

Marx and Education: working with the revolutionary educatorⁱ

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Abstract

This paper positions education as productive work, i.e. radical labour. It argues that education is a deliberate and conscious process directed to the building of human capacities to labour for socialist transformation. In drawing on the intellectual resources left by Marx the objective of education is the production of the 'revolutionary subject'. Such radical labouring does not frame 'production' from the perspective of Capital but from that of Labour. It does not take 'production' in its narrow bourgeois economic sense. Rather, it is cast in a broader historico-political frame that fully appreciates the radical potential of Labour and the power of labour. Marxian education is a form of socialist humanism that expresses the class agency as a productive process of simultaneously confronting and of participating in history.

Keywords: Marx, Marxism, education, socialism, historical materialism.

It is a timeworn observation amongst academic educationalists that Marx wrote very little, directly, on education. For example, in his review of educational sociology over thirty years ago, Jack Demaine reported what Marx did write on the subject was “scattered” through his work without offering any “systematic elaboration of a theory of education” (1981: 65). More recently Robin Small as part of his extensive study of the contribution of Marx and Marxian ideas to educational thought, made a similar point:

Even though Marx did not write any thorough treatment of education, what he did write is sufficient to indicate the general outlines of his approach to education. Where there are gaps, they can often be filled in by drawing upon other material. Marx's theories were intended to be put to work in looking into particular problems, and so, by using them in this way within our own investigations, we are following a course which is true to their original purpose. (Small 2005: viii)

I concur that it is certainly the case that Marx did not direct his considerable intellectual energies to either a sustained elaboration of education or the specifics of a well-developed approach to education. Indeed, one has to trawl Marx's voluminous works to find what might accurately be described as the occasional exploration of general educational themes and issues.ⁱⁱ However, like Small, I do not see this absence of a 'thorough treatment of education' by Marx a debilitating barrier to the development of a coherent Marxian view of education. But in what does such coherence consist? On this matter Small insists, correctly in my view,

that it is less important to draw on what Marx specifically said *about* education than it is to go about ‘putting to work’ his broad theories *for* radical and transformative educational praxis. In developing this idea in his most recent work, Small describes Marx-the-revolutionary as Marx-the-educator:

Marx is an educator for us. He challenges us to develop our capacity to think critically about our own society and, in particular, to look beneath the surface of schooling and find out what is really happening in this area of social life. (Small 2014: 2)

I believe Small’s instincts here are both correct and instructive. It is Karl Marx as the revolutionary educator that makes it possible to conceive of Marx *and* education. I take this to be the meaning of and the force behind Small’s provocation: ‘Marx is an educator for us’. It calls to those of ‘us’ who understand the purposeful vitality of any education worth its name to be nothing other than radical praxis. Simultaneously, it is an invitation to engage in a process – an unfinished project – that takes education as a necessary (but not sufficient) ingredient of revolutionary socialist strategy. Behind the provocation – and in the context of what is to follow is the view that education is a liberating force that, in its unfinished nature, is an open process of self-reflexive engagement. In other words, we can say that the substance of Marxian education will not be located in the words of educational scriptures or the logic of elegant curriculum plans laid out over 150 years ago. The argument presented below is that such a *formal* approach to understanding Marx and education is both limited and limiting. Rather, the point will be that Marxian education is to be built from an engagement with the *content* of Marx’s work i.e. from the theoretical resources he provides to develop human and humanizing capacities to envision and actualize alternative post-capitalist futures. In other words, as long as humanity is ruled by the logic Capitalⁱⁱⁱ then education can be nothing but “the labour of thinking out *and working out* in everyday life an alternative to capitalism” (Hudis 2013: 215).

To be clear, such building work opens terrain beyond that of particular historically specific institutional educational *forms* like schooling and higher education. While considerations of form are important, working with Marx educationally necessarily implies the identification and clarification of emancipatory content. These are first order concerns and are central to what constitutes the urgent historical task for Marxian education (Malott et al. 2013). To borrow from István Mészáros (2008), it represents the challenge and burden of our historical time: the reclaiming of history for humanity. Its urgency is witnessed every day in what has now been more than three decades of neoliberal assault on the foundations of human existence across the globe. This assault, as David Harvey (2005) reminds us, comes not from the hand of nature but from the fist of Capital. Neoliberalism is a political project waged by the global capitalist elite. It is directed to the ultimate and complete dominance of Capital over Labour. It is class war on a brutally grand scale. The consistent ideological messages coming from the political and intellectual representatives of Capital have been that human history has come to its end (e.g. Fukuyama 1992) which was perhaps most infamously captured in Margaret Thatcher’s TINA dictum: There Is No Alternative (to capitalism).

The prime task of this paper is to position education as productive work, i.e. radical labour. It argues that education is a deliberate and conscious process directed to the building of human capacities to labour for socialist transformation. In drawing upon on the intellectual resources left by Marx the objective of education is the production of the ‘revolutionary subject’ (Banfield 2015a). Such radical labouring does not frame ‘production’ from the perspective of Capital but from that of Labour. It does not take ‘production’ in its narrow bourgeois *economic* sense. Rather, it is cast in a broader *historico-political* frame that fully appreciates the radical potential of Labour and the power of labour. What I advance is a form of socialist humanism that expresses the class agency of the proletariat (see Lebowitz 2006). John Freeman-Moir captures this well in what he describes as a ‘Marxian sense of education’ i.e. a “political education [that] can be understood as the process of consciously turning towards history in the course of participating in history” (2004: 555).

In positioning Marxian education as revolutionary capacity-building work, the paper presents two related issues that are fundamental to Marxian praxis and its educational content. The first attends to a consideration of the materialist view of history as the core of Marx’s work. It will be argued that historical materialism represents the very sinew of the Marx and education relation. Particular attention will be given to Marx’s economic works and the centrality of the labour theory of value in explicating the content of Marxian education. The second fundamental issue turns attention to the nature of the revolutionary subject. Here, the idea of human agency is brought to the fore in order to emphasise Marx’s idea of labour power as a human capacity. Following Marx, the argument will be that labour power is a commodity of a special kind. Given its potential for consciousness and self-reflexive creativity it has the power, unlike other commodities, not only to fuel the furnaces of capitalism but also to burn them down. But the latter possibility can only be fully grasped from the vantage point of Labour i.e. from a perspective beyond Capital (Lebowitz 1992) that also, importantly, includes Marx’s internal critique of political economy in *Capital*.

