

# Red Chalk:

## On Schooling, Capitalism and Politics

**Mike Cole, Dave Hill, Peter McLaren and Glenn Rikowski**

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Key Texts

**80-84****PREFACE****Gang of Five***Peter McLaren*

Glenn Rikowski once put to me a challenging question during an e-mail conversation. Referring to the political praxis that guides his own life, he wrote: "What is the maximum damage I can do (given my biography, skills, talents, and physical health, etc.) to the rule of capital?" He followed his question with the comment: "This question needs to be asked frequently, as the answer may change (perhaps many times) during the course of one's life." I don't think Glenn was aware at the time he pitched this question to me from his office on the other side of the Atlantic, that his question would provoke in me a long and extended rumination on the way that my own work has changed over the course of twenty years of scholarship and political activism. Always a leftist, I became immersed in the seductive thrall of *avant-garde* politics in my late twenties, and this was carried forward into my subsequent educational research and practice. Marx was always a major ingredient in this eclectic mix, but became increasingly tangential as I began a heady engagement with the works of postmodern theorists, many of whom I discovered had not only disdainfully spurned any real calls for class action, but had rubbished the Marxist left with accusations that the grain of its analysis seemed to conjure up the politics of the primordial self.

**Presumed to be trapped within a culture of relics that invoked the universal archetypes of white male pontifications, Marxism was dismissed as hopelessly class reductionist, encased within**

**teleological thought, male-dominated, irrefrangibly self-assured, and fatally contaminated by the smoke and testosterone of barroom masculinities. The echolalic mocking of Marxism that one continues to hear in the corridors of the academy these days is – especially within schools of education in higher education -- less an expression of capitalist triumphalism or populist nationalism as much as a dotty understanding of historical materialism and the history of socialism. This part of my political biography has been written elsewhere (some of it appears in this text) and I won't rehearse it here except as a point from which I can begin to situate -- albeit in broad-brush fashion -- my work with Mike Cole, Dave Hill, and Glenn Rikowski. As my relationship with these three 'working-class blokes' began to expand into co-authored projects, my work shifted orbit, joining the challenge of Mike, Dave, and Glenn in casting off the limit-horizon of postmodern theorising, and placing the overthrow of the rule of capital at centre stage. I should warn the reader, however, that what follows is not a full-dress defence of Marxism against its many detractors inside the educational establishment (those defences have been made elsewhere) but rather is meant to be a full-on, frontal opposition to capital's white reign.**

The position that quickly emerges from within these pages is that corporate-driven education has been contemporary society's great swindle of fulfilment. Much of the work of educational research has been dedicated to giving a rational account of teaching and learning, and finding ways of reconciling 'what could be' with 'what is'; that is, with rationalising the educational enterprise 'in itself' with existing property relations and state rule. Schooling is very much an abstract form of estrangement that has real, concrete effects on the lives of working people. The worst of these effects are correspondingly disproportionate for individuals who are classified in the US as 'people of colour' and are female. The critique contained in *Red Chalk* is very much a feminist and anti-racist one. While it is clear that there exists in the United States a distinguished neo-Marxist educational tradition of challenging neo-conservative policy, practice, and pedagogy, and admirable efforts at understanding schooling from the perspective of race, class, and gender relations, the connections with Marxist revolutionary theory and socialist praxis is tenuous at best. That's where the work of Mike, Dave, and Glenn comes in. Theirs is a Marxism with the gloves off. It is a negative dialectics of sorts, and could aptly be described as moving towards the abolition of education through its reactivation; that is, through its ultimate

realisation. It is in this regard that I most fully appreciate the distinct contributions of these three.

The lines connecting their struggle to the revolutionary socialist tradition are clear and unambiguous, which is not to say that they agree on all points (as readers will soon discover in the pages that follow). In the struggle against the rule of capital I have been emboldened not only by the efforts and examples of Mike, Dave, and Glenn, but also by the work of Paula Allman. Paula's stunning book, *Revolutionary Social Transformation*, has crisply and unapologetically – and with admirable erudition – put on the table many of the questions raised in *Red Chalk* and has taken them in new and important directions. We hope to include Paula in publications that we have planned for the future. Paula, Dave, Glenn, and Mike are four individuals that live and breathe Marxist critique, not a very fashionable diet these days. Hence, they cannot easily be described as academics in the usual sense, but as organic intellectuals who put it ALL on the line when it comes to fighting for and with the working-class. I am proud to be part of this extraordinary Gang of Five.

The bulk of discussions for *Red Chalk* took place in April 2000, as part of an invitation that I extended to Dave, Mike, and Glenn to produce a joint discussion for a column that I write ('The Internationalist') for the *International Journal of Educational Reform*. This pamphlet represents the full version of this discussion. The section on 'market socialism' was put together through an e-mail discussion during August. Some works produced by Cole, Hill, and Rikowski between April-September 2000 have been referred to in the references.

**Our collective idea was that this pamphlet would enable us to start a dialogue about educational reform by situating the political project that animates our lives in our lived experience as educational activists. This follows from the sound advice given to us by the work of Paulo Freire. Equally important from a pedagogical point of view, is that we attempt to locate, critique, refine, and develop the theoretical perspectives that give us critical purchase on those experiences. As Myles Horton, the great Appalachian social activist and founder of the Highlander school in Tennessee was fond of saying: 'You only learn from experiences that you learn from.'**

Dave, Mike, Glenn, and Paula have, in distinctly creative ways, used Marxist theory to re-direct current educational debates in the theatre of educational critique. One of the central 'players' that serves as the theoretical protagonist in the political project guiding *Red Chalk* can be

found in Glenn Rikowski's exegesis of labour power. Maintaining that we live in the social universe of capital whose primary substance is value, Rikowski notes several important things about how such value operates. Claiming that it is the 'matter and anti-matter of Marx's social universe' – a manifestation of 'social energy' that is permanently being transformed and created – he argues that it constitutes itself as capital in the form of surplus value. As such, value cannot be self-generating. It cannot create itself, nor can it magically transform into capital on its own accord. It must be fuelled by the living furnace of labour. It is labour that powers its transformations – and its transmogrifications. It is labour, the ultimate alchemist, that fires the engines of value, transforming it firstly into capital on the basis of surplus value, and then into the myriad forms of capital springing from surplus value. Rikowski grounds his analysis in the observations made by Marx (1858) in the *Grundrisse*:

Labour is the living, form-giving fire; it is the transitoriness of things, their temporality, as their formation by living time. (p.361)

But Rikowski does not end his observations here. He further notes, following Marx, that while value depends upon our labour, labour, in turn, is dependent upon labour power, which is 'our capacity to labour; the energy, skills, knowledge, physical and personal qualities that we, as labourers possess'. It is labour power that constitutes the central actor around which the entire drama of capital unfolds. Labour power ceases to have only virtual or potential existence when it is transformed into labour. In the labour process, labour power (potential, capacity to labour) is transformed into something very concrete – labour. It achieves its actuality by the active will of the labourer once it has been sold to the capitalist for a definite period of time and for a price. The value of labour power is measured (like all commodities) by labour-time. Specifically, this is the labour-time necessary for whatever is required for workers to sustain themselves (individually, and the next generation of workers), and to keep them fit for work (i.e., a *living wage*). Wages are expressions of the value of labour power (though the wage viewed as the *prices that labour* fetches fluctuates wildly from its value within the marketplace – generating gross inequality still further).

**Understanding this process has important implications for education, since labour power includes not just the mechanical or functional 'skills' and knowledge it takes to get the job done, but also incorporates the attitudes and personality traits essential for effective performance within the labour process. It depends on what is included within what Rikowski refers to as 'mental capacities.' So that when employers assess labour power, they are referring to**

**'mental capacities' that includes work attitudes, social attitudes and personality traits – aspects of our 'personalities'.**

**Rikowski's focus on labour power has profound implications for the way in which knowledge is produced both within and outside of school settings. Education and training are heavily implicated in the social production of labour power. Insofar as Marxism is a theory of society, it attempts, notes Rikowski, to dissolve theoretically and practically the value-form of labour, classes and all other forms of oppression. It is through illuminating the process by which labour power is socially produced, and dismantled, that Rikowski sets the stage for the struggle ahead. And it is here where the work of Dave Hill, Mike Cole, and Rikowski take on singular importance in contemporary socialist struggles. These scholar/activists have worked for many years, each in their own distinctive ways, to deepen and extend the socialist project, particularly in terms of its implications for educators. Their collective message repays close examination for all those who are interested in educational transformation.**

## ***Why Marx, Why Now?***

The current crisis of global capitalism is a sign, not of capital's excess, but of its mutation. Whilst capital's metamorphosis is being met with cries of distressed astonishment by some of our colleagues in the academy, the normalising capacity of familiarity has enabled others to grow accustomed to practices once reviled for their vicious assault on the poor. Whereas throughout much of its history, the ravages of capitalism were held partially in check through the creation of welfare state protections, today capitalism continues to engineer its campaign against the masses unabated, freed of its former fetters, free to plunder in ways hitherto unimagined, creating conditions where work itself has become an obsolete utility. The ever-growing polarisation between the many and the few continues unabated, accelerating, in fact, with each new technological achievement that makes life more palatable for approximately 20 percent of the world's population. Since the Second World War, labour has undergone unprecedented defeats and we have witnessed dramatic wage reductions, an increase of absolute poverty, a drastic reduction in welfare provisions, chronic economic stagnation, increasing class polarisation, the ascendancy of neo-Hayekian market fundamentalism, whose policy nostrums amount to nothing less class warfare on a global basis, a vicious anti-unionism, the emergence of new forms of wage-slavery, and the categorical dismissal of the possibility of 'real existing' socialism anywhere in the world, to name but a few of the current symptoms of the retreat from class struggle.

The reality we live in begs to differ with these conditions. Here, in Los Angeles, it is difficult to miss the concentration of poverty, especially in the Pico-Union/Westlake neighbourhood directly abutting downtown, as well as in south central Los Angeles where the 1992 uprising took place, and the port-adjacent areas of Long Beach. Employment in high-tech durable manufacturing has declined dramatically (especially aerospace), while there has been some modest gains in non-durable manufacturing (printing, food processing and apparel). Los Angeles remains the largest manufacturing centre in the United States. Even within high-wage industries like the motion picture industry, there exists a dramatic bifurcation of income. Most of areas of working poor employment are in manufacturing and retail, and most of the working poor fill labourer and service positions (Los Angeles Alliance For a New Economy, 2000). The regional economies of Los Angeles and those throughout the United States and the United Kingdom need to be understood from the perspective of the global marketplace, and correspondingly from the vantage point of Marx's labour theory of value. It was in consideration of

addressing this task that the dialogue of *Red Chalk* was born, believing as we do that the educational left needs Marx today more than perhaps at any other time in human history.

## ***Education, Capital and Crisis***

The *Red Chalk* dialogue does not deal directly with the debate over the nature of the current crisis of stagnation and decline in the advanced capitalist world. It does not explore capitalism's current crisis. One view of this crisis is that inter-capitalist struggle or inter-capital competition generates over-capacity (i.e., to falling labour productivity through over-production and over-accumulation linked to excessive competition amongst world-wide manufacturers – after Robert Brenner, 1998). An alternative perspective is that the current crisis of capital is related, after Marx, to inter-class struggle (see Bonefeld, 1999). *Red Chalk* does, however, address how the labour theory of value can be used as an explanatory framework to help educators understand – and eventually overcome – current forms of exploitation and oppression, specifically as these relate to the process of schooling. We are centrally concerned with the marketplace, not in its constitutive nature so much as with its external manipulation, particularly with respect to hostile interventions into the market, with what amounts to an imposition of a new world political framework for trade. This perverse framework not only extends the global reach of the market but manipulates (by means of the World Trade Organisation, The International Monetary Fund, and other organisations) trade in the interests of advanced country profitability (i.e., the United States). We are aware, in other words, that globalisation is not an endogenous consequence of the market, but is the outcome of a political reorganisation of the world economy initiated by the United States (see, Freeman, 1999). We are interested in how such a reorganisation constitutes a form of imperialism, exacerbating a global war against the working-class. We agree not only that neo-liberal policies to extend global free markets are implicated in global social instability, but also, as Tony Smith puts it, that "the ultimate cause is the dominance of the value form, which necessarily tends to invade every nook and cranny of social life, subordinating all other social concerns to the imperatives of valorisation" (1999, p. 174).

In the long struggle against exploitation, capitalism can easily survive the *intermezzo* efforts of the postmodern vanguard. While we vent diffuse dissatisfaction with the postmodern left, we do so not because it has annoyingly preoccupied itself for too long with a hectoring and lampooning of Marxism, but because it has reduced the struggle for emancipation to exploring the genealogies of discourses, to identifying relations of power at the level of the individual, rather than understanding the history of class society and ways to transform it. As Dave Hill and Mike Cole -- no journeymen as far as labour activism goes -- can readily

attest: one day on the picket line can do more to bring about social justice than all the campus-wide clarion calls for fashioning the self through bricolage out of the detritus of semiotic culture that we can fit between the pages of the latest *avant-garde* journal. We do not wish to privilege intellectual elaboration as the motor of educational transformation but to put praxis back on the agenda again. In the words of Paula Allman:

Visions and passions must develop in concert, in an intimate dance, with analysis and intellect. Only then will we create the possibilities for authentic, humanising, revolutionary social transformations" (1999, p. 141).

This means more than a collective rebuff of capital; it means breaking with the value-form of labour itself. In order to break with the value-form of labour and the separation of labour from its constitutive conditions of origin, we need to make cross-border alliances with teachers, with working men and women, and with social movements collectively dedicated to smashing capital's rule. We continue to fight because we must, not because we are assured of victory. The mere chance of victory is reason enough.

What is the maximum damage you can do to the rule of capital? Your answer to that question will, as Rikowski notes, perhaps change over time, and in different contexts and geo-political configurations. Yet how you answer it may determine the shape of our collective future. And whether or not we have one.

*Peter McLaren*

University of California, Los Angeles  
6th September, 2000

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## FOREWORD

### Education on Fire!

*Paula Allman*

It is a great privilege to write a *Foreword* to this exciting conversation amongst four of the world's most committed and significant critical/radical educators. This publication (which began as an interview but reads much more like a conversation or discussion) demonstrates poignantly that education has the potential to fuel the flames of resistance to global capitalism, as well as the passion for socialist transformation. Indeed, it demonstrates the potential to provide a spark that can ignite the desire for revolutionary democratic social transformation throughout the world. To carry the metaphor even further, it does so at a time when critical/radical education, almost everywhere, is in danger of terminal 'burn-out'.

However, I must stress that this is only a *potential*. One of the most important points you will hear as you take up the invitation to eaves-drop on this conversation is that the educational 'Left' needs Karl Marx? an authentic Marxist theorisation of all aspects and arenas of education. However, this is not a clarion call for a return to or a reworking of Bowles and Gintis (1976), or even the post-structuralist or neo-Marxist theory currently on offer. Glenn, Peter, Mike and Dave are calling for something much more radical, and more directly tied to Marx? to his critique of capitalism and political economy, and thus his dialectical conceptualisation of our material world. With the contradictions and atrocities of capital screaming for our attention with nauseating frequency, the times have never been more propitious for a Marxist theory of education, nor the need more urgent. Moreover, we require with greater urgency than ever before, a viable Marxist theory of education? a theory internally related to (and therefore inseparable from) critical revolutionary praxis, both within and without the classrooms of the world. As you read this pamphlet, I trust that you will hear what I hear in this conversation and that at last we might begin to hope for and expect the emergence of a thoroughly revitalised and radicalised approach to critical education.

