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Neoliberalism Worsening Climate Change

Introduction

I am currently in Kevin Gould's Geographies of Justice course at Concordia University. This paper accompanies and complements a learning module about how Neoliberalism is worsening climate change. The learning module consists of this paper, a PowerPoint, and a Zine. The class worked in solidarity with Divest Concordia; this learning module was an answer to the Campaigns Coordinator of Sustainable Concordia for education research. The paper will first broadly define and discuss Neoliberalism, the Neoliberal University, Divestment, and finally how Divestment can be used as a direct action against climate change. The goal of the paper is to give the facilitator in-depth knowledge of these subjects in order to be able to present the PowerPoint it accompanies. These two pieces of work are meant to disseminate knowledge and make it accessible to enable the increased reach and accessibility of the Divest movement. The Zine me and the Education group are creating is meant to increase the accessibility of the knowledge and have work that doesn't need a facilitator. I undertook a literature review to produce this paper, PowerPoint, and zine.

This learning module is creating a narrative that directly links Divest Concordia with neoliberal strategies. Neoliberalism is playing out in today's politics at nearly every scale and big corporation directly engages and grows with hegemonic discourses promoting austerity, lower state involvement, and markets knowing best. Fossil fuel and colonialism are both connected to capitalism and thus neoliberalism as the current hegemonic discourse government and others use

to allow capital accumulation. Divestment is positioned within the climate justice movement; which illuminates the fact that not all people are equally affected by climate change. This inequitable distribution of negative externalities is disproportionately affecting peoples in the global south, racialized groups, and people of lower socioeconomic status whereas the positive externalities are being siphoned off by big corporation and people of power. The theory behind climate justice centers around ideas of working in solidarity. This learning module is meant to illuminate and simplify these relations to show how Neoliberalism is worsening climate change.

Neoliberalism

This section enables the reader to put on the Neoliberal glasses which is a distinct way to analyze life, society, and culture. Neoliberalism as an ideology began to take hold in the 1980's and 1990's as a response to declining levels of economic growth. Proponents of neoliberalism view a minimally regulated market as the institution best able to maximize economic growth and the creation of wealth. This form came around after the Fordist era wherein the Welfare State was the hegemonic discourse; in this era, we saw large state interventions and many social welfare programs to support the country. Neoliberalism challenged Keynesianism economics. Proponents argued that economies were best stabilized through controls over the supply of money rather than through state fiscal intervention, which tended to produce inflation. Proponents interventions by states as impediments to economic growth and individual liberty. (Mullings, 2010) Neoliberalism is viewed as more efficient and "fair" due to the fact demand and supply forces are causing the allocation of goods and services. Hayek was a main proponent and argued that free markets are vital to individual freedom and able to stop any one person from amassing all the complex information needed to manipulate the world to his or her own advantage (Mullings, 2010). He believed allowing markets to allocate resources was more

democratic than the distribution of resources determined by the state. The state holding the power would “inevitably” lead to the states using coercive means to achieve economic control.

Neoliberalism is more than a narrow set of philosophies aimed towards economic reform; they encompass and push certain cultural ideals, social relations, and relationships between states and civil societies. Feminist scholars in particular have argued that neoliberalism has been accompanied with social policies that have sought to create a new type of citizen; one who is self-sufficient, entrepreneurial, and able to compete in the markets with minimal reliance on collective resources. All of these things go under the idea of state making and internal colonizing. Scott discusses how state making is undertaken through the naming of the masses, a dominant language being imposed, and various other infrastructure and social projects that enable the state to codify and condense large quantities of information. Foucault shows that the state and the corporation have partnered together to form a panopticon like state in which citizens move around and are constantly watched and patrolled. The combination of increased legibility that Scott discusses where the state and corporation have mass amounts of data and information about every citizen and the Panopticon state which Foucault defines and illustrates portrays current state making practices. In today’s neoliberal state it is seen as politically sound for private and public institutions to come together and combine their collective knowledge.

