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THE CONSTRAINTS OF NEO-LIBERAL NEW MANAGERIALISM IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

Catrina Brown

UNIVERSITIES HAVE BEEN overtaken by corporatization and managerialism. This means they are run like a business with a focus on economic sustainability, viability and business relations, rather than education. Managerialism is a form of restructuring the workforce under neoliberalism (Baines, 2007). Neoliberalism refers to “[a]n approach to social, political, and economic life, that discourages collective or government services, instead encouraging reliance on the private market and individual skill to meet social needs” (Baines, 2011, p. 30). Everyday practices of managerialism involve an intensified control and disciplining of the workforce evident through strategies and surveillance tools such as performance reports and outcome measurements. Like universities, social services are increasingly shaped by these same tactics. According to Chomsky, disciplining workers requires reducing people’s expectations for democracy, social justice, and control over the workplace (2014). The emphasis is on productivity and keeping costs low while taking power away from those who do the work and increasing the power of those in administration. This is true not only of social work academics, but of professionals in the social services and front line social work practice. The Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) has argued that universities are at risk and that we need to resist the corporate control over Canadian higher education (Tudiver, 1999; Turk 2000, 2008).

New managerialism has a deeply problematic grip on higher education in Canada. There is a growing pressure for teaching, research, and scholarship to serve the market rather than a broader notion of the public good and the core mission of teaching and research. The CAUT *Policy Statement on Academic Freedom* maintains that,

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the common good of society is served by the advancement of knowledge through teaching and research, and that academic freedom protects the right to teach and research without interference. Academic freedom also requires that academic staff participate meaningfully in the governance of universities through collegial governing bodies of the Institutions (p. 3).

As such, social work educators need to be vigilant toward administrative demands geared toward the market such as employability, competency-based training and an emphasis on brief cost saving interventions within schools of social work in order to resist rather than contribute to the snowballing impact of managerialism.

Managerial Bloat

Under neo-liberal new managerialism we see a disproportionate swelling of university administration. For instance, between 2005 and 2015 at Dalhousie University the number of senior administrators such as vice-presidents and vice-provosts (not including deans and executive directors) was up from eight to 20. Between 2002 and 2015 Dalhousie's spending on "Administration and General" went up by 150%, and "Facilities Management" by 239%, while spending on "Academic" went up by only 77% (Dalhousie Faculty Association, 2016a). The expansion of management continues to grow while tenure-track faculty numbers decline and universities become dependent on a casualized labour force of contract employees. These limited term and sessional faculty have limited job security. Under new managerialism, governance is top-down, and board decisions are increasingly rubber-stamped by disempowered senates (Findlay, 2014). Gone are the days when collegial governance meant professional administrators such as deans would be part of administration for a period of time and return to the faculty ranks. Today administrators are often not academics or scholars, but pure and simply management.

Benjamin Ginsberg (2011) describes this as the growth of the "all administrative university" and the fall of faculty. Chomsky equates current trends with the "Walmart model" centered on part time or contingent workers with few to no benefits. University contract employees are a precarious, vulnerable, and exploited labour force. They are routinely given high teaching workloads and low wages with few benefits.

The School of Social Work at Dalhousie is part of the Faculty of Health Professions, which has approximately 40% of all limited term-teaching staff at the university, and this does not include sessionals. During this time of program prioritization it appears our Faculty, like the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, is not well valued. Many, if not most, of these limited term faculty are highly qualified PhDs or doctoral candidates who have a research agenda they can never fairly pursue given their heavy teaching workloads. Taken as a group, they are poorly positioned should

a scarce tenure-track position become available. This means they live from contract to contract with little job security over the long term. University administrations may justify these trends as being the choice of contract academic staff themselves. However, contract review consultations with limited term faculty by the Dalhousie Faculty Association in 2013 indicated that contract employees would overwhelmingly prefer a tenure-track position.

The aim of university administrations is to keep costs down and academic labour resources docile and compliant. Precarious faculty often feel they cannot speak out or carve out space for their research. A focus of neo-liberal labour reform is to make labour more “flexible.” Flexibility is a mechanism that ensures greater profit and control while making it easier to hire and fire people.

The ballooning of university administration and bureaucracy seems counterintuitive when many academic staff face ongoing job insecurity due to administrative claims that universities are broke. However, according to Chomsky (2014), while the growth of administration and their high salaries may appear like “economic waste,” it is useful as “[i]f you have to control people, you have to have an administrative force that does it.”

Impact on Teaching and Research

Under a business model, academic integrity is threatened as is academic freedom and tenure. We see the commercialization of research and funding and the many dangers that this poses (Oliveri, 2000; Turk, 2008). Even among tenure-track faculty, funding for research becomes very difficult to attain with the need to comply with more and more narrow government priorities. Successful National Tri-Council funding applications are reduced every year. With each passing year, fewer and fewer applications for Tri-Council funding opportunities are successful. In 2013, 17% of Tri-council operating grant competitions were funded (University of British Columbia, 2013). The priorities and amounts of federal funding available can severely constrain the ability to conduct critical social-justice-based research in social work.

