Challenging Economic Inequality
Tactics and Strategies

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Economic and social inequality is a major problem, implicated in poverty, ill health and exploitation. Inequality has increased in many countries since the 1980s and it is also widely seen as unfair, yet action against it has been sporadic and often ineffective. To better understand why inequality has persisted, it is useful to look at tactics that reduce public outrage over it. These include covering up the existence and impacts of inequality, denigrating those who are less well-off, explaining the existence of inequality as natural, necessary or beneficial, using official channels to justify inequality, threatening those who challenge it and rewarding those who defend it. Each of these tactics can be countered, resulting in a set of options for those pursuing a fairer world.

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Inequality in various realms—economic, political and social—appears to be an enduring feature of human societies. However, many challenges have been made to extreme forms of inequality: for example, democratisation movements have challenged dictatorships and various forms of political exclusion; labour movements have campaigned against economic inequality making the case for a living wage and social protection; and social exclusion of various groups is widely castigated as prejudice. While all forms of inequality have persisted, what is notable is that economic inequality has increased and, according to many analysts, become much more extreme within countries through processes of corporate globalisation (Cammack 2009; Piketty 2014).

Most humans have a well-developed sense of fairness (Moore 1978). Haidt (2012) argues that fairness is one of the fundamental moral foundations deriving from humans' evolutionary past. It is found in people of all political persuasions, and is especially important for those on the left. On an informal level, many parents observe that their children compete for their attention and resent being treated unequally. In workplaces, grievances develop when workers are rewarded differently when doing the same work. Yet, despite this sensitivity to fairness, wide-scale economic inequality in contemporary societies has persisted and sometimes increased.

Governments are often seen as the means for redressing unfairness: they have the capacity to redistribute income and wealth through policies of taxation, investment and welfare. Despite the efforts of reformers, though, the divergence between the wealthy and the impoverished has continued within and between countries. A whole range of data has come out over the past few years to support this claim (Inequality.org 2015; OECD 2011; Piketty 2014), the most recent being an Oxfam report that by 2016 over half the world's wealth will be owned by just the richest 1% of the world's population. The trend to increasing inequality is clear in the report: "In 2010, it took 388 billionaires to equal the wealth of the bottom half of the world's population; by 2014, the figure had fallen to just 80 billionaires" (Hardoon 2015: 3).[1] Although there are periodic expressions of concern and impressive-sounding policy statements, political concern about inequality is seldom as great as for economic growth, terrorism, crime and a host of other topics. Indeed, until the rise of the global justice movement and the Occupy movement, inequality was not a serious agenda item for most governments.

To better understand how economic inequality has been marginalised in public discourse and thinking, it is useful to look at tactics of outrage management (Martin 2007). When a

powerful group does something that might be perceived as unjust, it can use several types of tactics to reduce public outrage, with the key ones being to: (i) cover up the action, (ii) devalue the target, (iii) reinterpret the action by lying, minimising consequences, blaming others or reframing, (iv) use official channels that give an appearance of justice, and (v) intimidate or reward people involved.

A good example of how these tactics are employed is in cases of torture, which is widely condemned but, nevertheless, often tolerated and rarely prosecuted. Individuals and governments implicated in torture hide their activities, denigrate victims as terrorists, criminals or subversives, lie about the extent of torture, minimise the impact of it, blame individuals for abuses, reframe torture as "abuse" or define it away (as in the case of waterboarding), use courts or investigations to whitewash actions, threaten victims of reprisals if they speak out, and reward compliant officials with jobs and promotions (Martin and Wright 2003). The same sorts of tactics are found in a wide variety of injustices, including censorship (Jansen and Martin 2003), sexual harassment (McDonald et al 2010), corporate crimes such as Bhopal (Engel and Martin 2006), and genocide (Martin 2009). Therefore it is plausible that similar tactics serve to reduce people's concerns about inequality.

