

## *From economics to organising - The pivotal mutual sector*

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This chapter is intended for Section 3: The State, globalisation and social movements, alongside the chapters by Mary and Hilary. It was in my original listing of offered chapters but is absent in Hilary and Mary's recent listing, 20aug19. The argument and the vocabulary weave closely together with that of the chapter on 'formacion' that I'm offering for Section 1, on methodology.

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In *Danger and Opportunity*, 2009 (DaO), Robin deploys a generic background framing of four 'grand sectors' in an economy: state, market, household, grant-funded economy. This chapter unpacks that 'blob map' and, in particular, explores the composition of the oddly named and unfamiliar 'grant funded economy'. That formation clearly has something to do with 'civil society' and 'global civil society', which have become prominent as activist formations during the post-Fordist period which Robin is analysing; but there are differences between the frames of 'social' and 'civil' economy, which should be examined. The chapter argues that this fourth and superficially marginal 'economy' needs to be addressed as a sector of *cultural* as well as economic production - where 'culture' is understood as a matter of capacities to know and organise; that is, as a field of *production of labour power* - which is fundamental both to the production of radical activist formations in civil society, and to emergent forces and relations of production in 'the Fordisms', and especially in post-Fordist 'knowledge based' capitalism.

This makes 'the 4th blob' of far greater historical significance in making a Living Economy, than it might seem to be if understood primarily in terms of its *funding*, which is the basic way in which Robin frames the four grand sectors. Rather than the secondary and variable aspect of funding, the sectors are seen in this chapter - in a thorough-going 'labour process' mode - in terms of their *production*; and their relationship is framed in terms of the *publicness/privateness* of their production, and of the *generic or particular* contribution made by their production, to means of living and working. The social and economic territory mapped in Robin's schema can then be seen as an entire, diverse field of mundane, everyday organisation of *necessary means of subsistence and wellbeing*, addressed in practice through four

distinct but systematically - rather than accidentally - related modes of *material provision and access*.

*Forces of production* is a central concept in this reframing, in three respects. First, the four-sector schema can be seen as mapping an entire system of forces of production (FoPs), which is in fact a complex weave of very many mundane, historical *practices*, organised in diverse, dominant or residual or emergent formations, and under various *relations of production*. Relations of production (RoPs) replaces 'values' as the pivotal concept in this perspective, and formations of activist practice (and *their* production), as well as forms of organisation of economic provision, become key concerns. The focus on formations as well as forms shifts the perspective well beyond the technics of 'social innovation', and into politicised, intentionally transformational *organising*.

Second, understanding the 4th blob as a sphere of cultural as well as economic production greatly expands the significance of the sector, and also the range of RoPs that need to be explicitly and skilfully engaged and brought into play by activists in producing new forces of production. Some of these forces and relations can properly be seen as emergent aspects of post-Fordist capitalist organisation, but the argument necessarily goes beyond that 'economic' perspective, to questions of distinct intentions of *radical activist formations*, self-consciously engaged in resistance, oppositional affiliation, historical struggle and the assembling of 'prefigurative', counter-hegemonic forces.

And third, emphasising *material* provision and means of *subsistence*, as the basic perspective implicit in the four-blob schema, prompts detailed attention to the variety of material forms that are implicated, the different bearing of these on subsistence and wellbeing, and the materially distinct forms of FoPs that need to be actively constituted, through distinct and diverse kinds of formations. This is a thorough-going 'labour process' extension of the conceptualisation in DaO, arguably fully consistent with Robin's own labour-process 'project' following through from the focus of the 70s in the Brighton CSE labour process group. This extension seems necessary for at least two reasons. First, it is needed to underpin the environmental thrust of Robin's attention - pivotal for making a Living Economy - and to ground it in a basic materialist ontology for the four-blob scheme, rather than allowing it to appear somewhat 'stuck on' or external (as is arguably the case with the rather ad hoc collection of policy proposals at the end of DaO). And second, some of the central dimensions of post-Fordist economy (and hegemony) involve forms of materiality in forces of production - including algorithmic machinery,

digital media, technological prosthesis - that are historically very unfamiliar and conceptually very hard to handle.

Robin overlaid a fifth blob on the four grand sectors: 'the new social economy', constituted in ('social') values. The chapter argues that this should rather be seen - from an organising standpoint - as comprising (prefigurative) constellations of *forces of production* constituted by particular *alternative relations of production*. On this basis, the chapter argues that at the centre of 'the new social economy' as identified ten years ago by Robin, and making a necessary integrating or foundational contribution, there needs to be a constellation of practices of *commoning*. Practices of commoning are emergent in the post-Fordist period and have begun to receive substantial attention in the decade since DaO, in the form of widespread and economically important forces of (cultural and economic) production organised under peer-to-peer (P2P) relations. The relations of production of 'commoned' forces of production are deeply - intrinsically - oppositional to RoPs of capital, of extractivist and propertarian regimes, of supremacist structures of feeling and of corporatist forms of cultural organisation. All of these are understood to be necessary features of the making of a Living Economy, and a politics of commoning is one that weaves these together in a self-conscious, systematic and profoundly radical (transformational) way which can not necessarily be expected to emerge from fragmentary formations of place-based or sectoral 'solidarity' or 'social' economy. Certainly, not from a commitment to mere 'social innovation' in a period of churning capitalist and environmental crisis - a continuation of the mundane churn of 'innovation' in society and technology over the past two centuries - in the face of the powerful 'disruptive (social media) innovation' championed by post-Fordist oligarchs in their struggle with other formations of capital.

Overall, the chapter advances two views whose emphases depart in some ways from the central emphases of Robin's 2009 argument in DaO. First, the view that attention should shift from 'economics' (and *forms* - notably post-Fordist forms) to 'organising' (and the production of prefigurative activist *formations*). And second, the view that a highly developed and differentiated politics of peer-to-peer commoning is central to organising 'beyond fragments' in civil society, in the way that movements of 'solidarity economy' or 'social economy' aspire to. Underpinning this dual shift of emphasis is a reframing of the puzzling and apparently minor and marginal 4th blob of grant funded economy, as *the mutual sector*: a major, complex 'grand sector', equally implicated in economic and cultural production, and in mundane subsistence and resistance as well as radical change and historical vision, historically pivotal in its relations with three other spheres which

figure almost exclusively in 'economic' thinking: state, markets and households. It's where the 70s and 80s activist project of moving 'beyond the fragments' lives. If there's to be a shift from economics to organising, it's the mutual sector that *does* the organising. The mutual sector is where the historical answer lies to the neoliberal assertion that there is no such thing as society: it's only a fully fledged, active, *civil* society - and not the State, the market or domestic consumers - that will secure the environment and initiate a Living Economy.