

## The Long Shadow of Class - discussion points

This document offers suggested discussion points you might find helpful in relation to our film on class, education and economic justice.

The film considers the crucial role class and education play in making the UK an economically unjust society. It explores the lenses through which we view each other and ourselves and how that can determine our attitudes, behaviour and, ultimately, who gets what.

Experts in their field from very different backgrounds discuss unequal opportunities, accent bias, the markers and stigma of poverty and the devastating effects of our current economic model.

The film is available on our website and can be used as a whole (47 minutes) or in sections divided by themes:

[www.economicinjustice.org.uk/category/stories/education/](http://www.economicinjustice.org.uk/category/stories/education/)

### General

- To what extent do 'class' and 'classism' still exist in the UK and why?
- Does our education system reduce or increase economic inequality? How?
- How can people and frontline organisations most affected by policy changes be more involved in decision making?
- Is economic injustice the fundamental inequality?
- What do we need to **do** to make change happen?
- What should/could be done to address economic injustice?

### Class

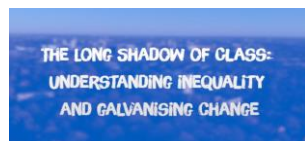
The concept of 'class' and 'classism'. Definition of class: the way in which people in society are divided into groups based on perceived social and economic status. *Do you think 'class' and 'classism' still exist?*

How classism is embedded in our media and the arts. *Do you think the media perpetuates class stereotypes? If so, how?*

Deb and Shahajahan talk about how classism can be 'internalised'. What do they mean?

The concepts of a 'class ceiling', 'myth of meritocracy' and who gets to the 'top'.

- For Professor Sam Friedman, individuals are systematically disadvantaged depending on their accent, dress, self-presentation and behaviour and consequently are often overlooked for promotion despite their talent, intelligence or competence. *Do you agree or disagree with Sam and why?*
- *What is the 'myth of meritocracy' as described by Professor Friedman?*
- Professor Friedman suggests we need to make 'class' a protected characteristic, like 'race', gender, sexuality etc. so that it is recognised by institutions and no longer a taboo subject. *What is class to you? Do you agree or disagree with Sam and why?*



## Justice

*What is an economically just society? Do you agree with Susie that it's impossible to achieve?*

We need to examine who we value in the economy. *Which skills do you value and why? Who do we celebrate and reward?*

Deb Neville says that the system wants and needs people without much education so that “we have Amazon delivery people and security staff at the front of shops on zero hour contracts.” *She thinks this is ‘despicable’. What do you think and why?*

## Poverty/stigma

Shahajahan Ali says poverty is material and cultural: “It’s about opportunities to access experiences, the arts, museums, trips etc as well as whether people have food and clothes.” *What is your understanding of poverty? What is stigma and how does it relate to poverty?*

Dr Elizabeth Henry notes people in poverty have different concerns to those who are not. For example whether they have enough money for food and rent. *What would you say are the major concerns faced by people living in poverty? Would you say they are fundamentally different to the concerns faced by people who are more wealthy? Why?*

Rather than people blaming themselves for being in poverty, we need to understand the UK economic and political system and policy decisions. Shahajahan says, “We need to know it’s not our fault, it’s purposeful policy which creates divisions.” Do you agree or disagree with Shahajahan? *How do we challenge the entrenched idea that individuals are to blame for being poor?*

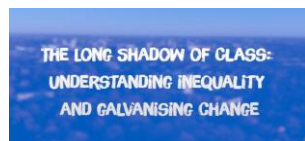
Elizabeth Henry says, “We need to lift people out of poverty. It’s not about depressing people’s wealth at the top. It’s not either or.” *Do you agree?*

## Wealth

Dr Ben Tippet says it would take the average worker 400 years to have as much as the top 1% if they saved every penny of their earnings. And 800,000 years to save as much as the inventor Dyson makes. *Is this fair enough in a free market or should income be restricted or redistributed?*

*Why has the wealth gap increased since the 1970s?* Ben suggests: a. Technology (replacing jobs), b. Globalisation, c. Taxes have come down and d. Trade unions’ power has decreased so workers’ bargaining power is reduced. *What do you think?*

