to the authors, there are 837, 027 non-profits in the US, a number which does not take into account religious organisations. These groups are availing themselves of foundation funding, the amount of which has grown exponentially in the last four decades. Foundations have assets totalling 500 billion dollars (US) yet only donate a small portion of that annually, as legislation only forces foundations to spend 5% of their wealth (Incite!: 7). On the surface this model might appear more benevolent than sinister. However, as many authors in this volume demonstrate, this system has been most advantageous for those interested in maintaining their wealth and furthering a conservative agenda, both socially and economically. On the other hand, the NPIC has been detrimental for those on the left interested in mass mobilisation for social transformation.

The most immediate issue addressed by this important work is the extent to which funding has transformed the objectives, strategies, and organisation of groups working for radical social change. Foundation funding has no doubt skewed the goals, abilities and politics of many non-profits. As several essays point out, acquiring and maintaining funding forces voluntary organisations to plan reactively as opposed to proactively, and discourages them from taking the long view. As funding is primarily applied for and awarded on a yearly basis, organisations are unable to plan beyond the typical one year funding cycle. Organisations become trapped in this cycle of managerialism as their funding now pays salaries and keeps the organisations alive on a yearly basis. As a result, there is a dependency on funding that was not there prior to partaking in the NPIC. Organisations have become mini-corporations with much of the focus and energy being put into administrative work (application forms, keeping accounts, office management) as opposed to mobilising. Piven and Cloward in their seminal piece on poor people's movements made similar claims suggesting there is an important difference between mobilisation and organisation with the latter resulting in less effective movements (Piven and Cloward 1977).

This book also produces clear evidence that accepting funding can often come with strings attached. Groups who accept funding are also subject to censorship and limited in what campaigns they can work on, what language they can use and who they can work with. Bierria's piece on manipulation of the anti-violence movement and Durazo's essay on the experiences of Project South provide strong testaments to this. In order to be seen as deserving of funding, tough decisions need to be made, strategies and goals revised. Consequently, as some essays clearly show, funding has the detrimental effect of transforming organisations which were initially radical and revolutionary into

liberal/progressive ones. This raises the further point of 'legitimisation' – which groups are legitimate and therefore visible and which ones are seen as illegitimate, and on the margins. It creates a dividing line between 'respectable groups' who engage in dialogue as opposed to those who are engaged in tactics like 'direct action.' Such groups are marginalised, seen as on fringe, less respectable, and volatile. This dividing line is quite evident in the book as well. It would appear those who support revolutionary change are now reticent, even opposed to accepting all external funding, unless it is raised at the grassroots level. By contrast, those organisations which tend to be more reformist than revolutionary are less likely to harbour ideological objections to this form of funding and more likely to see the value of this funding for their work.

The most troubling aspect of the NPIC, however, is the way in which social justice groups are now implicated in supporting a system which furthers oppression. Many of the various authors in this book clearly reveal the troubling ways in which the NPIC subverts capitalism by allowing significant amounts of money (that is largely unaccounted for) to accumulate in foundation bank accounts as means of escaping taxes on wealth. In effect, foundation funding is 'private money' that should in fact be public money were it not for the tax loophole that the NPIC provides, money that would be in state coffers paying for public services.

Furthermore, several authors remind us of how this money was made in the first instance. As much of the money channelled into foundations is derived from the profits of large corporations, it is actually money made through capitalist practices which in turn often means exploitation and oppression on the basis of class, race, gender, among other things. Foundations, it can be argued, are taking from those who rightfully own it, i.e. workers on whose back profits were made and citizens whose tax money is being withdrawn. As Smith's piece rightly points out, funding agencies can only exist within a capitalist structure. Social justice groups by declaring themselves as registered charities or non-profits in order to avail of this funding are therefore becoming part of this complex. The very nature of the NPIC and the means through which foundations acquire their funding for donations is antithetical to the ethos of many social justice organisations, who ironically now partake in this system and accept such funding with open arms. By illuminating this situation, *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* has, no doubt, shone an uncomfortable spotlight on many activists and groups.

Although American in its focus, the issues explored and subsequent questions that emerge in this collection can be applied anywhere, whether it be to the role of non-governmental organisations in the Majority World, EU funding of projects throughout the European community, or funding from philanthropic organisations like Atlantic Philanthropies, Carnegie and Ford which have international scope. This book is not only relevant beyond the context of America but a must-read for any activist. This publication also makes an important contribution to critiques of capitalism. Philanthropic capital is very rarely the subject of inquiry by critics of capitalism, yet the implications of such

capital are significant as the essays in this volume so clearly and insightfully show.

Perhaps the two most outstanding pieces in this collection are that of Madonna Thunder Hawk and Paul Kivel. Thunder Hawk has written a short yet notable piece on her experiences of organising within the native community. It provides a strong reminder of not only how to organise without funding but why it can be more desirable. It recounts the dangers of managerialism which plagues groups in receipt of funding. This, in turn, prevents fluidity amongst groups working on a variety of campaigns. Thunder Hawk argues that being a non-profit requires a focus on an organisation's own goals and hence limits the imagination of what we can seek to achieve and do. Paul Kivel powerfully argues that the non-profit tax category grants substantial economic benefits to the ruling class and directly benefits those at the top. This piece drives home the point that the ruling class, through the non-profit sector, controls billions of dollars of private and government money. Furthermore, he rightfully argues that the jobs created in non-profits are, in fact, a co-optation by the ruling class. In taking money and creating jobs through such funding non-profits are maintaining the capitalist system. While these two pieces stand out, on the whole, each essay in the collection offers an important contribution in its own right.

To my mind, the greatest offering contained in this volume is the questions it forces activists and organisations to ask themselves based on the evidence put forward. As Duranzo points out, funding- whether government or foundation money - emerges from the 'deepest ranges of capitalist inequality.' Similarly, the pieces by Allen and that of King and Osayande highlight the racialised nature of the NPIC - that the leadership of the philanthropic movement is predominantly white, and this white leadership protects white wealth and undermines the work of oppressed communities of colour. In essence, white capital is circulated among white people and thus maintains white supremacy. And, as Kivel and de Almeida argue, by taking foundation funding non-profit organisations are taking money made at the expense of millions of people struggling in the face of the systems of oppression such groups originally organised to fight against.

If I were to offer one criticism of this collection it would be that its discussion of what exactly the Non-Profit Industrial Complex comprises is too brief. The introduction offers a cursory (less than a page) examination of the dimensions of the NPIC and does not actually explain what it entails in any significant way. A full understanding is only gleaned from reading the rest of the book. A more extensive explanation in the introductory chapter would have been most beneficial.

The truncated introduction aside, this collection is full of rich and detailed case studies and analyses. At the end, one is left wondering how any social justice organisation can reconcile the many contradictions associated with the philanthropic funding regime. *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* claims to offer no way forward, however, some of the essays offer real, tangible alternatives to foundation funding, and to being part of 'non-profit sector'. Most importantly, it makes it very clear that organisations need to assess their

priorities and think seriously about the implications of accepting funding – not just in terms of how it impacts the organisation itself but from a broader perspective, i.e. their participation in furthering inequality and oppression. This is a difficult challenge no doubt, but one that can no longer be ignored thanks to this publication.

References

Piven, Frances and Richard Cloward 1977. *Poor people's movements: why they succeed, how they fail*. New York: Pantheon.

About the author

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