The possibilities raised by *Red Chalk* don't stop there. Anyone who is committed to critical/radical education must share my nagging concern about the way in which those of us who profess and practice this form of education are separated from one another. This separation is not just geographical and temporal but in terms also of how we have tended to

isolate ourselves from one another over debates about what are fine (although extremely important) points of theoretical detail. In fact, nothing has kept the 'Left', and the educational 'Left' is no exception, so well divided and isolated (and, as a consequence marginalised) as the 'Left' itself. The conversation we listen to in *Red Chalk* is among people whose solidarity makes it possible for them to listen to one another carefully enough such that the grounds for common agreement can be found. In this dialogue the issues of greatest importance? the abolition of capitalism and the creation of an economically and socially just future for all of humanity? are always held foremost in our minds. We desperately need a global alliance of critical/radical educators? something that I have written about in considerable detail elsewhere (Allman, in press). For me, *Red Chalk* is more than a rehearsal for such an alliance; it may well mark its beginning. Of course, for the moment, it is only a trans-Atlantic alliance of three-plus-one. Yet if others, not just in the UK and US but throughout the world, will join their conversation with solidarity and openness, then we may be about to embark on what will be a long and arduous, yet equally the most important and urgent educational endeavour of our times. This would be an endeavour, which in the words of Antonio Gramsci, may lead to the creation of an "intellectual base so well rooted, assimilated and experienced that it becomes passion." (Gramsci, 1971, p.349)

Another crucial point that arises, over and over again, in this interview/discussion is that value and surplus value? the life-blood of capital ? and thus capital itself, is a *social relation*. In fact, capital would not exist if it were not for the exploitative relation between labour and capital? a relation made possible when any of us sell our labour power as a commodity to capital for a wage or even, and increasingly, a salary. Peter, Mike, Dave and Glenn stress that contrary to capitalist and post-modern rhetoric, discourses and/or ideology, the working class, or those embroiled in the labour-capital relation, is not shrinking. Throughout the globe, there are now more productive workers? people who, in Marx's terms, produce surplus-value within the labour-capital relation? than ever before in history. Their numbers are growing daily as more and areas of work are being drawn into? recast? within this exploitative class relation. Readers might be surprised to know that teaching was one of the service professions that Marx predicted would be subsumed under capital (Marx, 1867). Marx stresses repeatedly that capital is a relation?not a thing ?but a social relation between people that we perceive, or rather misperceive? in the fetishised form of a social relation between things (*ibid.*)? e.g. a use-value, such as a pair of shoes, is related to an exchange-value in the form of money! In other words, we think that we pay the price we do for

a commodity because of some intrinsic value it possesses or because of supply and demand? never asking in the latter instance what determines value when supply and demand are equal? rather than understanding critically (i.e. by a dialectical conceptualisation of capitalist reality) that the value of any commodity is determined by capital's social relation with productive labour. Moreover, it is around this exploitative relation that a whole complex or network of alienating and oppressive social relations exists in capitalism. The class relation shapes and helps to sustain these other relations, just as they also help to sustain the relations of class. Therefore, relations of oppression and discrimination based on race, gender, age, physical and mental ability, sexual preference, etc. are endemic within capitalism. They help to sustain the system, primarily through the mechanism of divide and rule; even though, technically or theoretically, it is only those who sell their labour power as a commodity to capital who need to be exploited, controlled and dominated in capitalist societies. Class matters, and ironically in these times when many critical educators have so easily dismissed the centrality or importance of class, it has never mattered more!

Clearly, the contributors to *Red Chalk* agree with my contention that one of the most crucial tasks facing critical educators is that we must say "NO"? the "Ya Basta!" cry of Mexico's Zapatistas? to capitalism. In my writings (especially Allman, 1999; and Allman, in press), I argue that to do this effectively, we need to understand capitalism dialectically as Marx tried to enable us to do in his three volumes of *Capital*. Furthermore, we must be clear that in saying "NO", we are speaking about an habituated structure of social relations for which we are all complicit in producing and sustaining, rather than some personal manifestation of these relations (*ibid.*). Our struggle is not against evil people or corporations, though there are clear examples of both and at times it may have to take this form. It must be directed at the *totality* of capital's interlocking relations of oppression and domination. These are first and foremost the internal relations? the dialectical contradictions? or the capitalist social relations that people enter into daily, and within which they live their lives and understand their world through what is basically an uncritical and *reproductive* form of praxis (*ibid.*). These are the relations that breed the greed, bigotry and hypocrisy in the individual representatives of capital and their corporations, the traits that evoke our disdain, and provoke our anger.

With a dialectical understanding of capitalism? the type of understanding critical/radical education has the potential to foster? we can understand that these dispositions in people arise from their social

relations, from following the illogical and unethical 'logic' of the capitalist system. We can also understand that our attempt to persuade individual capitalists or their corporations to be 'fairer' or 'environmentally friendly', or even using legislation to force their hand (although sometimes potentially useful as a short-term tactic) gets us nowhere in the long run. Tragically, it often does little more than to teach capitalists and their corporations to portray their public image in a more favourable light, which they often accomplish by incorporating our language of protest and totally mutating its meaning. With a dialectical understanding of capitalism, we should also be able to see that neoliberalism is not the 'real' enemy, but simply capitalism's most recent manifestation? capitalism dressed-up in the latest fashion, albeit a fashion absolutely necessary given the present crisis of national capital that has led to nations more forcibly than ever before being hurled into the inescapable whirlwind of globalisation (*ibid.*). And finally, as the discussion makes clear, we should also be able to understand that most of the current attempt to offer alternatives to neoliberalism? such as 'Third Way' politics? that remain trapped within the assumptions based on the social relations of capitalism, will turn out to be nothing more than neo-liberalism disguised by the discourses of social democracy: neoliberalism in an ostensibly more palatable form, meant to provide 'deep cover' for the harsh realities of global capitalism.

The approach to critical education that I advocate in my writings is an approach that is aimed at enabling people to engage in an abbreviated experience of pro-alternative, counter-hegemonic, social relations. These are social relations within which people can learn to 'read' the world critically and glimpse humanity's possible future beyond the horizon of capitalism (Allman, 1999; and Allman in press). There may be even more effective approaches that we could devise from a critique of capitalist social relations, as well as the ontologies and epistemologies that serve capital so well, but they should always aim at enabling people to 'live the no' by struggling to transform it into an affirmation of humanisation, i.e., an affirmation of our faith in human beings' ability and need to "make and remake, create and re-create" their world (Freire, 1972, p. 63). Like the four critical educators who speak to us here, we must not fear being ridiculed for our critical utopianism or for trying to ignite the fire of hope in people's hearts and minds. For some, that fire may have been extinguished. Instead, they profess or have succumbed to a utterly ludicrous utopia? the one that arises from the belief that liberal democracy can continue to buffer us from the worst excesses of capitalism, and the equally ridiculous and dangerous belief that it can enable us to continue to live as civilised beings regardless of the deepening and expanding of

capital's contradictions, which inevitably accompanies their displacement into the global arena. It is my hope? a hope once more renewed from reading *Red Chalk*? that this type of risible utopianism is only lodged irrevocably in a small minority, and that a dialectical understanding of capitalism can rekindle the light that sustains our optimism for humanity's future. For:

This is a light that always burns in some hearts, somewhere; the task is to enable it to burn more brightly and widely until it obliterates the horizon of capitalism. (Allman, in press)

The significance of *Red Chalk* is that it provides more energy for this light.

*Paula Allman*

Nottingham, England  
5th September, 2000

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## THE FOUR

**Mike Cole** is Senior Lecturer and Research and Publications Mentor in the School of Education, University of Brighton. He has written extensively on equality issues; in particular, equality and education. In recent years he has engaged in critiques of postmodernism, globalisation and education. Mike has edited *Bowles and Gintis Revisited* (Routledge-Falmer, 1988), *The Social Contexts of Schooling* (Falmer Press, 1989), *Education for Equality* (Routledge, 1990), *Migrant Labour in the European Union* (Berg, 1999), *Education, Equality and Human Rights* (Falmer Press, 2000) and *Professional Issues for Teachers and Student Teachers* (1999, David Fulton). With Dave Hill, Mike co-edited *Promoting Equality in Primary Schools* (Cassell, 1997) and *Promoting Equality in Secondary Schools* (Cassell, 1999) and is editing *Schooling and Equality: Fact, Concept and Policy* (Kogan Page, 2001). Mike co-founded the Hillcole Group of Radical Left Educators with Dave Hill in 1989. He is a labour union activist.

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## THE DISCUSSION

## Marxist Educational Theory

Peter: Great to be talking to you Mike, Dave and Glenn. I've been following your work for some years, and appreciate the perspective you are bringing to educational debates. The three of you are known for your work on Marxist educational theory, education and social class, Left perspectives on education policy and also the role that postmodernism has been playing over the last decade in both North America and the UK. Can you tell our readers a little bit about these debates, and how you see your contribution to them?

Glenn: Yeah, for me, I have to go back a bit. I remember a Day Conference I went to at the Institute of Education, in London, in the spring of 1977. I was training to be a teacher, and some people from the Open University (Geoff Esland, Madelaine McDonald, some others, I can't remember, it's along time ago), er, did this Day Conference thing on Bowles and Gintis's *Schooling in Capitalist America*. I'd read reviews and bits on it in the Left educational press. It was held in one of the Institute's biggest Halls – can't remember which – but it was packed. The atmosphere was electric. But, well, er, when I actually listened to what the speakers were saying, I mean, it was clear there were some big problems with B and G's work. So I was pretty disappointed. The next day I went out and bought *Schooling in Capitalist America*. Perhaps the Open University people had got it wrong – but they hadn't. It was full of holes. Not much Marx or Marxism, functionalist approach and all the rest of it. Still a great book though, a milestone. Looking back on it, that Day Conference, for me, in all innocence, was the high point of Marxist educational theory in the UK.

So, I would characterise my work since then as being about trying to turn things around, to try to rebuild Marxist educational theory, but to do so from reading Marx himself, not trying to take short-cuts like B and G. Only in the last ten years, really, have I got some idea of what this involves. The thing is, it entails rethinking much of Marxism itself. That's why I've spent a lot of time reading Marx, reading Open Marxist writings (John Holloway, Werner Bonefeld and others) and more recently Moishe Postone's *Time, Labour and Social Domination*, and work by Michael Neary – especially the book he wrote with

Graham Taylor, *Money and the Human Condition*. Only now – over twenty years later – do I feel I'm in any kind of position to start to move decisively beyond the 'old' Marxist educational theory based on B and G, Paul Willis and all that whole thing (including all the hopeless attempts to patch this all up). I mean, even now I know of research students who are attempting to "apply" B and G's correspondence theory to aspects of contemporary English education!

Mike: I don't see any problem with that, particularly in the light of the blatant Thatcherite and Blairite project of aligning schooling closer and closer to the needs and requirements of capitalism. The Correspondence Principle would need to be applied critically, of course. In more general terms, while I agree that there are problems with the way Marxist theory is used in *SCA* (indeed that was the *raison d'être* of my edited collection, *Bowles and Gintis Revisited*), I think its importance lies in its focus on the capitalist economy *per se*, in that it put the relationship between education and capitalism firmly on the agenda after a period in which this relationship was unreported. In addition, its unequivocal commitment to revolutionary socialism ('democratic' rather than 'Eastern European authoritarian') put debates about the possibilities of a transformed economy in the educational arena. This was no mean feat, given the fact that the statistical and historical studies were paid for by the Ford Foundation, and given the fact that the book was first published in a country totally hostile to socialism.

Glenn: [Interrupting] ...*The* problem with it Mike, as I see it, was that Bowles and Gintis's work was not a great starting-point on which to base a project of Marxist educational theory. I mean; the problems of the work have been well documented. Madan Sarup's critique really summed it all up for me, in his classic *Marxism and Education* – in 1978. So I figured that an alternative was required, as did Rachel Sharp, John Freeman-Moir and a whole bunch of others. And ...

**Dave: [Laughing] ... Well, this does go to show that Marxism, and Marxist educational theory, is not as 'monolithic' or one-dimensional as some would like to make out!**

Peter: Is it always like this?

Mike: No, but of course we have disagreements. We've been writing stuff together (the three of us) for just over five years now, me and Dave for nearly ten, so obviously we have enough in common to hold the thing together.

Glenn: Er, sure: we have our disagreements – and it isn't too bright, I admit, it's not good, to start out on an interview illustrating them! (Dave and Peter laugh). My fault, really, sorry – not the time, or place.

Dave: No need, Glenn: it's just good, healthy Marxist debate.

Glenn: Yeah! Hmmm, we do disagree on some aspects of Marxism, for sure. Like I'm into Open Marxism: Mike and Dave are not. Dave describes himself as a structuralist neo-Marxist, and I don't. But we agree on enough to work together. I think it adds a certain dynamic. I think gives the writing an edge too. We *are* passionate about what we are doing: and we hope it's important.

## **Class, 'Race' and Global Capital**

Dave: Social class is important: well, the three of us agree on that. The way that it structures educational opportunity and people's life chances in general. A Marxist understanding of class, is something we all agree on. It's crucial, politically, to the struggle for economic and social justice. Well, I actually think it's important to say, '*economic*' as well as '*social*' justice – not just social justice. It draws attention to the fact that without economic justice there *cannot* be social justice. A bit more here and there, sure; but not the whole shebang.

Mike: Absolutely.

Glenn: Yes, no disagreement there. And the passion thing: Geoff Mulgan (an advisor to Tony Blair, and ex-Communist Party member) wrote an article in *The Observer* (a UK Sunday newspaper) arguing that the Marxist Left no longer had any passion! I mean, but it's really New Labour that actually, er, has no significant

ideas, and has no soul or passion really. I pointed all this out in my *Third Fantasy from the Right* article.<sup>1</sup>

Peter: But Dave, now back to social class. This is an issue that has special resonance for me. I've told you that my family (Scottish, Irish, and English ancestry, 4th generation Canadian, I'm now a dual U.S./Canadian citizen) were small-time farmers, and when times got tough my dad moved to the city (Toronto) and sold wallpaper in a store – this was before the Second World War. I was born three years after the war. We lived in a working-class neighbourhood that is now mostly Polish. Anyway, my dad was one of the first salesmen to start hyping television sets. Our family had the first television set in our neighbourhood – we were really a popular family! Anyway, we moved from a working-class neighbourhood into a lower middle-class one when dad became general manager of a large international electronics firm. Then he was fired when the European home office cut off all the managers over fifty. Mum went on to work as a telephone operator at an answering service agency. From that moment on – in the late sixties – I became a fierce anti-corporate activist. Class is a big issue for me. In education, it has always played a bigger role in the UK than in North America. Anyway, some of your critics say that 'class is dead' and that gender, 'race' and other forms of inequality have superseded social class in terms of understanding personal and social identities. What would the three of you say to these critics? I mean, why is social class so important in your analyses on education and society?

Dave: Well, we live it. It is, you know, part of our lives, all around us: our families, histories, lives – the whole thing. My dad was a cabinet-maker/French polisher in the East End of London, then a building site carpenter. My brothers are a carpenter and a postal worker. They work hard, but earn less in a year than some capitalists (and others) make in a week or a day even. My mum, from Spitalfields in the heart of the East End (of London) was a dressmaker, now she lives on the social security (welfare, you would say in the US). All of our lives, er, yeah – our schooling, our work, the way we are positioned, and the way we are positioned, treated by others, are, to a substantial extent affected by, structured by, our social class position.

My class-consciousness is a lived experience of outrage and

anger, based on the experiences of my family, of teaching in inner-city London – in Brixton, and in Tower Hamlets – and er, based on my experiences as a political and labour union activist.

And as an activist, yeah, you live it too. Thirty years teaching, organically part of the working class and its movements, speaking up and speaking out, being on countless picket lines, and so on. Camaraderie in solidarity, with exploited coalminers, teachers, Bangladeshis, students, building workers, bakers, National Health workers. Legal demos, and illegal ones, yeah sure! We were, are, there in whatever force we could or can muster. The massed cry, the chant from a thousand voices, on mass pickets, on May Day Rallies, of: '*the workers, united, will never be defeated*', '*o povo, unido, jamais sera vencido*' has a truth. Through our ideological work and political work, through the use of Marxist principles, we seek that unity! But a *critical* unity – er, you know, not a unity around the lowest common denominator. Not the unity of fifty-five types of separate program and development!

On the picket line we can pretty quickly analyse what the class struggle is all about; things become crystal clear. And the analysis it has all led to, and, er, deepened, is that, well, as Marx put it in the opening lines of the *Communist Manifesto*: "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles".

Glenn: Well, I agree with Dave, but would go further. Now, you see, in one sense, things are worse, as compared with old Marx's day. Capitalist social relations, and capital, as a social force, have *deepened* since Marx's time. Today: *the class struggle is everywhere* – as, well, capital is everywhere - including within 'the human' itself. Scary stuff! Education is implicated in the capitalisation of humanity – and we have to face up to this, as I explain in *Education, Capital and the Transhuman*. Fortunately, there are ways out and limits to the process (which I also explain in that article).

Mike: Capital continues to globalize.<sup>2</sup> The double movement of capital – the growth and speed that Marx explored in *Capital* continues unabated, and, er, has taken on new dimensions, in particular with respect to finance capital, from the 1970s onwards. From then on, as a result of the over-production around the world, there was no profit to be made from expanding the capacity to produce goods. This led to a big increase in investment in finance rather than

production. A turning point was, of course, 1971 – when the United States renounced the convertibility of the dollar into gold as a result of a huge balance of payments deficit (the war against Vietnam and Cold War expenditure). This ongoing outflow of dollars was, of course, reinforced by the jump in oil prices in 1973 and the creation of a huge international pool of petrodollars. And it was during this period that the large international banks used the excess dollars overseas to create an international capital market, first known as 'Eurodollars'. It was during the 1970s that the Eurodollar market lent heavily to countries and corporations in search of capital. A large portion of finance capital began to flow through the new offshore banking centres, set up to free the banks of the regulatory activities of their national governments. That makes the task for socialists – to change society to the benefit of all – more urgent actually, but also more demanding. And it means greater links with workers in developing countries.

