

What CLP believes - three brief statements.

Introduction

In civil society organisations, the overwhelming tendency is to speak – and the unerring consequence is to reinforce the silencing of the people. In fact much civil society practice and thinking proceeds really on the assumption that speech is not a capacity of the people. The Church Land Programme (CLP) has explored an alternative path. Aspects of the thinking, experimentation and consequences of that path have been articulated in some written pieces we've shared like [Learning to Walk: NGO Practice and the Possibility of Freedom](#) (2007) and [Finding Our Voice in the World](#) (2010), as well as numerous contributions via CLP's [Padkos](#) initiative. A central idea that emerged was that “our voice is our praxis” - or indeed, “our praxis is our voice” - and that the discipline of that principled praxis requires of the organisation much more listening than speaking.

On the other hand it has been important at various moments to be able to collectively and clearly articulate the principled basis of that praxis in relation to issues, constituencies, or terrains of work and engagement. The kinds of papers and publications from CLP indicated above, provide a pretty solid basis for this but we still get continuing requests to share and explain our approach. Over the past years there continue to be moments of collective discussion and clarification that we've captured in much shorter sets of (often internal) notes. What follows below are edited extracts from three such notes from the past three years:

- A CLP confession of faith (2011);
- A CLP statement on the land question (2012); &
- A CLP Summation of our principles and politics (2013).

1. A CLP confession of faith (2011).

Extract from: Church Land Programme Quarterly Meeting: A Liturgy

During 2011, CLP workers departed from the standard format for one of their quarterly review sessions. Expecting a regular 'review and planning' meeting format, everyone was a little taken aback to get the following flyer outlining a structure for the day's work together!

Order of Service

Church Land Programme Quarterly Meeting

Introduction

Readings from the Gospel eMzabalazweni

Confession of Faith “We believe...”

Sermon

Prayers 'for the whole state of Christ's church'

Communion

Commissioning – Amandla!

Certainly this was an experiment, perhaps a risky one, perhaps even a blasphemous one – but it was a perfectly serious experiment. It was based on the fundamental conviction that the sacramental presence of God is in real and human life, or it is not the God of the Christian tradition. And we entered into this experiment acknowledging and respecting the powerful creativity of liturgy. And it worked. (Note that for those who are interested, we've attached the full, but short, report of the day at the end of this document.) For now though, we just selected people's contributions to the **Confession of Faith**:

Confession of faith

Intention and rationale

Having heard how we have read the 'good stuff' emerging in our activities, we are going to capture our own 'creed' – what is it we actually believe?; what feeds us (and will continue to feed us) in our journey? We will collectively work on a statement that says for us, 'this is the kingdom'. Can we name the abstract from the specifics and then hear from each other and see if we can collectively draft a CLP creed - “We believe ...”

Contributions and discussion

We no longer doubt for a second...

- that people demonstrate their sovereignty through the struggles they lead;
- that we are not alone – and that the more our praxis is connected to popular and genuinely political rebellion, the less alone we are, and the more ordinary and democratic the struggle becomes;
- that things happen beyond our control and our effort, and beyond our resources and words;
- that faith in truth keeps us going on an uncertain path - and a sometimes messy ride;
- that people (in CLP and beyond) are our most important asset;
- that love, respect and fidelity are key: love of rebellion and of the people, respect because everyone matters really and we express this in our action and our listening, fidelity in being true;
- our faith in a praxis that places ourselves against the world as it is;
- that thought, especially collective processes of thinking are key to liberatory action;
- that the will of the people is the will of God;
- that liberation of the poor and the oppressed is liberation of everyone – it is our liberation/salvation;
- that our faith is the certainty of truth, that fidelity to truth is a matter of action, and that this faith is a sufficient basis for acting concretely in the world.

We do not believe in the common-sense knowledge of the world as it is – we believe in the crazy nonsense of the truth that is its rupture/disruption.

2. The Land Question: A Statement of Belief

Church Land Programme (2011)

Elements of our theological perspective on the land question:

- Land is a gift from God, to be equitably shared for the benefit of all humanity.
- Land is the 'locus of life', the place where life is lived and celebrated, the place that gives life and identity. There is a critical social function of land.
- 'Ownership' of land is never absolute because this social function of land is paramount.
- We must acknowledge the propensity for commodification, accumulation and profit, leading to the exclusion of the poor and the denial of their rights in land. Our interventions must be to work against this and ensure redress.
- The Jubilee tradition affirms the redistributive nature of God's commitment to the poor, seeking to ensure just and equitable access to land and resources.
- Human work on the land should express the dignity of human labour and the joy of participation and cooperation because it is a privilege to be co-creators with God in the unfolding story of creation.
- It is judged as contrary to God's will where our working of the land strips the earth of fertility and robs future generations of its benefits.

