

# On Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

## Introduction

This background document explains CIPSET's view of the problem facing the TVET system and the institutions of which it is made up. It argues how the generally accepted approach is not helpful and the reasons why that is so. The essential point of departure of CIPSET's argument here is that the accepted approaches about the difficult problems facing TVET Colleges, their role, purposes and possibilities are conceptualized and understood poorly and that will lead inevitably to a weak response to the possibilities available to TVET Colleges. It will continue the present malaise affecting the meaningful utilization of this very important public resource on which a great deal of expectation is placed for learning, through education and training, for especially young South Africans. This background is also important because it provides an explanation of how we approach the various aspects of the work to be done, including the research around the key concepts to be used, the conceptual and practical model derived from an examination of solidaristic economic systems and cooperatives and the nature of the relationship between work and learning especially as these issues affect the transformation of the TVET system.

## Background discussion explaining CIPSET's approach

The TVET College sector is called upon to play a critical role in providing opportunities for learning to young South Africans thus enabling them to make important choices and decisions about their lives and their role in society. It has been quite clear however that this role is very limited and hugely constrained. A great deal of research and discussions in many conferences, seminars and workshops have shown how the anticipated function of these institutions is not being fulfilled, despite the many policy interventions by government, its associated strategies, the refurbishing of the infrastructure of institutions, increased funding and support for Colleges and students and the many attempts to raise the public profile and usefulness of these institutions so that they become institutions of choice for communities and learners alike.

The academic literature on this sector of education points to many 'dysfunctions' amongst which are the 'mismatch' of the competencies and skills attributes of College graduates, including the learning outcomes for work integrated learning, relative to the expectations of employers, the low levels of employment and even of 'employability' of those who pass through TVET Colleges, the inadequacy of the training and qualifications of its teachers and administrators, infrastructure weaknesses and more generally the poor record of the training outcomes of these institutions relative to the formal labour market. The sector is perceived as having the potential to greatly enhance the functioning, competitiveness and efficiencies of the economy, productivity levels, global competitiveness and more generally

the agenda of economic growth of the country and by these achievements, to make a real contribution towards the achievements of government's planning goals.

Employers have consistently complained about the lack of 'relevant' skills of the graduates coming out of these institutions and have, on this basis, found justification for the low levels of investment in jobs, the poor uptake of TVET graduates by industry and commerce and by the economy in general. And students themselves have bemoaned the reality that they have not been able to find employment pointing to many systemic, discriminatory and other barriers to their entry into the labour market. They also complain about the lack of available employment opportunities despite their qualifications, the conundrum of not having the required experience while not being offered the opportunity to gain experience in the first place, and to the deleterious psycho-social consequences of unemployment for especially working-class families and communities.

Policy makers continue to be perplexed by the obduracy of this problem despite the many attempts at finding workable solutions through endless discussions, conferences, consultations, reports and strategic plans and the commitment of resources to institutions and grants to students in this sector. Overall there is a great deal of evidence and supporting data to exemplify these issues focussing on the quantitative and qualitative aspects of TVET and the responsibilities placed upon it especially about the problem of the transition from learning to work.

But these expectations are, in our view, not based on a rigorous analysis of the critical factors affecting the life and work of TVET. The given analysis is not useful for understanding the failures of the TVET system and its challenges. At best the descriptive attributes of the TVET system we are provided with are partial even though based on empirical data which could be used for a more systematic analysis of the nature and functions of these institutions and what might be realistically expected of them. We believe that the very nature of the analysis and the ideas and discourses on which it is based, is limiting and will not lead to any meaningful innovation in the TVET system, leaving it to reproduce the very characteristics of the present system. In other words, the possibilities for renewal and for the transformation of the knowledge related educational and practical work of this sector will continue to remain socially ineffective.

In our view what employers, policy makers, many academics and other commentators take little account of are several contextual and historical factors which could provide a more rigorous and dependable explanation of the reasons why education and training in this sector has little hope of responding to the wide array of expectations placed on them, their promise and possibilities. We argue that unless several overarching contextual issues are understood it would not be possible to attain a clearer understanding of the challenges

facing the TVET sector, and any attempt at developing this sector meaningfully will not succeed.

These factors, that are fundamental and constitutive, are both *structural and conceptual* as explained briefly below. Although we do not deal with this in detail, there is in fact a massive body of critical and very important writing and reflection on these issues – their theorisation and practical meaning and implications for policy - which can be available to anyone interested in them.

