The Edinburgh Lectures: Richard Holloway 'Creating an Inclusive Capital'

'I'm the only visual aid, so maybe you'd better shut your eyes' – that's how **Richard Holloway** started his **Edinburgh Lecture** at the National Gallery of Scotland's Hawthornden Theatre last week. Nobody did, of course; the audience was riveted from beginning to end. Holloway is one of Scotland's very best speakers; he's also an author, a broadcaster and former bishop of Edinburgh. As Matthew Haggis, chair of sponsors One City Trust, said in introducing him, 'It's hard to keep up!'

Holloway's father served his apprenticeship as a block printer at the United Turkey Red factory in Alexandria, West Dunbartonshire. Technology eventually rendered his job obsolete and he became a labourer for the rest of his life, apart from a brief return to printing during the war. He was a man who 'endured and kept quiet' but after his death Holloway found his father's two printing mallets in a cloth-wrapped bundle in a cupboard. Holloway understood then his father's huge sense of disappointment and betrayal. The Industrial Revolution took people from the land to the cities, where they learned trades and skills – skills that were then cast aside. Time and change rob the poor of their jobs, their pride and their dignity. Invention, says Holloway, buffets the poor. He quoted **Lewis Grassic Gibbon's Sunset Song**, 'the crofter has gone…the man …with the land closer to his heart than the flesh of his own body..' 'Nothing is true but change, nothing abides.'

Holloway wants us to *feel* the impact of change on the poor; he wants to motivate us' not to guilt but to action.' Marx said that the poor suffer and the rich garner the profits of their

suffering; that was how the capitalist system worked – but he also thought that the poor would eventually rise up and smash that system. Revolutionary anger has not come; instead there is self-destructive apathy. The poor, says Holloway, are no longer at the bottom of society; they are socially excluded, banished and living as exiles in our midst.

Some of our well-intentioned efforts to improve things have made things worse. A welfare system intended to help people until they get back into the workforce has instead led to permanent exclusion. Post World War II redevelopment plans moved the poor from the city centres to the peripheries without asking any of them if that was what they wanted. Glasgow's Gorbals and places like them were flattened and the families who had lived there for generations were exiled to far flung housing schemes; again they were excluded, this time from the cities they had been born in.

Scotland, says Holloway, is an unequal and divided country in which a significant minority are excluded and alienated from the benefits enjoyed by the rest. What's more, it costs the country a fortune to finance this exclusion; illness, domestic violence, mental health problems and all the issues associated with the disenfranchised poor are not only expensive, they're also bad for society as a whole. Civic leaders in Edinburgh have never been complacent about the problems, just puzzled as to how to solve them.

Ten years ago, Holloway chaired a commission on the subject, and one of its recommendations was the setting up of a foundation to draw on the wealth and positivity of Edinburgh and to stretch these assets across to those in need by giving practical help. The commission's report was entitled One City because that's what its members wanted to see, not what they saw. The One City Trust is the result of that recommendation; it facilitates practical work to tackle exclusion, such as an allotment gardeners' project, food banks and children's breakfast clubs.

A happy life, Holloway suggests, is a balance between positive and negative freedoms, 'freedom for and freedom from.' Our public policies should concentrate on the latter, to remove the barriers that stop people flourishing. Edinburgh has made good progress on this, he said in citing the council's policies protect the rights of disabled people, women, and racial and sexual minorities. Change can be good. Thanks to local politicians and social reformers it is now one of the best ever times to live in our capital city; we should be proud of how much we have achieved. Despite all this however, poverty is still there, blocking the way for so many people. Legislation cannot remove it; the Westminster government's attempts to do so have been crude and ineffectual.

Holloway explained that one quarter of Edinburgh's population lives below the poverty threshold. Eighteen thousand children in Edinburgh are living in low income households; poverty is the single most powerful determinant of a child's future, and it costs all of us huge sums – according to the Child Poverty Action Group, possibly £156,000,000 per annum in the city alone. Camilla Batmanghelidjh CBE, founder of the charity Kids' Company, has said that money is only cascaded into a child's life when he offends, whilst a fraction of that cash might have kept him out of trouble in the first place. Imaginative early intervention work is taking place in Edinburgh, but the city council acknowledges that much more is needed. Holloway advocates getting into children's lives earlier to build a stronger reality around them; we need to recognise that our primary duty to our children is to allow them to live abundant and fulfilling lives, whether there is paid work for them or not. The future is uncertain, more and more jobs are being taken away; we need to strengthen young people to deal with the changing world by preparing them, not for the market but for life.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Holloway reminds us, there was a strong self-improvement ethos. Libraries,

orchestras, choirs, evening classes – these were all available to the poor and they educated people like Professor John Wallace and the late Jimmy Reid. The poor today are excluded from all of these opportunities. Time, says Holloway, hangs heavy on the hands of the unemployed poor; 'empty time' is social exclusion's worst killer. People hang around like characters in a Beckett play; they are rational beings with time on their hands and nothing to fill it . The weight of empty time is destructive in communities who have no skills to use it, no memory of how to 'play.' We need to accept economic facts; short term tactics based on work practices do not work. Cultural and creative resources need to be poured into these disaffected communities.