(Taken from: Church Land Programme, Occasional Paper No. 1, 2004, ***Land in South Africa: Gift for all or Commodity for a few***, Chapter 2: "Articles of Faith: Theological Perspectives on Land").

We believe that: A holistic understanding of land shows it to be a fundamental basis of the life of the people, of community, of shelter, of neighbourliness, of community, of the enjoyment of nature and the production of food, but...

too few people have enough, productive, and sustained, **access** to land in South Africa.

On balance, government **policy** is not just failing to deal with the land problem, and not just dealing with it too slowly, but is taking us in the **wrong direction** in any case.

Aligning policy and practice of commercial land-uses (especially agricultural) with the interests of **elites** (in South Africa and globally) is a disaster, and it relegates land-use policy and practice for the poor to an ineffective side-show marked by lofty rhetoric and zero positive impact.

Land is not just a 'rural' issue and not just an agricultural issue.

Land-access and land-use policy and practices that are shaped by the dominant class interests continue to dictate what goes down and as a result:

in urban areas:

- the rich and powerful tend to have much better access to land, housing and services while the poor do not; and

*in rural areas, particularly in areas of **commercial** agricultural production:*

- the consolidation of land ownership continues apace, driving staggering numbers of farm tenants, farm workers and even farmers off the land whilst strengthening the grip of agro-industrial and -financial interests, large-scale, energy- and input-intensive mono-crop farming predominates; and

*in rural areas, particularly in areas of largely **non-commercial** land use:*

- the combined impacts of the power of the dominant and globalised capitalist system that organises almost all aspects of life, has been to render them barely liveable under conditions of grinding poverty, social exclusion, and the systematic destruction of viable livelihoods and communities outside of that capitalist system.

For both 'rural' and 'urban' it is obvious that:

- their current **crises are closely linked** (e.g. the engineered collapse of the viability of humane and sustainable rural life feeds migration to cities and the growth of shack settlements);
- that therefore neither can be 'solved' without addressing the other; and
- that in the longer term the radical separation implied by the categories of 'rural' and 'urban' needs itself to be overcome and integrated as we collectively fashion ways of life and living together that integrate both, and that re-invent them on the basis of a **radically democratic politics and properly ecological productive systems.**

Moving forward in urban areas, it is obvious that:

- a better system will be inclusive and egalitarian, and
- getting there will be driven by the thinking and action of autonomous, mass-based, democratic struggles for equality, dignity, land and housing.

Moving forward in rural areas, it is obvious that:

- a better system of land-use will be driven by smaller-scale productive units farming agro-ecologically; and
- getting there will be driven by the thinking and action of autonomous, mass-based, democratic struggles for equality, dignity, and land.

Good **government policy** is better than bad policy, but the policy terrain and process itself **reinforces**:

- the idea that a small group of clever **experts** (including those in 'civil society') decide things on behalf of the people;
- the dominance of powerful and rich **elite interests**;
- the power of the **state** over the people;
- **silencing** and ignorance of the real struggles, insights, practices, lives and issues of the masses of **the people.**

Learning from, and supporting the **struggles** of, those who tend not to be counted in the dominant systems:

- gives better insight into what it is that actually needs to be dealt with and how,
- strengthens the forces for effective and just transformation, and
- enables us to subject our social and political life to **the will of the people.**

In conclusion: the land, and the 'land question', is best resolved in the hands and the minds of the people.

3. CLP: Summation of our principles and politics

June 2013

In the build up to a major strategic planning event in the organisation's life, staff got together to collectively name and define CLP's fundamental principles and values. This exercise in owning our politics, our ideology, was not focused on particular issues, groups or places – it was about the universal core principles that we think in relation to whatever situation arises. These are important to articulate and defend.

Politics

There's a fundamental split between:

- living politics and a dead politics;
- emancipatory politics and state politics;
- liberatory politics and party politics.

CLP is committed to a living, emancipatory, and liberatory politics.

CLP is pretty much finished with the dead politics of the state and the parties.

Ranciere reserves the name 'politics' for only the emancipatory trajectory and calls the rest "the police". For him, politics is the clash of the logic of egalitarianism with the logic of the police. For Badiou, emancipatory politics is always a rupture with what is – it is the void of the situation.