Key to these factors, and the relevant literature, is the failure to properly understand the relationship between education and training and the labour market. That understanding is deeply flawed because of the primary assumption that an adequate supply of skills by training institutions can largely resolve the problem of unemployment and simultaneously meet the demands of a competitive economy. This simplistic and linear relationship between education and work remains the key to informing policy and the activities of the very institutions of TVET in their quest for a match between the learning outputs and the requirements of the labour market. Yet this understanding of the relationship between learning and work, on which a great deal of theory, policy and practice is shaped, is not supported by the evidence - as countless studies have shown. There is a large and compelling body of literature which simply cannot be ignored regarding the problem of muted demand for skills *arising from structural factors affecting the labour market* in capitalist economies. These explain the real causes of the problem of unemployment and must lead us to understand differently the complex issues involved in understanding the question of knowledge and skills, the epistemologies that are relevant to the acquisition of skills, pedagogical [including socio-linguistic] questions, the competence of educators and learning texts, contextual and other related issues, which must be taken into account in understanding the low levels of the uptake of skills produced in training institutions.

The failure to take account of these structural factors is in some senses, unsurprising because of the reliance by academic economists on neo-classical ideas about the relationship of supply to demand, which they assume is always resolved through the achievement of equilibrium in market-led economic systems. This assumption has a pervasive influence on employment policy-making, because, for the adherents of this approach

*in the long-run, the economic system is self-adjusting towards a full-employment equilibrium level, only external rigidities i.e. those external to the economic system, can be sources of involuntary unemployment. In the long-run, the crossing of supply and demand curves for labour should determine the full-employment equilibrium, a*

*level of employment for which those who do not work, given their preferences and the price system, choose not to work.<sup>1</sup>*

This is the dominant and widely accepted approach for explaining how unemployment is resolved in capitalist societies. Yet we know that this view is patently wrong and misleading. It flies in the face of the direct experience of millions of workers and of the factual evidence that has shown how unemployment is a deeply historical and structural phenomenon both under apartheid capitalism and even in the post-Apartheid state. Explanations which avoid these realities are totally unhelpful and cannot be used to chart a way forward. Recognizing the structural and systemic barriers to employment, together with the role of skills acquisition could provide a more defensible explanation of the phenomenon of unemployment. It is therefore critically important to understand the power of the structural characteristics of capitalist economies and how these affect the relationship between the supply of skills and its demand and consequently the limits and possibilities that frame the responses of education and training institutions in capitalist societies. These structural characteristics are hugely responsible for the shape of the economic and socio-political systems not only in developed economies of the West but even more strongly in the 'developing' post-colonial economies in Africa and elsewhere. The research literature around it is abundant and easily available to anyone who seeks to examine it carefully and here we simply point in outline to some of these structural factors which are largely ignored in the discussions about the role of TVET and other education and training institutions.

### **Structural systemic factors**

Pride of place in the *causal structural factors* we refer to is the problem of the extreme concentration of wealth and power in South Africa arising from both historical and contemporary developments. Apartheid had a fundamentally formative role in the concentration of wealth and incomes in society but that has been further exacerbated by the continuities of many of the attributes of apartheid in the post-1994 era. The consequences of this for socio-economic, political and other attributes of inequality are well known. In nearly every calculation – whether it be based on the Gini coefficient of income inequalities or on the more recent measures of wealth, income and wellness, such as the alternative Palma ratio, South Africa remains at the proverbial bottom of the pile or very close to it. There, it is perpetually in competition with one or two 'developing' nations like India, Brazil, Haiti or Namibia.<sup>2</sup> The effects of such egregious levels of inequality are morally

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<sup>1</sup> **DISCUSSION PAPER N°1 *Towards a Reflection on Political Economy: Employment Theory***, Matthieu Méaulle (Economic Advisor, FEPS) June 2009. This view has been challenged by possibly the most influential economist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Keynes, who was very influential in the development of Welfarist policies for the UK and more widely.

<sup>2</sup> Inequality index: where are the world's most unequal countries?  
<https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/datablog/2017/apr/26/inequality-index-where-are-the-worlds-most-unequal-countries>.

indefensible and should not be tolerated at all, but their profoundest impact is to be found on the nation's development. Not only is the control over the wealth of the nation by a tiny minority reprehensible (where for instance a busload of billionaires own the equivalent of the wealth of half the population of a country as Oxfam's and other data has shown), but also is it a barrier to the agenda of development that any sovereign state wishes to pursue. This is because of the power that is attached to such structural inequalities; the power to control wealth and incomes, to export profits out of the country through both 'legal' and illicit financial outflows, (there is data which shown annual outflows exceeding hundreds of billions of rands from South Africa over the last decade), the power of illegal evasion of tax through the process of 'trade misinvoicing,'<sup>3</sup> the 'boycott' of investment in the real and productive economy of the country, the holding of enormous financial reserves in institutions while there is great need for such investment in productive activity and employment, keeping capital reserves in financial institutions, stocks and bonds; most importantly the power to make undemocratic and unaccountable decisions about the use of resources which could have value for engendering national development, peace, goodwill and progress. Added to which is the power to subvert and corrupt state institutions, politicians, political parties in power and to undermine the very processes of democratic accountability – no less the power to undermine the democratic values of the Constitution.