Tactics used to reduce public outrage are most apparent in sudden injustices, such as police beatings and massacres of protesters. In the aftermath of the exposure in 2004 of the torture and abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib by United States (US) prison guards, outrage was expressed throughout the world, and the methods of devaluation, reinterpretation and official channels were obvious (Gray and Martin 2007). Inequality is different in that it is an ongoing process, with few sudden events to trigger an increase in concern: it is a "slow injustice" (Martin 2006). Therefore, tactics to reduce outrage are likely to be more routine and institutionalised.

Usually, tactics to reduce concern about inequality are used in an intuitive way rather than as part of a conscious strategy or conspiracy to subordinate the poor. Most perpetrators of violent and cruel acts believe they are justified in what they do, or do not think their actions are all that important (Baumeister 1997), and undoubtedly those acting in ways that foster inequality feel similarly. Furthermore, perceptions are shaped by self-interest, with research supporting Lord Acton's classic saying that "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely" (Kipnis 1976; Robertson 2012). As well, a small percentage of people display antisocial personality traits, having concern only for themselves and not others; some of these individuals rise to positions of power within hierarchical systems (Babiak and Hare 2006; Berke 1988). For these reasons, it is not surprising that some people want greater inequality and believe it is good.

Rather than try to determine people's motivations, our aim here is to illustrate the tactics that reduce outrage over inequality. This involves noting methods well known to informed observers but seldom combined into a tactical or strategic analysis. We use examples from different parts of the world, as our goal is to demonstrate the plausibility of the crucial role of tactics rather than provide exhaustive proof. Following this, the next step in the analysis is to point to counter-tactics that increase concern about inequality. These are (Martin 2007): (i) exposure of inequality, (ii) validation of those who are most oppressed or marginalised, (iii) interpreting inequality as a form of injustice, (iv) avoiding official channels but instead mobilising support, and (v) resisting intimidation and rewards.

To illustrate these counter-tactics, we use several examples, with special attention to the Occupy movement.

Because tactics to reduce or increase outrage are found in so many different sorts of injustices, there is potentially much to learn by comparing tactics used, or not used, in different issues. In undertaking an analysis of tactics used in relation to inequality, there is much to learn from the dynamics of outrage over torture, massacres and other injustices.

Cover-up

If people are not aware of an issue, they will not be concerned by it. Even if they know it exists, the issue may be disguised or covered over in various ways, so it is less likely to be noticed. Nearly everyone knows about the existence of inequality, but in various ways its visibility is reduced, thereby reducing awareness and the likelihood of action against it.

One way to reduce awareness is physical separation. This is most obvious in residential stratification by income, with rich people likely to live in exclusive areas. The former system of apartheid in South Africa involved separate facilities for blacks and whites. However, formal apartheid is far more likely to create a backlash than a seemingly natural separation, thus this is not a common tactic. Poverty in the midst of affluence is sometimes accepted as normal, but for some it can be disturbing. Beggars and homeless people are usually absent from wealthy areas; sometimes governments instruct police to force them out of their usual areas, which serves to reduce the visibility of poverty.

Cover-up of inequality is partly about hiding poverty but more about minimising understanding of the wealth of the rich. A number of surveys has shown that people significantly underestimate income and wealth differentials in their country and would prefer a more equal wealth distribution that the one that they incorrectly think is the case (Norton and Ariely 2011; Norton et al 2014).

In many parts of the world, including India, the wealthy and the impoverished live in clear view of each other: there is little attempt to hide inequality. This suggests that cover-up, as part of the toolkit working for inequality, is not as common as a lack of interest in the topic or as reinterpreting inequality as due to the supposed intelligence and hard work of the wealthy or devaluing the poor, where the poor are said to be responsible for their situation because of their laziness, lack of smarts or because they are simply "Shameless"—as the British TV series puts it. These methods are described in the next two sections.

Devaluation

One of the most potent ways to reduce outrage over injustice is to discredit those at the receiving end. Therefore, attempts may be made to lower the status of victims of injustice, thereby diminishing concern about the injustice itself. Poor people are regularly blamed for their own misfortune, a process called

"blaming the victim" (Ryan 1972). They are castigated as being lazy, cheating, unclean, drug-dependent, criminal and in other ways unworthy. The basic idea is that success in the contest for riches is due to the characteristics of the competitors, and those who are poor are failures in every way.