At CLP's "Fanomenal event", S'bu Zikode (of Abahlali baseMjondolo, the South African shackdweller movement) defined politics as the movement out of the places where oppression has assigned us. Whereas the dead politics of state and the parties is always the instruction to go back to your place, emancipatory politics is a politics from below. A living politics is one with the everyday life, thinking, language and struggle of the people – it is a politics of dignity. And it is grounded to what is happening and what needs to happen to achieve real change in the world.

In the tradition of Freire, for us this politics is open-ended and we cannot pre-determine or plan or impose it because it is made by the people, and they/we make the path by walking. As the Zapatista's say too: "asking, we walk". This emphasises also that politics is **thought** – this is very important: everyone thinks!

As CLP staff discussed in January 2013:

We recall here Anna Selmeczi's suggestion that proximity is central to understanding the "living politics" articulated by Abahlali. Indeed we suggest that in important ways, living politics is characterised by the apparently paradoxical conjuncture of both **proximity** (to the real of the life and struggles of the people) and **distance** (i.e., a politics at-a-distance from the state). A living politics connects us all to the Real, and shapes us. It is the everyday practice of thinking, choosing, acting subjectively. It is grounded and it is a collective praxis of militancy. It is intimately connected with the idea that "asking, we walk" – as comrades from Abahlali and the Rural Network said in a discussion at CLP during 2012: "we are a philosophical movement".

It is clear that what we name as 'politics' is not always how others tend to use the term – it is often used exactly to describe the (non)politics of the state. In 2010 (*Finding our voice in the world* – see: <http://www.churchland.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Finding-our-voice-in-the-world.pdf>) CLP clarified:

There is an oft-repeated English saying that 'politics is the art of the possible'¹. But CLP increasingly reserves the name 'politics' for those properly emancipatory moments - or ruptures - where the people establish their human subjectivity in the wider society, and throw off the oppression of being objects of history and domination. Under these conditions, politics is precisely the refusal to accept that the world-as-it-is determines what could be.

The world-as-it-is is structured by an underlying architecture of institutions and ideas that seem to work together to uphold the state of things in the interests of those who benefit from it.

Civil society

Civil society is overwhelmingly, “in order”. Indeed, civil society is part of the order of how things are in the world. In this way, it is part of the state, and operates on the terrain of the politics of the state. Civil society is important for the state politics in allocating people to their place in the state system as 'beneficiaries', 'stakeholders' and 'interest groups'.

Civil society sees itself (and is seen by many other elites) as important bearers of knowledge, of skills, of resources, of the power to access and represent “the community”, or “the poor”, or “the people”, and so on. Civil society tends to think for..., and to speak for... . It often assumes it has the solutions, processes, strategies, and theories – and that its role is to mediate these to 'beneficiaries'. It does so by workshopping, capacity building, facilitating, running 'teach-ins', info sharing, etc etc. The real effect of this work is to relentlessly try and convince the people that they cannot think for themselves, that they cannot think their own politics, and that they cannot take effective action in the world.

By assuming that ultimate agency resides in elite spaces like civil society, organizations working in that terrain land up being preoccupied with “sustainability” and their own organizational survival. This can only happen once civil society has imagined itself as a project in its own terms, and separate from any living politics of the people.

We affirm leading radical South African thinker and academic, Michael Neocosmos' clarification that civil society is not really about organizational form – it is more a domain of state politics where citizenship, rights and rule of the law are assumed. As we commented after his Padkos visit last year:

Michael clarifies that “civil society” is better understood as a domain of state politics (esp. of liberal representative democracy) with characteristic ways of thinking and relating between people and the state, and not simply as a list of organised interest groups. He commented that here, for thinking the state mode politics, it is necessary for the state to have a monopoly on the claim to speak for the universal – 'we speak for the people', 'we are the interests of the nation' and

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Originally attributed to Otto von Bismarck, German aristocrat, Prussian Prime Minister(1862 -1890), and First Chancellor of Germany (1871 – 1890).

others are only allowed to speak for little 'interest groups'. This is why the state is so very threatened by any irruption of a universal politics as the principled practice of people in collective action at a distance from the state.

A central insight is Neocosmos' contention that "the majority of people do not relate to the state within a domain of civil society and rights at all, but within what I term 'uncivil society' where the core of politics is founded on patronage not on rights".

Although militant people's movements are put under pressure to label themselves "civil society", they are not (until and unless they can be co-opted) – and certainly the mass of the people live and struggle outside that domain where rights and the rule of law hold.

In many ways, civil society is to the neo-liberal state, what the missionary project was to colonialism.

State

We noted already that civil society is part of the state, so the term 'state' means more than the government of the day – but certainly includes that. It is all the machinery that maintains and restores order; that allocates people to their places and keeps them there; that ensures stability of the status quo for the benefit of the powerful and rich elites; that maintains a 'balance' between interest groups so that the system itself carries on; and that carries the guns in the last analysis.