The final section draws the previous issues to a conclusion by emphasising their point of commonality: the idea that education, by necessity and definition, is class struggle (Banfield 2010). For Capital, ‘education’ is about limiting horizons of possibility within its own vista and bringing closure to history. It expresses pedagogies of hopelessness. For Labour – and humanity – education is about envisioning alternative possibilities and participating in the radical openness of history. It expresses pedagogies of hope enlivened in and through the development of class-consciousness. For Labour, education is political education. Its *raison d’être* resides in facilitating people’s exploration of the nature and extent of their powers and, in this active doing, enabling them to not only discover but also pursue their class interests (Banfield 2013). To grasp the significance of Marx *and* education is to understand the revolutionary potential of doing history work i.e. of placing history in human hands. This also means appreciating the historical context from which Marx-the-educator emerged.

Marx: Philosopher, Political Scientist, and Revolutionary

Nihil humani a me alienum puto ('I consider that nothing human is alien to me')
De omnibus dubitandum ('You must have doubts about everything')^{iv}

Karl Marx was born on 5th May 1818 in Trier - one of the oldest cities in Germany. His parents, Heinrich and Henrietta, were Jewish but Marx remained an atheist through his entire adult life. Before Marx's birth, his father converted to Protestantism in order to keep his job as a lawyer. Heinrich Marx was a well-respected member of Trier's professional class. He and Henrietta provided their son with a solid middle-class upbringing. While the politics of Henrietta is unclear, Heinrich is known to have been a prominent liberal in Trier. This must have influenced the early thinking of his son. Furthermore, according to David McLellan, it was also the political events that surrounded Marx's childhood days that shaped his future radicalism:

... during the Napoleonic wars, together with the rest of the Rhineland, [Trier] had been annexed by France and governed long enough in accordance with the principles of the French Revolution to be imbued by a taste for freedom of speech and constitutional liberty uncharacteristic of the rest of Germany. There was considerable discontent following incorporation of the Rhineland into Prussia in 1814. Trier had little industry ... [and the] consequent unemployment and high process caused increases in beggary, prostitution and emigration; more than a quarter of the city's population subsisted entirely on public charity. ... Thus it is not surprising that Trier was one of the first cities in Germany where French doctrines of utopian socialism appeared. (1987: 2)

At the age of seventeen, Marx left home for university. He studied law and philosophy at Bonn and Berlin. His thesis, and the culmination of his university studies, was an exploration of the thinking of the Greek philosophers Democritus and Epicurus. But Marx's time at university is probably most significantly marked by his introduction to Hegelian philosophy. The influence of Hegel on Marx was profound as British Marxist scholar Andrew Collier notes:

... at university [Marx] encountered Hegel, whose philosophical system dominated German universities at the time. In Hegel's thought, many apparent opposites are reconciled for instance the French Revolutionary belief in the sovereignty of reason and the romantics' belief in organic community. Hegel's political philosophy is not a compromise between reason and organic community. It is, in intention, rationalist through and through. The same could be said ... of the society Marx was to aim for. (2004: 8)

Collier echoes here what is generally acknowledged amongst Marxist scholars, that Marx's work emerges from three sources. As Lenin noted, these are the "direct and immediate continuation of the teachings of German philosophy, English political economy and French socialism" (Lenin 1977 / 1913: 21). From the latter, Marx formed the idea of human history as a more or less rational movement towards a free and peaceful society (McLellan 1980: 134). English political economy furnished Marx with the beginnings of his labour theory of value. Both Adam Smith and David Ricardo had already shown that labour was the essence of value. However, Marx took up their work to develop a distinctive theory of value that not

only revealed the surface movements of capitalism but, unlike Smith and Ricardo, also made transparent its inner workings that brought to light the internally contradictory seeds of its own destruction. Against the assumption of bourgeois economists that capitalism represented the end-point of history, Marx was able to point to its transient and social nature. As Marx put it, ‘classical economists’ like Smith and Ricardo have no interest in explaining something like poverty as more than “merely the pang which accompanies every childbirth, in nature as in industry” (Marx 1977 / 1847: 211). Importantly, Marx’s experiences in the French Revolution of 1848 stand in contrast to the assumptions of British political economists that construct people as self-seeking individuals and that naturalise capitalist social relations. In the ‘June Days Uprising’, Marx witnessed, first hand, that class struggle was not simply an egoistic response to exploitation. Rather, it represented the historical unfolding of real dialectical contradictions. Just like the Paris Commune of 1871, class struggle could provide the embryo of socialist revolution (Marx 1966 / 1850, 1969 / 1871).

Importantly, it was through Hegel that Marx came to understand human history dialectically. They both wrote from a backdrop of the French Revolution and shared the revolutionary idea that freedom was essential to being human. However, Marx was to eventually reject Hegel’s political reformism and defence of bourgeois society. For example, Hegel argued that freedom always took a specific historical form, and that the progression of history brought the development of concrete possibilities to undermine old forms. But Hegel posited that the expression of ultimate freedom had already arrived in the form of the Prussian state. Just as bourgeois apologists today tell us that liberal capitalist democracy is the pinnacle of human achievement, Hegel told the Prussian citizenry that its state represented the fulfilment of history.