The structural constraints that grow out of the staggering levels of inequality which exists in South Africa (and elsewhere) are also buttressed by the ability to influence government policies through a combination of threats and false incentives; threats about the level sovereignty and solvency of nation states invoked by international rating agencies and 'incentives' which in reality are no more than the right to loot public resources for wealth accumulation through policies that directly and indirectly (through tendering and procurement processes) support privatization while simultaneously imposing severe restraints on funding for public goods and services which affect poor and marginalized communities the most.

These powers that subvert democratic accountability and which are exercised by powerful conglomerate global interests range over decisions directly affecting jobs and job security for those who are tenuously employed not only because of the agency given to brokers to manipulate employment practices but also, as any worker will attest, through the practice of work substitution by technological diffusion, done not simply to speed up and 'rationalize' production processes but ultimately to reduce reliance on the workforce.

The single purpose of these mechanisms is the achievement of ever-increasing profits. The data is replete with the evidence of job losses because of this phenomenon. Now, there is a

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<sup>3</sup> Grd Nicolson 19 November 2018, Daily Maverick, Trade misinvoicing costs South Africa \$7.4 billion a year: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2018-11-19-trade-misinvoicing-costs-south-africa-7-4bn-in-tax-a-year/>

burgeoning body of research which suggests that human beings are becoming dispensable as the onward march of technological substitution moves ever more rapidly in the direction of the 'robotization' and mechanization of work. Indeed, not a single wee passes without some or other announcement of the threat of job-loss to add to the numbers of those who will not be employed in the future, will not have any prospect of such employment or who because of the strictures of the labour market have never been involved in it. The data of formal unemployment in SA is overwhelming, showing that at least one in four persons who could and is available to be employed, is not. If one were to add workers who have simply not been counted because they have become dispirited by the traumatic process of work seeking, or disenchanted for any other reason, then the figures are simply shocking. As a recent 'high level overview report' has averred

*There is broad consensus that youth unemployment in South Africa is critical, with latest figures confirming that one half of young people 15–34 years are unemployed by the broad definition<sup>1</sup> (Statistics South Africa 2018). The situation is increasingly viewed as a national emergency, as the high level of youth unemployment is expected to lead to an increasing sense of exclusion among young people and to heightened 'levels of frustration and impatience' (National Planning Commission 2012). Indeed, prolonged periods of unemployment among young people have profoundly negative effects on their physical and mental well-being and feed the vicious cycle of exclusion and poverty (De Lannoy, Leibbrandt and Frame 2015)<sup>4</sup>.*

Moreover, the devastating consequences of structural unemployment for individuals are likely to persist as argued by Nonyana and Njuho.

*Structural factors such as the length of time spent in unemployment and job sustainability have a considerable effect on the persistence of unemployment for an individual.<sup>5</sup>*

Thus, over 9 million human beings, of whom the majority are young women and men, now languish without any realistic likelihood of gainful employment. They have entered the realm of the permanently unemployed with very limited prospects of any change to their reality.

And as the data is beginning to show the phenomenon of precarious work structured into the economic system, is also now apparent everywhere. Daily, thousands of workers must accept conditions of employment which are insecure relative to tenure, lowly paid, with

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<sup>4</sup>WHAT DRIVES YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND WHAT INTERVENTIONS HELP? A Systematic Overview of the Evidence and a Theory of Change High-level Overview Report Ariane De Lannoy, Lauren Graham, Leila Patel & Murray Leibbrandt October 2018. [http://www.povertyandinequality.uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/image\\_tool/images/95/2018/Publications/Youth%20Unemployment%20report\\_181117\\_interactive.pdf](http://www.povertyandinequality.uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/image_tool/images/95/2018/Publications/Youth%20Unemployment%20report_181117_interactive.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Nonyana JZ, Njuho PM. Modelling the length of time spent in an unemployment state in South Africa. S Afr J Sci. 2018;114(11/12), Art. #4313, 7 pages. <https://doi.org/10.17159/sajs.2018/4313>

little employment security or benefits and dependent on the will of their 'broker.' It is a phenomenon of global proportions leaving no employee secure at whatever level of the enterprise – including at managerial levels.