Peter: And yeah, it was then that loans were made to projects and governments in the developing world.

Mike: Exactly, which, well, led to the 'Third World' debt crisis of the early 1980s. Finance capital then turned its attention to reaping large profits, by underwriting much of the merger and acquisition craze of the 1980s. In that book by Burbach *et al*: they estimate that between 1985 and 1989, the asset value of world merger and acquisition deals rose to \$1 trillion, providing the opportunity for big banks, brokerage firms and junk bond dealers to move centre stage.

Also, of course you have speculation in foreign exchange rates, another major area for finance capital, since the US went off gold-convertibility, as the dollar floated *vis-à-vis* other international currencies. Again, according to Burbach *et al*, by the mid-1990s, it was estimated that currency trading was \$1 trillion a day.

The biggest arena for finance capital today is the global equities markets – the buying and selling of stocks – particularly in the 'Third World', where there are thirty-five stock exchanges, and in former communist bloc countries.

Peter: And what would you say are the implications of all this for organised labour?

Mike: Rather than a decline of the working class, that, you know, some people proclaim, it can be argued that we are witnessing, in fact, a recomposition. John Kelly has argued that there are two definitions of that class in common usage. First, there's a narrow definition which includes only those workers directly exploited by capital in the production process, where actual goods are produced; workers whose surplus labour yields surplus value. And secondly, there's a wider definition which includes all those who are obliged to sell their labour in order to survive: the majority of whom, but not all, are er, indirectly exploited – that is, not actually producing goods. On the latter definition, the working class is growing absolutely and also relatively.

Justifying this wider definition of the working class in the context of Britain, Kelly argues first, that, er, an increasing section of the workforce is employed in business services which directly contribute to the production of surplus value by helping capitalists extract ever more out of workers. Such businesses include research and development, industrial engineering, computer hardware and software and other branches of consultancy.

Second, there is a growing service sector: retail stores, hotels, the leisure industry and personal services such as hairdressing – that sort of thing – but Kelly fails to mention the significant 'sex industry'. The antagonistic relationship between, say, a supermarket check-out assistant or burger-chain worker and her/his employer is analogous to that of a factory worker and her/his employer, since both employers have a vested interest in keeping wages and salaries down, and therefore profits up. It is women who are particularly exploited in this sector.

Third, there are workers in the central state and in the local state who are essential for the political stability of capitalism, even though they are not directly exploited for surplus value, such as civil servants and local authority workers/bureaucrats.

Finally, there is a large section of the workforce engaged in producing new workers and/or maintaining the working class, particularly in the health and education services. Teachers, of course, fall into this last category. The devolution of budgets, the marketisation of schools, the setting up of hierarchical management structures, league tables and performance-related pay and so on – all this means that working in schools is more and

more like working for ICI or American Express.

Ellen Meiksins Wood contrasts today's global economy with earlier forms of colonial imperialism, where there were no effective geo-political boundaries. Today, however, multinational capital, in order to operate, depends on individual nation states to maintain the conditions of economic stability and labour discipline. Er, this goes on sometimes by military force, as in the case of the defeated strikes of the 1980s. In addition to, or instead of, military force, the state often centralises control. This is particularly true of the education system of England and Wales.

Dave: That's right, yeah. I think this just makes what I said earlier even more central. Globalisation is a fact of life, sure, but the lived experience, of individuals, in class society – in the UK, and in the US – now has even wider and greater significance. So an attack on class privileges *anywhere* has more resonance in the global economy as a whole – as the whole thing's increasingly connected up. And obviously so. Trotsky had a point, you know, about the need for worldwide struggle.

Glenn: Yeah, the events in Chiapas, in recent years (which you have written about Peter, in your book on Che and Freire<sup>3</sup>) confirm Dave's point.

Peter: Yes, Dave is right, exactly. I grew up foregrounding class-consciousness in my political praxis. ... [pause] ... I had to readjust coming to Los Angeles. I've learned a lot from the Left in this city but there are still some problems with which I'm grappling – with mixed success, I guess. ... [pause] ... Here, in Los Angeles, racial politics is very hard core. It is the main game, in a very *real* sense. The consequences of where you stand on this issue can literally mean life and death. Tensions run high here in the city. Last week, a block from my house, somebody made a racial slur – and it cost him his life. Nine millimetre bullets were sprayed into his back and one shot point blank to the temple.

Economic justice and racial and gender justice go hand-in-hand. Structural racism has helped the state divide-and-rule and to reproduce vast economies of white privilege. It has devastated working-class communities, has relegated people of colour to lives on the economic margins, to the sweatshops, to the streets, and we know the role that capital accumulation is playing in

restructuring the criminal justice system and building up the prison industry. Many towns are begging for prisons to be built nearby – to help provide jobs: it's a supply and demand process. The engines of capital are supplying African Americans and Latinos who are being incarcerated at staggering rates. It's good for the politicians too; who can win points by establishing their no-nonsense 'character' by executing them. Showing no mercy is a big plus these days for the politicians. You have to show you can kill without hesitation. Whether in the gas chamber or by making war on weaker nations. Take the execution rate of Texas governor, George Bush Jr. People are impressed.

You know that I consider myself a member of the new abolitionists who are calling for the abolition of 'whiteness'. This has not made me very popular when I speak in Klu Klux Klan territory, as you can imagine. But I also get many white students upset with me here in Los Angeles, who think I am a self-hating white man, or trying to promote guilt among Euro-Americans. Well... I won't rehearse my politics of whiteness here since I know you've read my *Revolutionary Multiculturalism*.

The difficulty I am having is conveying to folks the centrality of class struggle and how this relates to racism. I argue that class should not be privileged over race or gender, or sexuality etc., but that it is still more central. It co-ordinates, and gives ballast to other forms of oppression. Social class is lived racially or ethnically – no question about that. Class relations are racialised, gendered, sexualised, to be sure. Whiteness is a social position of privilege – one that is disguised as 'raceless' – and is premised on the demonisation and oppression of black folks and Latinos, not to mention Asians. There is no way to re-articulate whiteness in a positive sense.

There is no way to put a positive spin on whiteness. I can identify with my Scottish Canadian background, for instance, but I would never want to identify with being part of the white race, because the white race was largely a pernicious invention of the 17th century plantocracy. It is difficult for me to make a convincing case among many students for class exploitation being one of the fundamental characteristics of racism and the politics of whiteness overall. Many of my students, and many activists I know in Los Angeles, and elsewhere throughout North America

for that matter, see class as a secondary form of exploitation that is largely distinct from the politics of race. The work that all of you have been developing, particular through the Hillcole Group – has been very helpful in my pedagogical efforts, more than you realise, I think. You set a powerful lead for those of us to follow in the US.

But: back to you Dave. I want to talk a bit about the politics of the personal life, I mean - you are unusual in that you were a socialist politician before becoming an academic. What were your key experiences?

## Politics and the Labour Party

Dave: Through the seventies and eighties, for around fifteen years I represented working class areas politically as an elected representative, and uhhh, for longer – since my very first day at work – I've been a labour union activist. For a time the Labour Party was sort of semi-socialist in places – my local Labour Party, Brighton Labour Party, with two thousand members, was, in fact, dominated through the 1970s and 80s by the Militant Tendency (now called 'The Socialist Party', a Trotskyite group). They were largely expelled from the Labour Party in the eighties. Anyhow, I led the Labour Party locally on a local council, and was, for a few years, the Labour candidate for Parliament. On the council, erhm, sometimes we had legislative and financial power – hiring extra teachers, increasing social programmes – and appointing people to key positions, who *we* valued, rather than, you know, people with conservative or reactionary values.

It was fascinating, an illuminating experience, meeting the ruling class – the wealthy, privately educated local ruling class. That was a shock: to meet them! That was interesting. I'd never met people like that before, speaking with upper class, cut-glass accents, rich, comfortable with and used to exercising political and social power. Of course: personally unaffected by the lay-offs, the pay-cuts, the cuts in services and the rest of it that they enforced. That was informative! A different world! A world which *fed off* ours! Their comfort, their power, their sleek suits and expensive

cars, their private school education, their belief that they were 'born to rule' seeping out of their expensive tailoring – the privileges of their class! Where do these benefits and privileges come from? Where? From class exploitation, that's where! From employing people, workers, and taking fat profits from their labour. ...

Glenn: [Interrupting]... the usual stuff, then, really!

Dave: Yeah, well, it's as old as capitalism, and the ruling class might be fairly pleasant enough as individuals, but that's not the point. They wage the class war 'from above', through charming smiles, and crocodile tears. Ultimately, of course, the ruling class – the capitalist class – they rule, they rule through clenched fists! They control the repressive state apparatuses. Althusser was pretty clear on this. When the going gets rough they change the laws and, you know, just send in the police, or the army, or the goons. It's never them who pay or lose out, as a class. We say: let the rich pay for the crisis, '*os ricos pagem a crise!*'

Mike: Yes, whatever disagreements we may have about the contribution of Louis Althusser, his discussion of ideological and repressive state apparatuses is important. He argued, of course, that education was the key ideological state apparatus – and Tony Blair is well aware of this – but, but you're right, whenever the pro-capitalist pro-state ideologies are challenged, then the repressive apparatuses are put in place.

Glenn: No messing! As history indicates – and, for me, Althusser's ISA notion is more useful than his relative autonomy concept, or his general theory of the state.

Mike: The state, from a Marxist point of view, is not, of course, synonymous with government. I mean, modern Marxist conceptions of the capitalist state have incorporated a complex of institutions including, for example, the higher echelons of the civil service, the judiciary, the military, the welfare services. Such institutions are not democratic, and, of course, do not even claim to be. As far as the political wing of the state is concerned,

whether parliaments are democratic or not is contentious. First of all, 'majority rule' is, in fact rarely that – the government in power is not often elected on account of the support of *the majority* of the population of a given country. There are strong grounds to contest conceptions of 'democracy' which consist of a severely limited five-yearly choice of electing a representative – who does not usually fulfil her or his promises anyway. In most scenarios, the only parties with a chance of gaining power are pro-capitalist. The classic historical exception is, of course, the election of the Marxist Salvador Allende in Chile. But US government soon put a stop to that!

Dave: Yes, Mike's right about Althusser and the state. But Peter, you asked about my experiences. What did they teach me? I learned the importance of *extra-Parliamentary/direct action alongside* Parliamentarist action. I am a *democratic* Marxist. I *do* believe in Parliamentarism, as one track of a twin track strategy. Reforms by social democratic or even by New Labour Governments and local councils can, and have had major effects. The National Health Service, the Race Relations Act, the Sex Discrimination Act, progressive taxation, the introduction of comprehensive education, workers' rights, the introduction of a national minimum wage – they are all important – even if they are under attack, too weak or too parsimonious.

Mike: Yes, these anti-discrimination acts have had important effects. But they're weak - and they need strengthening. So does the Disability Discrimination Act. And we need a Sexuality Discrimination Act.

Dave: Yes, but the use of Parliaments and Councils is not restricted to passing laws, or re-allocating finance, or setting levels and sources of financing, taxation. At local level, as I said earlier, I did discover the power of policy, and of finance, but I also became much more aware of the powers of appointment: who, what type of people, get what jobs in the bureaucracy, and in the education service. That can and does make a local difference, even if it is within the context, the constraints of a broader, reactionary national policy. And using the Parliamentarist/local council forum, as an ideological platform is important, too, I believe.

But, uhmm, I did learn that that pretty speeches in Council chambers and Parliaments are really not enough. And that it is not enough simply to work through the Labour Party. Ultimately, the Labour Party, as a party, sides with the capitalist class. That's not to say it always will. I'm not knocking Labour's achievements, here, but I certainly am knocking their failings. Particularly since the Blairite entrists infiltrated and took over the Labour Party and neutered it as New Labour.

I think that it's clear that, er, history shows the importance of mass – street and picket line – struggle. In Britain, most major struggles have been in the face of national Labour Party leadership hostility and timidity. The General Strike in 1926, the Cable Street anti-fascist mobilisation in London's East End in 1936 where my family come from, the struggle to form an anti-fascist popular front in the late 1930s, the series of national strikes in the 1970s, the Anti-Nazi League in the 1970s (and today), the great miners' strike of 1983-84, the anti-poll tax movement of the 1980s. *All* were denounced or distrusted by the Labour leaderships! Yet, sustained by thousands, hundreds of thousands, Labour Party activists and other Left and labour union rank and file. And, yeah, some were successful, too.

To take one example, from Brighton, my hometown, coach loads of Labour Party members – including local councillors – and other activists – joined the mass picket of Grunwicks in the late 70s. That strike was symbolic; the photo laboratory in North London where (south) Asian women workers were paid pittance wages, and were sacked/dismissed for joining a union. Tens of thousands came onto the picket line, including the disciplined mass ranks of the unions. I'll never forget the sight of the miners! From all over England! Marching in columns, over the Hendon hilltop, with the sun behind them. Led by a brass band. The police, on horseback, who had just been trying to force us all back, parted, and retreated. Lessons in solidarity, lessons in organisation. Without that support, without that essentially class solidarity against dreadful working conditions, low pay and an openly anti-union factory owner, the strikers would have got nowhere.

But now, in 2000, the Labour Party leadership is more right-wing than at any time in its history. Ken Livingstone (who's running for

Mayor of London in the election in May) is wildly popular, partly because of the historic successes of the Greater London Council before Thatcher abolished it. And er, because of his current stand against New Labour policy – for example, its plans to privatise the London Underground. And in his criticisms of capitalism, pointing out that capitalism (through the WTO, the IMF, the World Bank, and the European Union) kills millions through impoverishing the 'Third World'. In the battle between capital and labour, the Labour Party leadership ultimately, so far, at least, sides with capital. And expels leftist 'troublemakers' like Ken. So that's a current lesson on why we mustn't put all our eggs in New Labour's basket.

Mike: Yes, New Labour is no longer remotely socialist. For the first time in their lives, a number of socialists, myself included, have stopped voting Labour as a result.

Glenn: Labour had its last vote from me in 1997.

Mike: Yes, me too.

Peter: But how does all this relate to a program for socialist activists? What do you think Marxist educators should do, whom with, how?

Dave: Well, political platforms are important. Using whatever platforms that we have. Labour Party, labour union, parents' or teachers' organisations, too. Using the access to the media and to national organisations. And, for example in organising demonstrations, connecting with local issues of that are concrete in the lives of teachers, parents, and kids. But, obviously, concentrating on the local is not enough in itself.

Glenn: That's right Dave. We've criticised so-called 'Left' postmodernists for over-concentration on the local.

Mike: Playing a political role at the local level shouldn't be confused with 'localism': that all you can do, you know, politically, has to be

played out in your own local community. And, we should also avoid postmodernist fragmentation.

Dave: Mike's right! We need *solidarity*, and must work for *political coalitions of interest*. Not twenty different interest groups marching along staying in their own particularistic, specific groups. That's not enough! The ruling class has no problem with that! We always try to show the *community of interest* we have – that related to social class analysis, the class struggle – like at Grunwicks – and like in the current teacher struggles against increased workload and the introduction of Performance Related Pay. We have a political and ideological struggle against neo-liberalism at the political level. And against both postmodernism and liberal pluralism at the theoretical academic level.

I really am outraged at the pretence, this media/political party/education system conspiracy that the existing national – and global – systems are 'non-ideological', 'common-sense', 'incontestable', that 'there is no alternative', that 'class is dead', and the rest of it. It's amazing how people like us, when we exercise power in the open pursuit of our class interest and social and economic justice, are labelled 'Stalinist'. Anyone else exercising power, whether over curriculum design, staff appointments, local or national policy, whatever, is regarded by some as somehow democratic and non-ideological! Such liberal pluralist naivete! This liberal pluralist mind-set fits into how all the major political parties in Britain now adopt the 'common sense', the tenets and the savageries of the Thatcher-Reagan neo-liberal settlement.

Peter: Is it the same neo-liberal settlement in the UK, as in the USA?