Blaming the victim is aided by a psychological process called belief in a just world (Lerner 1980). Some people believe the world is fair and, when confronted with evidence to the contrary, maintain their belief by saying people are responsible for their own misfortune. Those who are unemployed are blamed for not finding jobs even when unemployment is structural, with dozen of applicants for every vacancy. People who are highly committed to just-world beliefs are more likely to blame poor people for their poverty. This belief is common across developed and developing countries and it results in a poverty/shame nexus (Walker 2014; Chase and Bantebya-Kyomuhendo 2015). Policies and public commentators push poor people to feel ashamed, and some of them take this on and devalue themselves. Shame has traditionally been seen as a useful mechanism for social cohesion and control, yet the negative impacts of it on the poor have received little attention. Walker (2014: 40) has shown how its "psychological consequences can be severe; … low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, eating disorder symptoms, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicidal ideation have all been associated with shame…"

Shame on its own is damaging enough but when it becomes part of government policy it becomes stigmatising and even more damaging to the poor. Inducing shame has long been a feature of many social welfare programmes; its use has increased in recent years with measures like income quarantining. An even more disturbing trend is the deliberate use of shaming and stigmatisation in order to get people to construct their own latrines (Engel and Susilo 2014).

Walker (2014: 44) also provides evidence that the shame associated with poverty has grown with globalisation since the 1980s. The corollary to increased emphasis on individualism and consumerism of the past decades may well be greater shame and stigma for those who have not succeeded. The counterpoint to devaluation of the poor is glorification of the wealthy and this has also increased since the 1980s. Individual success stories are regularly presented as moral lessons in the virtues of hard work and enterprise. Similarly, successful companies are presented as models, with their methods emulated, even though their success may only be short term and due in large part to luck (Rosenzweig 2007; Taleb 2001).

In situations where inequality is stark, devaluation of those who are disadvantaged is a key method of reducing outrage, with poverty-related shame now the "cement" in the structures that maintain inequality and perpetuate poverty (Walker 2014: 191). Those who are ashamed of their poverty are less likely to confront the wealthy, thereby contributing to de facto cover-up.

Reinterpretation

Reinterpretation involves explaining why inequality is acceptable, necessary, natural or beneficial. This has a stronger cognitive component than devaluation. Four techniques of reinterpretation are lying, minimising, blaming and framing.

Lying in this context involves giving false or deceptive information about the extent, consequences or responsibility for inequality. For example, it might be claimed that unemployment payments damage the initiative and prospects for the unemployed, when the evidence says otherwise. People can lie to themselves in a process called self-deception (Trivers 2011), so those who provide false information may also be deceiving themselves.

There is a close connection between the techniques of cover-up and reinterpretation by lying. In cover-up, people do not know a problem exists; in reinterpretation by lying, they are given false information about it. Consider the well-known fact that the per-capita gross domestic product in India is much less than in Britain. What is little known, at least outside India, is that prior to the British conquest of India, living standards of working people in the two countries were similar, and that a significant part of their subsequent divergence can be attributed to colonial exploitation (Davis 2001). Yet many internet sources on British imperialism in India start with its supposed benefits, with students asked to weigh up the positives and negatives as if the railways could make up for the between 12 and 29 million deaths during the late Victorian era famines that can be largely attributed to British policy (Davis 2001). The broader point here is that current level of inequality is known but the historical processes leading to it are seldom understood or publicised.

"Minimising" means suggesting that the scale or consequences of inequality are not as serious as they actually are. An example is the prominence of the $1.25 a day measure of global poverty. Using this measure the World Bank could claim in 2014 that the number of people living in poverty declined from 1.93 billion in 1981 to 1.2 billion in 2011 and looked at as proportion of the world's (growing) population, the fall sounds large. The $1.25 a day measure was calculated by taking median of 10 lowest poverty lines across the globe in 1985, it only allows people a very frugal existence and results in a shortened life expectancy. The measure significantly understates the level of global poverty, even considered in absolute (not relative) terms. To achieve a reasonable life expectancy and the associated quality of life, Edward (2006) calculated that the associated income was closer to $3 a day. When we look at the poverty figures using even a $2 a day calculation, there has been less progress in poverty reduction—in 1981 there were 2.59 billion in that category and for 2011 the estimate was 2.2 billion. The consequences of the $1.25 a day calculation cascade, if you are above that you are no longer regarded as absolutely poor. The *Economist* (2008, 2009) is very fond of labelling those with incomes above $2 a day as the new middle class!