In the developed economies of the West the picture is not very different. Steigler<sup>6</sup> has predicted that French unemployment will reach 30% within ten years. He refers to the creation of 'automated herds' by these processes, referring not simply to technological development but 'to the ingrained habits that attend them'. And even in the UK's developed capitalist economy the picture looks bleak especially for low income earners for whom job losses of around 35% in the next 20 years are predicted. Moreover, according to David Spencer, the effects of unemployment are not distributed between high and low income earners since low income earners (around 30000 pounds) are 'nearly five times more likely to be replaced by automation than jobs paying over 100000 pounds.'<sup>7</sup> Capitalism has, as Steigler argues, 'captured' technology 'within its ongoing project of rationalization'. Philip Alston, the UN's rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, ended a two-week fact-finding mission to the UK with a stinging declaration that levels of child poverty were "not just a disgrace, but a social calamity and an economic disaster", even though the UK is the world's fifth largest economy.<sup>8</sup> He points to 'social engineering leading to the perverse effects pointing to its effects on a fifth of the population [14 million people] living in poverty while 1.5 million people are destitute - citing figures from the Institute for Fiscal Studies and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation which also suggested that 'child poverty could rise by 7 percentage points between 2015 and 2022, possibly up to a rate of 40%.'

Added to this is the threat – paraded as opportunity – of the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution, which is a strategy, dependent primarily on a technological and information communication 'revolution' for greater accumulation and the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a global minority. Even in the most advanced global economies the consequences of this 'computational revolution' is revealing its true character in respect of both its social,

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<sup>6</sup> below

<sup>7</sup> Calum Watt review of Bernard Stiegler, trans. Daniel Ross, Automatic Society: Volume 1, The Future of Work, Review 31, Sulaco Publishing Company and Douglas Spencer, Proletarianization isn't working, review of Bernard Stiegler, trans. Daniel Ross, Automatic Society: Volume 1, The Future of Work, Review 31, Sulaco Publishing Company, Radical Philosophy 2.01 pages 99

<sup>8</sup> The Guardian: [https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/nov/16/uk-austerity-has-inflicted-great-misery-on-citizens-un-says?CMP=share\\_btn\\_link](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/nov/16/uk-austerity-has-inflicted-great-misery-on-citizens-un-says?CMP=share_btn_link)

cognitive and psychological outcomes. As Steigler,<sup>9</sup> has argued 'digital consumer capitalism is producing "generalised stupefaction" and "systemic stupidity"'.<sup>10</sup>

### **The power of ideology in defence of global corporate capitalism and inequality**

To exacerbate and lend justification to the structural factors we refer to is the ideology that beckons society to accept that there is, cannot be, and even *ought not to be*, any alternative to the present social system in which the unlimited reach and power of a global and local elite hold nations to ransom and prevents the development of any alternative that might meet the aspirations and basic human rights of the citizenry and the sanctity of the planetary ecology for future generations. This ideology is often attributed to the conservative political ideologies of the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher and too Ronald Reagan, the American President<sup>11</sup>. The policies they pursued were deliberately intended to secure the ascendancy and power of the rich by destroying the power of working-class organisations like trade unions and curtailing the impact of the political parties that sought to represent their interests. The effects of these policies can be seen in the unimaginable levels of global inequality, unemployment, poverty, famine, insecurity, war-making and civil strife together with greed, opulence and consumerism and environmental degradation and the destruction of peasant based agricultural production and other practices that could counteract the dominant global economic system.

Despite the unprecedented levels of growing inequality and other alarming developments globally,<sup>12</sup> apologists of the corporate capitalist system and its supportive governments continue to refer to the idea of increased economic growth (and 'redistribution through growth') as the only panacea to the ills of the present. For them the contradictions of the present global system can be resolved through increasing the competitive efficiencies of the national economy, greater levels of savings and investment, controls over the price of labour (in particular), stable macro-economic and financial policies, 'hard work', the

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<sup>9</sup> Calum Watt review of Bernard Stiegler, trans. Daniel Ross, *Automatic Society: Volume 1, The Future of Work*, Review 31, Sulaco Publishing Company and Douglas Spencer, *Proletarianization isn't working*, review of Bernard Stiegler, trans. Daniel Ross, *Automatic Society: Volume 1, The Future of Work*, Review 31, Sulaco Publishing Company, *Radical Philosophy* 2.01 pages 99-102)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid: page 1 On this point one of Steigler's recurring references is to the testimony to US Congress of Alan Greenspan, the former Chairman of the Federal Reserve, during the financial crisis of 2008, in which Greenspan effectively admitted that computational free market capitalism was flawed and out of control.