While Marx accepted the methodological core of Hegel’s dialectics he ultimately rejected what he saw as its conservative idealist form. For Marx, his materialist dialectics was an inversion of Hegel’s idealism. As he said in reflecting on his debt to Hegel: “With him [the dialectic] is standing on its head. It must be inverted, in order to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell” (Marx 1976 / 1873: 103). Central to the development of Marx’s materialist dialectics was his involvement with a group of radical German Hegelians. Formed in the late 1830s and known as the ‘Young Hegelians’, they rejected the politically reformist and conservative directions of Hegel’s philosophy. The influence of the Young Hegelians on Marx and, his lifetime collaborator, Frederick Engels through the late 1830s and early 1840s was considerable (see McLellan 1969). Their influence can be seen in the degree to which the Young Hegelian Ludwig Feuerbach and his materialist critique of religion shaped the development of Marx’s materialist view of history. As Lucio Colletti notes, Feuerbach had a “significant place in the critique and dissolution of Hegelianism in Germany, and so on the formation of Marx’s thought” (1975: 23). However, in time, Marx and Engels dismissed Feuerbach’s humanism as just as abstract and idealist as the Hegelian system it sought to replace (Engels 1946 / 1886; Marx 1966 / 1845). By 1845, both Marx and Engels had split with the Young Hegelians. Their critiques of them were sharp:

Since the Young Hegelians consider conceptions, thoughts, ideas, in fact all the products of consciousness, to which they attribute an independent existence, as the real chains of men ... it is evident that the Young Hegelians have to fight only against these illusions of consciousness. Since, according to their fantasy, the relations of men, all their doings, their fetters and their limitations are the product of their consciousness, the Young Hegelians logically put to men the moral postulate of exchanging their present consciousness for human, critical or egoistic consciousness. (Marx and Engels 1976 / 1845 - 6: 35 - 36)

In the light of such cutting critiques of German philosophy, it is perhaps easy to see why Marx has been characterised, in some quarters, as having broken with philosophy. Most famously, of course, it was Louis Althusser who claimed to have found an ‘epistemological break’ in Marx’s work that made it possible to identify a ‘young’ humanist Marx and a ‘mature’ scientific Marx. As will become clear in the following sections, I reject not only this distinction but also the argument that, in his mature wisdom, Marx “broke with his erstwhile philosophy” (Althusser 1996: 33). Rather, I will argue that radical educational praxis requires both philosophy and science. In other words, utopian philosophical vision and hard-nosed scientific critique are necessary dialectical partners in what John Freeman-Moir (2004) aptly calls ‘turning towards history’.

If Marxian education is to avoid ‘turning from history’ then it must be alert to its own Marxist history. Colletti’s observations of the place of Marx’s early works are instructive here:

A whole generation of Marxist theorists knew next to nothing ... of Marx’s philosophical writings ... [They] approached Marx via *Capital* and his other writings (mainly economic, historical or political) and were unable to fully understand the philosophical precedents and background underlying them. They could not give the reasons, philosophical as well as practical, which induced Marx to give up philosophy after his break with Hegel and Feuerbach; induced him to devote himself to the analysis of modern capitalist society, instead of going to write a philosophical treatise of his own. (1975: 8)

The death of Marx in 1883 saw European worker organisations turn to Engels for intellectual leadership and the articulation of historical materialism to the political practicalities of advancing the socialist project. This represents a point in time of socialist history that probably marks, as Gareth Stedman Jones observes, “the transition ... from Marx to Marxism” (1973: 19). While Engels had worked in close collaboration with Marx through most of his adult life, it was Marx who was known as the prime intellectual driving force of the relationship. It was only after Marx’s death that Engels took the role of “consciously speaking as the foremost authority on a comprehensive socialist worldview that bore the birthmarks of his own interpretive spin” (Steger and Carver 1999b: 4). This also coincided with the materialist view of history coming to be increasingly interpreted along determinist lines and used in the justification of political reformism rather than as the guiding thread for social revolution. While it is a matter of intense debate as to the extent to which any ‘interpretive spin’ of Engels contributed to this revisionism (see Steger and Carver 1999a) the influence of the German Social Democratic Party (SDP) on European socialist thought of the time is certainly central.

The SDP rose on the expansion of industrial capitalism in Europe. The consequent increase in working class numbers was coupled with a growth in socialist organisations and class-consciousness. But the defeats in the 1848 and 1871 revolutions resulted in a dampening of revolutionary spirit and organisational drive to directly challenge capital (see Harman 2008). This saw the political activism of European workers directed to winning concessions from Capital and building reformist worker organisations. The evolutionary strategy of the SDP appeared to be working and could be seen, as Chris Harman has chronicled in its “network of ancillary organisations (unions, welfare societies and so on) [that] became part of the fabric of people’s lives in many industrial districts. ... It seemed to show that capitalist democracy could be turned against capitalism” (Harman 2008: 391). The success of the SDP in building a mass base of working class support was noted by other socialist parties and labour organisations across Europe. They took its reformist lead.

Following Engels’ death in 1889, socialist parties and worker organisations from across Europe (along with the SDP) gathered in Paris to form the Second International (1889 – 1914). The theoretical and political gravity of the Second International was firmly located in German social democracy (Johnstone 1991). The intellectual leaders of the Second International were SDP members Eduard Bernstein and Karl Kautsky. From Bernstein, the Second International derived its suspicion of Hegel, giving impetus to its drift towards the determinism of positivist science. From Kautsky, the Second International formed a belief in parliamentary reformism over revolution. Kautsky saw his intellectual roots being completely different from those of Marx and Engels: “They started with Hegel, I started with Darwin” (from Callinicos 1999: 112). The idea of an evolutionary path toward socialism was set (see: Salvadori 1990; Steger 1997).

The significance of Kautsky’s remarks and the experience of the Second International more generally is that it brings to focus the question of what precisely is the ‘Marx’ in Marxism? Where is Marx-the-revolutionary in evolutionary socialism? Indeed, we may extend this to ask where is Marx if, for example, he is called to the postmodern heels of Frederick Nietzsche (as in post-Marxism) or into the *Verstehen* orbit of Max Weber (as in neo-Marxism). It is from these contextual considerations that we can now ask: what is the essence, or content, of Marxian education?