Sistema Scotland is a charity whose mission is to transform lives through music. Based on a Venezualan movement founded in 1975 by Maestro Jose Antonio Abreu, it was set up in the belief that children can gain huge social benefits by playing in a symphony orchestra. Board members include Holloway himself, Nicola Benedetti and Sally Magnusson. Sistema, says Holloway, doesn't talk about crime, drugs and alcoholism – instead it floods communities with beauty and hard work. Time is filled co-operatively, joyfully and with discipline. Sistema's Big Noise orchestras give pride back to a community; when children succeed their parents and grandparents change too.

The first Sistema Scotland project in Raploch (an economically deprived district of Stirling) has already sent more children to the National Youth Choir of Scotland and the National Youth Orchestra of Scotland than any other postcode; it has identified highly talented young musicians who would perhaps never otherwise have been spotted. The focus remains, however, on everyone participating and working together, co-operating and sharing mutual support – it doesn't matter if a child is musically talented or not. The orchestra has visited Caracas and broken the hearts of a thousand Venezualans who

came to hear it play. Raploch is now on the Royal Town Planning Institute's shortlist for the Best Place in Scotland. Popular demand has led to the introduction of an orchestra for smaller children, **Baby Noise**, and one for adults, **The Noise**. The senior orchestra is now called **Rinconda**, and Sistema is delighted that a similar ensemble set up in New Zealand has been named the Raploch Orchestra. Sistema is now organising a teachers' conference, and hopes to establish Stirling as a world class centre of expertise.

The Big Noise orchestras are a revolutionary way of achieving changes in whole communities. They address every problem and improve every aspect of local life. We need, says Holloway, to spend thousands to save millions. There is now a Big Noise orchestra in Govanhill, and Aberdeen City Council is about to launch one in Torry. Holloway's dream is to see Big Noise orchestras in deprived areas of Edinburgh, but he acknowledges that Sistema can only move into communities one at a time; there has to be patience. The Scottish government's own evaluation of Sistema's work has been globally influential; Stirling has now cemented relations with almost every country in the world through the Big Noise orchestras.

The original project in Raploch was funded for five years by Sistema itself on the basis that if it worked, the local authority would then take responsibility for 75% of the cost, which it now does. Sistema has been successful in attracting private and grant funding. Aberdeen City is to come up with 75% funding from the get-go; Sistema will raise the rest and is hopeful that the **oil community** will help. Holloway explains that if councils realise that they can take a little bit of the money from many different budgets, it is easier for them to find the funds – even **proceeds of crime** accounts can be accessed for this purpose, something that Holloway finds particularly satisfying.

People are given the confidence to participate in the orchestras because Sistema waits to be invited into a

community – it doesn't just 'parachute in'. People must be empowered, enabled to take part; they must be given back control of their own lives.

The orchestras accommodate all levels of talent. Instrumentality has a unique power that Holloway doesn't think sport, needing as it does a certain amount of ability, can match; Sistema welcomes all comers. To the suggestion that the creation of more and more orchestras might stop them seeming 'special', Holloway answers that there are 250 such ensembles in Venezuala – more orchestras don't just help more children, they also create more jobs in such areas as instrument-making and teaching.

Holloway believes that Big Noise orchestras will spread joy and purpose, giving children resilience to live no matter what the market throws at them, and the resources to deal with economic and social events in new and innovative ways.

Young children skip to school because they are natural artists with an instinct to play and dance. Many have lost this instinct owing to the problems in their lives, but Sistema knows that with daring and imagination, it can get children skipping once more.

One City Trust sponsors the 2014 Edinburgh Lectures. A PDF version (and a video, when ready) of this lecture and more information about the Edinburgh Lectures can be found at edinburghlectures,wordpress.com

The Edinburgh Lectures continue at 6pm tomorrow 21st May 2014, when **Professor Tom Devine** will discuss the global impact of the Scottish people over the last three centuries, in '**Beam Me Up Scotty**.' Hawthornden Lecture Theatre, National Gallery of Scotland – booking via Usher Hall Box Office.

One City Trust has also published three **books** to promote awareness of social justice and raise funds for projects tackling social exclusion. Contributors include **Ian Rankin,**

Kate Atkinson and **Alexander McCall Smith**, and the books can be purchased via the One City website or from bookshops.