At yet another level, the very focus on poverty, not inequality, is a way to minimise concern about inequality because empowering the poor has, over the past few decades, not been regarded as being in any way linked to the power or wealth of the rich (Freeland 2012; Marcuse 2015). When inequality is the focus, the rich come under scrutiny as the Occupy movement showed. Here we see how different tactics converge as this is an issue of both minimising inequality and reframing it, discussed shortly.

As well as blaming the victim (a type of devaluation), it is also possible to blame others. For example, governments can blame greedy corporations and corporations can blame ineffective governments, or they can blame previous governments or individual politicians. In the case of inequality, the "blame" is often put on supposedly natural socio-economic processes. For example, the *Economist* (2015) attributes a large part of the recent upsurge in US inequality to an escalation in assortative mating, which they describe as where "clever, successful men marry clever, successful women" rather than as, say, people marrying in their own class. Again, this blame also converges into the area of framing, which is the most potent reinterpretation technique. It is a process of seeing and presenting inequality in a way that makes it seem acceptable or natural. Historically, religious doctrines or local philosophies were a major force in framing inequality. Confucius said that when a country is "well governed, poverty is something to be ashamed of" (cited in Walker 2014: 5). In India, the Vedic civilisation attributed inequality and poverty to people's actions in their previous lives and the later development of karma encouraged acceptance of existing circumstances. The Christian tradition started out promoting poverty as the way to salvation but this did not last long and the more pertinent legacy is the distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor. These traditions too often counsel acceptance of one's situation, say that poverty is natural, or promise that things will be different in a future life. While such doctrines can provide peace of mind for individuals, they also reduce the incentive to question or challenge inequality.

Since the late 1970s, neo-liberal ideas have actively promoted inequality as a natural state. As one of the founding fathers of neo-liberalism, Friedrich von Hayek (2006/1960: 76), said:

> It has been the fashion in modern times to minimize the importance of congenital differences between men and to ascribe all the important differences to the influence of environment. However important the latter may be, we must not overlook the fact that individuals are very different from the outset. The importance of individual differences would hardly be less if all people were brought up in very similar environments. As a statement of fact, it just is not true that 'all men are born equal.'

Neo-liberalism promotes belief in meritocracy, in which people rise in the system according to their talents. This can serve to justify inequality, because it assumes that social systems are hierarchical and that divergences in outcomes are natural. The ways that people at the top of hierarchical systems use their power to reward themselves is obscured. Equally, stigmatisation of the poor has grown as this approach attributes poverty to failure, laziness, lack of intelligence and so on.

Academics present many arguments to justify inequality, for example arguing that talented people need to be amply rewarded so they will undertake important jobs, that low wages lead to higher employment, that prejudice is natural and greed is good (Dorling 2010).

Official Channels

Various formal processes in society give a figurative stamp of approval for inequality. The most important is schooling, which is a system that reproduces and legitimates social stratification.

Those who do better at school obtain high grades and more advanced degrees, which may be prerequisites for certain types of jobs. Not having a diploma, degree or sufficiently high grades can be a rationale for denying a person a job, even when the credential or grades are irrelevant to the work (Collins 1979; Dore 1976). The education system seems to offer a justification for inequality, even though there is no necessity that those with degrees should receive higher income.

Welfare agencies, providing various payments and services for those in need, are usually highly bureaucratic, with many complex rules concerning who is entitled to what. Applying these rules according to rigid formulas helps legitimate the social location of those served: if a person or family is ruled as ineligible for a payment for unemployment or disability, this serves as a type of official statement that they do not deserve any more.