The Guiding Thread: Materialist View of History

As Marx famously put it in his Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, the materialist view of history is the ‘guiding thread’ to all his work on political economy (Marx 1966 / 1859: 503). Its theoretical centrality to Marxism was amplified by Engels who proclaimed that, along with the theory of surplus value, ‘historical materialism’ represented Marx’s greatest scientific discovery (Engels 1970 / 1883)^v.

If the scientific core of Marxist theory is the materialist view of history, then its prime concept is ‘mode of production’. In providing an explanatory basis for fundamental societal change, mode of production is understood to consist in a combination of what Marx refers to

as the forces of production and the relations of production. The famous passage from the *Preface* presents this with clarity:

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, their real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production. [...] From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. (Marx 1970 / 1859: 20 - 21)

A striking feature of the *Preface* passage is the apparent absence of active human engagement in, and with, such change. For example, Marx refers to consciousness as nothing but a ‘determined’ product of ‘social existence’. But is this a jettisoning of philosophy for science, as some have argued? Care needs to be taken here with Marx’s concepts – particularly in this instance that of determination. It should be noted that, as Marx makes explicit in *The German Ideology*, the ‘real process of production’ does not simply refer to material (or ‘economic’) production:

This conception of history thus relies on expounding the real process of production - starting from the material production of life itself - and comprehending the form of intercourse connected with and created by this mode of production, i.e. civil society in its various stages, as the basis of all history; describing it in its action as the state, and also explaining how all the different theoretical products and forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, morality, etc., etc., arise from it, and tracing the process of their formation from that basis; thus the whole thing can, of course, be depicted in its totality (and therefore, too, the reciprocal action of these various aspects on one another). (Marx and Engels 1976 / 1845 - 6: 61)

Here Marx makes clear that production consists in a totality determining *and* co-determining relations. We can take from this that Marx’s idea of determination does not refer simply to all-powerful uni-linear forces but includes historically contingent and contextually emergent forces in the ‘real process of production’ (Banfield 2010). Furthermore, it is clear that humans produce not just material things but ‘theoretical products’ as well. This is a crucial point for theorising education. As the following section will develop further, if human agents were erased from history, then a Marxian conception of education, or any conception of education, would be impossible. In anticipation of that argument to come, it should be emphasised that writing humans out of history was neither Marx’s intent nor is it a feature of his materialist view of history. But the fundamental point remains that in order for people to ‘make history’ they first must be able to live:

... life involves before everything else eating and drinking, housing, clothing and many other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself. And indeed this is an historical act, a fundamental condition of all history, which today, as thousands of years ago, must daily and hourly be fulfilled merely in order to sustain human life. (Marx and Engels 1976 / 1845 - 6: 47)

The ‘fundamental condition of all history’ is production for human need. Whether the mode of production is capitalist, slave, feudal or other, this “*earthly* basis” (Marx and Engels 1976 / 1845 - 6: 48) is the first act of history. For Marx, the development of productive forces (which requires knowledge of both nature and how to change nature) necessarily occurs in particular relations of production (or forms of social cooperation). It is in the labour process that these forces and forms of social relations are brought together for the purpose of the production of use-values: “It is an appropriation of what exists in nature for the requirements of man^{vi}. It is the universal condition for the metabolic interaction [*Stoffwechsel*] between man and nature, the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence” (Marx 1976 / 1867: 290).

To be clear, by referring to the ‘requirements of man’, Marx is operating at a high level of abstraction. In adopting a vantage point of the labour process in general, the panorama of all possible modes of production is brought into view. But Marx is aware that, in doing this, more concrete production relations are occluded. “The taste of porridge”, as Marx put it, “does not tell us who grew the oats, and ... does not reveal the conditions under which it takes place, whether it is happening under the slave owner’s brutal lash or the anxious eye of the capitalist” (Marx 1976 / 1867: 290 - 291). The way in which the means of production and labour power are brought together differentiates one mode of production from another. In class societies, direct producers are forced to labour for a non-producing minority where the former work to produce surplus value for the latter. As such, the basis of class societies is exploitation. How the extraction of a surplus from one class by another is achieved “distinguishes the various economic epochs of the social structure” (Marx 1978 / 1884: 120).

Exploitation is obvious in slave and feudal societies. The threat of physical violence is always a possibility and is ever-present. However, things are – or, rather, *appear* - different in the day-to-day life under the capitalist mode of production. It seems that labour and capital come together in the market place as equals seeking to negotiate a ‘fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay’. This is not the case for the slave or the serf. The market is both a level playing field and an effective leveller where worker is ‘free’ to sell or withhold their power to labour power according to their wishes. Without any apparent or overt physical threat or domination, no obvious force is involved compelling the worker to exchange their labour for a wage. But Marx makes it clear that this freedom carries a ‘double sense’. The wage labourer is “free from the old relations of clientship, bondage and servitude, and secondly free of all belongings and possession, and of every objective, material form of being, *free of all property*; dependent on the sale of [their] labour capacity or on begging, vagabondage and robbery as its only source of income” (Marx 1973 / 1857 - 8: 507).

Marx's point here is that, within the capitalist mode of production, exploitation is concealed and freedom comes to be expressed as a-historical atomised individualism. But this egoistic sense of freedom disguises the reality of the social nature of production upon which the possibility of capitalist accumulation rests. Here we have what Harvey (2014) describes as one of the 'fundamental contradictions' of capitalism: the tension of private appropriation and common wealth. To grasp this contradiction at its root it is useful to compare capitalist relations of production to those of feudal societies (see Engels 1947/1878). Under feudalism, the processes of production and appropriation were essentially governed by individualistic peasant-lord relations. They took place on communal land that peasants not only worked for their own survival but also needed to resist lordly power. However, with the emergence of capitalism, production is socialised (e.g. bringing workers under one factory roof in the case of industrial capitalism) while accumulation remains individualised (Wood 2002). Whereas the former reveals the necessity of cooperative interdependency, the gravity of the latter sinks sociability and demands that people confront each other as self-interested competitors.

