

PSYCHOLOGY POLITICS RESISTANCE

Position Statement

Psychology Politics Resistance is a network of people - both psychologists and non-psychologists - who are prepared to oppose the abusive uses of psychology. This means challenging the ideas within psychology that lead to oppressive practices, supporting those who are on the receiving end, and using psychological knowledge positively to help those engaged in struggles for social justice.

Psychology Politics Resistance has grown out of a number of conferences and meetings in which psychologists and non-psychologists have met together in discussion with individuals and groups who have been silenced and exploited in the name of psychology. These gatherings have made it clear that there is a need for a new form of radical psychology organisation. The aim of our organisation is to ensure that, if people feel that they are being undermined by psychology, they know that there is a body that would be prepared to intervene on their behalf. Or, on a more positive note, if those involved in social struggles consider that psychological knowledge could contribute to their cause then there would be somewhere they could go for help. We aim to mount practical opposition to the oppressive uses of psychology. While this will involve challenging those ideas within psychology which lead to abusive practices, the aim is to relate ideas to practice rather than produce radical theory for its own sake.

The effectiveness of Psychology Politics Resistance depends upon three things. Firstly, we need to build a large network of people who support our aims - so join immediately and pass on information about the organisation to anyone you know who might be interested! Secondly, we need to make ourselves known to those who may wish to make use of us. In order to do this we are planning to organise a major funding conference next year to which people from women's organisations, anti-racist groups, gay and lesbian organisations, labour organisations and so on will be invited. Thirdly, we need to consider how to network information amongst ourselves, how to organise practical interventions and how to spread our message. These are tasks to be decided upon at the founding conference.

If you agree with our aims, whatever your experience may be, we want you to be involved in the network. Please fill in the form below and return it to us with 2 if you are waged, 1 if you are unwaged or a student. Make cheques payable to "Psychology Politics Resistance". The money will be used to mail you about the founding conference and other relevant events and also to further publicise the organisation.

I am interested in becoming involved in Psychology Politics Resistance

Name

Address

Position

Please return to Ian Parker, Department of Psychology and Speech Pathology, The Manchester Metropolitan University, Hathersage Rd, Manchester, M13 0JA, UK or to Steve Reicher, Department of Psychology, University of Exeter, Exeter EX4 4QG.

THE ROOTS OF "PSYCHOLOGY POLITICS RESISTANCE" AND THE RATIONALE FOR ITS AIMS AND OBJECTIVES.

Psychology Politics Resistance (PPR) is not the first organisation to be concerned with the politics of psychology. Over the last three decades there has been a series of attempts to raise the issue and to combat abusive and oppressive psychologies. Even if they are now defunct, such publications as **Red Rat**, **Humpty Dumpty**, and **Ideology and Consciousness** have done much to force generations of psychologists to confront the effects of the discipline that many might have rather ignored.

If these are the distant roots of PPR, its more immediate origins lie in a series of meetings that have been held over the last five years, mainly in Manchester. These meetings have addressed the ways in which psychology abuses, silences and disempowers people. However, in the course of these meetings, culminating in a conference of over 100 people on July 4th 1992 (to mark 500 years of colonialism and racism since Columbus), three themes have emerged as increasingly distinctive.

In the first place, our orientation has been less to construct a general conceptual alternative to current psychology, but rather to provide a practical challenge to the abusive consequences of its ideas and practices. This is not to say that we consider ideas unimportant. Far from it. We are committed to exposing the oppressive consequences of many psychology concepts. However the reason for so doing is not simply intellectual satisfaction. Rather we wish to challenge ideas in the context of practical opposition to their uses.

Secondly, insofar as our aim is to be effective, we would rather set targets that are limited but realisable than ones which are global and unreachable. An early attempt to set up an organisation founded partly on precisely this point. After addressing the inequities of psychology, we went on to look at the nature of our institutions which limited the possibilities of radical work. We then addressed the forms of government policy and state formation which framed the institutions. Having defined our targets as ranging from the specifics of research methodology to the nature of the state, we looked at the small number of us in the room and felt totally disempowered. Subsequently, we have consciously limited our scope to a focus on the way in which psychology itself acts to devalue people's lives, to challenge this where it occurs and to seek ways of using psychology to aid struggles against oppression rather than being a part of the oppression itself. Our logic is simple. Before psychology can be accepted as part of the solution it must first show itself willing to address and reverse the ways in which it has been part of the problem. In the future, we may well want to expand our horizons. However that can only grow out of initial and more modest achievements.

The third and final theme has been the need to make our ways of working congruent with the purposes of our work. If part of our critique is the tendency of psychology to "know better" and to put "expert" diagnoses before people's experience, it would be ironic for us to claim radical credentials while continuing to operate in effectively the same way. In practice this means that, rather than us deciding how best to liberate people from the abusive imposition of psychology, we need to define our agenda in response to the oppressed and exploited themselves. Thus, at all times we must seek to allow relevant organisations and individuals a central place in the organisation. Of course, this won't be easy. In part, there is no reason why such bodies should trust any organisation to do with psychology. We will need to earn the right to be called upon to act. Another reason to start off with realisable objectives.