<sup>11</sup> Although there is a compelling argument to be made that its development was an inevitable consequences of prior developments in the capitalist economies of the West.

<sup>12</sup> Taking just one such issue into account – that relating to the statistics on urban informal employment based on QLFS conducted in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2010 by Stats SA for instance, showed that 53% of the labour force was women (of a labour force of 33.8 million). Of this population 50% of women ( 8957 million women of a total of 14676 million) were not economically active. The WIEGO Statistical Brief No. 1 of May 2011 article by Debbie Budlender. Age group working age 15 years and older. 33.8 million of total of 49.3 ml.



reduction of 'wasteful' and 'inefficient' state expenditure and now, the increasing reliance on the privatisation of public services and other such policies and practices.

Denials about the failures of the present system are heard notwithstanding the wealth of research setting out the data and arguments about how the capitalism has failed the majority of the citizens of the world – especially in the 'developing world'. David Harvey<sup>13</sup> provides a useful compendium of the main contradictions and weaknesses inherent in corporate capitalism and a flood of other writings has emerged in the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2008 reflecting similarly on capitalist failure. For ecosocialists, the crisis is no less an ecological catastrophe, 'as global capitalist economic growth accelerates planetary ecological collapse.' They argue for radical solutions to the crisis wrought by the present system, arguing for an alternative based on 'the construction of a mostly publicly-owned and mostly planned eco-socialist economy based on global "contraction and convergence," on substantial deindustrialization, on sharing, on much less work and much more play and on bottom up democratic management' is an alternative to 'the collapse of civilization and ecological suicide'.<sup>14</sup>

### **The need for alternatives is urgent**

It is against this background that an alternative to the very conceptual categories and the evidentiary data used to shape the policy perspectives of governments that support corporate interests to the exclusion of other social considerations, must be developed. These together inform the analysis and interpretations on which the policies and practices of the state and the educational plans and strategies of TVET institutions, can be built to shape the life and the subjective predilections of the students themselves. Only this will address the dominant system, widely accepted as responsible for the lack of responsiveness of the education and training system to the demands of the economy. Understanding these formative issues about who has the greatest power in shaping education and training policy, whose interests are served and who is ignored as a result of this and the real 'beneficiaries' of these structural constraints, ideologies and the policies shaped by them are, is the real challenge we face in determining an alternative approach to the role of TVET Colleges.

It requires an alternative concept of the role of TVET institutions from which alternative policies, strategies and projects might be implemented to turn around a system which is

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<sup>13</sup> David Harvey (2015) *Seventeen Contradictions and the end of Capitalism*, Oxford University Press, UK. Other references to capitalist crisis. Also Piketty; Richard Smith, *Capitalism and the destruction of life on earth: Six theses on saving the humans*, 30th June 2017, Ecologise.in , page 1 <http://www.ecologise.in/2017/06/30/capitalism-destruction-life-earth-six-theses-saving-humans/>, page 1

<sup>14</sup> Richard Smith, *Capitalism and the destruction of life on earth: Six theses on saving the humans*, 30th June 2017, Ecologise.in <http://www.ecologise.in/2017/06/30/capitalism-destruction-life-earth-six-theses-saving-humans/>

pointed in the wrong direction and which continues to inflict more and more harm on the recipients of a knowledge system that deepens social inequality and poverty, makes it impossible that any real changes can happen in the levels of unemployment in society and condemns young and old to exclusion and penury.

Now the crisis of global corporate capitalism has indeed given rise to a plethora of alternative approaches to social organization, political, economic and livelihood related systems and a wide range of academic and other reflections. This is necessary in the face of the pessimisms and confusion of those who suggest that the present system cannot be substituted; that the world is as it is because it is 'meant to be', and that any talk of changing it is no more than hopelessly misguided.

In fact, not only are there now a wide range of alternative livelihood and economic systems in development or emerging but also have many of these managed to survive the challenges of sustaining themselves in the hostile environment of the overwhelming power of the market. They have managed to build communities of resilience, produce useful goods and services, create markets independent of the profit motive, provided livelihoods through solidarity to millions of people in many parts of the world. These developments have also produced useful knowledge and insights about the emerging alternatives and its possibilities through a variety of models of production, distribution and consumption markedly different from the dominant models of corporate globalisation. These exemplars of alternative systems are moreover not just about the production of goods and services, they relate also to patterns of consumption and distribution and to decision-making, collective and cooperative action and a new social vision based on a set of values quite distinct from that engendered by the individualist, dog-eat-dog values of the prevailing globally dominant system. And they are environmentally conscious.