The legal system regularly makes rulings that reinforce the legitimacy of inequality. Those who are seriously disadvantaged are more commonly subject to attention from the police and courts, whereas high-level crimes, such as massive corruption or production of dangerous products, are seldom prosecuted. In the aftermath of the Bhopal disaster, the company responsible, Union Carbide, was able to escape with minimal penalties. The various court cases on behalf of victims of the disaster led to pitiful levels of compensation, yet gave a stamp of legitimacy to the outcome (Engel and Martin 2006).

Official channels are rule-based systems that promise to provide justice. Yet these systems are themselves biased in ways that make them tools for the rich and powerful. As writer Anatole France famously commented, "In its majestic equality, the law forbids rich and poor alike to sleep under bridges, beg in the streets and steal loaves of bread." When the rules are biased or applied in a biased fashion, they give the appearance of fairness without the substance.

Intimidation and Rewards

Some of those who challenge inequality are met with reprisals, including harassment, job loss and assault. When workers, especially low-paid workers, organise to demand better wages and conditions, they are sometimes met with harsh opposition. Union organisers are special targets. The US, the most unequal industrialised country, is noted for employer campaigns against unions.

Whistle-blowers—employees who speak out in the public interest—are often subject to reprisals (Miceli et al 2008). These include whistle-blowers in government and corporations who expose corruption at high levels, for example, tax avoidance by wealthy people, pay-offs to government officials who give favoured deals to corporate friends, or even just the packages obtained by those with high incomes. The Occupy movement, which burst into public consciousness in 2011, was essentially a protest against inequality. In some countries, Occupy protesters were subject to attacks by police.

Intimidation can serve to discourage challenges to inequality; a parallel tactic is offering rewards to those who serve to protect or justify inequality. One example is corrupt union officials,

who connive with employers to keep a poorly paid workforce quiescent. Leaders of left-wing political parties, who say they support a fairer society, can be lured by the privileges of office, and become far more conservative when they are elected. There is a long history of progressive parties and politicians failing to live up to the expectations of their followers (Boggs 1986; Miliband 1969).

These five sorts of tactics to reduce outrage over inequality often overlap. For example, elections are an official channel that often promises more than it delivers, while rewards for party leaders serve to buy off challengers. The value in classifying tactics is to clarify and group the great variety of methods used, and to show more clearly pathways for taking action to oppose inequality. Each of the five types of tactics reducing outrage over inequality can be countered by corresponding tactics to increase outrage. We now turn to examples of these outrage-increasing tactics, with special attention to the Occupy movement (Gitlin 2012; Graeber 2013; Sitrin and Azzellini 2014).

Exposure

If cover-up is a key method for reducing outrage, then the obvious counter-tactic is exposure of the injustice. This is indeed the method used by many who seek social justice: social problems are documented and publicised.

In some workplaces, the salaries of top management are not disclosed, and furthermore are disguised through such techniques as providing share options. When salaries are publicised and compared to those of low-level workers, this can cause outrage, which is even greater when top management is involved in corrupt activities.

The Occupy movement has served as a method of exposing inequality; indeed, its most lasting legacy may be putting inequality on the public agenda. Through public protests and through the memorable attention to a division in society between the wealthiest 1% and the other 99%, the movement has drawn attention to economic inequality. A related campaign has been exposure of tax minimisation and avoidance strategies by multinational corporations or the super-wealthy, for example by the Tax Justice Network.

Validation

The technique of devaluation reduces outrage; the countervailing technique is validation of those who are the targets or victims of unjust actions and systems. Validation can be promoted by treating poor and disadvantaged people with respect, by associating them with positive symbols and values, and through their own dignified and courageous behaviour.

A classic validation technique is organised action, taken in a resolute manner. When lowly paid workers join rallies, strikes and boycotts, and present themselves as worthy of respect, they are more likely to be treated seriously. Validation also occurs by association with valued individuals, organisations and symbols. When prominent people —respected politicians, religious leaders or celebrities—speak on behalf of those who are disadvantaged, this contributes to greater respect; even

better is personal involvement with those who are otherwise stigmatised. Dalit groups in India have reframed cultural beliefs that traditionally worked to oppress them as untouchables, to create new identities. The belief that they were the earliest inhabitants of India has been used to develop a "Dalitology" that validates their existence rather than undermines it. This has developed along with a range of Dalit literature that resists the inevitability of discrimination against Dalits (Nimbalkar 2006).