All three of these themes are apparent throughout the draft Aims and Organisation documents. The practical orientation and the attempt to structure those we seek to work with into the heart of the organisation probably require little explanation. What may provoke more comment is the prioritising of particular aims and activities. The list is clearly limited and it is possible to think of many omissions. However, as argued above, the limitations are deliberate. The vision is of PPR as a resource to be called upon to combat oppression whether that is on a personal or a collective scale. While a limited vision, it is far from a modest one. It means turning the tide of close on a century when psychology and psychologists have been largely something for the oppressed to shun rather than embrace. Even as constituted here, PPR faces a considerable challenge ahead.

PSYCHOLOGY POLITICS RESISTANCE

Draft documents: (A) Aims and objectives. (B) Organisation.

(A) Aims and Objectives

Psychology Politics, Resistance (PPR) has five principal aims:

- (i) to expose the oppressive consequences of current psychological ideas, practices and institutions, to contest them wherever they appear, and to promote positive alternatives.
- (ii) to support those individuals and organisations who seek help in challenging the contribution of psychology to their oppression or exploitation.
- (iii) to provide whatever psychological expertise would be of use in supporting individuals and organisations in their struggles against oppression or exploitation.
- (iv) to contest the reactionary usage of psychological ideas in public debate.
- (v) to persuade both individual psychologists and organisations of psychologists to adopt an active opposition to exploitation and oppression as a central aspect of their work and, in particular, to encourage such considerations as a key element in the education of all psychologists.

(B) Organisation

1. General principles of organisation

- (i) The organisation shall be known as Psychology Politics Resistance (PPR).
- (ii) PPR shall be open to all those who are opposed to the oppressive and exploitative consequences of psychological ideas, practices and institutions whether or not they are themselves psychologists.
- (iii) PPR shall seek to respond to an agenda as set by those who experience oppression, exploitation or exclusion and who are seeking positive and empowering alternatives. To that end, PPR shall make a priority of making links with appropriate individuals and organisations and shall seek to maximise their influence on its activities.

2. Principal activities

- (i) PPR shall use its network to monitor and contest oppressive exploitative or exclusionary uses of psychology and to promote links between those others with matching aims.
- (ii) PPR shall provide a network of psychologists who are able and prepared to respond when the organisation is asked to challenge oppressive, exploitative or exclusionary uses of psychology.
- (iii) PPR shall provide a network of psychologists who are able and prepared to respond when the organisation is asked to provide psychological expertise in the furtherance of campaigns against oppression or exploitation.
- (iv) PPR shall actively seek to reach students of psychology both through written materials and by organising meetings in individual institutions.
- (v) PPR shall seek to contribute symposia and also to arrange fringe meetings at appropriate conferences both within and beyond psychology.

- (vi) In addition to its regular conferences, PPR shall, from time to time, organise special meetings around specific issues - where appropriate in conjunction with other relevant organisations.
- (vii) PPR shall seek to publicise our views through the media and shall provide an alternative network of "experts" to respond to, comment upon and intervene in public debates.
- (viii) PPR shall publish a regular newsletter.

3. Constitution

- (i) PPR shall have a general meeting at least every two years at which policy will be decided and coordinators elected. This meeting will be the supreme decision making body of the organisation and shall be open to all members. In addition, organisations as invited by the officers or by previous general meetings shall have voting rights on a par with individual members. Contested decisions shall be decided by simple majority vote. Meetings will be called by the coordinators, or an emergency general meeting may be called by 30 members.
- (ii) The general meeting shall elect a coordinating committee to be responsible for the organisation of PPR between meetings. All those eligible to vote will be allowed to make up to six choices and the six individuals obtaining most votes shall be elected. The committee shall meet at least twice a year and meetings shall be open to both members and invited organisations. All attempts will be made to make decisions by consensus. However, in cases of irresolvable difference, only elected committee members will be entitled to vote.
- (iii) The committee shall allocate the following tasks amongst themselves: membership organiser, treasurer, newsletter organiser, conference and meetings organiser, coordinator with outside organisations, press coordinator and campaigns organiser who shall be responsible for arranging members to respond to requests for help. Such others as are willing to help shall be coopted to assist with these tasks.
- (iv) Individual membership shall depend upon payment of an annual membership fee. There will be a sufficient differential between waged and unwaged/low waged rates so as to allow all to participate on equal terms. Initially the fees shall be 4 waged, 2 low/unwaged.
- (v) There shall be a bank account in the name of the organisation. Any two of three named committee (to be named by the committee itself) shall be signatories. Accounts shall be provided to general meetings.
- (vi) All applicants who agree with the aims and objectives of the organisation shall be eligible for membership. Should the committee reject any applicant they will be entitled to appeal to a general meeting for admittance.
- (vii) A newsletter shall be produced at least twice yearly which shall be distributed free to members and sold to non-members. While the newsletter shall seek to be as open as possible and to promote debate, the committee member(s) responsible for the newsletter shall be empowered to reject any material that is contrary to the aims and objectives of the organisation.
- (viii) Any changes to this constitutions shall require a two-thirds majority at a properly constituted general meeting.