In important ways the state is mostly about organising the relationship of the people to the dominant order, so that no fundamental rupture (i.e., politics) takes place.

Sometimes we in CLP have used the idea of the state to indicate simply 'the state of things as they are' – what the New Testament might call "the world". In this way, the state is the opposite of (emancipatory) politics – it is that against which we rebel.

Democracy

It is obvious that majority rule in a state system of representative democracy is nowhere near sufficient – even though this is a common meaning of the word "democracy". For us democracy is more the principled form of political practice deployed by the people themselves. Its essential principle is that everybody counts, really – and its practice is centred on the truth that everybody thinks.

The state, and those (like in civil society) who think like the state, insists that democracy means they should give leadership to the masses – in effect that the masses give away their political power in order to be represented. This is the basis of representative 'democracy'. (Again it is worth noting that this means we are back at the opposite of an emancipatory politics because, once you are "represented", you can and must return to your place!) But a real democracy comes from a living politics when the people are not represented but present themselves; when the real issues and struggles of the life of the people are not sorted out by experts other than the people themselves; when making history and the exercise of power is not given away but remain in the minds and hands of the people.

We are reminded of Peter Hallward's discussion of the "will of the people" during the Fanon Padkos series (see: <http://www.churchland.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Hallward-Fanon-and-Political-Will.pdf>). As Alain Badiou puts it: "politics begins when one decides not to represent the victims but to be faithful to those events during which victims politically assert themselves".

Clearly a real democracy is a 'bottom-up' politics. But that does not guarantee that anti-democratic tendencies are impossible at the grassroots. A radically-democratic and principled praxis must always be maintained through open assemblies and the possibility of rupture from below. We know that even the most militant rupture can degenerate into structures and practices of power over people and lose its real democratic heart. Even in social movements, when 'democracy' is thought of as putting people into structures to represent the masses, then even if the process of electing appears 'democratic' it is sliding into the representative kind of democracy and easily allows leaders who trample on the people and on democracy proper. So, here too, it is not organizational form that is decisive but political principle – the axiom that everyone matters.

Voice in the world

When CLP was (repeatedly!) asked to claim its 'voice in the world' we had to ask: who's voice?, and which world? For us what counts is principally:

- the voice of those who have no voice and should not speak but who do speak through their living politics of struggles of dignity – we listen carefully to the counting of those who do not count;
- we take our place in the world opened by the rupture of those militant struggles – i.e. in the void, and precisely *not* in the world-as-it-is (or the state).

And in all this, our voice is our praxis – i.e. it is who we *are* in the world, and what we actually *do*, that is the most eloquent clarification of who we are. For CLP this praxis must frequently be a disciplined silence in order to listen. This is a break with the praxis of most NGOs in general. The majority praxis of NGOs reflects and re-inscribes power and control to speak for, to speak over, and to mediate the representation of people's struggle and life.

Finally, since our voice is our praxis, and our praxis is political, *it is always thought* – and therefore it always depends on thinking our principles in relation to a concrete situation, to what erupts, and to what confronts us.

This was discussed in: *Finding our voice in the world (CLP, 2010)*.

Our world is the world made where the poor resist the world-as-it-is and lead that struggle. In that rupture emerges the **truth** of that situation – and that is what we support. ... In our world, the poor lead; only their struggles can liberate the world and humanise themselves and the oppressors. That's what we support – that's where our voice lies, in solidarity. ... [T]he fundamental truth of a situation emerges in a rupture with the state of things ('the event'). That truth is what we support. That truth is 'universal' in the sense that it is valid for everyone everywhere – it is not simply about a local struggle or interest group or stakeholder; it is not even just about a particular movement like Abahlali or the Rural Network or whatever.

So perhaps one implication is that it is wrong to assume that CLP's position refuses engaging 'the world as it is'. No, the truth of any politics implicates everything in the world. Our discipline is simply that it is not for those other than those who suffer it to lead it. A further implication is that we too, even in an NGO (!), are capable of being constituted as subjects of its truth and therefore as militants in fidelity to an event.

Principles of good stuff

In 2010 we wrote:

Our 'theory of change' assumes the people are the agents of human liberation. Our praxis as CLP assumes this, and must therefore assume a faith in the struggles of the people. Our praxis cannot continue the lie that some other power or agent, let alone little CLP, can 'deliver' real change and freedom.