To further the understanding of Neoliberalism we must acknowledge that Neoliberalism is an umbrella term of a programmatic bundle of pro market, pro corporate, and pro-choice policy measures; to a rationality of small government transformation, modeled on the principles of entrepreneurialism and competition; linked to a historically ascendant ideology and pattern of capitalist development, linked to globalization, financialization, and the hegemony of “market rule” (Peck). Neoliberalism is a utopian term; and cannot exist in its purest form or definition. In

the real world it manifests itself alongside other social forms and political economic tendencies. There are policies that accompany neoliberalism, and which are easier to identify. Signature policies include privatization, deregulation, various forms of marketization, structural adjustment, and austerity. Now it is important to define and understand each of these terms. Privatizations the sale of state assets, the outsourcing of government services, and the reallocation of functions from the public to the private sector (Peck). Deregulation is when the state changes its policies to allow for more competitive, market based, or choice-oriented approaches (peck). Marketization is the adoption of market principles and orientation, these are based on competition and choice; this gets done across a wide range of government and non-government spheres. Structural adjustment which is more often done in the third world setting; where the colonial power enforces, by way of loan requirements, a neoliberal restricting. Austerity is public expenditure cuts, strict fiscal discipline, and defunding (peck).

Hegemony is the ideological control through the production of consent by unions, schools, churches, families, and so on in civil society (Peet & Hartwick, 2009), which is central to this paper because it is how neoliberalism gets accepted and embodied in day to day politics and life. Civil institutions instill in people an entire system of values and beliefs that are supportive of the established order and its dominating classes (Peet & Hartwick, 2009). In this system blue collar workers are said to associate their good with that of the ruling class. When hegemony is internalized it becomes common sense. Hegemony helps to justify the deprivation of the many so that a few can live well. It helps to induce oppressed people to consent to their own exploitation and misery. It is important to know that Neoliberal ideologies get pushed by hegemonic discourse. Counter hegemony is at the center stage of what Fossil Fuel Divestment (FFD) is all about. It aims to counter hegemonic discourse and the ingrained beliefs of

individualized consumerism, collective popular consent, disempowered hapless citizens, industrial obstruction, and carboniferous capitalism. The divestment campaign gets at asking big structural questions but focusing on actions that people can take directly to influence the climate and social justice movements.

The Neoliberal University

The discussion about hegemony and Neoliberalism allows for us to further analysis the distinct processes occurring inside of our Universities. Turk feels the traditional mission of Universities is being compromised through underfunding, policies of Canada's funding agencies, inappropriate research collaborations, and by a growing reliance on an exploited contingent academic staff. At the core of these lays the hegemonic discourse of Neoliberalism. Universities have experienced increasing levels of privatization due to austerity measures taken by government that force the university to push up rates. CSU notes Universities get 87% of their operating costs from Provincial grants and fees charged by the university; therefore, when one is lacking it is made up for through the other. Through continuing cuts to university funding universities are accelerated and provided with greater force towards an ideological transformation. Academic professionals have felt the pressure to focus their research on what is deemed practical and economically beneficial and to narrow education to preparing students for the job market (Turk, 2017). Under this pressure Universities become engines of growth. This occurs inside the neoliberal university through corporatization; characterizing universities as knowledge factories with corporate corruption of higher education, corporate campus academic capitalism, and the commercialization of higher education.

The neoliberal university sees students as economic agents, pursuing education for their own advancement with the relation between students and university as buyers and sellers.

Academic staff are thus viewed as service providers. Just as provincial grants have been lowering, pushing the university toward privatization, funding has been decreasing causing fettered research and collaborations with industry and wealthy donors (Turk, 2017). Quebec's public discourse has been dominated by discussions about deficit budgets and allegedly dangerous growth in the government's debt. CSU has found that the public debt in the province is still substantially lower than it was 20 years ago. Cuts have come across the board in Quebec; affected everything from healthcare and education to environmental protection and employment programs. Austerity policies put in place by government today have shrunk the role of government in supporting vulnerable populations and redistributing resources fairly and has shifted those resources towards helping the top 1% earners in Quebec. Austerity in Quebec's education chip away at the quality and accessibility of Concordia's studying environment. These cuts represent an intentional effort to stop offering education as a public good to a privately provided individual good. All these things and more are eroding the academic freedom and collegial governance while adding to insecurity and anxiety. We can see from this that the University is part of an increasingly pervasive framework of Neoliberalism in which progress is derived from individuals competing freely in international markets (Turk, 2017).

