

Getting Real About Class: Towards an Emergent Marxist Education

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Abstract

The central claims of this paper are that (i) class is a real and essential feature of capitalist societies, and (ii) the Marxist materialist view of history provides the best means for understanding and transforming class relations. To support these claims the paper draws on the growing literature in the area of critical realism. Particular attention is given to its affinities with Marxism and a materialist view of history. Sean Creaven's 'emergent marxism' is developed and applied to an understanding of education policy and social class.

Keywords: Marxism, Historical Materialism, Social Class, Critical Realism. Education, Policy.

Introduction

"I've never seen the working class. Show me a working class person. Until then, I'll know class is dead. It died with the exhaustion of the Industrial Revolution."

"If you insist on using social class as a key concept in this proposed research then you will need an adequate definition of social class. How else will you know if someone is middle class, working class or whatever? But, as I have said to you before, forget about social class, 'social disadvantage' is a far better term."

I begin this paper with the above two snippets of 'wisdom' drawn from my memory. Both comments were made by academics in the recent past. The first was part of a conversation that continued after a faculty seminar on Marx and social class. The second comment was offered to a research student in a thesis defence meeting. I present them not because they are startling or extra-ordinary. Indeed, from my experience, such statements are quite common - especially in and around the halls of academia. Both give expression to a widespread incredulity towards the existence or

place of social class in contemporary society. The first rejects class entirely pending tangible evidence. This is a typical empiricist position that reduces what is, in this case, a complex historical social relation to simple observables. The second also rejects class. However, it is a rejection of a different kind. Class, or rather, 'social disadvantage' (not even 'economic' disadvantage!) is thrown into a pluralist hotch-potch where one 'disadvantage' is just like another.

In opposition to pluralist and empiricist assertions about class this paper makes two broad and inter-related claims. The first is ontological:

Class is a *real* and *essential* feature of capitalist societies

Here I assert the existence of class relations independent of our knowledge of them. As I will show this avoids what Bhaskar [1978] calls the 'epistemic fallacy': the reduction of ontological statements to epistemological ones where class, for example, can be explained away in the absence of definitional purity or empirical confirmation or class consciousness. As such, class cannot be understood as a 'thing': an individual possession or the characteristic of a group of people. Rather, it exists as a social relation. Just as this does not reject the fact that class conflict may appear at times as conflict between social actors it does not deny the "contradiction between ourselves as *labour and as capital*" [Rikowski 2003: 153].

Taking anti-reductionism to be implicit in Marx's theory of history brings me to my second claim. It is methodological and practical: The Marxist materialist view of history provides the best means for understanding and transforming class relations.

As Hickey has put it, class cannot be understood outside historical materialism: independent of the "theory of which it is part" [2000: 164]. However, since the days of Marx and Engels, historical materialism as a theory and scientific method has been contentious. Declarations that it is determinist, teleological and reductionist have been abundant. This paper begins to outline arguments why such declarations might be taken as false. My method here will be to draw on the growing literature and intellectual work in the area of critical realism. In particular, the affinities between critical realism and Marxism will be explored in order to 'get real about class' [1] .

However, the affinity case must not be overstated. Critical realism is essentially a philosophy of science whereas Marxism is much broader consisting of a philosophy, theory and practice. As such, critical realism cannot replace Marxism. It can contribute to the clarification of Marxist concepts and play an underlabouring role to its science and practice [2] .

The paper begins with a brief sketch of the materialist view of history and social class. It then moves to an outline of critical realism. Particular emphasis is given to the idea of ontological depth and the critical realist conceptualisations of emergence and stratification. These are then applied to an exploration and reconsideration of the traditional Marxist base and superstructure model. In the end it offers 'human nature' as the real base of historical materialism with social class and class struggle seen not just as emergent properties of the contradictory dynamics of the forces and relations of capitalist production but founded on objective human interests. In the end these interest lie in the demolition of class society and the false accounts of reality that sustain it.

The paper concludes by developing the idea of education work as a critically informed practice: a praxis that gives *fundamental* attention to the class based nature of social reality.

Class and the Materialist View of History

The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles [Marx and Engels 1969: 108]

The concept of class is of central importance to Marxist theory and practice. It was the class structure of early capitalism, and the class struggles in this form of society, which constituted the main reference point for Marx's materialist theory of history. The views of Marx and Engels were greatly influenced by their observations of nineteenth century capitalist class relations. In some quarters this is evidence enough to consign Marxist theory of history and the attendant centrality of class relations to the 'dustbin of history'. Marx and Marxism are summarily dismissed as historicist, deterministic, and economicist. However, even in the days of Marx before Marxism, Marx warned against reducing his work to some historicist formula blind to the

concrete realities of particular circumstances. He appealed to his friends and critics not to

... metamorphose my historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe into a historico-philosophic theory of the general path every people is fated to tread, whatever the historical circumstances in which it finds itself ... [E]vents ... taking place in different historical surroundings [lead] to totally different results. By studying each of these forms of evolution separately and then comparing them one can easily find the clue to this phenomenon, but one will never arrive there by using as one's master key a general historico-philosophical theory, the supreme virtue of which consists in being super-historical ... [Marx 1977: 572]

It is undoubtedly true that surface features of class relations have changed since Marx's death. It is also true that the relation between class conflict and other forms of social struggle present as challenges to Marxist theory and practice. What is also clear is that these observations, in themselves, do not warrant the *in toto* rejection of theory.