However, that faith is not a blind faith that romanticises 'the people' or assumes every grassroots action to be emancipatory. It is possible – indeed necessary – to make principled judgements around these questions and to begin to discern the good stuff. In CLP we have been tentatively testing whether the following 'principles of good stuff' are practically helpful in this regard. We think that the 'good stuff' we want to support seems always to fit the following conditions (and all must apply at the same time – i.e. ticking 2 out of 3 doesn't cut it!):

- it is the counting of the uncounted, the speaking of those who should remain silent, the thinking of the un-thought who are not supposed to think
- it emerges from, and proceeds within, a properly/radically democratic base, which may have nothing to do with liberal democratic norms but has everything to do with a pre-figurative politics where 'everybody matters, really' (i.e. egalitarianism is axiomatic and practised throughout)
- it makes universal truth claims – that is, they are true for everyone, everywhere
- it is announced/contained/made in out-of-order militant actions (this last one is really not separable from the previous one, nor even from the first one – so we're calling this a list of 3 principles!).

Note that we also think it is worth testing the following additional clarification or elaboration - namely an ecological implication. It might be considered implicit (but is worth making explicit) in the principle of the universality of the truth claim. Thus, universality here signals not only (or narrowly) a claim for everyone as human being/s but, more holistically², a claim for everyone *in and of this world*.

² Over-used word, but we mean that each person only realises their human being in relation – and not only in relation to other people, but also in relation to the world they're in.

Expertise and agency

CLP recognises that in struggles that matter, 'those who suffer it should lead it' and that the people are 'professors of our own suffering'. We support the agency of those who are not counted but who choose to make themselves count through struggle and resistance. We encourage autonomous action by grassroots formations so that people's actions are done in a way that the people hold onto their own power and do not give it away. Insofar as outside or specialist expertise is useful, it can and must be deployed to support the agency of the people – it is necessary (and straightforward) to 'be on tap, not on top'!

The dominant understanding of expertise and agency is that these are the exclusive property of elites. This is central to sustaining oppression and inequality in the world currently. NGOs on the whole are part of this problem – but, as above, this can be turned around. Perhaps ironically, when elites (e.g. in civil society, or academia, or social movements, or the professions) change their praxis from domination to democratic service, they do not abandon their own agency – they discover it more fully when guided by the thinking of the people.

Solidarity

A living solidarity means to be with the people in their life and struggles, to walk with them and experience with them. It is closely connected with the idea of proximity in 'living politics' discussed above.

It is meaningful and effective when it is:

- on the terms set by militants themselves;
- concrete and directly connected to actual and specific struggle (not reduced to abstract ideas in petitions that anyone can easily sign);
- 'divisive' in the sense of forcing a decision to take sides in a real fight/struggle.

In relation to the "Platform against evictions" project, CLP thought through some of these issues in 2009 and suggested that civil society platforms of solidarity: are usually designed and implemented as a mechanism to enable easy action by others/outsideers, without necessarily actually strengthening movements – but using the struggles of poor people to strengthen the outsideers and the organisations and empires. We have all seen many examples of this kind of work where emails and internet and other elite-NGO ways of networking allow do-gooders to sign petitions, write letters and take positions that are quite abstracted from the actual and particular struggles people are waging. Even when these initiatives 'involve' local people's organisations, the kinds of 'action' they favour have the effect of moving people's struggles onto terrains where their own organisations are weaker and where the civil society elites are stronger (and anyway, these terrains seldom deliver concrete victories for the actual people facing crisis) – typical examples are to encourage things like more civil society *networking*; *lobbying* in the corridors of power; making *policy* proposals; and so on.

Annexure: Church Land Programme Quarterly Meeting:

A Liturgy

May 2011

Background

CLP has conventionally included “quarterly review and planning” sessions, involving all staff, as part of its internal organisational reporting system. Early in 2011 key parts of the overall processes were re-thought. One result is that much of the programme-based review and planning work is being addressed through a tighter and more efficient system of cyclical planning, reporting and review, including regular one-on-one meetings between respective programme staff and the CLP Director. This created the space to re-imagine the collective quarterly sessions away from a narrow programme-by-programme review and planning mode. But towards what exactly, was left deliberately quite vague. The only 'guidance' was the broad idea that this could become “the director's meeting” - not in a top-down authoritarian or managerialist fashion, but that it was an opportunity to be reflective at a broader organisational level, picking up key themes and challenges emerging across all the different programme areas. As ever, we had no idea what this would mean in practice, and thought we'd make that path by walking and asking questions!

Prologue

A day was set aside, and staff received the following from the Director in the preceding week:

In preparation for the meeting, I would like each of us to respond to the following two questions:

Looking back over your life / experience with CLP, can you name one time / event when you feel we really "got it right"; when you could say "this is it!"? Write that down in a couple of sentences.