Dave: Well, the theory's the same, and so is lots of the policy. The effects are certainly similar – anywhere, even if the details are different, because of local histories, and the local balance of class forces. In fact, I'm editing a book on this, as you know, Peter – you've got a chapter in it. So have Mike and Glenn.<sup>4</sup> Let's list what's happened in England and Wales. The neo-liberal settlement has cut back 'the social wage' (welfare), introduced more and more privatisation into the education system, tried to divide and rule work forces such as teachers by introducing Performance Related Pay from September 2000, and has introduced a

quasi-market in schooling. This, with its so-called 'school choice' for parents, means that schools, in effect, choose the students. Tough luck if you're unskilled working class, or African-Caribbean or Bangladeshi, or have got special educational needs – if, if you haven't got the 'right' sort of cultural capital – accent, vocabulary, body language, clothing or haircut style. Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and symbolic violence (you know, by middle class schools against the working class and minority ethnic groups) are brilliant here! I'm trying to write some stuff on this<sup>5</sup>. ...[pause]... The market in schooling, as people like Geoff Whitty, Stephen Ball, Sharon Gewirtz, Martin Thrupp and Gillborn and Youdell<sup>6</sup> have shown, alongside the already exclusionary subject curriculum and hidden curriculum, has obscenely increased social segregation in schooling throughout England and Wales. The market is ghettoising the working class, particularly the black and white unskilled working class kids who haven't got 'the right' cultural capital.

So, those of us in the Hillcole Group of Radical Left Educators (which Mike and I founded, in 1989) and the Institute for Education Policy Studies (which was also set up in 1989 and which hosted the founding of the Hillcole Group), and, on a much larger scale, progressive and socialist teachers, lecturers, tenants organisations, anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-homophobic and other individuals and groups, do what we can. For me, that means trying to be what you (Peter) and Giroux, using Gramsci, describe as an organic and public critical transformative intellectual! That's quite a mouthful that phrase, but very important. One that recognises class conflict and the need to develop class-consciousness.

Glenn: The great class divide. Postmodernists dismiss it, like they do all dualisms. Talk about being dogmatic! Some others deny it, or, really enraging, deny that it's still important. New Labour doesn't think poverty or social class can be adequate 'excuses' for low educational attainment. They are pretty good *explanations* or predictors of it though! Dave and Mike's work on social class over the last decade has meant that people who can't hack facing the harsh realities of social class are continually reminded of the sort of society in which we all live. Social class still cuts into my life on a personal basis – even though now, according to sociological experts, I'm middle class.

On my father's side, the family was peasant farmers, in East Prussia. His father was Polish, but his mother was German – and they were German citizens. My father's first job was working on the railway – his elder brother getting the farm (the traditional thing). With my mother's family it was either agricultural labourers or truck drivers, labourers or mechanics for the London Brick Company, in Peterborough. My mother worked on the land. Like with her own mother, this work had long-term effects on her health.

Having failed the old 11-plus examination, I went to a rural mainly working-class school – where all you could realistically expect was to work on the land, or work in a factory in Peterborough or Huntingdon (the nearest towns). Or work for the London Brick Company (where my family had a certain tradition). But it was the school experience – labelled a 'failure' at age eleven – that taught me the really *harsh* lessons about social class. In theory, everyone in my school was destined for 'nowhere very much'.

My father went on to have a number of jobs: a labourer in the London Brick Company, agricultural labourer (and a garage hand too at one time). But he also taught himself how to fix watches and clocks. Eventually he got himself a job working for a jeweller in town, and finally set up his own small repair business – which my brother now runs. From his example, I could see just how damn *difficult* it was to get any kind of decent life in our capitalist society. You know, if you come from the working class, and if you started out from basically *nothing*, but your capacity to labour.

My dad was a German prisoner of war, so yeah, the anti-German thing. Germans living in England in the first few decades after the war were not that popular: as a kid I noticed that! Various forms of discrimination compounded everything – especially in my junior school days. All this had an effect, and by my early teens I started to see the value of education. As I had been labelled 'failure' when I was eleven I took great pleasure in proving the selection system wrong! Yeah, but bucking the education system is not an easy option – as I discovered.

Mike: Like Dave and Glenn, I also come from a working-class background (my mother was a shopworker and my father a clerk

for the Co-operative Wholesale Society), and this class upbringing does give you a clear idea of the structural class inequalities inherent in capitalism. For example, when my first child was born, we lived in a one-bedroom house with no bathroom and an outside toilet. However, I believe, and I know Dave agrees, that it is the class you *serve*, rather than the class you come from, which ultimately matters, and involvement in political and trade union activity as well as in egalitarian educational projects is a necessity for a socialist. I agree with Dave about the significance of the picket line. It's no good claiming to be a socialist, and then crossing a picket line!

It is nonsense to say that social class 'is dead'. As Dave and I have argued repeatedly, in our critiques of postmodernism, while there has been a recomposition of the working class, there most definitely has not been a decline. On the contrary, internationally, there has been an increase.

## Postmodernism

Peter: Okay, you've touched on the significance of postmodernism. I remember how it first sucked me into its vortex. I've always been interested in the particular social form of capital, its immanence in human affairs and relations, kind of the way that Glenn talks about how capital has become part of us, part of our very subjectivity. We refract the phenomenal world through systems of intelligibility, through ideological mediations or "ways of knowing" that work on how we perceive everyday life. Trying to understand that process better is what drove me to reading the postmodernists. I remember attending some of Foucault's lectures when he visited my hometown of Toronto, Canada – I think it was in 1980, around then - and being hooked. Part of it was the fascination with the person himself, his visits to a club called the 'Barracks' and all of that. The local buzz surrounding him. But as the years went by, it became increasingly difficult for me to derive a revolutionary politics from listening to and studying the postmodern intellectuals – Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida and the lot. So my street level politics was not connected to my academic work. I didn't read Foucault on the picket line! Later I became more interested in the way that Marx took Hegel's process of self-alienation embodied in the metaphysical Idea, that is, how he reflected on the

contradictions internal to the dialectic, and grounded it in a material subject of history. Althusser took the subject away, so to speak, in his rejection of epistemology, and in his support for the idea that history is a process without a subject.

Abandoning Althusser was another turning point for me, but, uhm, I'm digressing. I think it is important to consider how the subject is constitutive of ideology, discursive regimes, and all of that, but not at the price of abandoning the subject of history. How can the postmodernists change the way people live their relation to society? While postmodernists have been able to show us the contradictory nature of our lived social relations with respect to reigning regimes of representation, they have not, at least in my view, helped us to figure out how to smash the capitalist state. In fact, most of them couldn't care less about the capitalist state. Which, as I see it, is the crux of the problem with postmodernism.

Perhaps – all of you – could say a bit more about postmodernism. I mean, in recent years all of you have critiqued postmodernism in your writings. Why have you given it so much attention? Some might say that by giving it such prominence in your recent writings that you are, sort of, well, 'fanning the flames' of a burnt-out theory, just prolonging its life. Are you worried about that kind of criticism?

Glenn: No, because the postmodernists can always put more petrol on their dying embers.

Mike: I agree with Glenn, but this issue needs some elaboration. While I agree that postmodernism is a burnt out theory in some academic contexts (and, let's face it, postmodernism was only ever an *academic* project), in others, like feminist theory, it's not. In 1995, as part of a lecture tour of South Africa (with Dave) I was asked at the very last minute by a black Marxist to give a talk to some leading postmodernists at the University of Witwatersrand. He told me just before my totally unprepared talk that he was relying on me. Initially I was nervous. However, once the discussion got focused on the impoverished townships I had visited, I became much more relaxed. When you ask postmodernists what they have to offer people in dire poverty, they've not got much to say.

Peter: What did you make of South Africa?

Mike: I was very disappointed and disillusioned. While 'petty' apartheid has collapsed (public transport, cinemas, restaurants and bars now admit everyone), grand apartheid – the grossly differential life conditions for the vast majority of whites and blacks – remains intact – particularly with respect to education. Dave and I discuss this in an article co-written with two South African comrades.<sup>7</sup>

But, to get back to the question of what postmodernists have to offer the exploited and the oppressed, it's the same with postmodern and poststructuralist feminists. The key question, as posed by Marxist feminists like Jane Kelly of "what do they have to offer working-class women", is left unanswered.<sup>8</sup> In the 1970s and early-1980s, it was considered 'not on' for males to enter into debates on feminism and I, for one, avoided doing this.

Dave: Actually, I never did, I never practised what I see as the genuflection and suppression of critical expression, which many leftists did, in the USA and UK, whilst at anti-sexist or, come to that, anti-racist meetings. You have, of course, to be aware of the need not to dominate in comradely discussion. But I never had any time for separatist feminism or separatist anti-racism.

Mike: I don't think it's as straightforward as that Dave – and there's two important issues at stake here. First of all, it wasn't for me a question of 'genuflection' and 'suppression of critical thought'. Along with many other socialists, I held the view that since Left politics had for so long been dominated by men, that they should keep out of the development of feminist politics. The debate between bourgeois feminists, and er, socialist feminists and black feminists was an important one...

Dave: [Interrupting] ... But Mike, you've missed out the *radical*, or separatist feminists. It's *their* exclusionary politics that I used to, and still do, find highly problematic. A problem in society is, of course, masculinist, sexist, exploitative behaviour. Patriarchy! But is it *the* main, fundamental problem in capitalist society? I don't think it is. I've always thought – and analysed – that in most respects – working class women have more in common with working class men than they do with women in the capitalist class. That 'the enemy', if you like, is the capitalist system, not men *per se*.

Mike: This issue of separatism. I have no problem with, and indeed no right to object to oppressed groups meeting *separately* at times. But er, I think we need to differentiate between *meeting* separately at appropriate times and *separatism*. The ultimate goal is, of course, unity.

Dave: At times no, I agree; no problem. But as a theoretical position and political strategy, I find it a *big* problem. I'm not into anti-men behaviour just as I'm not into anti-women behaviour. I think socialist feminists such as Jane Kelly, in our book *Postmodernism in Educational Theory*, and indeed Marxists such as Rosa Luxemburg, have got it right. Of course different groups have particularist, specific forms of oppression – gay bashing, Paki-bashing, sexual harassment, structural racism and structural sexism, for example. But the more general, more fundamental oppression – exploitation – I see as being class exploitation.

Mike: Talking about particularist agendas, I do agree with Dave about postmodern feminism. That's because postmodern feminists, along with postmodernists in general, deny the possibility of any major change in societies. So they have to be, they *must* be, challenged by socialists.

Dave: Let me bring these two things together. Separatism and postmodernism. Two stories. Mike, you remember at some of the ARTEN (Anti-Racist Teacher Education Network) meetings in the early eighties at the CRE (Commission for Racial Equality)? Well, look at what happened there. Of course there was a lot of intense and justifiable black anger. But I thought it was so counterproductive; some black representatives calling all whites racist, looking for a separatist strategy and so on. Of course we live in a racist society, but millions of whites don't *wittingly* collude in that. And the second story. You remember when we gave our first paper, criticising postmodernism, in Lisbon? We attacked Paul Gilroy and Stuart Hall for their perspectives. And what did we get back? Comrades angry with us for criticising two black writers. But the point is we were attacking them because of their ideas, 'New Times' and all that. Not because they were black. And when we attacked postmodern feminism, Gaby Weiner was furious! And told us to go and read Patti Lather, Judith Butler, Valerie Walkerdine.

Mike: Yes, that's right: and so we did!

Dave: Yeah, and we couldn't believe it, what we were reading! As you say, Mike, their writing is particularistic, anti-foundational, retreating from what they see as the 'totalitarianism' of solidarity!

Mike: Yes, no viable project, no emancipation in the general sense. No solidarity. Opposing solidarity, even of women.

Glenn: These positions – if you stress *difference* to the exclusion of similarity, or commonality – of course, ultimately lead to solipsism. The notion of difference incorporates infinite division, infinite differentiation. Er, that suits some people, very much so.

Mike: Yes, nowadays I have come to the conclusion that, because postmodern feminists (in fact, all postmodernists) deny the possibility of major change in societies, they have got to be challenged by socialists.

That's one of the major things we do, Peter. Dave, Glenn and I have challenged postmodernism in a number of articles, and in the book you co-edited with the three of us. We take issue with its anti-foundationalism, its rejection of the metanarrative, its denial of any 'totalising' system of thought like Marxism or feminism. Basically, we challenge its inability to make general statements about society. We believe that the motor of capitalism is still determinant. Marxism best explains current and ongoing economic, political, social, educational, cultural and labour market developments. That's true in Britain, in the USA, it's true worldwide.

Look at Jürgen Habermas. I mean, he's written about the neo-Conservative implications of postmodernist theory. He's right! Postmodernism – and er, and we know that this is unintentional for many postmodernists – but it just serves, serves the interests of capital and the Third Way, which is about attempts - and they're clearly interrelated – to discredit mass ideologies like socialism, to *dis*-empower mass groups who are structurally oppressed. In their analysis they stress consumption and greed over production and solidarity.

The way we see it, postmodernist ideas give capital something to celebrate. If, as postmodernists suggest, there are no other ways of living, and no alternative to unbridled market-led economic strategies, if no alternative fundamental structural changes in society are possible, then the Left has indeed become an anachronism.

Dave: Which is all defeatist nonsense, as we see it.

Glenn: Postmodernism will eat itself, so recycled versions will appear. Yeah, you see, even some postmodernists think this (Baudrillard, for instance). Unfortunately, then, the Left is likely to have to take on, to expose, postmodernism as a mask for the Radical Right many more times in the future. It's like a chore; it has to be done. Though critique of postmodernism can get out of hand! The real task, for me, is to develop Marxism and Marxist educational theory – that's how I see it.

Peter: That's how I see it as well ... although I happen to like some of Walkerdine's work! But in the main I agree with your critique. There is, er, a whole cadre of postmodern panjandrums out there who have assumed the leadership of the educational avant-garde in the United State [laughing]; mostly they function as cultural ironists in the Rortyeen sense, mocking whatever provides ballast to the status quo, and serve in the academic scene as little more than panegyrist for the incommensurability of discourses and the untrammelled will. In their understandable desire to escape the morbidity of utilitarianism and the presumption that the self can be known in its entirety, they have re-secured themselves in a new conservative doctrine of the free market. Baptised by Nietzsche, and summoned into action by a belief in the 'eternal return of the same', they invert the kyrie – sorry I can't resist religious metaphors for some reason – and rejoice in what they perceive as a funky relativism. What is really troublesome is that, well, they seek no mercy from anyone, and give none in return. They are, for the most part, cultural fascists – do you think this is too strong a term? – and exercise a volatile ambivalence in their relation to others. They just seem plainly detached from what is happening on the streets unless it is some interesting form of cultural

aesthetics they want to write about. It is as if their relativism serves as *an alibi* for their free-floating epistemologies. They feel it is quite unnecessary to ground their political positions in any form of rationality, and rejoice in the distance they are able to keep from the dialectic. They live in the thrall of capitalism, and live to be satiated by it, to achieve the maximisation of pleasure while at the same time they recoil from the possibility that they may become permanent prisoners of desire. They yearn to live as intensely as possible in the throes of new desires and believe that the best way to do this is to leave the free market unfettered and the neo-liberal oligarchs in command of state power.

What really blows me away is that they fail to realise the irony in the fact that their aversion to revolutionary action is politically dogmatic. They do not see social and political revolution as a climatic stage in the intensification of conflicts between labour and capital – from local conflicts to the international division of labour – and view revolution as basically an aberration. They studiously avoid admitting what they already know, that democracy denies in practice what it advocates in theory. They are embarrassed by the language of Marxism and label you as hopelessly old-fashioned and naïve. They wonder why, for instance, I would want to limit my reading audience by using Marxist analysis. Their revolution is basically an aesthetic one, and their revolutionary activity consists largely of going shopping [grinning]. What staggers me is how much importance they place on how they code themselves (sartorially, intellectually, etc.), and how much energy is spent on transforming themselves into works of art. They are hooked – well it certainly does seem this way! – on Foucault's governability thesis and his notion of self-fashioning through a practice of the self. They like to reveal how pedagogies of liberation actually re-situate the oppressed in new discursive regimes or tropes of oppression. They don't seem to care about the capitalist form of social life organisation, except as a career-promoting target to mock and to de-centre, or to unsettle – I call this a soft form of transgression. Marxism to them is, at its best, just a nineteenth century language game that isn't up to speed in being able to fathom the myriad forces and dimensions of the new information economy.

These transgressive trend-setters like to hang out a lot in art museums and theatre openings and they dress in ways that appeal

to trendy young people. But their politics for the most part sucks. Listen, I have nothing against art museums, guys, don't get me wrong on this!

For a while I thought that postmodernism might offer some forms of resistance to capitalist relations of exploitation. While I coquetted with postmodernism, I have demoted it to a more modest role than in the past. I still experiment with very select ideas – with Bataille's notion of expenditure, for example – but in the main my work has shifted to historical materialism. I remember that during the time I was intrigued by postmodernism, many colleagues of mine working in a similar vein in the mid-1990s, were surprised at the critiques you (Mike) and Dave made of 'resistance postmodernism'. What distinctions do you draw between 'ludic', or nihilist, 'reactionary' postmodernists on the one hand, such as Baudrillard and Lyotard, and 'resistance' postmodernists, who claim to be working for human emancipation and social justice, on the other?