In the 'classical' Marxist view of history, class struggle is the essential defining feature of 'all hitherto existing societies'. Since primitive communism, human societies have been characterised by struggles over productive surpluses and conflicts over wealth appropriation. For Marx and Engels a materialist conception of history begins with "real individuals, their activity and the material conditions of life". In order for people to live and 'make history' their need for material necessities such as food, shelter and clothing must be satisfied. Before anything else, the material requirements for survival and reproduction must be met. Accordingly, the 'first historical act' is the production of the means to satisfy such needs: "the production of material life itself" [Marx and Engels 1976: 47].

The motor of human history and the foundation of every society is production. However, Marx did not understand production simply as the satisfaction of material needs. Production in human societies involved cooperation and organisation. For Marx, production was also social. Not only does historical materialism draw attention to the material factors of production (the objects of production, the instruments of production, and labour power) but also to the social relations through which production is orientated. Together, these two dimensions - the forces of production and the relations of production - comprise the foundation of all human societies. It is

this foundation, or mode of production of material life, that is central to understanding class formation, social transformation, and social revolution.

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: 21]

The dynamism of human history spins from the contradictory relation between the forces and relations of production. Historical change is not driven by the 'discovery' of useful ideas or deeds of 'great' individuals [3] but rooted in production: the productive social activity of 'real individuals' and the 'material conditions' of their lives. As such, class and class struggle cannot be understood outside the historically specific mode of production from which they arise. The Marxist view of history affords predominance to the 'economic' and illuminates the centrality of exploitation: the extraction of a surplus from the class of direct producers by a privileged minority of non-producers. How this exploitation is achieved defines a particular society. In slave societies, for example, surplus labour is appropriated by the master. The direct producer is owned by the master in the same way as any other instrument of production. Under feudalism, the serf or peasant may control some of the means of production but does not own the land. The serf labours for the lord.

Within social relations of production shaped by slave and peasant labour, exploitation is obvious and the threat of physical violence ever-present. Under the capitalist mode of production things *appear* different. On the surface of things, labour and capital come together as equals in the labour market to negotiate a 'fair day's work for a fair day's pay'. Unlike the slave or serf, the capitalist worker is 'free' to sell, withdraw or withhold their labour power as they wish. In the apparent absence of physical domination there is no direct compulsion for the worker to exchange their labour for a wage. However, this freedom has a 'double sense'. As Marx explains, 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: 507]

The point to be made here is that in capitalist societies exploitation is concealed. For the worker, the alternative to selling their labour power to capital is starvation, 'begging, vagabondage or robbery'. Exploitation is exercised predominately through economic power: arising from the fact that the class of direct producers remain separated, or free from, the means of production. As with slave and feudal societies, the marker of a capitalist society is the appropriation of a surplus by a class of non-producers by virtue of their ownership of the means of production. It is how surplus labour is extracted that differentiates capitalism from other class societies.

What distinguishes the various economic formations of society - the distinction between for example a society based on slave-labour and a society based on wage-labour - is the form in which this surplus labour is in each case extorted from the immediate producer [Marx 1976: 325]

From the economic formations, or material base, of a society arises its politico-ideological superstructure that sanctions, regulates and normalises the existing social relations of production. The 'base-superstructure' metaphor - as it has come to be known - not only perhaps best captures the essence of historical materialism but also has been the source of much contention [4] . Since (and during) the days of Marx and Engels it has occupied the minds of Marxist theoreticians as well as providing ammunition for the dismissal of Marxism as determinist and economically reductionist [5] . The oft-quoted passage from the *Preface* presents the essence and elements of historical materialism succinctly:

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: 20-1]

According to Sayer [1987], all the key abstractions around which Marx and Engels framed their materialist view of history and social revolution have been

'comprehensively misunderstood' and 'fetishised' both within and outside of Marxism. In order to avoid misunderstandings and bring plausible clarity to claims like: "social existence determines consciousness" this paper turns to critical realism. The first step to this end will be to outline the basic tenants of critical realism and introduce some of its key ideas.

Critical Realism - Reclaiming Ontology

" it is because sticks and stones are solid that they can be picked up and thrown, not because they can be picked up and thrown that they are solid."

[Bhaskar 1998: 25]

I begin this section with the realist claim that both the natural and social worlds exist independent of human knowledge about them. Like sticks and stones, social forms such as value, capital and class are not simply 'social constructions' or sociological inventions that can be wished away or uninvented. Having never seen or thrown a stone, does not deny the existence of stones or their properties. Likewise, having never 'seen' class or 'felt' it's effects does not lay legitimate claim its non-existence.

For critical realists, it is the pre-existence of causal structures that make them possible objects of both social science inquiry and transformative practice. According to Bhaskar:

The relations into which people enter pre-exist the individuals who enter into them, and whose activity preproduces them; so they themselves are structures. And it is to these structures of social relations that realism directs our attention - both as the explanatory key to understanding social events and trends and as the focus of social activity aimed at the self-emancipation of the exploited and oppressed.

[1989: 4]

However, there is broad scepticism - especially in academia - towards claims to know 'reality'. It is commonplace to reject ontology - or at least that one claim to 'truth' is better than another. Here the Nietzschean 'will to power' dominates, framing a common-sense view of the social world as consisting of multiple and competing realities. Under historical conditions that posit post-structure as the grand narrative, class is described as just another 'social disadvantage' along with other free floating 'signifiers' like gender, ethnicity, and 'race'.

