

EDITORIAL

For perhaps two decades now, the large mainstream organizations of therapists, counsellors and psychologists in the UK have been campaigning for some sort of state control of therapists' activities. It seems that they are about to get their wish. As we know, though, one has to be very careful what one wishes for: instead of getting the sort of enhanced professional status and organizational power for which they hoped, the mainstream bodies are faced with a loss of independence and a downgraded status for the activities they represent: psycho-practice in all its forms is going to be administered by the Health Professions Council, which is responsible for professions ancillary to medicine – radiographers, chiropractors and so on.

It might be possible to derive some grim enjoyment from the collapse of mainstream therapy organizations' grand ambition to administer the equivalent of doctors', architects' or lawyers' professional bodies; except that the consequences will negatively affect all UK psycho-practitioners. The Health Professions Council's only way of proceeding is to operationalize psycho-practice – to create a series of farcically simplified 'competences', which are supposed to define our goals, procedures, and appropriate training. Built in to all this will be a core assumption that our aim is to make people 'better' – that is, to smooth out their discomfort and render them better able to function in advanced capitalist society (Totton, 2005).

At least two misconceived projects have led us towards this disaster. One of them is the quite deliberate and strategic campaigning of the mainstream organizations. A UKCP (United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy) spokesperson said at a recent conference that therapists are 'the victims of our own success', with the implication that we are a growth industry that naturally attracts regulation and standardization (the organic farming movement in the UK has recently been told that, because of its growth, it has to lower its 'unrealistic' standards). However, the government has until recently shown little interest in regulating us; only determined effort on the part of the mainstream bodies has kept the idea on the table. Truly, we are the victims not of our *success*, but of our *ambition*.

And this relates to the second project: the equally deliberate effort to have ourselves included within the medical system. The purpose was certainly benign – to make therapy available freely at the point of use to a large segment of the population. However, as some of us warned it would be (Totton, 1997), the cost has been extreme: to be incorporated into the NHS as a medical procedure, therapy has inevitably had to take on medical goals and medical self-descriptions, to become involved in the whole process of 'evidence-based practice', to take on cognitive-behavioural therapy at a game that only CBT can possibly win. (The much more difficult but much more authentic alternative would have been to campaign for free provi-

sion of psychotherapy and counselling as a new and distinct public utility.) So now the tail begins to wag the dog: the whole of psychotherapy and counselling – where private practice is far larger than NHS involvement – is to be regulated by the Department of Health according to the needs and standards of the NHS.

There is, of course, a much larger and more general project behind both of these: the project of *expertise*, which increasingly dominates our society. For every human activity, the goal of the expertise model is to boil it down to its ‘essential components’, extract correct ways of performing them, bullet point these methods, teach them, test them, assess them, monitor them. Expertise is of course the sea in which New Labour swims; it is also the primary badge and guarantor of professional status (Totton, 1999). From a therapeutic point of view, this task of surveillance and control amounts to an impossible, hubristic attempt to abolish the unconscious. And for therapists to accept and welcome such an approach, as I have written elsewhere, is not just a matter of turkeys voting for Christmas; in this case, the turkeys have not only invented Christmas but have written the menu into the bargain.

This particular group of turkeys, however, is starting to have second thoughts, and even to edge nervously away from the farmer. Hundreds of practitioners of all sorts – psychoanalysts, counsellors, psychotherapists, clinical psychologists, CBT practitioners – have signed up to two statements against state regulation (these can be found at <http://homepages.3-c.coop/erthworks/state%20regulation.htm> and <http://ipnosis.postle.net/SRStatementOpposition.htm>). When last sighted, the representatives of the mainstream organizations seemed to be in shock at the prospect before them. And apart from the dubious pleasures of *Schadenfreude*, this

shock is welcome because it opens up the possibility of meaningful communication, of putting aside bureaucracy-speak in favour of real dialogue between the different viewpoints – perhaps, even, actual therapeutic process around regulation. This may be decades late, but it is still extremely welcome.

This issue of PPI is a departure and an experiment. Most of it is devoted to discussion of a single topic: the recently published collection *Psychoanalysis, Class and Politics: Encounters in the Clinical Setting*, (Layton et al, 2006). The editors themselves kick off with an account of the experiences and viewpoints that they brought to the project, and how they see them working themselves out in the finished book. Then four different writers each take space to give their very different responses to the collection: Paul Hoggett, Valerie Walkerdine, Stephen Frosh and PPI’s own reviews editor, James Taylor. We think that the experiment has been a great success, producing a multi-faceted examination of the themes of analysis, class and political activism much richer than any single account could be, with authors taking the opportunity to explore a wide range of issues and also often to explore their own emotional responses. We hope that you find these papers as valuable as we do.

Also in this issue, and also of great value, is a second paper by Thomas Singer, who in the last issue introduced the concept of the ‘cultural complex’ as a way of thinking about how collective psychology expresses itself in group and individual behaviour and experience. In this second piece he applies the concept to some specific material: Singer discusses what he calls ‘archetypal defenses of the group spirit’ as they manifest in the cultural and political life of groups, through examples involving flags, operas, movies, speeches and weapon systems.

The issue is completed with Guy Gladstone's passionately engaged leaflet around issues of state regulation, and some distinguished and incisive reviews by Dorothy Rowe, Simon Clarke, Terry Simpson and Leonie Hilliard.

REFERENCES

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