Mike: Well, 'postmodernists of resistance' would, of course, reject the implication that they are playing into the hands of capital. Patti Lather, for example, asserts that there is nothing in postmodernism that makes it intrinsically reactionary.

Glenn: Yes, we disagree: in its 'anti-dualism', in its rejection of the possibility of the metanarrative, in its localism it is, we think, self-evidently reactionary.

Mike: Yeah, and not only that. They insist on anti-representationalism – the rejection of the view that reality is directly given without mediation. Well, as a result they rely on 'textualism' (that is, seeing the text as the only source of meaning). Because of this, it makes it seem that the possibility of structural analysis and structural change is further removed from the, from the agenda.

As we see it, actually, for those at the reactionary end of the continuum, the future seems to consist of some kind of extension, albeit perhaps accelerated, of 'the present', a present, in which we are resigned to survive among the remnants. And as for the 'postmodernism of resistance' end of the continuum, well, the future is either an open book or a rhetorical 'future' of 'social

justice', of 'emancipation' (local only, of course) and, that catchword which is all things to all people, 'democracy'.

Glenn: Yeah Mike, and typically, the more hopeless the implications (for, you know, any kind of socialist, or just vaguely 'progressive' politics) of their discourse, then usually the thicker the lacquering of vainly hopeful rhetoric – usually tagged on at the end, when the gloom descends.

Dave: Okay. So, let's see exactly what resistance postmodernists have as a program for action.

Mike: Well, for example, take Patti Lather. On the very first page of the Preface of her book *Getting Smart*, she declares her long-time interest in how to turn critical thought into emancipatory action. I read her book closely. She spends over two hundred pages of text indicating the need for what she wistfully calls 'emancipatory research praxis'. She makes proclamations of how the goals of research should be to understand the maldistribution of power and resources in society, with a view to societal change. But by the end of the book, what? We are left wondering how all this is to come about. Also, she never makes clear what the precise nature of this maldistribution and its implications are. How does one identify, locate, and explain structures of oppression, much less structural contradictions? How can inequalities be made known through a research process, which encourages us to see the social world as a text?

Just how close 'postmodernism of reaction', which is about despair and despondency, is to 'postmodernism of resistance' is most clearly demonstrated in one of Lather's latest offerings. Although she adopts Derrida's 'ordeal of the undecidable' with its obligations to openness, she nevertheless claims to be interested in deconstructing the position of intellectuals in struggles for social justice towards something, which she describes as more than academic. She then tells us that she is in favour of a 'post-dialectical praxis', which is about as-yet-incompletely thinkable conditions and potentials.

However, since she believes that all oppositional knowledge is

drawn into the dominant order, it is difficult to see how the overall project has any possible progressive potential. Any supporter of the capitalist order who had any belief in the impact of academic writing would surely be delighted with Patti Lather. In the 1980s, like so many of her post-modern contemporaries, she was arguing that feminism and Marxism need each other. Now she is so confused that she thinks the future is an open book, with some progressive potential and in which all opposition is drawn into the dominant order!

Glenn: Mike's right: when postmodernism isn't trivial then it's dangerous. This is essentially pro-capitalist confusion, big time! It is one of the ways that postmodernism acts as an ideological support for national and global capital.

Dave: Yes Glenn, Mike is correct here. How should we analyse current changes in education? What are these changes – across the capitalist world? marketisation, er, differentiation, the creation of different types of schools, pseudo consumer-choice, so-called quality control data, performance/test results, a proliferation of new routes into teaching, new types of school – magnets, beacons, academies – you (*re*)name it, you got it! How do postmodernists explain them, the ending of mass, comprehensive models of education provision? Hmmm. Well, they claim that all these changes vindicate and, indeed, demonstrate post-modern fragmentation, consumerisation and heterogeneity. They either welcome, or accept as inevitable, what they see as the end of mass production, mass control and uniformity in education.

Glenn: For me, it seems that they are just *not interested in explanation!* Superficiality is their stock-in-trade.

Dave: Maybe, but the upshot is that they justify the fragmentation, the creeping privatisation, the hierarchicalising of the state provided National Health and pensions services in the UK, the fragmentation of schooling, on grounds of meeting an increasing, and how interesting, diversity of life-styles and needs. It's rubbish! Postmodernists, in effect, justify neo-liberal policies, different services, and different schools for different life-style niches. They justify the poor getting poorer, with poorer and poorer state

services, while the rich get richer and richer, and private enterprise and private profit become glorified! And the crucial point is, they become richer and richer precisely because the poor, well, not just the poor in fact, but *the working class as a whole*, gets a poorer and poorer social wage, working conditions, and, yes, in some cases, pay cuts.

Glenn: Like, it's 'cool to be cruel'! That's awful. More charitably, perhaps they – the postmodernists – 'know not what they do', but I'm not so sure.

Mike: But they must take some responsibility as they mask the Radical Right – even though they might see 'responsibility' as a modernist obsession! (All laugh)

Dave: Well Glenn, whether they want to, or ever, face the implications of their own indulgences or not, er, nevertheless, the conservative revolution in education, and its continuation under New Labour, is not free-floating. Current 'reforms' in these areas needs to be seen as part of the Ideological and Repressive Apparatuses of the state. The apparent devolution of (hiring and firing, spending, admissions) powers to each school are rigidly bounded by strengthened central control – and kept in check ideologically by an enforced and highly prescriptive national curriculum. In schooling and in teacher education – the reproduction of new teachers – there are unprecedentedly tight regulatory systems of surveillance – regular inspections which are potentially punitive (closure, unemployment), regular pupil/student tests, publication of results.

Postmodernist analysis, it seems to me, with its stress on segmentation, differentiation, collective disempowerment and its *telos* of individuated desire, justifies the current marketised, neo-liberal project of capital.

Glenn: Yes, certainly, in the UK (and I guess also in the US) there was a real need for people to take on the postmodernists, to call their 'radical' bluff. Their caricatures of Marxism also made me angry. They seemed to think that with the fall of the so-called communist countries of Eastern Europe they could say anything about Marx,

Marxism and Marxist educational theory (kinda 'what's wrong with B and G' one more time) – and er, nobody would notice the impoverished versions of 'Marxism' they were criticising. They thought they could just say, and get away, with *anything*: 'Marx was responsible for the destruction of Cambodian education', and so on, all kinds of rubbish!

## Hillcole Group of Radical Left Educators

Peter: You are all members of the Hillcole Group of Radical Left Educators, and Dave – you and Mike started up Hillcole. What is Hillcole all about? And how does it fit in with your writings?

Dave: We hold conferences, and present papers and arguments at national and international academic conferences, and at labour movement meetings and conferences. We try to relate to a range of groups. Members include academics, schoolteachers, student teachers and education researchers. But, you know, really importantly, we try to reach and have debates with and dialogue with a general education and political audience. We write short articles, collectively or individually, in Left magazines in Britain, such as *Forum for promoting comprehensive education*, *Socialist Teacher*, *Red Pepper*, and the (new) *Education and Social Justice* journal – where the Hillcole Group has a considerable presence on the Editorial Advisory Board. A number of us are involved, in *ESJ*, in this attempt to have a mixture of refereed journal articles and short snappy articles, written by activists in all sectors of education.

Hillcole is important. We haven't changed the educational world, but we're in there, part of it. We're a group voice; we publish socialist education pamphlets and books through Tufnell Press.9

Mike: Dave and I set Hillcole up ten years ago. Erhm, we invited a dozen or so left-wing educationalists, mainly from various universities, but some from school-teaching and further and adult education.

Dave: The only time that conflicting views did, perhaps (well, definitely, I suppose) lead to some deciding to put their efforts elsewhere, was when members such as Gaby Weiner and Stephen Ball left, I think, because of what they saw as the too heavy Marxist attack

on postmodernism in which Mike, Glenn and myself have been engaged.

People come and people go, but whoever comes has to work at the writing. We are an activist writing group, and most of our stuff is collaborative. The two books, for example, are totally collective/collaborative efforts – with each paragraph fought over in our bi-monthly half-day meetings. Some of our booklets are individually written, but don't get published until/unless the group as a whole reads and comments on the text – so the collective view is taken into account. And the group has a massive amount of political, trade union, organisational and educational experience!

In fact, because leftists are usually fairly isolated in recent years, and harassed and often victimised, we have been a real source of emotional, intellectual and political support to each other. That has often been very important to us as individuals. Don't underestimate it, the emotional support. And the intellectual support and comradely critique. My own understanding and development owe a helluva lot to detailed criticism, comments and advice over the years, from Mike, Glenn and Pat Ainley in particular. Not that it's always been laudatory. I remember Mike's scathing comment on one of my early drafts on state theory. And he was right! It was so atrociously and incomprehensibly written. I've got too much of a penchant for strings of adjectives! And rhetoric. Comes from too much speechmaking!

In retrospect, some of our aims in 1989 seem ludicrous. 'To influence Labour Party policy on education'! No way now! At the present time this is just not possible! But at the time – in the, in the late-1980s, it was feasible, sure. A few times in the early 90s I went to national meetings, in the House of Commons and at Millbank (the New Labour headquarters) with Labour Party leaders. They read a couple of my early Hillcole/Institute for Education Policy Studies booklets on schooling and teacher education: *Charge of the Right Brigade*, and *What's Left in Teacher Education*. And on the strength of these, and the press publicity, they invited me to advise on policy for the next Labour government. At the moment, though, since Labour became New Labour, our views are certainly excluded from – vilified by – New Labour. As indeed, is *any* socialist opposition to the Blair line and leadership. New Labour reserves its venom for socialists rather

than rip-off fat cats or rip-off aspects of the current system.

Glenn: But, uhmm, if the Labour Party ever gets back to its roots (which, personally, I don't see happening) – in the working class – then things may be different. New Labour could be in trouble when the economy turns nasty, or even before if they don't stop trying to foist unwanted candidates on the Labour Party, such as in the Mayor of London election.

Dave: The Labour Party's one important site of struggle. Life is long, struggle is permanent, and culture wars don't end. So we are outcast, if not cast out. But in the wider political arena, which we also aim to influence, we do have a presence, a constituency. In just about every college/university in the country, there are faculty and there are students who read our stuff and agree with what we write and what we say, who find sustenance and stimulus. And who in turn inform and influence us. We provide ammunition. We provide a presence in our writing, our conferences, and our participation at academic and labour union rallies and conferences. In currently embattled times, socialists and Marxists and critical educators know that 'we stand not alone'.

Peter: Thanks, Dave. But Glenn, how did you get interested in the Hillcole Group? What was its attraction for you?

Glenn: Well, you see, I worked in further education colleges for many years – something like your high schools, I guess. In terms of ideas and intellectual work I was pretty isolated. But I was involved in my trade union (especially on various actions around the incorporation of colleges, the dreadful new contracts that managements attempted to foist on us, staff appraisal, pay and so on) and also involved in fighting against the local council's cuts in services in the early 1990s, in Newham (East London). I went to various far-Left meetings (the Socialist Workers Party in particular) – but never joined any of them. Too picky perhaps! I met Dave in the early 1990s. In fact, we were students together at the Institute of Education, in London. 1992 I think, Dave?

Dave: Yeah, autumn (or what you call the fall in the States) of 1992, the first one. But we were on another seminar together in spring 1993.

Glenn: Yeah, right. There was this great seminar run by Geoff Whitty and Dave Gillborn at the London Institute of Education. Tony Green ran another we were both on; excellent debates, flow of ideas and

so on. Anyway, I bought my first Hillcole pamphlets from Dave at those seminars. I thought those Hillcole pamphlets were great: they gave an edge and relevance to Left theorising. Anyway, I didn't join at that point, though I kept reading Hillcole publications, and used them in my own writing. I got to know Patrick Ainley very well in the early 1990s. He was a Hillcole member, and he lived near me in the East End of London. We used to meet up at "The Spotted Dog" pub, Stratford (in East London, not the Shakespeare place!), and talk about education, politics and stuff. Pat and Dave invited me along to a Hillcole Group meeting in early 1994. It was great! At last, I was with a group of people who were interested in education from a socialist perspective. These people were serious! Okay, there were socialist teachers in the college where I worked, but it was something completely novel – for me – to be surrounded by a whole bunch of socialist educators in vibrant discussion. You know, rather than being part of an embattled minority at work, where er, most teachers were sceptical of 'the socialists'. I was hooked!

Peter: What's on the horizon for the Hillcole Group in the next year or so? What plans for activities and writing does the Group have?

Dave: More collaborative writing and publications, closer links and joint conferences with other Left groups, more trying to get our views across to different types of audience. The professoriat, teachers and students, labour activists. And we're working with other national Left groups on a joint conference, early in 2001... with the SEA (Socialist Educational Association), the STA (Socialist Teachers' Association) and also with CASE (the Campaign for the Advancement of State Education).

Glenn: Well, I'm doing some pamphlets. One on the 'Battle in Seattle', its significance for education. Another one on the 'Which Blair' Project (a part-satirical skit comparing Blair's education project with *The Blair Witch Project* film). It's about New Labour's intellectual promiscuity. Basically, they have no significant ideas themselves, so they are scrabbling about – Third Way, communitarianism, Knowledge Economy, and so on. It's pathetic really! Having ditched their own traditions as a party of the working class, it's not surprising they have no real direction. A few years ago there was this virtual, Internet-based organisation called Nexus, which was set up by (supposedly) New

Labour-type academics. They couldn't agree on anything much, especially what the 'Third Way' was, or even if it existed. New Labour didn't give 'em any money either. New Labour, old meanness! They fizzled out. I heard that they might start up again, but it would be sad if Left academics wanted to waste themselves a second time round!

## The Educational Left in the UK

Peter: I kinda get the impression, like, speaking to you, that the educational Left is quite strong in the UK – er, certainly relative to the situation here in the US – yeah, but have I got this right? What's the situation, as you see it, in the UK with the educational Left?

Dave: The Left in Britain is getting stronger the more obvious it becomes that New Labour is carrying out neo-liberal policies. The working class vote for New Labour vote is collapsing in election after election over the last year. Groups such as the Scottish Socialist Alliance are winning local and national (Scottish) election victories. The left-winger Ken Livingstone, elected as a Labour MP, is currently, in public opinion polls, clear favourite to win the new post of directly elected Mayor of London – to the immense consternation of New Labour. Socialists are doing well in labour union national elections. And in London, the LSA (London Socialist Alliance) – an alliance of disaffected Labour voters and members with various other groups such as the Socialist Workers Party, the Socialist Party (formerly Militant), London Labour Briefing, Socialist Organiser, Workers Liberty, looks like emulating the SSA (the Scottish Socialist Alliance) in gaining some seats.

As far as the *educational* Left is concerned, well, for example, Christine Blower, running as a member of the Socialist Teachers Alliance, received around 40% of the votes in the (largest) teacher trade union (the National Union of Teachers) Presidential election in mid-1999. There are similar results in other unions, such as MSF, the biggest white-collar workers union in Britain. And some unions are starting to consider disaffiliating from the Labour Party. But, at the moment, there is not a *significant* Left electoral

alternative. Things could change.

## **The Third Way, Globalisation and Seattle**

Peter: And all this Third Way stuff! What's with Tony Blair and the Third Way? Does he know what it is yet! For me, from the US, it looks like this Third Way is important for UK politics, but how does it all relate with education?

Dave: Well Peter. I think that critical educators in the US, such as you in your *Che Guevara, Paolo Freire and the Pedagogy of Revolution*, and in our *Postmodernism in Educational Theory* book, and writers such as Mike Apple and Geoff Whitty, although I don't agree with everything they say, have got it right. The 'Third Way', what Tony Blair calls 'modern social democracy', is nothing of the sort. It's the old *capitalist* way, but one in which education and welfare systems and tax systems are even more yanked into ideological conformity with the capitalist demand for profit, neo-liberal policy. These have a neo-conservative moral agenda and, in Britain, a social democratic gloss. This gloss – some instances of targeted spending, and of rhetorical commitment to a one-nation society – is at the mercy of, and clearly subordinated to a regime of low wages/labour costs, and low public expenditure. A neo-liberal straightjacket. Blair's rhetoric of social inclusion clearly masks an education system that is becoming increasingly selective and *exclusionary*. A global neo-liberal phenomenon, but one which others, and we resist. Like in Seattle!

There's no doubt that Blair is international news, an international leader. Like Thatcher. And for similar reasons. Both have led their parties to the right. Both have transatlantic love-ins, one with Reagan the other with Clinton. But Blair is more dangerous internationally for the Left. To take one important, and telling, symbolic example. He lectures to the Socialist (which means social democratic) International and the European Union Socialist (social democratic) leaders to rename themselves as the Centre-Left international. He lectures Schroeder, Jospin, d'Alema and Romano Prodi on how welfare states need to be cut back and labour made 'more flexible'. Classic neo-liberal stuff! Cut labour costs, cut labour conditions to compete in the global economy.