As such, the 'freedom' - and the equally problematic appropriation of 'democracy' (Wood 1995) - so enthusiastically trumpeted by the defenders of capitalism is, pure and simple, ideology: a superficial (but never-the-less real) expression of deeper underlying contradictory social relations of production (see Larrain 1979). In *Capital*, Marx provides many concrete examples of the contradictory nature of capitalism. For example, in Part 8 of Volume I he explicates his theory of primitive accumulation, and describes the 'clearings' made by the Duchess of Sutherland in the early 1800s for sheep pastures. It is instructive to quote at length:

This person, who had been well instructed in economics, resolved, when she succeeded to the headship of the clan, to undertake a radical economic cure, and to turn the whole country of Sutherland, the population of which had already been reduced to 15,000 by similar processes, into a sheep-walk. Between 1814 and 1820 these 15,000 inhabitants, about 3,000 families, were systematically hunted and rooted out. All their villages were destroyed and burnt, all their fields turned into pasturage. British soldiers enforced this mass of evictions, and came to blows with the inhabitants. One old woman was burnt to death in the flames of the hut she refused to leave. It was in this manner that this fine lady appropriated 794,000 acres of land which had belonged to the clan from time immemorial. She assigned to the expelled inhabitants some 6,000 acres on the sea-shore – 2 acres per family. The 6,000 acres had lain until this time waste, and brought in no income to their owners, The Duchess, in the nobility of her heart actually went so far as to let these waste lands at an average rent of 2s. 6d. per acre to the clansmen, who for centuries had shed their blood for her family. (Marx 1976 / 1867: 891-2)

Such forms of dispossession have been central features of the generation of capital and vital to the history of capitalism (Wood 2002). We witness this in the violent global expansionism of colonial capitalism where "all nations, on pain of extinction, [are compelled] to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; ... to become bourgeois themselves" (Marx and Engels 1966 / 1848: 112). But, importantly, this process continues to this day. Harvey, for example, theorises a 'new imperialism' characterised by 'accumulation by dispossession'. This is what

we know of today as neoliberalism where mechanisms of privatisation, financialisation, state redistribution policies, along with the creation and manipulation of crises, augment the appropriation of land and the enclosure of public commons (Harvey 2003).

Noting the historical continuance of capitalism must alert us not to the coincidence of historical events or to the work of great individuals (as per the stories bourgeois history tell). Rather, it should draw attention to historical patterning and the necessity of identifying the enduring social mechanisms that have operated, for example, from times of nineteenth century land enclosures to the new methods of capital accumulation employed in neoliberal times. Marx provides the critical resources – or, more precisely, the resources for critique – to do this work. *Capital* is one such source. In this work he takes us to the very heart of Capital and its economic cell-form: the commodity.

Marx opens *Capital* Volume I with the sentence: “The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an immense collection of commodities” (1976 / 1867: 125). This is seductively straightforward – and so vividly obvious that we can imagine Marx was talking about the supermarket shelves or the shopping malls we know today. However, reading further through the early chapters of *Capital* we learn that there is much more to this opening line than first meets the eye. Firstly, the careful eye will note that Marx regularly uses the word ‘appear’ or phrases like ‘the appearance of things’. On these occasions he is drawing attention to the existence of what British critical realist Roy Bhaskar (1986, 1997, 1998) would refer to as deeper ontological strata existing below and occluded by the mere appearance of things (see Banfield 2003, 2010, 2013). It is in this way that we can grasp Marx’s description of capitalism as a generalised system of commodity production where the products of labour typically take the appearance of commodities to be bought and sold on the market. From the vantage point of Capital, the potential of workers to labour is also a commodity to be exploited. To return to the motif of freedom so cherished by capitalists, this means that a worker is “free in the double sense that as a free individual he can dispose of his labour power as his own commodity, and that, on the other hand, he has no other commodity for sale, i.e. he is rid of them, he is free of all the objects needed for the realization [*Verwirklichung*] of his labour-power” (Marx 1976 / 1867: 272 - 273). In other words, capitalist relations of production presuppose the separation of direct producers from ownership of the means of production.

As a commodity, labour power has *exchange* value like any other commodity. Its *use* value “consists in the subsequent exercise of that power ... its real manifestation” (Marx 1976 / 1867: 277). According to the labour theory of value, not only is labour a source of the value of commodities but also the worker creates more value than the value of their labour power. The surplus value is profit for the capitalist. While, from the perspective of Capital, the reality appears as a ‘fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay’, from the vantage point of Labour surplus value is nothing but unpaid surplus labour. Superficially, “the sphere of circulation or commodity exchange” consisting in interactions between apparently free and equal commodity-owners posits “a very Eden of the innate rights of man ... the exclusive realm of Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham” (Marx 1976 / 1867: 280). However, beyond “this

noisy sphere, where everything takes place on the surface and in full view of everyone ... [rests] the hidden mode of production” (Marx 1976 / 1867: 279). It is here, in the deep structures of capitalist society, that exploitation is revealed:

When we leave this sphere of simple circulation or the exchange of commodities, which provides the ‘free-trader *vulgaris*’ with his views, his concepts and the standard by which he judges the society of capital and wage-labour, a certain change takes place ... He who was previously the money owner now strides out in front as a capitalist; the possessor of labour power follows as his worker. The one smirks self-importantly and is intent on business; the other is timid and holds back, like someone who has brought his own hide to market and now has nothing else to expect but – a tanning. (Marx 1976 / 1867: 280)

We see here, in all the power of Marx’s biting imagery, Labour from the view of Capital. These are the last words Marx offers before he takes the reader beyond Part 2 of *Capital* Volume I. From the ‘noisy sphere of the market’ to the ‘hidden mode of production’ the reader learns of the deep occluded realities generating the extraction of surplus value, the exploitation of labour and the drive for the incessant pursuit of capital accumulation. Throughout, the power of capital weighs down – almost deterministically - on labour. But it should be recalled that *Capital* is one-sided. As Ernst Mandel notes in his introduction to the text, “Marx’s fundamental aim was to lay bare the laws of motion which govern the origins, the rise, the development, the decline and the disappearance of a given form of economic organisation: the capitalist mode of production”. Importantly, the purpose of *Capital* was not to discover universal economic ‘laws’ to serve the ends of prediction. *Capital* is “not ‘pure’ economic theory at all. For Marx, ‘pure’ economic theory, that is economic theory which abstracts from a specific social structure, is impossible” (Mandel 1976: 12). Rather, *Capital* offers an internal critique of capital that, in exposing the logic of bourgeois economics from within, can be used to overthrow bourgeois relations. This points to a move beyond both *Capital* and capital - and a turn to the power of labour (and, of course, Labour). In doing so, it exposes the tension between the human as commodity and the human as radical power. It also raises the fundamental ontological question of the nature of being human and the possibility of the revolutionary subject.