This is not to argue against scepticism or to make a case for the infallibility of human knowledge. Indeed, the opposite is true: any realism worth defending must be fallibilist. For critical realists, scepticism requires the distinction between epistemology and ontology to be maintained. According to Bhaskar, conflating epistemology and ontology is *the* fundamental error of contemporary social science and leads to two widespread fallacies.

The first of these is the 'epistemic fallacy'. It makes the error of reducing 'what is' to 'what is known' and ends in the ultimate neglect of ontology. Its expression can be found, for example, in crude empiricist claims like: "class does not exist because I cannot see it". The other error is the 'ontic fallacy', which reduces 'what is known' to 'what is'. Here, knowledge is determined by a given reality resulting in its "ontologization, naturalisation, or eternalization" [Bhaskar 1991: 141]. The ontic fallacy is fatalist, resting on appeals to supernatural beings or the fetishisation of, for example, market relations. The 'good word' is passed down to humanity from God or the market (or, indeed, from God via the market).

In short, by avoiding both the epistemic and ontic fallacies, critical realism relativises epistemology without relativising ontology. This is a significant departure from, for example, post-modern and post-Marxist theorising that fails to distinguish between and, as such, ends up relativising both epistemology and ontology. As Andrew Sayer has succinctly put it: "the world can only be known under particular descriptions, in terms of available discourses, though it does not follow from this that no description or explanation is better than another." [Sayer 2000: 2]

Bhaskar's point is that ontology cannot be avoided. It is because all philosophies, discourses and practical activities presuppose a realism that the crucial question is not "Is there a reality?" but "What kind?" [Bhaskar 1986: 7]. It is because critical realism takes the nature of ontologies as its object, that it can act as an underlabourer to the development of radical social theory and the realisation of transformative practice. This is not simply academic posturing. After all, the point is not simply to interpret the world but to change it [Marx 1969: 15].

'Reclaiming reality', as Bhaskar [1989] has put it, necessarily entails embracing scepticism. However, it is a specific type of scepticism drawn from the knowledge

that exploitation and human alienation are sustained by false accounts of reality and that those accounts can be exposed as false. This is possible for critical realists because the *idea* that the world is a phenomenal agglomeration of difference is rejected. In reality, the social and natural worlds are layered and stratified. They have depth.

Bhaskar's 'depth realism', as Collier [1994] calls it, employs the well-known Marxist distinction between essence and appearance to emphasise the fact that reality is more than appearances might suggest. To develop the idea of depth realism and to introduce the crucial concept of emergence, Bhaskar outlines three ontological domains: the real, the actual, and the empirical [Bhaskar 1975].

The domain of the real consists of underlying structures, mechanisms and relations; events and actions; and experiences. Structures, mechanisms and relations generate events and shape human action. Next, Bhaskar describes the domain of the actual consisting of events, actions and behaviour. Finally, the empirical domain consists of what people experience and observe. A critical realist ontology recognises of all three strata. In contrast, 'actualism' - the "commonest form of realism in empiricist cultures" [Collier 1994: 7] - denies the existence of enduring structures and their powers to shape events. Actualism, for Bhaskar, is an example of what he calls the New Realism: a 'flat ontology' that locates causation in actual events and "merely reflects and accommodates the new and rapidly changing surface features of contemporary capitalist society". It is a shallow realism that "effectively empties the social world of any enduring structural dimension" [Bhaskar 1989: 2, 3].

To explain the ideas of emergence and stratification it is common amongst critical realists to use the example of water. Separately, hydrogen and oxygen have certain properties or powers (eg. flammability). However, in combination they have quite different powers. For example, water has the power, or potential to extinguish fire. The new (or 'emergent') powers of water while rooted in the properties of oxygen and hydrogen are not reducible to them. It is said that the emergent powers of water exist at a different strata to those of its constituents.

Taking this one step further, the example of water can be used to introduce the ideas vertical and horizontal of causation [see Collier 1994]. For critical realists, the causal

relation of hydrogen and oxygen to water is 'vertical'. However, between water and (say) instant coffee powder, the relation is 'horizontal'. The former is a 'necessary' relation operating at the level of *generative mechanisms*. Water exists because of the properties of hydrogen and oxygen. In this sense, water and oxygen have 'determinance in the last instance' [Collier 1998: 270 - 2]. The reverse, of course, is not true. Hydrogen and oxygen do not exist because of water. Higher level strata, or relations, do not generate lower level ones. The latter relation is contingent i.e.: neither necessary nor impossible. It operates at the level of *actual events*. Both instant coffee powder and water can exist independent of each other but their relation can have significant effects (mixed together, they make a cup of coffee).

The emergent social ontology of critical realism recognises social reality consisting in irreducible strata. It is "the properties and powers which belong to each of them and their emergence from one another [that] justifies their differentiation" [Archer 1995: 14]. However, such separations, like those of the base and superstructure, are never disarticulations. They can only be separated in thought by abstraction [see, for example, Collier 1998].

Before returning to the base - superstructure metaphor, it will be useful to reflect upon and draw together the major ideas from the previous discussion. In what we now might be able to call an emergentist material view of history three things can be noted:

Material production is the basis of human history. This production is also social and includes the struggle over productive surpluses. Different societies can be known by their different modes of production: ways of extracting surplus labour from direct producers. Radical change to specific modes of production arise from the contradictions between the forces and relations of production. Capitalism is characterised by the historical separation of direct producers from the means of production and the transformation of labour into wage-labour. 'Emergent Materialism' has explanatory primacy. For example: the material predominates the social, and being predominates consciousness. Social realities and human consciousness are rooted in (and emergent from) materiality but are not reducible to it.

