

Social Activists as Altruists (And Where Titmuss Comes In): Smothering the Fire They're Trying to Kindle¹

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Many socially-concerned activists bemoan the unwillingness of the underprivileged to join in their political crusades. Baffled by the latter's unwillingness to take part in efforts meant for their own benefit, the lack of coordination frustrates the activists and is often cited as an explanation for their failure to achieve improvements in socio-economic conditions. The lack of cooperation between activists and the underprivileged is not new. A number of basic contradictions in the approach of the activists often stymie their efforts. Among these are altruism professed but not encouraged, dismissal of others' initiatives and conflicting views of material motivation. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: http://www.transformativestudies.org ©2017 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]*

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In this article I begin with a brief history of the problem of activists as altruists and then point out three pragmatic contradictions that confound the political efforts of these usually intellectual and economically secure agents. First, they present themselves as motivated by altruism but argue that the poor should be motivated by self-interest. Second, intent on

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