We need to ‘disrupt’ the process whereby inequality is perpetuated. That means increasing taxation, looking at inheritance tax and ‘gifting’ and ‘the Bank of Mum and Dad’ which gives children of more affluent parents some ‘insulation’ and determines who gets what. It helps shape opportunities for their children’s access to housing and career opportunities which can have a longer term impact on their careers and often results in unfair advantage over those with less wealth. What is the purpose of taxation? Do you have a clear idea of how your taxes are used, locally and nationally? *What do you think about increasing taxes? Should those with higher wages be taxed at a higher rate than they are already? How much should people be taxed as a proportion of their income? What do you think is fair?*



## Education

Educational grants helped Susie Morrow with housing and bus fares. A local creche made all the difference to her opportunities, enabling her to study and therefore have greater job opportunities. Students today have less access to grants and often need to take out loans to pay for tuition fees to attend university. *What impact do you think this might have on their education and future job opportunities?*

Deb Neville suggests we need to give more to some than others for the sake of equality and fairness. “We waste so much talent.”. *Do you agree or disagree and why?*

In what ways might some educators contribute to the marginalisation of working-class children and young people? What do you understand by ‘marginalisation’? *How can we improve the present school system to benefit children from a working-class background?*

## Government and the economic system

Dr Elizabeth Henry says it is essential to involve frontline organisations and the people most affected by decisions made in the policy process. People with lived experience know best how it feels to be in a particular situation. Drawing on his own experience of poverty, the footballer Marcus Rashford successfully campaigned in 2020 to overturn the government’s decision to end free school meals during the summer holidays. *Do you think it is important to involve the people and frontline organisations most affected by policy changes in making decisions? If so why?*

According to Jayati Ghosh, we need a Green, Red and Purple New Deal, focused on the environment, eradicating poverty and women’s and carers’ rights. *What does she mean? Do you agree with Ghosh?*

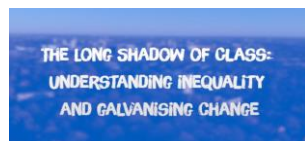
## Making change happen

Shahajahan Ali says that we can see ourselves as powerless and may feel ‘that’s just the way it is’ and ‘there’s nothing we can do about it’. But, he also says, we need to understand how things can be changed and how we can be involved in achieving that change. *Do you agree with Shahajahan? Do you feel you can be involved with helping to make change happen in the UK? If so, how? If not, why?*

All our rights and benefits – the NHS, the weekend, holiday pay, free education, the end of segregation etc. were won by people who stood up and made it happen. *What would you say were the crucial elements leading to those rights and benefits being won? What were the societal and historical contexts in which those rights and benefits were established?*

“That voice for change was in me and I went on. It’s so important to feel part of something. It doesn’t have to be big, you don’t have to be famous. You just have to give a part of yourself. I wasn’t a leader but a little seed. I had a voice. I learned to speak without fear.” Jean Stallings (civil rights and anti-poverty campaigner, JtoJ patron). *Is there something you would like to change? Do you know of any local or national groups working on that issue? Do you agree with Jean?*

Role models like Raheem Sterling, Stormzy and Malala are important. *Why? Which? Do you have any role models?*



Dr Ben Tippet suggests we need to build back power in the hands of trade unions. *Do you agree? Why?*

“First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you and then you win.” *Do you think that’s true?*

Professor Sam Friedman talks about the power of activists and academics working together at the International Inequalities Institute (III) at the LSE using evidence based research and the importance of critical thinking. *How can academic and grassroots activists join forces?*

Dr Ben Tippet suggests strategy is really important in order to bring about change. Having good wishes is not enough. We need to read and think and learn. What do you understand by ‘strategy’? *What advice and tips would you recommend to people who are keen to bring about change for economic and social justice? What would you say needs to happen to maintain momentum around change?*

Instead of describing people as ‘hard to reach’ or ‘deprived’ Dr Elizabeth Henry says we should refer to them as ‘historically excluded’. That way, with a change of thinking, behaviour can change too. *Would you say the language and framing we use to understand society contributes to the perpetuation of social inequalities? If so, why? Can you give examples?*

#### *Further information*

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**You can view the film trailer here:** <https://vimeo.com/journeytojustice/filmtrailer>