From these points we can observe a number of things. Firstly, class cannot be seen as a 'thing': a possession, or characteristic, of an individual or group. Class is a social

relation of *production* and, as such, defines a society - at its very base. Secondly, class conflict is an emergent property of the contradictory dynamics - or generative mechanisms - of the forces and relations of production of a society. Class struggle is, indeed, the 'history of all hitherto existing societies' - but not a history predetermined.

Reconsidering Historical Materialism - Emergent Marxism and the Base - Superstructure Metaphor

This section draws on the work of Sean Creaven and his 'emergentist marxism': what Creaven describes as a 'reconstruction' of "Marx's socio-historical materialism [into] a radicalised form of realist or 'emergentist' social theory" [Creaven 2000: 1]. One aspect of this work is a coherent and powerful application of Bhaskar's theory of the stratification of nature to the base and superstructure metaphor. Particular attention will be given here to the primacy theses: the base over the superstructure and the forces of production over the relations of production.

Primacy of the 'Economic Base'

Without fear of contradiction, it can be said that the base and superstructure metaphor is open to a number of interpretations. For the sake of simplicity, I will broadly categorise them here as: pluralist, determinist and relative autonomist [6] . All of these are problematic.

Pluralist conceptions reject distinguishing the 'economic' base and the politico-ideological superstructure. Not only does this deny the materiality of social existence it is ultimately reductionist: collapsing things with different causal properties together in an unstructured (or post-structural) pluralist whole. Fascination with surface features contained in the domain of the Actual frustrates any deep explanation.

On the other hand, determinist conceptions assert the *domination* of the forces of production over the existing property relations. Here people are understood as passive bystanders to history and only have to wait for the collapse of capitalism or the inevitable proletarian revolution. The mechanistic formulation of the metaphor has probably provided the most popular image - and justification for the vulgarisation - of

classical Marxism [7] . Its partner in bourgeois ideology might be TINA capitalism: There Is No Alternative to capitalism [8] .

In direct response to determinist interpretations, Althusserian Marxists proposed that the superstructure exists in relative autonomy from the base. The economy is determinant only 'in the last instance'. For Creaven, the relative autonomy thesis amounts to nothing more than "a dualistic-pluralistic conception of society and social change, not a materialist understanding at all" [2000: 307]. With its weakly elaborated concept of structural causality [see Bhaskar [1991: 180 - 3], Althusserian Marxism ends up as just another form of pluralism. Like the other interpretations, it fails to adequately account for the materiality of social life [9] .

Creaven offers a 'reconstruction' the traditional base and superstructure model "in the light of the realist philosophy of science, as one in which the higher order strata are 'emergent' from the lower order strata" [2000: 59]. For him it is a "deeper and wider" [2000: 59] model that does (and must do) more than outline the causal structural relations of base and superstructure. While Creaven recognises this is important, his model also emphasises the 'rootedness' of socio-cultural forms in *non*-social strata.

To this end, Creaven's model consists of three strata: substructure, structure and superstructure. The structure and superstructure have a close correspondence to the traditional base and superstructure. Ideological forms as well as social and cultural relations comprise the superstructure. Economic and class relations comprise the structure strata. The substructure - the strata with the greatest ontological presupposition - contains "humanity's biologically-given needs and capacities" [Creaven 2000: 60].

Creaven's emergentist reconstruction of the base and superstructure metaphor does two important things. Firstly, it gives *explicit* recognition to human nature. Secondly, it provides a means of distinguishing base and superstructure from being and consciousness. Together these establish the possibility of a materialist ontology of society *together* with a materialist ontology of human beings. Emergent powers of objects, social forms and human beings are those by virtue of their constitution. No simple one-way correspondence between base and superstructure exists. However, this is not to follow the problems of pluralism and eschew all structure. Indeed, the

material and social worlds exist in a relation of vertical causality through the stratification of their generative mechanisms. Or, as Collier has put it: "the ideological and political mechanisms are what they are because the economic (and more generally, material) ones are what they are - and not vice versa" [Collier 1998: 272].

In outlining his method in the critique of political economy, Marx exposed the nonsense in attempts to grasp the concreteness of class by fixing attention to the conjunctural chaos of what Bhaskar has identified as the domain of the Actual. Marx insisted that classes "are an empty phrase if I am not familiar with the elements on which they rest. E.g. wage labour, capital, etc." [1973:100]. Classes, and class formation are rooted in deeper generative mechanisms but not reducible to them. As Marx knew, the complexities and reality of class cannot be understood via the higher abstraction of 'population'. Simply put: "if I were to begin with the population, this would be a chaotic conception [*Vorstellung*] of the whole" [Marx 1973: 100]. Chasing an empirically grounded definition of class falls prey to the epistemic fallacy. Having begun with the 'chaotic conception of the whole', Marx tells us he

would then, by means of further determination, move analytically towards ever more simple concepts [*Begriff*], from the imagined concrete towards ever thinner abstractions until I arrived at the simplest determinations. From there the journey would have to be retraced until I had finally arrived at the population again, but this time not as the chaotic conception of the whole, but as a rich totality of many determinations and relations.