Education Work: Producing the Revolutionary Subject

In its full emancipatory sense, education is revolutionary work: a project of capacity building that both requires and produces human agents. As such, the ontological content of revolutionary education must be underpinned by a particular view of human nature. For Marxian education this must be a historically materialist one. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx famously announced that it is human beings that “make their own history, but ... not ... as they please” (Marx 1966 / 1852: 398). Interestingly, we find in *Capital* – the pinnacle of Marx’s ‘mature’ scientific work – the view of humans as active and historically situated agents being contrasted with, what Marx calls, the ‘Robinsonades’ of bourgeois thought. Marx reveals that in constructing their theories of society, bourgeois theoreticians like Adam Smith and David Ricardo were “fond of Robinson Crusoe stories” (1976 / 1867: 169) because they portrayed a view of ‘Man as the Natural Individual’: “not

arising historically, but posited by nature” (Marx 1973 / 1857 - 8: 83). If Robinson Crusoe was Daniel Defoe’s character hero, then the imaginary idol of political economists was and remains the ‘Natural Individual’. Thrown into competitive isolation with nature’s vicissitudes, Bourgeois Man was constructed as the ideal: the image of ‘Natural Man’ finally released from the bonds of all previous social relations. In the preparatory notes he made for *Capital*, Marx put it this way:

In this society of free competition, the individual appears detached from the natural bonds etc. which in earlier historical periods make him the accessory of a definite and limited human conglomerate. Smith and Ricardo still stand with both feet on the shoulders of the eighteenth century prophets, in whose imaginations this eighteenth century individual ... appears as an ideal, whose existence they project into the past. (Marx 1973 / 1857 - 8: 83)

In contrast to Smith, Ricardo and their ‘eighteenth century prophets’, Marx’s view of human beings is, in a vital sense, thoroughly social. For example, in his Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach, Marx described the “human essence [as] no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In reality, it is the ensemble of the social relations” (1966 / 1845: 14) that, Marx stresses, “conditions ... general social, political and intellectual life” (1966 / 1859: 20 - 21). We can take from this that ‘social being’ represents the historical dimension of Marx’s theory of human nature. It is constituted by those observable features of human action and historical events that, as Mihailo Marović notes, provide “the empirical scientific ground for any sound theory of human nature” (1991: 243).

However, Marx recognised that taking exclusively historico-empirical route to social being risks arrival at historicist destinations that ultimately dispense with any meaningful conception of what it is to be human. He saw historicism tending to reductionism (e.g. biological, sociological or psychological), empiricism (where human nature is simply what is observed) and scientism (human beings consist in patterns of a-historical characteristics). Indeed, historicism for Marx risked the obliteration of *social* being.

In opposition to historicism, Marx took an Aristotelian route where human nature is seen as consisting in essential powers. But his path was also a realist one where powers are grasped in both their actuality and their potentiality (see Isaac 1988). Understood as capacities, powers exist even if they are empirically absent. A power may not be observed or determining and countervailing powers. Thus, from a realist view of power, human nature experienced, but this does not deny its existence. Below the surface of actual appearance, it remains a force in its potentiality even when frustrated or dampened by co- determining mechanisms as well as historically specific dimensions. To Marx, human nature was simultaneously historical and trans-historical such that those “that would judge all human acts, movements, relations etc. ... would first have to deal with human nature in general, and then with human nature as modified in each historical epoch” (Marx 1976 / 1867: 759).

In dealing with ‘human nature in general’, Marx distinguished between ‘natural being’ and ‘species being’. As natural beings, humans consist in natural world powers that they not only

share with nature but also depend upon for their existence. Marx called this ‘man’s inorganic body’:

... that is to say nature in so far as it is not the human body. Man lives from nature, i.e. nature is his body, and he must maintain a continuing dialogue with it if he is not to die. To say that man’s physical and mental life is linked to nature simply means that nature is linked to itself for man is part of nature. (Marx 1975 / 1844: 328)

The concept of ‘inorganic body’ brings humans and nature into an internal relation. This is the basis of Marx’s materialist commitment to naturalism (Banfield 2013). But Marx’s philosophy of internal relations does not commit his naturalism to a search for first, or final, causes. For Marx, as Ollman argues, “it is the relations in which the so called first causes stand that ... require explanation” (1976: 28). As a realist about powers, Marx’s explanations are ontologically deep, entailing a human-nature continuity. In providing an example of natural continuity, Marx refers to hunger, taking it as a real expression of an objective unsatisfied need:

Hunger is a natural need; it therefore requires a nature and an object outside itself in order to satisfy and still itself. Hunger is the acknowledged need of my body for an object which exists outside itself and which is indispensable to its integration and to the expression of its essential nature. (Marx 1975 / 1844: 390)

Importantly, human nature is not exhausted in ‘natural needs’ and ‘inorganic nature’. It also consists in the powers, capacities and needs that all humans share i.e. species being powers that are qualitatively different from that of other creatures:

A spider conducts operations that resemble those of the weaver, and a bee would put many a human architect to shame by the construction of its honeycomb cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax. At the end of every labour-process, a result emerges which had already been conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence already existed ideally. Man not only effects a change of form in the materials of nature; he also realizes [*verwirklicht*] his own purpose in those materials. And this is a purpose he is conscious of, it determines the mode of his activity with the rigidity of a law, and he must subordinate his will to it. This subordination is no mere momentary act. Apart from the exertion of the working organs, a purposeful will is required for the entire duration of the work. (Marx 1976 / 1867: 284)