Most importantly, they shed light on the possibilities for the transformation and reorganisation of social relations to overcome the power of corporate greed and are based on accountable forms of association and democratic participation. Without the reorganisation of power, unequal social relations will persist and with it the structural attributes of inequality that characterises global society today. The alternatives we refer to must ultimately lead to a fundamental social re-organisation - not only of its contemporary racist, gendered, class based, geographic and other discriminatory characteristics but also the distribution of wealth and incomes in ways that are sustainable for humanity and the planetary environment. In other words, the effects of such a social reorganisation and transformation must achieve both the goals of social justice and environmental sustainability, simultaneously.

## What is the agency for change

The critical question is about how it will be achieved and what the agency for that might be. And what indeed are the learning attributes to advance these goals. Genuinely democratic social processes are necessary for the fundamental re-organisation of education and training for transforming society. The means for doing so are inseparable from its ends, or conversely, the democratic ends to be achieved through education and training can only be fully realised if the means are themselves based on social relations that prefigure these democratic ends.

Our approach relies on the genuine participation of constituencies through education. We do not subscribe to or agree with the command planning that characterized the 'real socialisms' that existed in the Soviet bloc of countries until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. There is a valuable historical literature on planning in the Soviet economic system, its merits and complexities which is rarely [if ever] acknowledged by the advocates of 'free-enterprise' systems.<sup>15</sup> Its detractors fail even to acknowledge the right to employment and accessible social services – like education and health - which were achieved by the Soviet system as it emerged from the grip of Tzarism, backwardness and war; the rapid strides made to achieve industrialization, scientific and technological progress (Russia's space programme overtook at least for some time the achievements of the pre-Kennedy US space programme) and the massive role played in the defeat of Fascist Germany in World War II. The failures of the Soviet system can only be understood by a proper historical and contextual analysis setting out the reasons why, despite its manifest achievements even under the draconian Stalinist regime, it failed the ideas of the great theoreticians of the socialist ideal and its practical possibilities. The Soviet state's inability to compete with global capitalism can be attributed to the contextual conditions of which bureaucratic and dictatorial systems were an important part. As Elster and Moene say

*Capitalism – actually existing capitalism – appears in many respects to be an ugly, irrational, wasteful way of organising the production and distribution of goods and services. Mass unemployment as is currently observed in most advanced capitalist economies is the most striking form of this waste. Yet we cannot say as confidently as many socialists have in the past that it is easy to create a better system ... The main cause of the disenchantment of socialists is the deplorable record of central planning, which in the socialist tradition was always the panacea for the ills of capitalism.<sup>16</sup>*

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<sup>15</sup> On planned economies see Dobb, M. An Essay on Economic Growth and Planning, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London. Devine, P. (1981) *Principles of Democratic Planning* in Currie, D. and Smith, R. (eds) *Socialist Economic Review*, Merlin Press, Pages 113-128. Smith, Alan H. (1983) *The Planned Economies of Eastern Europe*, Croom Helm, London

<sup>16</sup> Elster J and Moene K O (Eds.) (1989) *Alternatives to Capitalism*, Cambridge University Press, New York

Thus the charge of dictatorship in planned economies can be both disingenuous and hypocritical if it does not also acknowledge the weak track record of market led 'free-enterprise' economies; the colonialist and imperial roots of capitalist development through the manipulation of anti-social and anti-democratic practices globally and the support for dictatorial regimes worldwide together with the overwhelming control over production systems, distribution and wealth accumulation wielded by transnational global corporations.

### **Reconceptualizing work, alternative livelihoods and income generation through learning**

As we have argued, in the present system unemployment is an unalterable reality – one which countless covenants, strategies, consultancy reports, 'affirmative' laws and 'active labour market policies' will not resolve because the phenomenon of unemployment is irreversible in this society. That is why we must examine ideas about work and learning and livelihoods that exist outside conventional economic categories of capitalist production systems. The expectation that the TVET system, *as it is*, will resolve the crisis facing it and play a large part in resolving the crisis of unemployment in the present system is simply unrealistic. If the fundamental structural and conceptual barriers we have pointed to are not addressed very little change is likely to deepening inequality, powerlessness for the majority and increasing unemployment and poverty. The TVET system will continue as present, limping along to reproduce very poor educational outcomes. The continuous re-examination of its knowledge production, curriculum, qualifications, pedagogical strategies, the training of educators together with its governance and oversight structures will have little positive effect without a fundamental re-examination of the structural and ideological constraints that prevent the TVET Colleges from discharging a meaningful social mandate.