[Marx 1973: 100]

From this we see that the formation of class consciousness is to be explained as an outcome of the interaction between various generative mechanisms like the political, ideological, and material (with the material having greater ontological depth and thus ontological presupposition). However, what is also clear is that while class consciousness and associated actions can be explained in terms of generative mechanisms, they cannot be predicted. Concrete events are 'conjunctural': "a joint effect of several interacting processes" [Collier 1998: 277]. Or, as Marx put it: The concrete is the concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse. [Marx 1973: 101]

The 'unity of the diverse' describes, in critical realist terms, generative mechanisms and emergent powers existing in structured relations of horizontal and vertical

causation. However, it is the 'predominance' of the economic (or material) base that is "the general illumination which bathes all other colours and modifies their particularity" [Marx 1973: 107]. Class, class struggle and class consciousness are all emergent from and rooted in the mode of production of material life: the contradictory relation between the forces and relations of production.

The Primacy of the Forces of Production

In general terms, the productive forces are seen to include the means of production (the objects and instrument of production) and collective labouring activity (labour power, work organization, as well as technical and scientific knowledge). On the other hand, the relations of production are broadly taken to be the 'rules' through which production is orientated towards particular social ends. More specifically, the relations are constituted in the economic ownership of the means of production.

Much of the controversy surrounding the Marxist view of history centres on the nature of the relationship between the forces and relations of production and the manner in which they develop. Indeed, Marx's own notes and writing on the matter appear less than clear. For example, from the *Preface* it seems Marx intended the forces of production to be taken as primary:

At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of a 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.

And again:

No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured.

[Marx: 1970: 21]

However, at other times, Marx seems to give primacy to the forces of production. In his discussion of the formal subsumption of labour under capital, Marx notes the "direct subordination of the labour process to capital irrespective of the state of its technological development" [Marx 1976: 1034].

The apparent ambiguity in Marx's own writings has left the issue of primacy as a lingering problem for Marxists. Some assert the primacy of the forces of production. An example here is to be found in Cohen's [1978] seminal defence of historical materialism where a clear - but, according to Creaven "highly dubious" [2000: 226] - distinction is made between nature and society. Revolution occurs when the material relationship between nature and humanity develops beyond the existing social relations. The impetus or 'motive force' lying behind historical change for Cohen is a highly abstracted and a-historical notion of human rationality. In such theses, neither politics nor class struggle is fundamental to social change.

In contrast, other Marxist accounts emphasise the primacy of the relations of production and place class conflict at the centre of historical change. However, while advocates of 'political marxism' - like Brenner [1977] - escape the functionalism of Cohen's analytical Marxism and give greater weight to human agency, they can be criticised for leaving the sources of class conflict unexplained [see Callinicos 1990, 1999] or entirely "invisible" [Bonefeld 1999: 21]. [10]

Creaven's critical realist contribution to the primacy debate is to reject the idea that either the forces or relations of productions are 'determinant'. Like the base and superstructure relation, the mode of production must be held dialectically: as a unity-in-difference. For Creaven "the interrelationship between the forces and relations of production has to be grasped in terms of the distinct range of constraints, enablements and impulses which each places on the other" [2000: 227]. In short, the unity and dynamism of the forces and relations couple is to be seized through an understanding of their emergent of powers.

Likewise, Hunt (without reference to critical realism) describes the productive forces and the relations of production forming an 'immediate identity' and 'immediate opposition'. Following Marx he notes that the forces and relations couple exists as a 'unity of opposites':

when Marx refers to a dialectic of productive forces and relations of production, he means [...] they constitute a unity [...] in a three-fold way. First, there is a significant respect in which [they] are indiscernible, [...] and each can be discerned from the other only in terms of the relation between them. Second, each opposite depends for its existence and functioning on its counterpart. Third,

each opposite determines the specific form of its counterpart and reproduces (and transforms itself through its counterpart. It can be shown that each of these points is satisfied in the case of the productive forces and relations of production [11] .
[Hunt 1998: 162 - 3]

In his dialectical materialist interpretation of historical materialism, Hunt points to the relations of production working to 'orientate' the productive application of the forces of production to particular social ends. As such, control over the productive relations - or 'property' relations - brings with it the power to shape social outcomes. Where this results in the inequitable distribution of material, social and ideational resources, the structural advantage of non-producers to appropriate surplus labour from direct producers is furthered. It is the emergent powers of productive forces that provide the potential for production and the "impulse towards the reorganisation of productive relations" [Creaven 2000: 228]. It is because of their emergent properties that the forces of production have primary status or 'predominance', as Hunt insists, over the social relations of production.

When Marx says that production is the "predominant moment" when compared with consumption, he can be understood as claiming that in any clash between ends and means, specifically between our wants and our capacity to provide for them through production, the means of action we possess have a more powerful effect on the outcome than our desires have. It is easier in the short run for us to adapt our wants to our circumstances than it is to adapt our means of action to our wants. The objective standpoint is the correct one because reality is relatively intractable.
[1998: 172]

The point that Hunt makes here is that interests lying material well-being have greater power, or impetus, than loyalty to existing relations of production. Where social relations limit and constrict human fulfilment, they become fetters to what they have helped create. Or to put it another way, in Marx's historical materialism, his Promethean humanism "stands out as the most powerful spring of action" [Hunt 1998: 173]. From a critical realist perspective, Creaven agrees:

Marx is entirely justified in his belief the objective human needs and interests, far from being definable in narrowly 'economistic' terms, should instead be defined more broadly in terms of the degree of general economic, political and cultural 'freedom' or 'welfare' which is realisable by a specific societal

community, given the level of development of its productive forces.
[2000: 87]

According to Marx, "the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In reality it is the ensemble of the social relations" [1969b: 14]. Certainly, humans are material and biological beings with universal needs for food, shelter, security and the like. After all, people "must be in a position to live in order to 'make history'" [Marx and Engels 1976: 47]. As such, any grasp of human nature and social justice must be historically specific and context dependent as well as based upon the recognition of universal human needs. It is from here that a moral critique of capitalism and the role of class struggle towards a truly human future can be developed.