According to Marx, human species powers rest in conscious, self-reflexive, and transformative practice where “Productive life is species life” such that, in the “practical creation of an *objective world*, the fashioning of *inorganic nature*, is proof that man is a conscious species-being” (1975 / 1844: 328; 328 - 329). In productive life, human beings not only transform their inorganic body but themselves: they “practically and theoretically” (Marx 1975 / 1844: 327) make their species. It is the coming together of practice and theory that Marx calls ‘praxis’. Human self-creation in history is praxis such that “all history is nothing but a continual transformation of human nature” (Marx 1995 / 1847: 160). It is in this sense that Marx is able to refer to human beings as both ‘universal’ and ‘free’ (see Marx 1975 / 1844: 327). Not only do humans embody universal capacities to (re)make their own species but they can also make their species the object of thought and action. According to Marx,

“man reproduces himself not only intellectually, in his consciousness, but actively and actually, and he can therefore contemplate himself in a world he himself has created” (1975 / 1844: 329). In this way, Marx’s humanism is rooted in a tripartite of being: natural, species and social. Collier (1999) refers to this as an ontological ‘chain of being’ that stretches from non-human nature through to human socio-cultural realities. It expresses an inter-dependence of power relations where natural ‘laws’ (or, rather, ‘tendencies’) of being are basic in underpinning species-being on which social being in turn rests:

The species-being of individuals is ... always and everywhere an *antecedent condition* of their socio-cultural interaction and learning, of any *particular* social structure into which they are born, and therefore of the reproduction or elaboration of all historical socio-cultural systems. (Creaven 2000: 45)

The ‘chain of being’ emphasises natural necessity but avoids reductionist humanism. As Collier puts it, the power of human species being is that “ability to know and value things other than ourselves” (1999: 90). Or, in relation to praxis, it points to capacities not just to know one’s real needs and interests but the ability to judge, value and act upon them. Here, we are able to grasp Marx’s understanding of human beings as self-reflexive producers of nature and “the manifestation of a force of nature” (Marx 1971 / 1875: 11). This is the ‘sensuous activity of labour’ through which

... the creative human transformation of nature occurs. We mean by labour-power, or labour-capacity, the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in the physical form, the living personality, of a human being, capabilities which he sets in motion whenever he produces a use-value of any kind. (Marx 1976 / 1867: 270)

In this view of labour power beyond Capital, the sensuous activity of labour becomes a trans-historical category: a ‘nature in general’ capacity set in motion to produce use-value unconstrained by the compulsion to produce exchange-value. From this vantage point we can begin to conceive of the production of educational use-value. But care needs to be taken in doing so. At times Marx distinguishes between labour and praxis. Where the latter refers to conscious action, the former is sometimes used by Marx to describe “those first instinctive forms ... which remain on the animal level” (Marx 1976 / 1867: 283). The significance of this distinction becomes apparent when Marx talks of ‘alienation’ and ‘alienated labour’. As previously emphasised, labour power takes the form of a commodity within capitalist relations of production. Capital, for Marx is “accumulated labour” (Marx 1975 / 1844: 287), or “dead labour, that, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks” (1976 / 1867: 342). Entombed in commodities, capital is used to purchase living labour in order to accumulate greater amounts of dead labour. In the process of capital accumulation, the living labourer “must sell himself and his humanity” such that his “own labour increasingly confronts him as alien property” (Marx 1975 / 1844: 287; 285).

The externalization [*Entäusserung*] of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an *external* existence, but that it exists *outside him*, independently of him and alien to him, and begins to confront him as an autonomous power; that the life

which he has bestowed on the object confronts him as hostile and alien. (Marx 1975 / 1844: 324)

Here the ‘young’ Marx refers to alienation as expressing a double designation. It evokes an imagery of the subservience of labour that would not be out of place in the pages of *Capital*. On one side of the designation, the reader is presented with the objectification of labour. Alienation occurs because the worker’s own universal nature – her power to labour – is appropriated by an external force. Her own nature becomes an alien thing. It

... appears apparent not only in the fact that the means of *my* life belong to *another* and that *my* desire is the inaccessible possession of *another*, but also in the fact that all things are *other* than themselves, that my activity is *other* than itself, and that finally - and this goes for the capitalist as well - an *inhuman* power rules over everything. (Marx 1975 / 1844: 366)

On the other side, the objectification of the products of labour is revealed. Direct producers are alienated from the products of their labour. No longer seeing themselves in their work they are denied their species life:

In tearing away the object of his production from man, estranged labor therefore tears away from him his *species-life*, his true species-objectivity, and transforms his advantage over animals into the disadvantage that his inorganic body, nature, is taken from him. (Marx 1975 / 1844: 329)

The struggle against alienation is a struggle for species life and the reclamation of human history for human ends. It is labour power activated as a species being capacity that makes such struggles both possible and necessary. Labour power is universal and always possesses the potential for conscious, revolutionary action. It has, in other words, the capacity to turn its ‘living fire’ on the furnaces of capitalism. Understanding education as the production of revolutionary labour power is the fundamental message from Marx the educator. However, if education is revolutionary praxis, philosophy is not – and cannot be – the lordly legislator of that praxis. It is to be recalled that Marx placed great emphasis on practice. After all, it is what the ‘young’ Marx saw as distinguishing his materialism from that of Feuerbach:

The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism (Feuerbach included) is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the *object or of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively. (1966 / 1845: 13)

Philosophy can only be the conceptual underlabourer of revolution. As famously expressed, in the end, “philosophers have only *interpreted* the world ... the point, however, is to change it” (Marx 1966 / 1845: 15). Consequently, the educator’s praxis, like that of the philosopher, is to