Peter: Yeah, sure – globalisation. The globalisation of capital is the number one cause of world poverty. I became sick listening to Blair and Clinton during their imperialist war against Yugoslavia. Nobody talked about how the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo was – at least in part – a result of the machinations of the United States, the World Bank, and the IMF in demanding major macro-economic reforms and a forced austerity program. Did any of the media coverage of Yugoslavia talk about the resulting national currency devaluation, the general freezing of wages, the opening of domestic markets to foreign commodities, the abolition of worker self-management, and the dramatic decline in industrial production? Is it really possible to think of the globalisation of capital as anything else than a new form of imperialism? When you, er, rip away the social wealth from productive workers and recirculate it as a form of speculative venture in the market, you are talking about the devastation of the infrastructure of entire nations. But the media has done its job well in immunising such relations from critical scrutiny.

I've been struck recently by something John McMurtry says about the global economy of borderless, super-leveraged and decoupled money circuits – it rips home. He says that: "People are free in their work when they are not bound by the rules of freedom." Freedom in this sense means the opposite of its corporate assertion. So that under global capitalism the needs of people everywhere and anywhere don't matter unless they are backed by effective demand, that is, by the purchasing power of money. Any need that has no money to back it up goes unrecognised. Non market programmes that were connected to public sector Keynesianism – er, those that were designed to meet the basic needs of people – are being eliminated because the globobosses say they are 'unaffordable.' This is, to use one of your terms – 'bollocks'! How is it that those who have more purchasing power to meet their needs – that is, those who possess more money – demand than they need, are the ones who are getting richer through tax deductions! While those who are starving on the streets of Los Angeles, London, Johannesburg, Mexico City, and Sao Paulo are denied by the same system of their right to live! This is more than a moral lock-down on a global scale. It's class warfare! This is why Marx is more relevant now than ever before. Class oppression is the drive-wheel of all systematic oppressions under capitalism. Racism and sexism are

capitalism's incubi.

When I discuss globalisation with my students, I like to ask them the following question: "What is the price one pays to live in a truly 'free' and efficient market?" In other words, what is the price that one pays for not selling one's labour to a master? Canadian philosopher, John McMurtry, notes that "freedom" in capitalist democracy lies within the moral commandments of the market's rule, in particular the command that no one is to interfere with its smooth, unfettered movement. My, uhm, personal take on neo-liberalism is that it is the robotic elaboration of the value form of capital insinuated into the very logic of social policies within the current restructuring and re-engineering of the global marketplace. Neo-liberals seek their salvation in capitalist market doctrine and their undiminished and militant faith in market laws (co-ordinated by the reproduction of weak, quasi-states) that remove the inconvenience of having to think about how these laws affect the lives of millions of poor and suffering children. It excuses them from the burden of insight into how the IMF and World Bank serve as democracy's Dobermans, how the United States, as global imperialism's alpha male, rapaciously enforces those laws.

The received doctrine of the market with its principles of classical market theory and market value programs are upheld at any price, even if it means considering people as disposable. Let me put that another way – even if it means *making* people disposable. There are so many people out there walking the streets that cannot be put to profitable use in an oversupplied labour market. They are not even the unemployed. They are the 'unemployable'. They are the cast-offs. They are the untouchables in today's global economy. They don't have the freedom to act freely because to act freely is to be free to consume. You can't consume if you don't have the money to do so. The rules of freedom in this case really constitute a form of enslavement. We now have the freedom to forget about the homeless, the destitute, the wretched of the earth, the disenfranchised and exploited, to take them completely out of the equation. Those who demonise them are, after all, exempt from political control. If you try to resist this, world markets will exercise punitive action.

Isn't the "invisible hand," to which all alike must submit, and that lies at the centre of market command, in reality, the bloc fortunes

of several hundred billionaires who own as much wealth as almost half the globe's population put together, the interlocking directorates of multinational corporations, and global intra-firm trading empires that dominate the market's base of supply and demand? I think McMurtry and others are right on this account. Isn't the ultimate and unassailable value system supporting democracy comprised by the laws of the market, which seemingly exist prior to and independent of society? Haven't they become the laws of nature and of God? Isn't this what Marx meant when he said that capitalism as a historically specific form of society had become naturalised by the political economists? Both neo-liberal educators and postmodernists alike attend the same church, so-to-speak. That's how I see it. Seattle gave many of us in the U.S. some hope – especially those who, like me, do not see communism as an historical inevitability but rather as something that is politically desirable – although a lot of the protest going on there was, unfortunately, in support of protectionist economic policies. This can generate a narrow nationalism – where the imports of developing countries are put at risk, or the leading capitalist countries attempt to impose their own labour standards on the whole world. At worst, protectionist economic policies give succour and hope to the likes of Pat Buchanan and other rightist rabble-rousers. On the other hand, as McMurtry indicates, workers really do need "protection" from the depredations of capital. These issues require urgent consideration. I'd like to see Seattle as a marker of the increasing possibility for internationalist anti-capitalist struggle. I know Mike has written on this. The 'Battle of Seattle' was a significant development. The problem though, is how, as radical Left educators, you link this up with what is happening in schools and colleges. Do you have any ideas on this, you know, about what the links might be?

Glenn: It might seem difficult to link Seattle with education. As far as I know, educational Left groups were not that prominent in Seattle, nor was discussion about education high on the agenda. Er, well, but New Labour's view of globalisation, in terms of education policy, is that the nation has to develop *human capital* to the max – in order to compete internationally. Capital in its money form zips around the world, but human capital doesn't – with racist immigration laws, anti-*labour* laws, simultaneously. But it's at that point that education and training, and teachers and trainers, become mightily significant! Teachers and trainers have a role in

developing the single commodity, *labour-power*, the capacity to labour, that the whole capitalist system rests on. This commodity is the only one within the social universe of capital that can create more value than it needs for the reproduction of its own existence. It is the source of value, capital, profit, state revenue – the whole thing! That is the source of teachers' power!

The New Labour government instinctively grasps this. Maggie Thatcher's Tories also felt it in their bones. So, teachers can combat the program of the capitalisation of humanity for an era of globalisation *directly* through raising issues about the constitution of society – social class, social justice, sexism, racism and so on – the constitution of the whole social universe in which we exist – the *social universe of capital* – in their daily lives *as teachers*. Bringing out social issues in schools can be done – even within a National Curriculum, and even in, perhaps especially in, vocational education – as er, as my article with Arlene Piercy shows in relation to General National Vocational Qualifications<sup>10</sup> in England. And that's what Dave and Mike's trilogy is all about – their three books, aimed at teachers and student teachers, on how to radicalise the curriculum and schooling<sup>11</sup>...

Dave: [Interrupting] ... Yup and that's what the two Hillcole books are about, too. One setting out general, well, actually, specific principles for a socialist education policy, the second one setting out a detailed, 214 page (All laugh) ... Yeah! 214 pages on detailed policy: we're not just engaging in resistance rhetoric! We develop the policy too, an alternative, socialist policy, and ...

Glenn: [Interrupting] ... Yes, Dave, but let me get back to what I was saying. In the UK, the move to crack down on what, but also *how*, teachers teach expresses the deepest fears of the Government and representatives of capital. They want to keep those fears *secret*. Our role, as I see it, is to expose their fears, their weaknesses, and try to make them afraid, very afraid – and to constantly point out the *real power* that teachers have, and uncover this too. Seattle provides a spark for unpacking all of this. And thinking things through like this brings education *to the forefront* – shows up its real significance.

## Rikowski on Marxist Educational Theory

Peter: I'd like to put a few questions to you individually, though all three of you may have views on these issues, and please chime in. But, specifically, for Glenn, in 1997 you had an article published called *Scorched Earth* – now, come on, what was the point of that? The article seemed to be about starting afresh with educational Marxism. But some might say that you just went too far in that article, so we only have ashes remaining, nothing to rebuild with. What's your view on it Glenn?

Glenn: Hmmm, well Peter, no matter what people think I really didn't like writing *Scorched Earth*. I sort of hoped that Marxist educational theory would sort itself out, that others would come along and produce some real alternatives to the 'old' Marxist educational theory (which is really B and G plus Willis, and all that flowed from those works – the legacy). It didn't happen. There was some work by Rachel Sharp (from Australia), John Freeman-Moir (from New Zealand) – but it was very under-developed, and, er, didn't constitute, for me, substantial advance.

By the early 1990s, I decided to have a go myself. However, by then – in unpublished work – I had started to produce, what seemed to me, was a real alternative to the 'old' Marxist educational theory, what I call my 'labour-power theory'. This has not really been presented in the public domain yet (though I have done a few conference papers on some limited aspects of it). So, this work showed me that what was required was an uncompromising break with the 'old' Marxist educational theory, to *really* start again, which is not popular in academic life, political circles or amongst some other Marxists: my fiercest critics!

For me, the really important writing comes next. I am working on a paper called: *That Other Great Class of Commodities: Repositioning Marxist Educational Theory*.<sup>12</sup> I started it in 1995, but this summer should see a version emerge! I've worked slowly, tried to be patient on this work. But I think this is right, and I hoped I've learnt from quick-fix Marxist educational theory – all those attempts to shore up the deficiencies of the 'old' Marxist educational theory. Of course, just at the point when I found myself in a position to present my 'positive' views, others (Paula Allman – her *Revolutionary Social Transformation* book is very important – Michael Neary, Helen Raduntz, Grant Banfield and

others), in the late-1990s (and now), are producing Marxist work on education and training that *also* goes beyond the 'old' Marxist educational theory. This is great. Don't feel such a loner. But *Scorched Earth* and the more 'acceptable' (by 'old' Marxist educational theorists, anyhow) *Left Alone* had to be written, in my view, to clear the ground, as preparation for what I *really* wanted to say. Someone told me that those two articles have made it easier for others to write from a Marxist perspective on education. If that's true, no matter what people might think of the *content* of those two articles, then it was worth writing them.

### **Hill on Structuralist neo-Marxism and Political Agency**

Peter: Thanks Glenn. Now here's a tricky one for you Dave! You often call yourself a structuralist neo-Marxist. But how can you get political agency going with that position? With structuralism and determinism, doesn't capital and its schooling system call all the shots. Can we see a way through it based on your position?

Dave: That's right, Peter. I look at the trajectory of many in the academy, such as Henry Giroux and Stuart Hall, brilliant and powerful and admirable in their analyses of the 1970s and early 80s. And they turned from Marxist, to heavily culturalist neo-Marxist, Gramscian and then into post-Marxism. Giroux from 1993, Hall in his 'New Times' – 'Marxism Today' phase. I was shattered when Henry did that! He had hosted me at his house; his *Theory and Resistance in Education* blew my mind, reading it on Barcelona Beach! Brilliant, savage, emotive! I couldn't believe it when he said (in *Border Crossings*): 'I am no longer a Marxist'. (I see he is having quite a go at the class-based ideas we hold, in his latest book too, *Impure Acts*). And Hall and his (ironically, Communist Party) co-writers proclaimed the 'New Times' which is post-class, post-modernist, and they and the Communist Party disappeared in their own post-eriors. Ha! (All laugh)

Mike: Yes, I think Stuart Hall's and Paul Gilroy's conversions to postmodernism were tragedies for the academic Left. The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University, though derivative, was a hotbed of Marxist theorising for many years. I still think we can learn a lot from their publications. And, indeed from reading Gramsci, and, of course Marx. *Capital*,

particularly Volume 1, remains one of the most exciting works I have ever read. Demanding though! The three volumes can be read merely as 'a critical analysis of capitalist production'. That's the subtitle of volume 1. Or it can be read as a 'critique of political economy'- the subtitle of volumes 2 and 3. It's interesting how many bourgeois economists draw on Marx's insights. The point however, as Marx argued, was to change the world. Hence the importance of agency.

Dave: Yes, right. Of course human agency, the development – of true over false consciousness – the exposure of the 'non-ideological' liberal pluralist view that 'there is no alternative' is absolutely crucial. Armchair navel gazing and defeatism – the effect on some of the 1970s Bowles and Gintis, Althusser, Bourdieu analysis of capitalist schooling and society – doesn't do much at all. But their insights are fantastically powerful!

Peter: Well, you know my long attachment with Henry [Giroux] in the mid-1980s – we wrote dozens of articles together and co-edited three books – was it three? – yes. He brought me to the United States when I was unemployed in Canada. Yeah, I was teaching in Canada and my contract was not renewed when students launched a petition against me because I was a "communist." Because of Henry's efforts, my work soon gained national visibility after a relatively short time. We disagree – although not publicly – on my position as a Marxist educator and on the direction some of my work has taken, especially my critique of postmodernism. And while I would like to see Henry deal more with political economy, I do know that he sees economic exploitation as a central issue in his analysis of youth culture. But here I am digressing again...

Let me get back to your comments, Dave, by asking you: What is your critique of Culturalist neo-Marxism? Wasn't it just a way out of the pessimism and defeatism of the structuralist writers, the reproduction theorists you have named?

Dave: Yes it was. But, yeah we've moved on. The structuralism that I am trying to clarify, and I think I've got some way to go, is not as pessimistic as that of the seventies. Let me try to spell out my

views on the contemporary differences between culturalist and humanist neo-Marxism on the one hand, and structuralist neo-Marxism on the other. I've tried to do it an article coming out<sup>13</sup>.

You see, I think that the culturalist neo-Marxists overemphasise autonomy and agency in a number of ways. Firstly, they overemphasise the importance of ideology, of the cultural domain. Secondly, and it's connected, they rate too highly the importance of discourse. Perhaps that's the same point. Anyhow, thirdly, I think they lay too much store on the relative autonomy of individuals, on how effective human agency is likely to be when faced with the force of the state, without overall, major change and transformation of the economy, and society.

Fourthly, and again, it's connected, they overemphasise the relative autonomy of state apparatuses such as education, or particular schools. Fifthly, the relative autonomy of the political region of the state from the economic – the autonomy of government from capital. That sounds like a mouthful, I know.

Peter: Okay, Dave: let's take these one by one.

Dave: Yes, you're right. So, basically, culturalists get too starry-eyed. With respect to all of these five aspects, they under-estimate the power of force and the state acting in the interests of capital. As Mike said earlier, behind (as well as part of) the ideological state apparatuses are the repressive state apparatuses – dismissal, victimisation, anti-union laws, a new heavily prescriptive and heavily policed National Curriculum in schools and in teacher education.

Look, I want to stress that the difference between structuralist and culturalist neo-Marxists does *not* lie in views on the necessity of, or effort in, ideological intervention. We all recognise the necessity of that. And many do it, in whatever arenas they can. As activists, we axiomatically believe in and pursue action. And we can, and do, win some victories, and yes, they are important, and the learning through struggle is important, too. But it ain't easy and it ain't gonna be easy.

The Hillcole Group's *main* activity, and – since I ceased being primarily an elected political and trade union activist and organiser

in 1989, my own main (though not sole) activity – is in the arena of ideological intervention. And thousands of teachers and lecturers, individually but also in groups and organisations, do try to subvert, to develop solidarism instead of competitive consumerist individualism, to develop critique and social and economic justice. Chris Searle's book, and Mike Apple's with Jim Beane, show good examples of attempts at democratic and transformative schooling.<sup>14</sup>

Peter: Dave, let's go through these five structure/agency aspects one by one. Let's put some flesh on these bones.

Dave: Yeah, sure. It's not a common argument that I'm making, so here goes! To take the first point, on ideology. Culturalists, influenced by the Frankfurt School, and by some readings of Gramsci, overemphasise the impact of neo-liberal hegemony throughout different social classes. I don't subscribe to the dominant ideology thesis, which presumes the effective hegemonising of neo-liberal ideology. People are not so stupid as to be taken in all of the time by the false consciousness 'common sense' propagated through the ideological state apparatuses of the media and education systems, despite what New Times and post-modern theorists might claim. Millions see through all the propaganda. In Britain there is massive public opposition to privatisation of the London Underground, Air Traffic Control and to the privatisation of British Rail, for example. People know that private enterprise is at the expense of public service and safety. Millions see through it, because of their own material conditions and those of others. Talk to the rail workers! They're not taken in!

Of course, this is mainly hidden in the capitalist press, and in capitalist schooling and teacher education. And er, until they see the point – and have a counter-hegemonic political focus – millions opt out of the formal political process. They don't vote. In contrast, you can bet your sweet life that the well-off turn out to vote!

Peter: What about your second point? What about the culturalists' stress on discourse? Isn't that partly what we're all engaged in?