In this section of the paper, I have attempted to establish historical materialism as a "historical form of humanism" [Sayers 1998: 149] founded on an emergent materialist ontology. On this basis, history is not a directionless flow of events, but driven by human interests to secure material needs. Social class is a real emergent feature of all human societies with class struggle founded in a Promethean impulse towards the 'free development of all'. The following section will develop this further as a means to establishing a historically grounded moral basis for a radical education that places class and class struggle at the centre of its concerns.

Towards an Emergent Marxist Education

This final section turns to a consideration of education policy and practice. It will begin by providing a broad interpretation of education policy. This will be done succinctly in four points before moving to a consolidating discussion of class. Here we will return to the issues of the non-existence of class and class as another social disadvantage raised by the two educators at the start of the paper. The paper will conclude with the presentation of a concrete example of the enactment of policy bearing directly upon issues of class and schooling.

Firstly, I make the straightforward point that policy is real. It exists as material and form. Policy as material refers to its content and substance. We might say that policy material is what a specific policy is *about*. Policy as form refers to text (written, verbal or other symbolic forms), processes (the actions and interactions involved in

the interpretation, reinterpretation, making and remaking of policy) and contexts (structural, cultural and ideological). In short, policy cannot simply be 'delivered' and simply "understood as a one-way flow from centre to periphery [...] policy texts are worked on and undergo change" [Scott 2000: 76].

Secondly, 'policy as material' and 'policy as form' are different kinds of things, but each exists because of the other. In other words they constitute a 'unity of opposites'. The analytical separation of the material and its form is vital, I contend, for emergent realist policy analysis. It enables the policy researcher or education practitioner to distinguish policy material (ideas, claims to truth, statements of value) from the forms of its enactment or resistance. While understanding policy as process rightfully acknowledges the human dynamism of policy development, it risks conflating material and form. Collier calls this the 'loss of aboutness' where claims are made that "we can't know anything except by means of our own ideas [and practices]; so we can't know anything but our own ideas [and practices]" [1999: 2].

Thirdly, policy exists as un-stated and often un-declared ideas, dispositions and notions of reality. The policy form is shaped, in other words, by ideology and ideological practice [see, for example, Sharp 1980]. On this basis, educational policy is not only the formal kind held in the hands, heads and hearts of policy makers and educators but also by students. This begins to get us somewhere close I believe to grasping the reality of policy and how it is 'made'. While policy has the power (through its enactment) to 'set agendas', this is to be understood in the context of struggle and contest.

Fourthly, policy analysis must take seriously what Soucek [1995a; 1995b] calls a 'critical sensibility': "to be inspired by new ideas and new ways of seeing" [Soucek 1995b: 242] [12]. For critical realists this entails recognising the stratified nature of social reality. To this end, Willmott [2002] provides what I think is a good example of realist policy analysis. Using a qualitative case study approach he explores how teachers mediate the lived contradictions that exist between their child-centred philosophies and a culture of the 'new managerialism' fashioned by policies of marketisation and school 'effectiveness'. Willmott defends a stratified approach to structure and agency and develops a multi-level analysis of structure, culture and

agency. Each level is understood, not as a heuristic device, but *sui generis* and emergentist real.

Now, to return to the challenges presented by the two educators who introduced this paper I need to emphasise the anti-essentialism grounded in a historical emergent materialist understanding of class and human nature. It strongly rejects the pursuit of a definition of class. In the end, such efforts only serve to reify class: to divorce labour from its historical conditions and the real foundations upon which it arises. As if projecting a clarion call to two academics at the start of this paper, Bonefeld rejects 'orthodox', definitional, approaches where

the notion of 'class' stands accepted in terms of the reified world of capital [and] myth is summoned as the key to unlock the meaning of myth itself. The accepted - academically viable - expression of this sort of approach is the study of stratification.

[2002: 71]

Operating in the reified world of capital, stratification theorists chase the impossible. One elaborate schema drawn from empirical data leads inevitably to another, and another. The elusiveness of class lies in the fact that it cannot be assigned intransient ontological status on the basis of observed characteristics of groups. To confuse and conflate the 'reality' of class with the description of 'classes' in their necessarily loose and transient forms is to fall to the epistemic fallacy. Certainly, gathering data as evidence of class dynamics or the distribution patterns of social goods like education is vital for class-based research and socially just policy development. However, such data only offer snapshots of surface realities emergent from and rooted in deeper realities. For educational policy makers and practitioners to be transfixed on reified surface features of class relations is to adopt the visionless 'Third Way' reformism of the kind so well described by Grollios and Kaskaris [2003] in the first edition of this journal.

A further problem with 'orthodox' approaches to class is that it is conceived as a social relation somewhere 'out there' to be discovered and described (and when it is not 'found' this is held as evidence of its non-existence). Such approaches do not understand the capital-labour relation as one that is also *internal* to historically constituted human beings. As Rikowski has argued, our very social beings are

founded on the contradiction between ourselves as labour and as capital: "We are divided against ourselves, and within ourselves" [2003: 153].

Drawing on Marx's theory of alienated labour in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* [Marx 1975], Rikowski observes that within capitalism we are alien to ourselves - our humanity. However, within the social form of human capital - or capitalised labour power - there exists the (real) potential to create a world free of exploitation. Capital is the negation of this possibility. An emergentist ontology reminds us that just because human potential is suppressed and not actualised, does not mean it is any less real - or non-existent. It exists as a tendency (but not a guarantee). Human emancipation is active struggle and requires human engagement (intellectual, political and practical) to be actualised. Here lies the *potential* of education: the *real* possibility of transformative work.