When wealthy, prominent business persons, such as Warren Buffet and George Soros, speak out against inequality, this has an extra impact because they have nothing to gain financially from measures for social justice. While it is important for oppressed people to take stands on their own behalf, forming alliances with those in other parts of society is vital.

Interpretation

Given the various methods of reinterpretation—lying, minimising, blaming and framing—the counter-tactic is to interpret inequality as unjust and harmful. The inherent unfairness of extreme inequality needs to be highlighted, as well as the impacts of inequality.

In recent years, one of the most powerful analyses of the harmful impacts of inequality has been the book *The Spirit Level* (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009). The authors document that societies with greater economic inequality are worse off in various ways, such as having greater crime and suicide rates.[2] Their focus is on the damaging psychosocial impacts of inequality on society in general. There is also a growing body of research specifically on its impacts on the wealthy, which shows that wealth blunts the parts of the brain linked to empathy and that the rich are more likely to violate road rules, cheat to achieve financial benefits and even that they are more likely to shoplift (for a review of research, see Lewis 2014).

Others have argued that inequality can lead to slower economic growth, or even stagnation (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012; Ostry et al 2014), countering the usual trickle-down argument. Various authors have documented the huge influence of powerful industries—energy, pharmaceuticals, transport—on government policy, so much so that governments are often tools of special interests rather than serving the public interest (Stiglitz 2012).

Much of the intellectual debate over inequality occurs in academic journals and books, but this has spilled over into public discourse, in part due to the influence of the social justice movement and the Occupy movement. Thomas Piketty's 2014 book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* achieved bestseller status, something that would have been unlikely without the increased public discussion of inequality. Very importantly, Piketty and his colleagues have provided strong data demonstrating the rise in inequality since the 1980s and refocused debate about state revenue away from cutting social security, health and education benefits and services and instead towards the income side of the state ledger, in particular the method and amount of taxation of wealth and income.

Another contributor to the public debate is research on happiness, in the field of positive psychology. Among the

well-established findings are that greater income can improve happiness among those in poverty, but the benefits of added income are much more limited for those with a reasonable income (Frey et al 2008). Furthermore, happiness can be reliably improved through such non-materialistic practices as building personal relationships, expressing gratitude and helping others (Lyubomirsky 2008). Positive psychology can be used as a warrant for changing society to foster community and egalitarianism rather than competitive materialism.

Mobilisation, Not Official Channels

The most counter-intuitive aspect of the tactics for outrage management is that official channels such as courts may not be the solution but in many cases actually reduce outrage and hence discourage popular action. This is because official channels give the appearance of justice but, when used to challenge powerful groups, seldom the substance. Petitions, appeals to authorities, interventions by international bodies, formal investigations, courts, politicians or elections can sometimes be effective roads to reform, but to increase outrage over injustice, it is better to avoid relying on them. Although many who work in official bodies have the best of intentions and do everything they can to serve the population, they are constrained by narrow mandates, bureaucratic requirements, limited resources, and the possibility of losing their jobs should they become too activist.

Insights from many decades of social movements show that direct action can offer better prospects for change. The labour movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was instrumental in improving workers' rights in the West. The Indian independence movement saw Gandhi write letters to the Viceroy as a formality, not in any expectation that formal appeals would be successful. He launched direct action campaigns, such as the Salt Satyagraha in 1930, which changed consciousness across the country: people became energised rather than resigned (Weber 1997).

Similarly, social justice campaigners have had the greatest impact through organised mass action. The 1999 global justice protests in Seattle stimulated similar protests in many cities across the globe. Likewise, Occupy Wall Street set an example followed elsewhere in the US and the world.

Two main sorts of direct action are relevant here: to challenge inequality and to promote equality. The Occupy movement largely focused on increasing awareness of and concern about inequality, though it has also run a range of positive initiatives, in the tradition of Gandhi's constructive programme, to create the skills, resources and vision of a more equal society.