As you look at your work and the work of CLP currently, what do you see as the challenges you encounter in your ongoing work? Please describe no more than three items in no more than two sentences each.

On the day, expecting a regular 'review and planning' meeting format, everyone was a little taken aback to get the following flyer outlining a structure for the day's work together!

Order of Service

Church Land Programme Quarterly Meeting
5 May 2011

Introduction

Readings from the Gospel eMzabalazweni

Confession of Faith

"We believe..."

Sermon

Prayers 'for the whole state of Christ's church'

Communion

Commissioning – Amandla!

Certainly this was an experiment, perhaps a risky one, perhaps even a blasphemous one – but it was a perfectly serious experiment, based on the fundamental conviction that the sacramental presence of God is in real and human life, or it is not the God of the Christian tradition, and entered into acknowledging and respecting the powerful creativity of liturgy. And it worked.

In Service

The following report follows the "Order of Service" above, and combines edited notes that were prepared beforehand (indicating the intention and rationale for each component of the meeting) with some of the key contributions and discussions that emerged on the day.

Introduction

Intention and rationale

This quarterly meeting is a place of bringing together our organisational life. From our multiple activities - scattered, different, sometimes alone, sometimes lonely, sometimes crowded, magical, inspiring, ordinary. If we make the path by walking, then this is an opportunity on our journey to claim our space together, to claim *our* path, and feed and strengthen our fidelity.

The 'reviewing and planning' happens in our one-on-one's and other organisational spaces. If those are not working optimally yet – well, we will improve it so that it serves us well. It is essential that the accountability and thoughtful planning is there. However, today is a space to go below the 'reviewing and planning' and remember why we are here doing the work we do; to feed the fire, the vision, the passion – and find ways to make things happen in the months ahead. To help us do this collectively, we are going to make use of the moments of the liturgy – a huge experiment in the richness of symbolism that could take us beyond ourselves, and feed our passion.

Readings from the gospel eMzabalazweni³

Intention and rationale

The 'readings' we will use are what we read / have read from our own experience as CLP, focusing on those moments when we really felt that the "kingdom was present". These will be our readings from eMzabalazweni. Each of us have prepared some responses to the question: *Looking back over your life / experience with CLP, can you name one time / event when you feel we really "got it right"; when you could say "this is it!"?*

We now have an opportunity to hear those readings. They will be from different places, of a different nature, reflecting the diversity of who we are. We will hear the readings, listening respectfully to each others' readings of the gospel eMzabalazweni.

Contributions: People's readings

From the published Living Learning booklet, when comrades were discussing the idea of printing the notes from their discussions, they said that although the 'living learning' sessions took place in an NGO board room, they had nevertheless maintained living learning as a space of movement politics; it had not become an NGO space - cool.

When the Living Learning booklet was published it was a good feeling because, although CLP had a lot to do with enabling the process and publication, they were not our words and we did not try and 'speak for' others. It showed that animation really is our praxis – not just something we talk about or intend to do.

The certainty that we no longer doubt for a second the actual implementation of our stated principles – that people demonstrate their sovereignty through struggles that they lead to improve their lives. This praxis is our voice; it is who we are and are still becoming.

Faith is a big thing – we have faith in fundamental truths so that we can act, we can enable big things to happen even without the assurance of donor money and resources. The real stuff for CLP is beyond cash.

A lot of the journey of animation has been about the disruption of what we knew, and a real sense of loneliness as we made new paths. But what's been good is that it allowed us to realise we really are not alone, and that we can become one with the practice and principles of animation. What started as something that was hard to make sense of, starts making sense.

At CLP we remember a really powerful moment of rupture when the official state ceremony to hand over title deeds after years of struggle by a particular community was disrupted by a silent placard protest at the back rows of the hall by those who felt they were once again being sidelined and robbed by the actions of elites and officials. CLP's decision to stand with the struggles of those who disrupt, those who continue to fight against silencing and theft, is the heart of our work.

³ "In the struggle".

Confession of faith

Intention and rationale

Having heard how we have read the 'good stuff' emerging in our activities, we are going to capture our own 'creed' – what is it we actually believe?; what feeds us (and will continue to feed us) in our journey? We will collectively work on a statement that says for us, 'this is the kingdom'. Can we name the abstract from the specifics of our gospel readings?

Having heard the 'readings', in silence receive them, digest them, be struck by them, be inspired by them. Then distil for yourself from these 'readings' what it is we believe. Capture this in a short statement / phrase. We will then hear from each other and see if we can collectively draft a CLP creed - “we believe ...”

