

WCN – Civil society notes from round table discussion 20/7/17 NH

Jackie Rosenberg – chair

Nina Hathway and Dan Fuller – notes

The discussion elicited a good range of comment. Here are some of the main points from each question discussed:

Q1 What is your biggest hope for civil society in the next ten years?

“Ideally civil society should maintain its independence from the government. This is difficult for the third sector as we are so dependent on state contracts and patronage – this means we cannot hold the state accountable.”

“Hope that civil society will evolve away from interventionism and allow people to have a more proactive role.”

“Take power away from the big institutions and empower the grass roots. To let the grassroots – who know what is needed – come together and make positive things happen.”

“Better integration between civil society and institutions/big organisations. There should also be enough scope within the system for funding at grass roots levels.”

Q2 What is your biggest fear for civil society in the next ten years?

“The sheer centralisation of power and thereby a profound shift away from the grass roots.”

“The drive to bigger and bigger [third sector] contracts, which in effect means that smaller organisations will not get money.”

“Civil society will be irreparably damaged by the fast speed of technological change that is sweeping through the world at this time. Already it is unable to keep up.”

“Civil society is not being listened to at this moment and things are getting worse. Third sector organisations are invited to consultations to give their opinions, which they willingly do, only to find that core decisions have already been taken.”

“Focus group surveys are just ‘tick boxes’ to avoid judicial review rather than for gathering opinions to be acted upon.”

Q3 What do you expect to be the biggest driver of change in civil society for the coming years?

“The economy.”

“IT – digital and social media for both good and bad.”

“Frustration.”

“Alienation.”

“Young people -- who in many ways have more of a global vision and are less consumerist than older members of society, yet are not able to contribute to society in the same way as earlier generations having been in a sense let down.”

“Our inability to embrace change.”

“Environment – hopefully this ongoing debate will force a review of the global economic model.”

Q4 What do you think will be the biggest barrier of social change for civil society within the next ten years?

“Isolation caused by the technological age. A type of brainwashing caused by the individual’s inability to comfortably differentiate between ‘fake’ news and worthwhile news. “

“Brexit – if the economy fails post Brexit, then the reaction to this could be an authoritarian society.”

“Civil society will end up just supporting people to live; there will be no room for any other form of support.”

“Loss of hope and personal negativity as individuals feel they cannot make any impact.”

Q5 What are the new forms of civil society that you see emerging?

“Online activism, including petitions etc.”

“Leaderless organisations based around issues, like for example, Black Lives Matter.”

“Collective collaborations such as campaigns relying on emails etc like the campaigning organisations, 38 degrees, which allow many more members of the public to set the agenda.”