One example of an equality-promoting initiative is free software, cooperatively produced: it undercuts the intellectual monopolies that serve the powerful software companies, and by offering a positive alternative promotes greater access to a range of capacities. More generally, peer-to-peer alternatives in several fields can expand the commons—in energy, transport, information, creative works—and potentially undermine market capitalism (Rifkin 2014). In Greece, in the wake of the crisis, people set up successful solidarity health centres, food centres and cooperatives in their hundreds, which inspired

and was one support base of the newly elected Syriza-led government (Henley 2015).

Resistance to Intimidation and Rewards

The tactic of intimidation discourages expressions of concern, while rewards buy off dissent. To increase outrage and action against inequality, both intimidation and rewards need to be resisted. This is apparent in the courageous efforts of Occupy activists.

Resistance is also important in other arenas, in small and large ways. It can involve workers with access to information about corruption and harsh treatment of disadvantaged groups having the courage and the skills to collect documents and make them available to activists. It can involve journalists writing stories exposing obscene behaviour by the wealthy and telling about courageous campaigners for social justice. It can involve individuals quietly engaging with friends and colleagues to shift attitudes concerning inequality.

Conclusions

Inequality is linked to considerable poverty, ill health and suffering, yet is entrenched in many countries. Although many people consider extremes of inequality to be undesirable, public concern only occasionally reaches critical mass. Indeed, according to Piketty's (2014) analysis, it took the combination of the devastation of two world wars, high post-war population growth and the active labour movement to achieve the significant reductions in inequality that occurred between the start of the 20th century and the 1960s. To better understand the dynamics of concern about inequality, it is useful to examine tactics that reduce or increase public outrage. Defenders of inequality can use tactics of cover-up, devaluation, reinterpretation, official channels, intimidation and rewards to reduce outrage; challengers can use corresponding counter-tactics.

One implication of this analysis is that supporters of social justice need to give attention to the full range of tactics. It is not enough to assume that evidence and logic are enough on their own to stimulate action, given that existing perceptions and beliefs work to hide inequality and the desire to believe in a just world promote the corollary belief that the poor are responsible for their poverty. Equally it is important to understand the role of official channels, including formal inquiries, government agencies, and elections. Many people assume that official channels are always the appropriate avenue for seeking justice and, as long as officials or politicians are committed to doing something, nothing further is required. However, the lesson from many other injustices, from sexual harassment to massacres of peaceful protesters, is that when powerful perpetrators are involved, official channels sometimes give only an appearance of justice.

Many people put their trust in progressive governments to counter the inequality spawned by unbridled markets, but over the past several decades this trust has been broken repeatedly. Despite this, citizens often look to governments as the main solution, rather than being part of the problem. The analysis of the outrage-reducing role of official channels suggests it is more productive to pursue methods that directly tackle problems, rather than relying on those in positions

of power to act on their behalf. When social problems are highly entrenched, it is to be expected that formal processes have become implicated in the problems, either contributing to them or serving as escape valves.

The Occupy movement, an aspect of the global justice movement, has put inequality on the agenda, so that mainstream media and politicians now take the issue seriously. However, there are strong forces working against any systemic approach to it, starting with inertia and governments prioritising economic growth over equality or sustainability. So, it would be easy for inequality to slip out of public consciousness, as governments raise the alarm about other issues, such as terrorism. Generation of public outrage is part of the process in addressing poverty and disadvantage, and in promoting social justice; it needs to be accompanied by long-term efforts towards different ways of organising society.

NOTES

1   There has been a debate between economists over the last decade about whether the gap between countries is increasing or decreasing. Those arguing that a decrease has occurred rely on very specific sets of income groupings, ways of measuring of inequality and timeframes. For the key contributions, see Seligson and Passé-Smith (2014). We take the position of Passé-Smith in this volume, that there is an absolute gap between rich and poor countries and that for the most part it has been widening over the past few decades, though looking at relative gaps shows a slightly rosier picture. The most recent data regarding global inequality too highlight the illusory nature of the claims that inequality is decreasing.

2   The concern that *The Spirit Level's* findings may impact public debate about inequality is demonstrated by the number of books and websites that appeared attempting to discredit its findings.

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