Faculty are expected to do *more with less* resources. They are often expected to deliver expanded programming to greater and greater numbers of students with less and less fulltime tenure-track or tenured faculty. Administration budgets are based on dramatic and ongoing increases in tuition alongside deliberate efforts at increasing enrolment to cover a significant portion of their operating revenues as governments continue to proportionately decrease their funding relative to previous years.

The Canadian Association for Social Work Education (CASWE) may be able to play an important role in addressing the problem of declining faculty numbers while programming demands continue to increase. Accreditation standards require evidence that there are adequate

resources to run social work programs. When hiring does not occur, there are fewer faculty members to do the work, putting education quality at risk. Even when accreditation recommendations suggest the need for more faculty members, the administration is unlikely to approve tenure-track hiring. The expectations for accreditation and the demands of the market do not necessarily merge. Our accreditation process can be useful to our schools to help address the competing demands of the market and the importance of upholding quality education and our own professional integrity.

While the university senate is typically tasked with issues around academic programming, there is often a lack of meaningful discussion, and boards often railroad the senate's academic programming purview with their fiscal agenda. This allows administration to push through more and more disciplinary and surveillance tools around performance and outcomes. For instance, course evaluations are posted online (who else has their job evaluations made public?). In the case of Dalhousie University there has also been a strong push to shift the Career Development Increment (C.D.I) from providing financial progress through each rank to one based on merit in order to reduce costs. There is significant concern among faculty that while the C.D.I. has usually contributed to increased yearly salary, annual reports will become performance measures used to withhold the C.D.I. These annual reports have been modified, now requiring faculty to demonstrate innovation in teaching. Classroom scheduling has been turned over to an electronic, mass-time-tabling system under the guise of greater flexibility and better use of space when once again the amount of control faculty have over their work environment is reduced.

Resisting the Pressure to Comply

Paralleling the rhetoric of neo-liberal politicians, university senior administrations across the country disingenuously plead that we all need to tighten our belts as governments squeeze financial funding. Feeling the pinch, social workers being, well . . . social workers, often want to be helpful. It is time to take stock of how to resist the neo-liberal agenda and prevailing austerity discourse rather than become complicit. Despite positive intentions, we need to stop being helpful when being helpful means allowing university administrations to continue to put the squeeze on us. We need to learn how to resist rather than accommodate to these pressures. According to Polster (2000):

When we adopt a strategy of accommodation to the corporate agenda, we actually aim too low. We underestimate our own power and resources, both individually and collectively. Resolutely and collectively resisting the corporate agenda will bring far higher returns. Not only are we more likely to win particular battles, but even when we lose we will win – because we will reaffirm and defend the vision and values of a public serving university, rather than comprising them and ourselves in the process (p. 196).

We need to decide as faculty what new workload and programming we can and cannot take on with consideration of workload and resources. If we readily succumb to the “*more for less*” agenda of university administrations, we risk being complicit in their agenda. As the neoliberal new managerialist institutional practices become more and more entrenched, they are harder and harder to challenge.

Together university departments, faculty associations, and CAUT need to develop a systematic and intensive campaign to disrupt the austerity discourse, or what is increasingly referred to as economic accountability and sustainability, in order to demonstrate that governments and universities do have money to spend on educational programming and adequate faculty resources. They just don’t choose to. All institutional, corporate and government budgets involve political choices. It is critical that we support our faculty associations and bring forward grievances when senior management and administration overstep their bounds - especially when that means having administration dictate programming or program content. We need to bring forward grievances and know our collective agreement rights. We need to ensure that precarious faculty are properly protected within collective agreements. We need to lobby loudly for more tenure-track faculty. Universities and their faculty associations need to undertake ongoing forensic analysis of university budgets. This is an important bargaining tool and it is critical in resisting the austerity discourse.

Social work teaches political economy, theories of the welfare state, social-structural, economic, and political contexts of oppression. We educate students about oppression and marginalization, attending to issues of diversity in social work. However, we need to challenge the very context in which we teach students. Although tenure-track faculty are often aware of their relative economic social privilege, this does not mean we cannot be exploited and oppressed as workers and academics within the current university environment. Resisting the growing demands of senior administration is essential to our ability to freely teach critical social work.

Universities Accountability and Sustainability Act: Nova Scotia’s Bill 100

Recent Nova Scotian legislation *Bill 100: Universities Accountability and Sustainability Act*, which passed in the spring of 2015, exemplifies the now common corporate approach to higher education. This Bill legislates a neo-liberal managerialist agenda toward education, which strikes at the heart of the purpose of a university and its core mission of teaching and research. Universities should exist for the public good by promoting critical thinking, curiosity, and discovery. In order to carry out that mission,

universities must have autonomy in academic matters. Principles of professional autonomy and academic freedom in the design and delivering of programs must be upheld. Faculty must have the freedom to teach and conduct research without interference from either administrators or government (Dalhousie Faculty Association, 2015). We can see in Nova Scotia's Bill 100 how these new managerialism practices may limit the space for critical thought and social justice work (Baines, 2007).