Contributions and discussion

We no longer doubt for a second...:

- that people demonstrate their sovereignty through the struggles they lead;
- that we are not alone – and that the more our praxis is connected to popular and genuinely political rebellion, the less alone we are, and the more ordinary and democratic the struggle becomes;
- that things happen beyond our control and our effort, and beyond our resources and words;
- that faith in truth keeps us going on an uncertain path - and a sometimes messy ride;
- that people (in CLP and beyond) are our most important asset;
- that love, respect and fidelity are key: love of rebellion and of the people, respect because everyone matters really and we express this in our action and our listening, fidelity in being true;
- our faith in a praxis that places ourselves against the world as it is;
- that thought, especially collective processes of thinking are key to liberatory action;
- that the will of the people is the will of God;
- that liberation of the poor and the oppressed is liberation of everyone – it is our liberation/salvation;
- that our faith is the certainty of truth, that fidelity to truth is a matter of action, and that this faith is a sufficient basis for acting concretely in the world.

We do not believe in the common-sense knowledge of the world as it is – we believe in the crazy nonsense of the truth that is its rupture/disruption.

Confession of sin

Intention and rationale

Having claimed our own experience and taken the risk of asserting what we believe and what we will draw on going forward, we now look to the reality we currently encounter – the place where we must enact / give expression to what we believe. In the liturgy we have the confession of sin – for our work here we must move away from the sense in which this is just the personal sin that we feel guilty about. Rather, we describe the brokenness / broken bits that we will face in getting our work done in the months ahead. What will get in the way of the kingdom being made real?

We have each prepared something in response to the following question: *As you look at your work and the work of CLP currently, what do you see as the challenges you encounter in your ongoing work?*

We will hear from each other and see if we can develop our 'agenda' together.

Contributions

Local government elections, party politics, and autonomous political space.

'Celebrity activists' and the potential for distortion of democratic space by tendencies of some leaders that emerge from within them.

Corruption of living politics when contestation becomes a factional race for control over a movement and/or resources (in a broad sense).

Our own power as NGO.

Development of the CLP resource centre.

Relentless pressure to adopt donor and 'civil society' agendas and modes of working (e.g. 'mainstreaming' gender).

Sermon

Intention and rationale

Our sermon will be our collective discussion working out the word of God in the brokenness we see ahead of us. We have stated that our voice is our praxis – is this not God in the world? We have named what it is we believe; we have described the brokenness we encounter; how will we make real what we believe in that brokenness? What will we do to give expression to God's word in our place? This is space for the hard work of today, to naming what we as an organisation will be doing over the next months to ensure we remain 'fidel' – we bring our organisational praxis in line with our fire, vision, passion (now we nail it down). Using the 'agenda' developed above, we will discuss each area and strategise our fidelity.

Contributions and discussion

Some inter-related issues that had been raised were grouped together as a set, for purposes of discussion as indicated below. Although each issue raised requires analysis and understanding on its own terms, the real question for us invariably returns to: 'what does this mean for CLP praxis'?

Set A: Local government elections, party politics, and autonomous political space.

At the moment, with local government elections set down for later this month, at a grassroots level many people's minds and activities are occupied with issues relating to the elections, and party-politics has come to the fore. In rural areas of KZN this is predominantly about the ANC (although it's not true of every area). In urban and especially shack settlements, there is also a great deal of party-political energy but the range of parties is more diverse. This wave of party-politics affects the movements and autonomous grassroots spaces we work with and in. Some grassroots leaders are active as leaders and candidates for political parties, and some grassroots activists are deeply

involved in election mobilisation and campaigning for political parties. All of these factors, together with an awareness of how people of an area are reading these developments, inevitably become part of the thinking, decision-making and actions of the movements themselves. Sometimes this results in implicit deals being struck and promises made between party and movement; sometimes explicit/conscious adjustment and taming of movement language and positioning in the public sphere.

Questions that arise for us include:

- Whether this impacts and undermines the autonomous democratic space that movements have/had carved out through their struggles?
- If so, is it a temporary contamination that will dissipate after the elections season or will it leave more lasting damage to the praxis of a 'living politics'?
- Is it especially true of *this* 2011 election (and if yes, in what ways) or is it merely a repeat of the same tendency that accompanies every local government election season? In discussion the view emerged that to a degree there is something new this time round but that:
 - (a) party politics has always been 'at the door' of movement politics and people have fairly consistently had an interest in local government politics; but that
 - (b) keeping party politics 'at the door' of autonomous movement spaces and not allowing it to corrupt or undermine a 'living politics' has always been an active contestation. Crucially, the political capacity to *keep* it so, reflects the de facto strength of the living politics as praxis within any movement or structure from time-to-time (i.e. when the movement is strong, the spaces for party contamination are small and defended; when movements are weaker, parties, and the tendencies associated with party politics, come to the fore).
- Does it indicate some degree of a weakening faith in autonomous grassroots movement and action as the vehicle for emancipation and a reluctant (maybe even cynical) recognition that, screwed up as it is, the party-political game is the only one in town?
- What does it mean for CLP praxis? - if nothing else, that these questions remain alive in our work and thinking over the next period. We will orient our own praxis towards keeping a strong living politics.