Alternatives must be found to the realities of the crisis ridden market system as the dominant global system of production, reproduction, distribution and consumption riven with destructive human and environmental effects.

***These alternatives start with a reconceptualization of work and therefore of the relationship between work and learning.*** Work is integral to our collective being and needs to be wrested from the grip of its present organization. Paid jobs are only part of the picture. People also work to find and provide other forms of income generating and livelihoods not based on the failed promises of employment; to nurture others; to build communities; to access services; and more.

*People work to establish and transform identities, protect privileges, and resist the indignities of marginalization. They work to make change. Children work, in the informal economy, as well as at home, in school, and in their communities. Many people have long worked in shadow economies; some have begun to create new*

*kinds of local economies. And new technologies are producing novel forms of work that are only beginning to be understood.*<sup>17</sup>

There are many extant and historical examples of the alternatives that are possible. To take just one example that illustrates what is possible, a group of over 300 activists, including university professors, leaders of social movements and intellectuals offer an insight into the possibilities for a different approach<sup>18</sup>

*as a response to the loss of jobs, decline of industry and the inability of the state to stimulate development and the dissolution of rights enshrined in the Brazilian Constitution, together with the erosion of rights and the failure of traditional left approaches to political and social issues. These failures have compounded social problems for the majority and calls perversely for greater sacrifice on the part of marginalised communities who are asked to reduce the costs of the labour.*<sup>19</sup>

The group suggested several ways of dealing with the crisis of jobs and set these out in a policy paper which proposed a number of steps to deal with the structural barriers which impact on the lives of workers and the poor. These proposals included a strategy for preserving jobs and incomes, 'to consolidate the internal mass consumer market, sustain economic growth and reinvigorate the tax base', the lowering of interest rates (to stimulate production, jobs and incomes), rebuilding the state's financial capacity (through a different approach to the use of state funds and for generating more tax income), stimulating local, social, urban and logistical infrastructure for growth and to strengthen internal markets, preserving social spending levels and other such measures.

It is important to understand that these practical alternatives require new ways of thinking about society and the role of the state and its institutions. It requires 'cultural' shifts as suggested by Neera M. Singh<sup>20</sup> in her conceptualisation of the relationship between environmental care and human relations 'using ideas of gift, reciprocity and affect', i.e. using labour as a gift for local conservation practices as illustrated by the case of community forestry in the district of Odisha in India. She is critical of market-based approaches and the payment of financial incentives to support conservation and invites a consideration of a

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<sup>17</sup> Call for contributions to the *INVISIBLE WORK 2014 MEETING EASTERN SOCIOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

<sup>18</sup> *Silvio Caccia Bava*, (October 8, 2015) Time For Change To Leave The Crisis Behind, <http://www.brasilwire.com/timefor-change-to-leave-the-crisis-behind/>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.brasilwire.com/time-for-change-to-leave-the-crisis-behind/>

<sup>20</sup> Neera Singh (2015) Payments for ecosystem (PES) services and the gift paradigm: Sharing the burden and joy of environmental care.

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0921800915002426> and <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2015.06.011>

more equitable way of sharing the responsibility for environmental care together with 'the joyful and life affirming aspects of conservation care labor and its transformative potential'.<sup>21</sup>

The conceptual shifts include new ways of thinking about work, its organisation, distribution and rewards, i.e. the social relations of work in society and the role of learning in this regard. For instance, the case for working less is made by David Spencer<sup>22</sup> as against conventional work which demands 'more work' and work which is alienating and regarded as a drain on state resources for the unemployed. His perspective favours work that makes it possible to pursue a better quality of life, deals with the 'anomaly of overwork', providing work to those who do not have it by work-sharing, reducing work time, and the drudgery of work, while enhancing the possibilities for creative work. He refutes arguments that a reduction in work time could lead to higher firm costs and job losses. For him work reduction is related to work morale through shorter working hours. The more profound question is whether we should be asking society to tolerate long work hours for some and zero work hours for others.