In the spring of 2015, I participated in public protests against Bill 100 as President of the Dalhousie Faculty Association, and further expressed concern about this Bill to law amendments. We asked that certain sections of the legislation be deleted; those that impacted upon academic freedom, interfered unduly with the collective bargaining rights of unionized employees, and which violated the fundamental principles of labour relations protected in the Nova Scotia Trade Union Act. Hence, those that were unconstitutional and required compliance with the provincial government's social and economic agenda.

Key sections of the Bill make specific reference *to alignment with government priorities* in research and teaching. The notion that a university – and by extension, its faculty – would align its academic priorities to any government agenda is contrary to both university autonomy and academic freedom. As social work often teaches critical theory and practice, which is unlikely to support neo-liberal government priorities, this is a real concern. This Bill is a powerful example of the relationship between government, university administration, and business under neoliberal political agendas complete with the new managerialism's emphasis on outcomes – *which in this case are legislated*. Virtually every faculty association in Canada, and the national body CAUT, spoke out against this bill.

If there was ever any doubt that universities have been overtaken by the business model, we only need to look at how Bill 100 legislates a market-driven approach to education in Nova Scotia. This Bill states:

An outcomes agreement between the Minister and a university must establish the strategic **alignment between the social and economic priorities of the Government and the university's funding decisions** that enables and encourages the delivery of learning, research and knowledge, and must include the university's plan to consider the strategic alignment of its funding decisions to enable and encourage the delivery of learning, research and knowledge to achieve the identified outcomes and the social and economic priorities of the Government (2015).

Taken in combination with the trend toward program prioritization, we may need to worry about the reshaping of social work education, the downsizing of, or even cutting of our programs. Despite these pressures, the Dalhousie Faculty Association has found that Dalhousie University is in good financial health (2016a, 2016b; 2015). Audited financial statements show that Dalhousie holds close to 1.7 billion dollars in assets

despite its year-in and year-out cutbacks to its academic mission of teaching and research. This financial audit shows that between 2002-2015, money has been increasingly diverted from operating funds to capital expenses (2016a). These trends suggest that the administration chooses to move money out of academic activities into a burgeoning administrative structure and capital projects. During this time Dalhousie University budgets routinely predict deficits and subsequently decreases funding to programs and increases tuition. All the while yearly operating surpluses are seen in the financial audit (Dalhousie Faculty Association, 2015). The Dalhousie Faculty Association argues that these budgeting choices will impact the quality of education (2016a). While the focus of Bill 100 is on universities' economic accountability and sustainability, it does not address these issues. It does not make administrators and government truly accountable to everyone who holds a stake in our universities. Neoliberalism and the practices of new managerialism have a profound impact on our universities, and arguably, legislation such as Bill 100 will make them less sustainable, not more so.

Dalhousie School of Social Work

At Dalhousie University the School of Social Work has faced significant pressure from management, key mainstream institutions (i.e., Hospitals and Health Authority) and the government to align our programs with the market. None of these powerful employers seem to understand the requirements of accreditation that must be met and the lack of resources we increasingly struggle with. They have overstepped their bounds in an effort to shape our programming with little regard for professional integrity or academic freedom. There has been some heavy-handed threats from certain mainstream employers that they will not offer placements or hire our students if they are not *employment ready*. Yet it is very hard to get an explicit definition of this. These institutions tend to reflect neo-liberal managerialism and often adopt a mainstream medical model specifically to mental health and addiction issues. They advocate brief, one-off assessments and interventions based on "efficiency" while proffering unsubstantiated claims of best practice. Our commitment to critical thought and social justice does not readily comply with the worldview of market-driven education. This pressure is being felt at other schools as well. If these external forces had their way, our programming would be largely "clinical" with an unclear professional differentiation between social work, psychology, and psychiatry. There is a lack of understanding of what social work is and the breadth of social work practice in the larger community, including teaching and research. More than ever we will need to fight for the legitimacy of social work within the social structure of social services and social welfare. While we do not want to naively ignore market demands, we need to be vigilant in maintaining our own

professional integrity and academic freedom rather than allowing the market to shape social work education.

Conclusion

We cannot forget the larger public good of higher education. The university administration is not *the* university. We need to resist the neo-liberal agenda and its destruction of shared governance and worker control; to determine our areas of teaching and our own curriculum not dictated by university administration and market demands. Teaching and research cannot be aligned with governments' economic and social priorities and certainly not legislated. University budgets need to be rethought to ensure the prioritization of their teaching and research mission. In doing so there needs to be an emphasis on hiring more tenure-track faculty and relying less on limited-term or contract academic staff. We need to find ways to reclaim the collegium and uphold the important issues of academic freedom, professional integrity, critical thought, and quality education in social work.

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