Mike Cooley: towards a human-centred education

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Mike Cooley said that completing an engineering apprenticeship was a necessary qualification for his professorship at Bremen University but that if he had admitted to having been apprenticed when applying for an English professorship he would not have been considered for the post.

As it was, he was apprenticed in County Galway, both to a way of life and a close relationship with nature that he describes in his last, semi-autobiographical, collection of writings *Delinquent Genius* (reviewed in *PSE* April 2019). Here he describes childhood as 'a subversive hotbed for the spread of tacit knowledge' (p39). This term he took from the philosopher of science, Michael Polanyi, for 'things that we know but cannot tell'.

This formed the basis for the development of Marxism which is Mike's fundamental legacy, linking imagination to technology. As he quotes Marx's *Capital* on the frontispiece to his self-published 1980 book, compiled and edited by his wife Shirley, *Architect or Bee? The Human Price of Technology*, revised and republished by Hogarth Press in 1987:

> A bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of its cells; but what distinguishes the worst of architects from the best of bees is namely this. The architect will construct in his imagination that which he will ultimately erect in reality. At the end of every labour process, we get that which existed in the consciousness of the labourer at its commencement.

For Mike, this is 'common sense': 'a sense of what is to be done and how it is to be done, held in common by those who will have had some form of apprenticeship and practical experience in the area' (restated in the recently reissued *Architect or Bee?* prefaced by Frances O'Grady, p10). This is shared by 'ordinary people' but, as Mike was always saying, 'I have never met an ordinary person'. All are capable of extraordinary feats of ingenuity, even in apparently mundane activities let alone in our complex sociality.

Like the Lucas Plan, for which Mike is best known on the left as Chair of the Lucas Aerospace Shop Stewards' Combine Committee, which drew up an alternative plan for socially useful applications of the knowledge and skill developed in building Concorde, this implies that 'we must always put people before machines' (p1). This philosophy of science outboxes both relativism and pragmatism to undermine our 'overweening faith in science and technological change' (p8) by refounding it upon Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge*.

Mike envisioned 'the start of artificial intelligence around 450 BC' (p55) with Plato's idealisation of mathematics. Despite successive revolts by Epicureans, medieval cathedral-builders, renaissance artists and industrial artisans, disdain for manual labour terminated in Descartes's calculating homunculus which today is applied to the technological maelstrom in which humanity finds itself.

This, more than his many other achievements, like pioneering technology at the GLC to aid disabled people, his work with the German trade union IG Metal, or his 1972 book on *Computer Aided Design*, is Mike Cooley's true legacy which is yet to be developed, especially in education.