... confront the world not as doctrinaires with a new principle: “Here is the truth, kneel down before it!” We develop new principles to the world out of its own principles. We do not say to the world: “Stop fighting; your struggle is of no account. We want to shout the true slogans of the struggle at you.” We only show the world what it is fighting for, and consciousness is something that the world *must* acquire, like it or not. (Marx 1978 / 1843: 14 - 15)

Conclusion: Education as Class Struggle

In the preceding sections, education has been presented in its widest revolutionary sense. That is, its use value is found in the objective of human emancipation, and in its human capacity building potential. The argument has been that in order to grasp the ‘Marx and education’ relation it is necessary to take Marx on his own terms as a revolutionary educator. Logically, this means that the content of Marxian education is to be grounded in the work of Marx. Furthermore, I suggested that two issues of educational import flow from such a grounding. Firstly, the theoretical and methodological content of Marxian education is to draw from the ‘guiding thread’ of Marx’s materialist view of history. Secondly, its pedagogy is to be informed by the task of producing the revolutionary subject. The two issues are intimately connected and, in their relation, express praxis.

In giving emphasis to what counts as the content of Marxian education brings attention to the pedagogical possibilities lying in Marx’s work. This may mean, for example, using the rich historical data gathered by both Marx and Engels as a pedagogical resource (see, for example: Engels 2009 / 1845; Marx 1966 / 1852, 1976 / 1867). Some of these possibilities have been offered in this paper and, in bringing Marx to work for Marxian education, recognises Marx as a social historian (Small 2005: 43 - 46). However, in emphasising content, concerns about specific educational forms are side-lined. This was not to underplay the importance of attending to educational forms but rather to open a critical vista to the contemporary practical relevance of the ‘Marx and education’ relation. Such a vista shows education inhabiting spaces other than formal institutions like schools and universities. These include: workplaces, community settings, pubs, parks, the streets and the internet. In these contemporary times where schooling and higher education systems are increasingly capitalised (and neoliberalised), such spaces are to be reclaimed as spaces of radical hope. To be clear, by evoking the idea of radical hope I am not conjuring some far-flung idealist utopia. This is real hope formed from the knowledge of the material reality of labour power as a ‘special commodity’ with the capacity to think and do otherwise. But, like any capacity, it has to be developed and nurtured. This is the job of radical educators. However, as a capacity, labour power is only potential. Given counteracting forces and hostile contexts, the power to think and do otherwise can remain unactualised.

Just as history gives no guarantees, the rise of Labour’s class agency is not determined. But the point about labour power is that it is always there. It is the possibility of the emergence of a radical labour power that haunts Capital. The poor capitalists! Not only must they constantly fight to keep ahead of their competitors in the endless race to accumulate but they must also work to contain the power of Labour. Who is to liberate the capitalist from their anxious existence? As a class they cannot do it themselves. They cannot conceive of a world outside the orbit of capital. It is not in their class interest to do so. This is why they have to believe in TINA and why they would have us all speak their mantra.

It was Gramsci who famously said that we are all intellectuals (1971: 9). Independent of class, it is possible to conceive of alternatives to capitalism. However, it is only Labour –

because of its structural positioning vis-à-vis relations of production – that has the capacity to both envision and realise post-capitalist futures. This is an issue of structure and agency: understanding capacity as mutually derived from the structural power of class location and the agential power arising from not only knowledge of those powers but also knowledge of one's class interests. In his extensive study of agency and structure in social theory, Alex Callinicos aptly describes this as class struggle: “the process through which agents discover their interests by exploring the extent of their powers” (2004: 150).

In bringing Marx and education together, education is revolutionary, human capacity building, practice. It is the active making of human history through class struggle whereby in the transformation of their circumstances class agents are also transformed. This is the insight that Marx the revolutionary educator offers us. Its impulse is to draw us to the fact that revolutionary education is, and can only be, working class self-education. Thus, the political task (which has not been explored in this paper) is “to rescue education from the influence of the ruling class” (Marx and Engels, 1966 / 1848). This will require, amongst other things, the political work of building broad based alliances amongst education workers and working class organisations. In the act of building, the materialist view of history and the revolutionary subject are to be kept squarely in sight.

Education is class struggle.

ⁱ In slightly modified form, this paper was presented at the *IV International Conference on Critical Education* (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece, 23-26 June 2014) and subsequently published in the *International Journal of Educational Policies* (2014, Vol. 8, No. 1 pp. 5-24) as: ‘Reclaiming History: Marx, Education and Class Struggle’ (Banfield 2015b).

ⁱⁱ These include the free and universal education for children, the unification of education and material production, as well as education as revolutionary praxis. See for example Chapter 15 of *Capital* Volume 1 where Marx specifically discusses the impact of the Factory Acts on working-class children (Marx 1976 / 1867: 610 - 635); Section IV of his *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (Marx 1971 / 1875: 27 - 29); *The Communist Manifesto* (Marx and Engels 1966 / 1848); and *The Civil War in France* (Marx 1978 / 1871).

ⁱⁱⁱ It is to be noted that the term ‘Capital’ or ‘capital’ will be used in four different senses throughout this paper. Firstly, as ‘Capital’ (i.e. with an upper-case ‘C’), it represents a political category expressing Capital as a class vis-à-vis Labour. Secondly, as ‘capital’ (i.e. with a lower-case ‘c’), it indicates an economic category i.e. a flow of value that can take various economic forms such as money, commodities, labour power and other means of production. Similarly, ‘labour’ refers to productive work (e.g. concrete labour) or the potential to work (i.e. labour power). Thirdly, when contained in the noun ‘capitalism’ it is taken to mean a historically specific social formation organised around the rule of Capital and the dominance of capital relations. Finally, when italicised as ‘*Capital*’ it refers to one or all of Marx’s volumes of *Das Kapital*.

^{iv} These are known to have been Marx’s favourite maxim and his favourite motto (McLellan 1987: 457).

^v It is worth noting that Marx never used the term ‘historical materialism’. He consistently described his theory as the ‘materialist conception of history’. The two terms will be used interchangeably here.

^{vi} ‘Man’ refers to ‘human being’.

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