Divestment as a direct action

The first University to divest from fossil fuels was Swarthmore college in 2010, students were frustrated by the failed UN climate negotiations in Copenhagen in 2009. They were inspired by the apartheid movement in south Africa, and organizers saw divestment as a tactic that would allow students to engage directly in climate politics by leveraging the financial and political power of universities. McKibben popularized Divestment through his rolling stones article and his 350.org website. The basic campaign for Divestment is to culturally marginalize

the fossil fuel industry which would make it harder for fossil fuel industries to exert political influence and to increase much needed climate change legislation. Divestment may appear to solely target fossil fuel companies stock price but its actually aimed at eroding the hydrocarbon industries social license to operates. It is the re-politicization of climate change and combat new climate denialism. Divestment gains its power from being a social movement. Social movements understand that elite power ultimately rests on popular consent; most powerful actors and institutions rest upon collective consent. The political, economic, and cultural common sense of our times reinforces the idea of a disempowered, hapless citizen who is subject to structured law and politics of captured Petro-states everyday people ultimately hold the reins (Turk, 2017). Carboniferous capitalism today is reinforced through a daunting nexus of corporate and state power and reproduced daily by the everyday consent of popular publics. Mangat et al. found that divestment has had major gains from the fact that they politicized and introduced urgency into the climate change conversation. Mangat et al. states that “the 21st conference of parties to the UN framework convention on climate change in Paris at the end of 2015, the campaign had divestment commitments worth over 3.4 trillion from more than 500 institutions, including cities, corporations, universities, and religious organizations from across the world”. The Mangat et al. reading suggests the politics of environmental change have become narrowly focused on technical and administrative matters, squeezing out broader political contestation. This is the political hegemony of Neoliberalism coming into play once again; the individualization of collective issues and problems that then leads to the depoliticization of issues. Cultural marginalization, which holds an anti-hegemonic discourse, will make it harder for the hydrocarbon industry to exert their political influences; which should make it easier for governments to take needed action (Turk, 2017). Through targeting the carbon industry

divestment addresses industrial obstruction. I agree strongly with Turk's argument that divestment is best understood as a counter hegemonic cultural politics that seeks to transform climate change into a justice issue.

Concordia University is experiencing its own industrial obstruction; board members share a shyness towards divestment due the effects it may have on funding or relationships for the board members and Concordia. Divestment as a movement refuses the neutrality of institutional investment; this lack of centrism is a key area of power and discomfort for the University. Divestment is seen as confrontational; and threatening to the supposed neutrality of the University. Concordia does not want to appear to be a political actor rather than an academic institution. Critiques find that divestment entails serious risks to the independence of academic enterprise (Turk, 2017); yet as we know from the Neoliberal University section the academic institution is already under threat and reliant upon Neoliberal ideologies to gain enough money to operate. This argument relies of the dominant discourse that investments that maintain the status quo are neutral.

As we have explored the Neoliberal University increasingly relies upon outside funding sources; and in the individual case of Concordia there is a shyness to divest due to the social implications that may affect funding or relationships for the board members and Concordia at large. The University is comfortable altering curriculum and promoting activities and events that individualize environmental responsibility. At the core of those movements is the Neoliberal ideology of individualization; hence the University is not contesting the dominant norms. The current discourse surrounding universities and environmental concerns centers around educational programs and greenhouse gas emissions. Fossil fuel divestment encourages students to act collectively on campus and on a broader scale through the coordinated national movement

to target the fossil fuel industry (Grady-Benson & Sarathy, 2016). Grady-Benson furthers situates divestment inside of a mindset of crisis; meant to spark emotionality and inspire action.

Divestment is a way to take up the arms of anti-neoliberal discourse and a means with which to unite people on climate justice and critique the current accepted structures we have in place. Divestment offers students, academics, and popular culture a way to get directly involved to create collective change. The divest movement focuses on collective and solidarity-based work to give the movement more momentum and rejects the individualized method schools and government are pushing. Taking collective action will advance the systematic change needed to address climate injustice. Through targeting institutional investors, a key pillar of support upholding the industry's political and economic dominance, divestment targets the fossil fuel industry (Grady-Benson & Sarathy, 2016). Divestment has helped to politicize and radicalize students by directly engaging them in conversations and workshops concerning climate justice. As Pollon notes It has become increasingly clear there is not going to be a federal legislation about climate regulation, so wherever it is possible to affect change (city, university, pension fund, whatever tools are within reach) have to be used to maximum effort.

Conclusion

This paper was meant to explore structural issues surrounding divestment and connect them into and through the divest movement. Divestment can be a powerful tool to affect positive change; and a way to repoliticize and incorporate the climate crisis into discourse. This learning module is meant to introduce these structural concerns and guide both the facilitator and audience through complex information in a concise and meaningful manner. I believe connecting divestment to these processes allows for the possibility of solidarity across varying landscapes that are being affected by Neoliberal policies and hegemony.

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