Dave: Partly, yes. Well, to return to what Mike said a few minutes ago

about representationalism, seeing the world as a text. He was talking there about postmodernists. But it seems to me that culturalists, culturalist neo-Marxists that is, as well as postmodernists, place too much importance on discourse. Along with Foucault and Barthes, and alongside otherwise progressive educators such as Stephen Ball, they overestimate the importance of discourse. Discourse, rhetoric, can often be absolute lies, subterfuge. At other times it can be self-delusion. Apart from Thatcher – who did come clean sometimes – capitalists and their state agents are not often going to say openly: "we need to make the poor poorer to make the rich richer, even if this does involve heavily policing sink estates and jailing ever-increasing numbers".

Discourse analysis, and Ball's suggestions (using Barthes) that teachers in England and Wales can transform the National Curriculum by using it as a 'writerly text', whereby it can be re-written/recreated/reconstructed, is an example of being too starry-eyed. It's theoretically flawed. Ball's concept does have some use in that it draws teachers' attention to the fact that they can (and in his view and mine, should) seek to interpret the National Curriculum creatively and critically. But to suggest it can, at this present juncture, be 'written' by teachers is pie in the sky. Changed a bit, yes, but it is so oppressively comprehensive, regulated and monitored that teachers' critical agency is inevitably restricted to comment and insertion of critical perspectives rather than the National Curriculum being a 'writerly text'. There's a big difference there.

Stuff that Mike and I have written and edited, our *Promoting Equality* and *Schooling and Equality* trilogy, stuff that lots of others have written, has er, been dedicated to showing how there are spaces in each subject area of the National Curriculum (and in schools) and how these can be used by radical educators<sup>15</sup>. But er, sure, we need to recognise that these spaces are limited.

Under a regime of tests and inspections teachers do not have *carte blanche* to rewrite the curriculum. The curriculum needs radical change, blowing open. Suggestions that individual and small groups of teachers can actually rewrite it, lay too much stress on the autonomy of individual actors, and individual schools. Such efforts might be valiant and have a limited effect, and, yes, a limited effect is, of course, so much better than *no*

effect. But such teachers need to have a realistic appreciation of what they are dealing with.

Peter: Where does your third point, about human agency, how much autonomy teachers and other cultural workers have come into it?

Dave: Well, yes, a third culturalist neo-Marxist over-emphasis is its over-privileging of individual human agency acting within state structures which themselves operate within the capitalist state. Culturalist neo-Marxists, to a degree, *underestimate* the importance of force and policy and state regulation. They don't give sufficient recognition to the force of the state, the repressive apparatuses of the state. And of course, there are the repressive aspects of the ideological state apparatuses that we keep coming back to – the non-promotions, the redundancies and dismissals of radical left staff/workers, the exclusion from school and thereby from higher education – of non-conforming students.

To move on to, er, where was I? Ah yes, the fourth point! About culturalist claims for relative autonomy of state apparatuses, such as schools. Obviously this is linked to the limitation on individual agency that I've just mentioned. But conceptually it's a different point.

Well, basically, as soon as something, or some groups become too threatening to the capitalist class, they abolish it (like the Greater London Authority in 1986 and the semi-socialist Inner London Education Authority in 1988), regulate it (like teachers work and teacher educators), attack it with the armed and legislative force of the state (like Trade Union Rights, like the striking miners, like the Criminal Justice Act restricting the right of assembly and protest). I am not denying at all the importance of ideological intervention. Of course there is a battle of ideas. To use Ira Shor's phrase, of course there are 'culture wars'. We fight that war of ideas. The ruling class fights the war of ideas. For example, prior to, and alongside (and after) repressive actions against each of the above, first they demonise it. But when that doesn't work, they use force anyway – and even tighter regulation – with penalties for the unregulateable.

And, that leads on to the final point: how much autonomy the political, the government, has from the economic, from the overall demands of the national and international capitalist class. Very

little! Again, any threat gets demonised. And, almost always, neutered or removed. Bombed by the cavalry of international capital, the American marines, like Allende, snuffed out, like Lumumba, contra'd out like Nicaragua and Angola, bribed and funded illegally like the German CDU, or neutered like the Labour Party in Britain. No threat to capital there. But the *potential* is there, for worldwide resistance, and ultimate replacement of capitalism. And- one of us was saying this earlier- there is now a more globalised resistance, a wider understanding of the global nature of capital. It's great to see Greens developing a more red awareness.

And the fifth point is about the degree of autonomy of the political – government activity – from the economic, from the demands of capital. When capital and profitability are under threat, the capitalist class changes its ideology, its discourse, and its policy. For thirty post-war years, in an era of growth, it was a form of social democracy, or Christian Democracy. Nowadays, with greater global competition, when national and global capital wants to create a more compliant work-force, governments act in the interests of capital, changing the laws, such as on union activity, or on the curriculum, and cutting back on the welfare state. Its current ideology, of neo-liberalism, is a clear subordination of the political to the economic. Pat Ainely is good on this<sup>16</sup>. It was always there, of course, but now it's more naked, more obvious.

Peter: In a democratic socialist society, I don't believe that individuals will live the same type of imaginary relationship to the world that they do under specific capitalist modes of production, or within a specific social relation or value-form under capitalism. So there won't be as much need for the culturalist neo-Marxists [laughing]! I am agreeing with you on this, Dave. Critical pedagogy for me is not the class struggle in theory; it's not a textualist revolution – but a struggle in practice! It is historical materialist practice. I agree with you that the potential is there for world-wide resistance.

So what do you think radical teachers need to do, then, Dave?  
What do you see as a viable role?

Dave: There's individual and small group actions over school democracy, and over issues of equality within the subject curriculum and the hidden curriculum. But, radical teachers also need to organise on a mass, solidaristic basis, with a critical

awareness of the bigger picture of capitalist exploitation and schooling as economic, cultural and, yes, ideological reproduction. They need to become critical transformative intellectuals, working for equality within and outside the classroom, aware of the eco-destroying, human-alienating, commodifying, and essentially class exploitative nature of national and global capitalism. It's not just the ideological struggle, the cultural struggle. Teachers, cultural workers, need to be activists as part of the working class movement, active in the material struggles of teachers, and of those of other groups of workers. Marxists have always believed this. Your own recent writing, Peter, your recent *Che/Paolo* and *Multiculturalism* books, your stuff with Ramin, are all good examples<sup>17</sup>. I want to repeat that, Peter; it's not enough just to work within, with education. The struggle is wider; the role has to be wider, and co-ordinated, organised.

Glenn: Dave's last point is vital: radical educators are not that radical if they show no interest in stuff beyond the school gate.

Dave: Yes, but not just that. There needs to be vision plus strategy- of identifying and working with social forces. And plus organisation, too. Without organisation we don't get anywhere. Vision, strategy, organisation. Lots of radical educators underestimate the strategy, and the necessity for organisation.

### **Cole on Globalisation and What Goes On in Schools**

Peter: Thanks Dave. Turning to you Mike: I thought your article on globalisation in *International Studies in Sociology of Education* was important because it tried to establish links between globalisation and what's going on in schools. That's great. But it's difficult to make the connections between economy, education policy and what's going on in schools. What further work is needed to solidify those links, in your view?

Mike: Well, I don't think it is that difficult, actually. What I tried to argue in that article, was that, while there are great changes taking place in world economies, it is important to view globalisation as a process rather than a new epoch. It's a process that began 400 to 500 years ago. While the Internet is, indeed, revolutionary, so

were the invention of paper, the printing press, the typewriter, and the first satellite, which made all this possible. The Left can, and must, of course, make use of the spectacular advances in global communication. But it's important to consider the *ideological* role that, in the hands of business people, politicians and the media, globalisation plays.

Tony Blair and New Labour put it about that globalisation is proof that world capitalism has triumphed and that there is nothing that should or indeed *can* be done about it. All that remains, therefore, is to *modernise* the Labour Party and British business in general. This means, of course, purging the Labour Party of its socialist roots and continuing the Thatcherite agenda in economic policy in general. As, er, I put it in the article, if globalisation is used ideologically as the *raison d'être* of New Labour economic policy, then modernisation is the conduit through which the policy is introduced.

The 'Third Way' has two major anchors; competitiveness and modernisation. Competitiveness entails an economy in which everyone works, where the need for the untrammelled expansion of the free market is promoted as natural and inevitable and where there is the requirement for flexibility in the labour market and for low wages. All of this in the context of the diminution of the welfare state. Since Keynesian demand management has been abandoned, one of the few strategic levers available to the New Labour Government to achieve these ends is to police the education and training of the workforce in the economy and in the educational market place. That's why education is the passion of the New Labour Government.

## **Key Issues for Teachers in State Schools**

Peter: I'm sure our readers would be interested in your views on what the key issues are for teachers in state schools in the UK at the moment. Have any of these issues led to any kinds of political mobilisation? What's the situation on the ground then, in schools?

Dave: Teachers are really angry – and often demoralised – by the low pay, the high class sizes, by being blamed for so called 'failing

schools' – and by the sheer hard work and stress of trying to meet government targets, and all the testing and bureaucratisation that goes with that. Er, and alienated too, by what is now, in many working class schools, a 'back-to-basics', utilitarian curriculum. One that is devoid of critical thought, and bereft of wider educational experience. We now have a skills based national curriculum, one which, I think certainly, overall, bears out the theses, the structuralist neo-Marxist analyses, of Bowles and Gintis (in *SCA*), Bourdieu, and Althusser more than at any time since the post-war settlement and consensus in the UK – as elsewhere in the capitalist world. In particular since the world commodity price rises, and crisis of capitalism in the 1970s.

Peter: Right. Now, what difference has Tony Blair's New Labour made to the schools and colleges in the UK? Is anything happening that's radically different from the years of Thatcher and John Major's administration?

Dave: Nope! There is some residual social democratic policy – some extra money has been targeted at areas of greatest need. But this is still within tight education budgeting – at the moment it is as tight as under the Conservatives. So there are thousands of classes with more than 35 kids. And the National Curriculum has been slimmed down slightly – especially for schools that do not meet targets. That's one major way in which the formal school curriculum has become more differentiated along (racialised and gendered) social class lines. And the curriculum content remains essentially the same Conservative Party curriculum.

Well, in some respects New Labour has out-conservatised the Conservatives. New Labour has increased neo-liberalisation and managerialism in schooling and in education generally. As I try to point out in some of my recent writing. There is now more selection in schooling – the comprehensive ideal has been abandoned. New snappy sounding types of schools are introduced – such as 'City Academies', 'Fresh Start Schools'. Teachers are trashed for poor test results in inner cities. No mention of poor resourcing, or of a culturally imperialistic national curriculum. Oh no! For New Labour the problem is the teachers and lack of school leadership. The solution is 'effective schooling' – highly paid 'superheads', school principals – and increasing the competitive market in schooling<sup>18</sup>. And letting private companies build schools and colleges under the Private Finance Initiative – a

bonanza for private enterprise and a kick in the teeth for public service! Oh, and inviting private companies to take over some schools and school districts! And inviting private companies to take the lead in, and have a free hand (curriculum, hours, staffing) in 'Education Action Zones' – chunks of school districts. All of them predominantly working class! Oh no, we mustn't mess around with middle class and suburban schools, must we!

## **Education Action Zones**

**Peter:** Perhaps you could tell the readers a bit about the Education Action Zones that New Labour has brought in. I know Mike has written on them, and they figure in some of Dave's writing too. They seem pretty much to do with the modernisation of schools in your *ISSE* article Mike. Is this how you'd see them?

**Mike:** The idea of EAZs, of course, comes from the United States. It seems that the introduction of EAZs is being used as a springboard for individual and group privatisation. The privately owned Centre for British Teachers (CfBT) is managing Rams Episcopal primary school in conjunction with the east London Borough of Hackney and church authorities (the first of such joint ventures). CfBT is also running the UK's first company-led EAZ in Lambeth, south London, in partnership with Shell. There is a queue of private education management firms, including Edison, with their sights set on taking over and privatising Kings Manor school in Surrey, a move that the Government has said is legally possible. Finally, there are apparently moves afoot to privatise the whole of Hackney Education Authority, with its 30,000 pupils/students. From the business perspective, the future looks good: an increasing economic and ideological foothold in British schools, with the prospect of burgeoning privatisation. In fact, businesses didn't rush in to take over EAZ schools: not enough money in it! The whole thing was too small: no economies of scale! Instead, companies have tried to sell services (contract teachers, private sector training, consultancies), and expensive information technology to EAZ schools instead, and to do sponsorship deals (you know, like MacDonalDs sponsor a specific group of kids in a school).

Glenn: For the last year, my main research work has been on EAZs. I've interviewed teachers, kids, parents, school governors and people from community organisations in some Zones<sup>19</sup>. For me, they are more like experiments in educational modernisation through privatisation. The money invested in the EAZs is not going to change the educational landscape. But that's not the point. They can be viewed as experiments in opening up education to *capital*. Now, of course, as Mike says, business has not rushed into these deprived areas clutching bags of cash. The idea, it seems to me, is that New Labour is searching for what forms of educational privatisation can actually be generated by something like EAZs. They are really *money zones*: experiments in how money (even small amounts) can generate educational innovation and aid the entry of capital into schools. Which gets me on to the second point.

The EAZs, it seems to me – with the exception of some things going on around information technology, in some Zones – have not actually led to much radical, new, or innovatory teaching and learning. But the real aim for New Labour is to see if the Zones innovate in terms of the *social relations* of production: are the Zones helping to redefine teachers' roles so they become more like educational managers of lower paid classroom assistants? New Labour's interested in this. Capital, after all, as Marx indicates, is a *social relation*. Finally, the EAZs help to create a critical mass (well, an *uncritical* mass of consumers perhaps!) of IT products in schools. Along with other government initiatives in IT – such as the National Grid for Learning – it gives IT capital (and New Labour drools over Knowledge Economy-type corporations, e-commerce and so on – the sources of cash for elections if the trade unions get too fed up) economies of scale for IT-based capital penetration within education: a significant amount of business, but also significant in terms of embedding these companies' products into the fabric of UK life. The EAZs, therefore, are really *money zones*: they facilitate the penetration of capital (in its money form) into education. But there are big risks in this, for capital and also for New Labour: it raises the stakes and, potentially, awareness of the capitalisation of the *whole of social life*. There is no hiding place!

## Market Socialism

Peter: What I hear a lot of my colleagues on the left talking about more and more these days is market socialism. They believe it is possible to ameliorate the worst dimensions of globalisation by forcing capital to become democratically accountable – to exercise 'compassion' for the 'little guys'. You are supposed to be able to stomp on some of the demons of capital and that will keep the others in their place! They have suggested – and some of these blokes are really committed to this idea – that developed countries – like the UK and the US – should embrace a form of market socialism. This is a move, and I feel confident in saying this – that it won't work because, well, I think it is a basic contradiction in terms. To respond to this position we first of all need to understand right up front that capital is not simply a thing; rather, it is a social relation – a specific type of social relation of labour that is indifferent – and usually hostile – to human needs and aspirations. As the congealment of abstract, undifferentiated labour, capitalism reduces all concrete labour to its opposite: to abstract, undifferentiated labour – and Peter Hudis in an important article published this year in the CSE journal *Capital & Class*, alerts us to this. Labour is the source of all value only insofar as we acknowledge that value itself is abstract labour. Only that which is the product of abstract labour has any real value in capitalism. As Peter Hudis points out in your UK Marxist-Humanism journal, *The Hobgoblin*,<sup>20</sup> and other Marxists have talked about this also; capital is a *social relation of abstract labour* that cannot and must not be reduced to its 'thing-ness', but should be conceived as a value-relation. Capital is constituted by value as it obtains ever more *surplus* value, or unpaid hours of labour, from the workers who produce it. Capital feeds on devouring as many unpaid hours of abstract labour produced by the worker that it sinks its teeth into. Because capital reproduces itself through a process based on our labour, any effort to control capital without fundamentally transforming its basis of value production, keeping the actual nature of capitalist labour constant, will only serve to strengthen capital. Kind of like – 'what doesn't kill it makes it stronger' – although don't identify me as one of Nietzsche's corps for using that phrase – okay guys!