Such work begins with the recognition that knowledge is a social product: a productive force and a material product of a society. Indeed, education and schooling are sites for the class struggle over the social production of knowledge. It is flesh-and-blood struggle rooted in the lived experiences of historically constituted people. This is not to say that this is the view held by many educators or students. Indeed, the power of bourgeois ideology drives the common-sense view that class is dead or it is just another 'social disadvantage'. However, common-sense is never predetermined. This is why schools - as 'educational' institutions - have to work hard to naturalise capitalist relations and with constant vigilance to perpetuate erroneous accounts of reality.

In the following I offer a small viewing window to the outcomes of such hard work. It takes the form of transcribed selections of an interview with senior high school students and an opportunistic follow-up conversation. These are drawn from the author's ethnographic study of the development of 'Enterprise Education' in a suburban working class public school in Australia [13]. The interview and conversation indicate the fragility of hegemony and point to how common-sense can be disrupted in the most ordinary of ways.

As I have indicated elsewhere [Banfield 2000], there exists considerable enthusiasm amongst political leaders, captains of industry, and education 'experts' across Western

Capitalist nations for schools to contribute to the development of an 'enterprise culture' and to produce 'enterprising' young people [see Heelas and Morris 1992]. In the face of rising youth unemployment [see Furlong and Cartmel 1997] and carried on the back of a self-confident neo-liberalism trumpeting the arrival of hyper-competitive 'new times', enterprise education has become another "way of shaping the products of schooling and the aspirations of young people tightly to needs of capital" [Banfield 2000: 23].

In Australia, at least, the enthusiasm for Enterprise Education in schools is most intense in working class suburbs and rural areas with high unemployment [14] . 'Enterprise High' is one of those schools. As part of Enterprise High's curriculum each year its senior students engage in a week-long programme called 'Australian Business Week'. Developed and promoted by private business interests, the week involves students working in 'company teams' of five to six to set up an imaginary business. Each team develops a business and marketing plan for a particular product.

Interspersed with presentations and lectures from local business people and management experts a significant portion of Business Week is devoted to a 'computer simulation' exercise. At various times each day, each company team met to make production, marketing and investment decisions about their product. These decisions were then entered into a specially designed computer programme from which the ongoing relative 'performance' of each team was calculated. The teams were each assigned a teacher and a business mentor (a volunteer from the local community with experience in business) to assist them with their assigned tasks for the week. The winning team was the one with the greatest market share at the end of the week. Competition was an essential feature of Business Week.

A few days after the completion of Business Week, I interviewed three members of one of the company teams. The interview is picked up at a point where we discuss the group's decision to 'donate' \$100,000 to help clean up river pollution their company had caused. I asked Kerri directly what motivated the team to do that

Kerri: [sheepishly] Profit mainly.

GB: How does that make you feel?

Kerri: Bad. Because we are meant to take care of the environment and stuff like that.

GB: So, if that is what you thought you should do why didn't you act like that in the game?

Mark: Market share was more crucial. By watching the environment we got more market share.

Here we can see 'informal' policy at work. All three students knew what they *should* do, but within the laws and the logic of the game this was not the *right* thing to do. The object of Business Week was the naturalisation of capitalism. Decisions about environmental issues were to be contained within a policy of uncritical acceptance of the logic of business. According to the three students, neither their teachers nor business mentor asked them to question or even consider the purposes and assumptions underlying the Business Week experience. I continued:

GB: If I remember correctly, at the same time you were donating for the clean-up you were laying off workers from your factories. Is this right?

Mark: Yes.

GB: How did that make you feel?

Brian: Devastated [Laughs - with bravado].

GB: Did you think about it at the time?

Brian: Not really.

GB: Do you think about it now?

Brian: Yes, a bit.

GB: What did you say your father does for a living?

Brian: He works at [a car manufacturing plant].

GB: What would be the implications for you, your father, if he lost his job because [the company] wanted to increase its market share?

[Silence - 5 seconds]

Brian: [Quiet voice]... I don't know.

GB: Mark, your father works for [a local manufacturing company]. They were recently taken over by an international company, weren't they?

Mark: Yes.

GB: I read in the paper that some people lost their jobs. Did you make any connections with you fathers work and the lives of real people when you were making these decisions in the game?

Mark: We just did it to get more output and we were allowed to do it.

Once again, this section of the interview reveals how the 'rules' of Business Week illuminated some things as logical and sensible but left others in shadow. When I asked the students to imagine the workers they laid off as real people - as their own parents - the tone of the interview changed. Brian's bravado, for example, melted into what I described later in fieldnotes as "a quiet worried sadness". The interview did not continue long after this point.

Some days later I met Brian again as I was strolling the school oval at lunch-time. The two of us sat on the grass and chatted. Brian was eager to talk about Business Week.

Brian: When we were doing it, it was like a game - you know, it was sort of like how things are but not really. I mean, it was a game but sort of serious too. It was teaching us what the real world is like - what we can do to be successful when we leave school.

GB: Successful?

Brian: Running your own business and stuff like that.

GB: But it was just a game?

Brian: Like I said, it was not like things really are. It was all about us, the bosses, you know? Like we talked about the other day, the workers in the factories were just numbers. We wanted to win [the game] - and to increase our market share we decided to lose some workers.

GB: Lose some workers?