*Surely society can achieve a more equitable allocation of work that offers everyone enough time to work and enough time to do what they want? ...The cult of productivity crowds out other more 'leisurely' ways of living that can add to human well-being. Challenging this cult and seeking ways to lighten the burden of work could allow us all to live better lives inside and outside work. Arguments for shorter work time have a long history. Keynes, for example, gave support to a reduction in working time as a way of achieving full employment.*<sup>23</sup>

## Conclusion

It should be clear that these alternatives imply a much broader view of the role of education and training than is contemplated by the dominant discourse about education as an instrument of the labour market, because knowledge and learning is deeply implicated in these issues. Howard Richards<sup>24</sup>, talks about universities in this regard since they are regarded as the key social institutions of knowledge development and learning. He enjoins us to rethink the social sciences against the 'liberal world view' about 'modernity' which we are asked to unlearn. In this view

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<sup>21</sup> ibid

<sup>22</sup> Spencer D, (posted 22 January) The Case for Working Less. [http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/58749/1/\\_lse.ac.uk\\_storage\\_LIBRARY\\_Secondary\\_libfile\\_shared\\_repository\\_Content\\_American%20Politics%20and%20Policy\\_2014\\_February\\_blogs.lse.ac.uk-The\\_case\\_for\\_working\\_less.pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/58749/1/_lse.ac.uk_storage_LIBRARY_Secondary_libfile_shared_repository_Content_American%20Politics%20and%20Policy_2014_February_blogs.lse.ac.uk-The_case_for_working_less.pdf) blogs.lse.ac.uk <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2014/02/11/the-case-for-working-less/>

<sup>23</sup> ibid

<sup>24</sup> Howard Richards (2015) Modernity's 'other' and the transformation of the university. *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning* 7(2).6-22 <sup>331</sup> Ibid: page 6

*We need to go further back in history beyond the point where commerce replaced kinship, to find the premises of a viable future. This implies that non-Western and indigenous knowledge systems are entitled to respect. Standard science as it stands today has many useful practical applications, but it does not have a metaphysical monopoly on the right way to talk about what is (Bhaskar 1986).<sup>331</sup>*

In effect, we need to respond to the question of how – in addition to the broad and multifaceted purposes of learning for social justice and citizenship, education and learning can support the development of useful livelihoods and income generation, based on collective and cooperative work that is socially useful and necessary for sustaining and reproducing societies and protecting the environment.

The alternatives we refer to in the discussion about solidarity economies, cooperatives and its related concepts, raise questions about how these radical approaches to learning and work can be taken forward to make a real impact on the very nature of power and the structures that deepen the socio-economic and political crisis faced by South African society.

We also understand that the alternatives envisaged here are always likely to encounter serious resistance given that even attempts to create solidaristic systems can be subverted where

*If the aim of these non-capitalistic forms of labour organization is still the production of exchange values, for example, and if the capacity for private persons to appropriate the social power of money remains unchecked, then the associated workers, the solidarity economies and the centrally planned production regimes ultimately either fail or become complicit in their own self-exploitation. The drive to establish the conditions for unalienated labour falls short.<sup>25</sup>*

A critical question therefore is about the political and social agency that would be required to support and give meaning to the approaches envisaged here. Attempts at social transformation are best engendered with the widest possible support of the citizenry. The mobilisation, organisation, and education processes necessary to do so must be based on serious engagements with the very constituencies most affected by the problems of work and learning. This requires the development, as far as possible, of democratic and accountable processes by which engagements with these constituencies are organised.

The state remains the central and primary organiser and controller of the very substantial financial, institutional and physical (and even of some intellectual) resources of society. An alternative agenda must be based on, and expect, the support of the state because democratic states and their resources are critical to fundamental change regarding learning

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<sup>25</sup> Harvey, 2015: ibid

and work. This implies the need to strengthen and support the social agency and organizations in active struggles contesting the choices made by the state especially as many of these choices result in deepening the problems faced by working class and marginalised communities. Ideas and practices related to democratic local control, accountability and mandates can be promoted through the very education and training approaches we are concerned with here.<sup>26</sup> These would require a complete rethink of the overall curriculum and systemic structures, qualifications and other attributes of the TVET system and the learning promoted by it and can refer to short and longer-term strategies for achieving these ends. We know that detailed processes and planning is necessary to support any fundamental reorganization even of just some elements of a system.

In our approach, academic institutions have a critical role to play in supporting the processes of learning in relation to work. New and innovative ideas can be researched and examined rigorously in such institutions through the partnerships that already exist. A great deal of support will be required for these ideas that could lead to long-term and positive outcomes for the TVET system and enable it to make a meaningful contribution to social transformation.

**CIPSET**

***Draft at December 2019***

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<sup>26</sup> Including a range of approaches now being debated worldwide about different political philosophies and approaches to socio-political systems. See for example Holloway, J. (2016) *In, Against, and Beyond Capitalism: The San Francisco Lectures* PM Press (2016) ISBN 9781629631097, *Change the World Without Taking Power* (2002), ISBN 0-7453-1864-9, Wolff R.P (1970) *In Defense of Anarchism*, Harper and Row, New York