The point I am trying to make is that until value and surplus value are both targets for elimination by social reformers, capital will

continue relentlessly to self-expand. While many socialists have tried over the years to construct programmes for 'controlling' capital by 'softening' its more destructive capacities through the establishment of state planning or market socialism, these efforts have been limited because they allow value production to persist. It's like, er, putting a happy face on an open wound. Cuba scholar Ken Cole<sup>21</sup> provides what I think is a cogent explanation as to why market socialism is screwed as an option. Market socialism won't work because the attempt to establish social justice on the basis of exchange value is flawed; in fact, it's a fundamental contradiction in terms. Value can't be evaluated in quantitative terms only. This is because value is a social relation – it is both qualitative and quantitative. What is valued is not just labour time but labour-power (the abstract value of the concrete labour time that is worked). This, of course, will vary according to the social demand and social supply of the commodity that is produced as well as the labourer's control of the means of production. When you are stuck with a model of development founded upon commodity exchange, there will be qualitative changes in the value of the quantitative measure of labour time worked by wage labour, a value that we know very well varies with the process and practice of exploitation. Labour time is devalued – the same quantitative amount of labour time is qualitatively worth less as exploitation increases and intensifies. Exploitation is a consequence – a reflex – of power, of the control of the means of production. As Ken Cole says, labour power, for Marx, thus becomes a form of variable capital whereas the means of production is a constant value (like, constant capital). Because value is a social relation, qualitative changes in the social relation of production – for instance, the historical punch out between capital and labour – bear directly on the quantitative expression of value as exchange, like, for instance, in price. The point is that within the messy web of current global capitalist arrangements, the same concrete labour time actually worked is worth today substantially less than it was decades ago. This is because the relationship between capital and labour – a relationship you can see expressed in the abstract valuation of concrete labour time – when reflected in the exchange value of labour power on a world scale, has declined. And we have seen what this means for our worker comrades, right?

The point is that market socialism seems a contradiction to me, it

seems that if we flirt with capital it will turn on us eventually and bite us.

Glenn: Well, abstract labour is important Peter, as you say. As Mike Neary and I noted in our *Speed of Life* paper, the substance of Marx's social universe is not *simply* labour. It is not concrete labour, but *abstract* labour. This abstract labour is constituted on the basis of socially necessary labour-time – the time it takes, on the average, to produce a commodity. It is this abstract time that also constitutes exchange-value, that allows Marx (and hence us) to say that commodities are 'equal' in relation to the socially necessary labour-time it takes to produce them. Of course, the socially necessary labour-time in turn presupposes socially average labour-power: labour-power of average skill, intensity and so on – in fact all the attributes that constitute labour-power in its expression. Education and training, as I have argued many times, are implicated in the social production of labour-power. They are elements entering into, therefore, the generation of 'socially average labour-power' that constitutes socially necessary labour-time and hence *value itself*, as well as the equalisation of commodities through exchange-value. Education and training in capitalist society are *that* crucial!

Social justice on the basis of exchange-value (the only phenomenon that can socially validate us as 'equals' in capitalist society) is an abomination and an impossibility. As I showed in a short programmatic paper called *Education and Social Justice within the Social Universe of Capital* – that I produced for a conference on education and social justice earlier this year – the equalisation of labour-powers (labour-powers of equal exchange-value, in fact equal *value* as labour-powers) is the only form of social justice validated by capital. There is no 'morality' involved here; it is just that this is the form of social worth that makes sense in terms of the social relations of production based on capital. I then show that processes of the production of value (as substance of capital) entails a *dis*-equalisation of labour-power values, thereby terminating the possibility of the generation of equality (and hence 'social justice') on the basis of capitalist production. One possible solution is to subvert the whole process by programming education and training with the (near practical impossibility but theoretically attainable) goal of equalising labour-power values through education and training. Merely

stating this as solution is laughable! Capital – practically, through its workings – runs counter to social justice.

On market socialism specifically, Hillel Ticktin and Bertell Ollman have done some important work. Their papers in *Market Socialism: the debate among socialists* are well worth looking at. The important points are that the market, wherever it strikes, creates a whole bunch of inequalities. I agree Peter; 'market socialism' is an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms. However, for Marx, the really important point was that markets opened the way for the formation of capitalist social relations. They 'opened the door', if you like, to capital itself. Marxist educational theorists need to show how, in practice, and empirical work is important here, this is actually happening in education today: it is being capitalised – and this leads to the capitalisation of humanity itself. Dave has written recently a very important paper on markets in education. Dave, you should talk about this paper.

## **Neo-Liberalism**

Dave: Yeah, right, Glenn. It was great getting into this in detail. I was down to speak at a Conference run by radical student activists, the Campaign for Free Education, to debate with James Tooley, who, in Britain, is the hired hierophant of national and global capital, the leading guru of the marketeering neo-liberal Radical Right. He runs the education unit of the Radical Right think-tank, The Institute of Economic Affairs.

Well, I looked in detail at his arguments, his writing.<sup>22</sup> I think it's really important to take on that current hegemonic set of arguments; when I say hegemonic, it is hegemonic amongst media and main political parties – it is, of course, widely contested and spurned. It'll be interesting, for example, to see how well Nader does in the States, the Presidential elections.

Well, looking at markets, lots of us, everyone here today, looks at the *effects* of the market in local, national and global arenas...we've talked about it today – the devastating growth in inequalities, the environmental depredations, the commodification of humans and human relationships, the destruction of

democracy, the kleptocratic world system.... [pause] ... But, and I'd never done this before (others have, of course), it's also important to examine, dissect, deconstruct, critique, the market's philosophical and intellectual foundations. It's all very well, and necessary, to critique postmodernism, liberal pluralism, but it's the Radical Right that, currently, is the main enemy, the current discourse and project of global capital. That's why I was so pleased to have to look into the arguments for the market in education in some detail, to examine Tooley's arguments closely. This is the guy – nice guy, actually, except for his arguments – the market darling of the educational Radical Right, who was drafted in by Blair (via Chris Woodhead of the Office for Standards in Education) to write a major report on education research in the UK!

So. His arguments on the market in education. Guess what: they're flawed! (All laugh). No big surprise, huh! But what I mean is, his arguments are not only ideologically flawed – we would say that, wouldn't we, coming from different, opposed ideological values, analyses and projects – but also they are intellectually flawed!

Glenn: Say how, Dave.

Peter: Yeah, you guys do a great job dissecting postmodernism, but what do you say, Dave, about these neo-liberal arguments?

Dave: Right. I'm astonished at the illogicality, the unwarranted conclusions in his detailed arguments. They don't stand up. How can I show this? Well, I make eight separate criticisms of his writing. Some are based purely on ideological analysis, some on the coherence and validity of his intellectual arguments. I argue that, in some respects, his arguments *fall down in themselves*. He makes a number of unwarranted implications or conclusions about the role of the state in education and about the role of the market in education.

He (and other neo-liberals) has an outdated notion of the 'Free' Market. Markets might have had some credence in the early stages of capitalism, around the time of Adam Smith. Today, as you pointed out earlier, Peter, neo-liberalism merely opens the door to vast corporations who wish to squash competition. Neo-liberalism

replaces dependency on the state with dependency on the market, which now means dependency on vast corporations and the law of money.

**Another criticism of Tooley relates to quasi-markets, markets and the generation of new forms of control, hierarchy and privilege. He does not show an understanding of how management works in contemporary society. To hand over education to capital means to hand it over to a group of people to manage it. Administration is being duplicated rather than centralised as in the old LEAs. Tooley is a fantasist. He assumes that 'setting state institutions free' has no consequences for the generation of new forms of control, hierarchy and privilege if capitalist society remains the framework in which the new 'freedom' is expressed. The mythical 'Hidden Hand' cannot (and never did) work by itself. Tooley is locked into Adam Smith and the 18th Century. He has no substantial theory of society; thus he misreads and misunderstands actually existing markets.**

**Peter: But what's this about his internal logic, Dave?**

Dave: Yes, Peter, this bit surprised me. I do criticise him for his logic. To take a couple of examples. The definitions of equality he uses are not recognisable to Marxists. He suggests, from his analysis of arguments of what he terms 'several significant social philosophers', that, when they speak for 'equality' or 'equity', it is possible that all they are doing is demanding that the needs of the underprivileged are met by the state.

**But the range of philosophers that he has analysed is spectacularly restricted – to non-Marxist analyses. His findings are neither significant, nor valid, nor respectable. Marxist analysis – and policy – is concerned not simply with those families or communities who are not responsible or resourceful. We are concerned with the working class(es) as a whole, with securing or enabling more equality of outcome – a very different story and project than 'adequacy'.**

This is a serious flaw in Tooley's pantheon of arguments, a classical, if carefully hedged, implication about the aims of egalitarians. It serves, of course, to advance, illegitimately, his argument that those arguing for state provision of education are arguing for this primarily as a safety net for the underclass. He goes on to argue that the 'free' market can also provide equal opportunities, on this (false) definition. This brings me on to the next criticism. In a nutshell: what is Tooley's answer, his projected provision for those who don't buy into the market place of education? Why, surprise, surprise – guess what: it's charity. Sweet charity. The rescuer of all those arguments wishing to slash state welfare provision! He suggests that 'philanthropy may be all that is required to help that small minority'.

Not Oxfam, but *Ignorox* here we come! Dump your unwanted teachers and textbooks here! Charity Schools for the poor and feckless able of course, to compete with Eton, Roedean and Anytown Comprehensive. So, away with what Gerald Grace argues for, 'Education as Public Good', free at the point of entry, and as a right.

Tooley singularly fails to show that the market may deliver equal opportunities better than state intervention. He repeatedly implies that this could be the case, yet does not show it. Despite all his writing, his books, his articles, his trips round the world for the World Bank to see privately provided schooling in operation, he is unable to show the success of one of his major claims; that the market has a concern for equity and social justice! Astonishing claim!

*He also considerably overstates his case regarding market provision of education in the mid- nineteenth century Britain to try to show that the market was providing. He uses a figure from*

*the Newcastle Commission report of 1861, which showed that 95.5% of children were in school for up to 5.7 years. Using this statistic, he suggests that with increasing wealth, except for the case of irresponsible parents, universal schooling would have arisen. So no, or very little if any, state provision would have been necessary. Like Topsy, it would have just growed!*

He is carefully clever in his phrasing, but he does use this figure misleadingly – leaving the implication that 5.7 years was the norm. It wasn't. His figure includes a multitude of types and lengths of provision.

**And for other criticisms of Tooley and of neo-liberalism, like you, Peter, I've been using John McMurtry's work (which is very clear and powerful). For McMurtry, knowledge is not a commodity; therefore it is unsuitable for and inimical to marketisation. He shows that education has different aims, goals, different methods, different motivations, different standards of excellence. Ultimately, of course, education and the market have different concepts of freedom.**

Freedom in the market is the enjoyment of whatever one is able to buy from others with no questions asked, and profit from whatever one is able to sell to others with no requirement to answer to anyone else. Freedom in the place of education is very different. The essence of education is precisely the freedom to question, and to seek answers, whether it offends people's self-gratification or not.

Glenn: Yes, and there's big profits to be made.

Dave: Right, big bucks. As Richard Hatcher shows, big bucks globally and nationally; to be made from 'the Business Plan in education' – privatising school and local district/local education authority provision. Alex Molnar and his Centre Against Commercialism in Education at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee do a brilliant job here, looking at this in the USA – the advertising, franchising, ownership by private big business education companies.<sup>23</sup> Hatcher also looks at the 'Business Plan for Education'. How capital, in its international fora, are deciding how to make schooling – and higher and further education – fit for capital.

## What Next for the Three?

Peter: So, what are you all working on at the moment? And what projects will you be involved in over the next year or so?

Glenn: Well, for me, there's the Hillcole pamphlets (Seattle, and the one on Which Blair/Blair Witch), the paper that presents my own position on Marxist educational theory, *That Other Great Class of Commodities*. Also working on a book on Education Action Zones with Stewart Ranson, Richard Hatcher and Faith Webster – called *Inside Education Action Zones*. Developing stuff on time, abstract labour and abstract and historical time – with Michael Neary.<sup>24</sup> I've also done research on the UK horological industry recently (not a lot of people know that), and some of this will appear in articles. Having been involved in contract research almost solid for the last four years, I'm writing more this year than for many years.

Mike: Well, I've just finished editing a book *entitled Education, Equality and Human Rights*. It will be published by Routledge/Falmer in May 2000. It has chapters on gender, 'race', sexuality, special needs and social class per se and then on their relationship to education. I've co-written the chapters on 'race' and on 'race' and education. I'm also working on an edited collection with Dave called *Schooling and Equality: Fact, Concept and Policy*, to be published by Kogan Page, late in 2000. And I'm about to review your Che and Paolo Freire book<sup>25</sup> for the (London) *Times Higher Education Supplement*. I've travelled extensively and have just embarked on writing a book, which will relate the various political and social experiences I've had travelling in North America, Asia, Africa, Australasia and in Europe.

Dave: I think that in my own work, I need to get more sophisticated theoretically, and to turn to analysing neo-liberalism both theoretically and in policy terms in relation to the steadily progressing marketisation of education. And there's related work on the 'Third Way' – an edited collection and a solo book, exploring various aspects of the Third Way – in general, and how that particular confidence trick relates specifically to education. Plus I have an article on Marxist educational theory on the horizon

– I'm still trying to develop the argument – coming out in *the British Journal of Sociology of Education*. And, we must not lose sight of developing policy and strategy. Armchair work and publishing is fine and necessary, but so is streetwork, conference work, activism- organising. They inform each other, for all of us.

Oh, and I'm fixing up a discussion/lecture/seminar tour of USA for the month of May 2001 – with Glenn and Mike – if they can get some time off. I wanna meet with and talk with you guys! Any invites welcome!

Peter: (Laughs) Okay, Dave, see you soon! Well: you all sound busy! Lots on the horizon! Thanks very much for speaking to me. It's been great talking to the three of you, and I look forward to reading your new works, and to continuing to work with you.

**END**

## NOTES

1. Glenn Rikowski (1999) Third Fantasy from the Right, *Education and Social Justice*, 1(3), pp.25-27.
2. See Mike Cole (1998) Globalisation, Modernisation and Competitiveness: a critique of the Labour project in education. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 8(3), pp. 315-332.
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# **Postmodernism in Educational Theory: Education and the Politics of Human Resistance**

**Edited by Dave Hill, Peter McLaren, Mike Cole and  
Glenn Rikowski**

Postmodernism has become the orthodoxy in educational theory, particularly in feminist educational theory. It heralds the end of grand theories like Marxism and liberalism, scorning any notion of a united feminist challenge to patriarchy, of united anti-racist struggle and of united working-class movements against capitalist exploitation and oppression. For postmodernists, the world is fragmented, history is ended, and all struggles are local and particularistic.

Written by leading and internationally renowned British and North American socialist and Marxist thinkers and activists, *Postmodernism in Educational Theory* poses a serious challenge to this postmodern orthodoxy. Authors critically examine the infusion of postmodernism and theories of postmodernity into educational theory, policy and research. In addition, issues such as social class, 'race' and racism, gender, education policy and policy analysis, youth, and capital and commodification are addressed.

Writers in the book argue that despite the claims of self-styled 'postmodernists of resistance', postmodernism provides neither a viable educational politics, nor a foundation for effective radical educational practice. In place of postmodernism, the book outlines a 'politics of human resistance' which puts the challenge to capital(ism) and its attendant inequalities firmly on the agenda of educational theory, politics and practice.

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## The Hillcole Group

The Hillcole Group was founded in 1989 by Dave Hill and Mike Cole at the Institute for Education Policy Studies. It is a group of socialist practitioners and academics in education in Britain. Their aim is to improve the quality of schooling and teacher education; to confront the assaults by the radical right on the quality of education; and to influence policy and decision making on educational matters.

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In the conclusion, Caroline Benn and Clyde Chitty argue that the left must go beyond critique of existing policy drives and produce an alternative to old ideas about educating for business. They must construct an education policy in which the values and goals of democracy, equality and real educational and social progress are central.

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Even Adam Smith said that education was too important to leave to the whim of the market place, and we must reassert the social principles on which education should be based, for the good of the individual and society. The future that free market ideologists plan for us must be changed.

In this book the Hillcole Group renew and extend their criticism of changes made to and proposed for the education system by the Conservative government, many of them adopted by the New Labour government. They move beyond criticism to outline their proposals for an integrated comprehensive education-training system, from pre-school to post-18 and beyond, based on principles of equality and democratic accountability. Changes are proposed for the structure of the system, for curriculum and assessment, for teacher education, and for resources and funding. The proposals are drawn together in a New Education Act which provides an educational charter for the entire population, integrating education and training throughout the system. New bodies would be established to monitor and enforce high standards of participation, achievement and provision at all stages, and to integrate preparation for work with education for personal and community development. The Hillcole Group have laid down a challenge to all political parties, and revitalised the 'Education Debate' with a fresh vision of the future for education.

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### **Ann Marie Davies, Janet Holland & Rehana Minhas**

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**Dave Hill**

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**The Hillcole Group**

We argued in this pamphlet that the 'triumphalism' of educational Conservatism was hollow. Far from resolving the problems of education in England and Wales, it made them worse. At the same time it creating the conditions for its own downfall. Working through the effects of change in the different sectors of education, *Falling Apart* showed how Conservative policy created unmanageable organisational problems, while at the same time bringing into being an opposition that could destroy it.

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