**Set B: 'Celebrity activists' and the potential for distortion of democratic space by tendencies of some leaders that emerge from within them.
Corruption of living politics when contestation becomes a factional race for control over a movement and/or resources (in a broad sense).
Our own power as NGO.**

'Celebrity leaders' are a worry when we suspect that particular individuals in leadership positions are taking advantage of the resources and power that an emerging movement creates access to – and abusing these to build their own power or prestige rather than the grassroots base. In itself this is important to note because it concerns and affects the democratic quality and praxis of the movements and grassroots spaces we work with – but it is particularly critical to the extent that CLP itself can get dragged into it.

There is also real concern about the emergence of leadership factions whose praxis seems mostly to be some sort of race to control people's movements and structures. Obviously this completely undermines a properly democratic grassroots politics, and it could have serious effects on the overall quality and content of a movement's politics on the ground.

In some ways, CLP can get dragged into these dynamics because we have, and are seen/believed to have, money and resources. This puts power and responsibility into our hands to say yes or no to particular requests for support. If some start to see us as *primarily* a source of money and resources rather than as comrades, that would seriously distort the relation between us as an NGO and people's structures and struggles. It is vital to be true to our own principles and to work out their concrete meaning in our ongoing praxis in an ever-changing context. In this regard, our 'principles of good stuff' remain our shield and a resource to guide our thinking.

It was recognised that, although these issues were correctly raised as challenges facing us, they are in some ways simply the shadow of the good stuff – and that sometimes recognising the paradox of light and shadow as a tension that exists is more important. For example: emancipatory movements create power and resource possibilities where there were none before and, to a certain extent, it is simply inevitable that this itself becomes an object of competition; that CLP is an NGO with some resources is precisely what enables it to do good work in the world – even though it inevitably also carries the real and present danger of distortion and corruption.

A general observation that connects the discussion of Sets A and B is the following: the defence of a living politics is against any tendency to treat the people as objects of some other game, rather than defending a praxis that keeps the people as subjects of their own game. The corrupting tendency (often described as a 'top-down' politics) is indeed characteristic of party politics and the ways in which party politics infect movement politics – but the same fundamental pattern can emerge equally from *within* the dynamics of movement building and the emergence of leadership forms. It is finally a question of the quality, in the real practice of the grassroots popular life and politics within a movement.

Are there ways in which CLP's praxis can 'induce' good politics – especially through encouraging and facilitating processes of mutual learning and critical reflection between ourselves and other spaces of liberatory politics? If nothing else, the danger of us not doing something usually means someone else does! But while it is good to explore ways of taking this intention forward it is fraught with danger because of the relation between an NGO and popular spaces of struggle. At minimum, the tools and methods for this kind of intentional work must be carefully chosen and strictly in accord with our principles. As we do so, it may be helpful to remember and adapt Anna Selmeczi's notion of 'proximity' – in other words, to explore the potential spaces for mutual learning and critical reflection that are intimately connected with moving concrete struggles forward. This may help avoid slipping into any kind of 'teaching' mode (however well disguised!).

Prayers 'for the whole state of Christ's church'

Intention and rationale

Having 'worked out' the word of God, clarified our programme of fidelity, we now commit ourselves to it and make petition for it. There may be particular prayers – one liner formulations capturing the result of the sermon work; or there may be just an acknowledgement of the demands of holding faith in difficult times / spaces.

Communion

Intention and rationale

Recall the formulations: “We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy table. But thou art the same Lord whose nature is always to have mercy ...”; “whenever you gather you do this in remembrance of me”.

We are not going to celebrate the Eucharist here, but the key point is to think the Eucharist now. Two points stand out for me:

- (a) the re-mem-bering of the (collective) body of Christ – the making real of Christ's body, the scarred, messy body – this is God in the world. This raises the question of fidelity.
- (b) acknowledging that our participation in eternal life is by grace & not earned through works - Badiou suggests that nothing in the 'world as it is' offers life; life giving is in the rupture.

Commissioning – Amandla!

Intention and rationale

'The peace of God that passes all understanding...'