Brian: Give them the sack.

GB: And this is not the way things happen?

Brian: Yes it is. My Old Man lost his job. But the game wasn't exactly like real life because it was only about us. There were no workers: no-one playing workers.

GB: Did you think of the workers as real people when you were playing the game?

Brian: No, not really. It was just a game.

GB: If this was real, do you think you would have given your Old Man the sack?

Brian: I don't know. Probably.

Since the interview, Brian's thinking about the Business Week 'game' had changed. While the experience was supposed to be about 'real life' - life after school according to Brian - it only told half the story. Capital was there, but Labour was missing. As Brian said: "It was all about 'the bosses'". Business Week was framed within a policy of erasure directed towards a kind of collective forgetfulness - the unimagining of the lived realities of the labour-capital relation. It was also hitched to policies that would suppress human potential and frustrate the power of labour to realise more just and human futures. However, as Brian showed, such ideological work was not complete. Resting on false and partial accounts of reality, it can never be complete. This is why capitalist schools have to work so hard and with such great vigilance. Maintaining appearances is difficult.

While this ideological work was not expressed directly in *formal* statements of policy, it was certainly understood. It was also not limited to Business Week at Enterprise High. In response to a question about the absence of content around labour laws, unionism, and the rights of workers in the school's curriculum, the senior teacher in charge of Enterprise Education told me bluntly and rather tersely:

The kids here are pretty street-wise. They know what goes on. We don't need to tell them about workplace laws and regulations, what their rights are as workers, or things like joining a union. We prepare them for getting a job - or to make their own. Besides, there is plenty of time for that other stuff after they have left school - if they need it.

On the pretext that Enterprise High students possess some innate street-wise cunning, knowledge of class and class struggle was rejected by the coordinator as 'other stuff' outside the bounds of legitimate curriculum knowledge. It was probably best

forgotten. However, against the ideological weight of school policy, Brian did not forget. Our discussions stirred knowledge of the world that ran deeper than, and exposed the partiality of, the common-sense embedded in school policy. What Brian knew was a different common-sense: one that reflected the materiality of lived social life. This, it seems to me, is where critical transformative praxis begins. If the basis of this praxis is a 'critical sensibility' it must rest then on the rejection of Actualism and on distinguishing depth reality from surface appearances. As Freeman-Moir insists, this is the key to 'remembering the future' - one that understands that the

the ruling ideas may ever be the ideas of the ruling class, but the ideas that strike most deeply, most authoritatively, are ever the ideas consonate with class identities, habits and intuitions. What is ruling and what is deep can be two very different things in social life.

[1995: 34]

Following Freeman-Moir's lead, I suggest that the idea of a critical sensibility entails a *deep* interrogation of capitalism: one that understands that history remains, and will remain, the history of class struggle until capitalist relations are transcended. It is one that recognises class struggle as human struggle (within us all) and a struggle for humanity. For radical educators, it is here that we find a pedagogy of hope and we see the policies of possibility.

Notes

[1] Unfortunately, to this point in time, the application of critical realism to education has been limited. For two examples see Scott [2000] and Wilmot [2002].

[2] Some Marxists do not believe that Marxism needs such help. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore those positions. However, for an excellent edited collection that presents a range of views on the relation between critical realism and Marxism see: Brown, Fleetwood and Roberts [2000].

[3] The revered status afforded Marx by Marxist disciples is an example of such here. Significantly, dogmatic reverence towards 'the great man' pushes hard against the very impulse of historical materialism. As Lovejoy put it:

Of course, the deepest historical materialist insight is that the work of great men (and women) rests in a fundamental way on a platform of labour activity by millions, mostly exploited and dominated, which provides the surplus and the development stages that set the questions and the conditions for answers.

[2000: 146]

[4] Describing the relationship as a 'metaphor' is not meant to convey the idea that it is simply a 'heuristic device' as Creaven [2000: 236] rightly warns. With the understanding that 'base-superstructure' is not a simple idealised abstraction the descriptor 'metaphor' will continue to be used in this paper.

[5] It must be noted that Marx (and historical materialism in particular) is often dismissed with ignorance - perhaps even with an intuitive fear of the radicalism that Marx's materialist view of history holds. In his biography of Marx, Francis Wheen [1999: 68] recorded this observation (along with an interesting suggestion):

Marx's work has often been dismissed as 'crude dogma', usually by people who give no evidence of having read him. It would be a useful exercise to force these extempore critics - who include the present British prime minister, Tony Blair - to study the Paris manuscripts, which reveal the workings of a ceaselessly inquisitive, subtle and undogmatic mind.

Of course, this is not the case for all arguments with Marx. For example, Anthony Giddens' critique of historical materialism is scholarly and masterful [see Giddens 1981]. Unfortunately, an outline of what is ultimately a flawed critique is beyond the scope of this paper. However, for Marxist and critical realist critiques of Giddens see, for example: Callinicos [1989] and Archer [1995: esp. ch4].

[6] The first two of these are well known to critical realists as familiar foes. As Collier put it:

Emergence theories such as Bhaskar's are fighting on two fronts: against the dualist or pluralist theories which assert the complete independence of higher strata on lower, and against reductionists who assert the ultimate unreality of the higher strata.

[1994: 111]

[7] Marx and Engels were insistent that the metaphor was not mechanistic or deterministic. Engels, for example:

According to the materialist conception of history, the ultimate determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that it is the *only* determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase.

[Engels 1970: 487]

[8] There is, of course, another possibility. The relationships could be imagined as weak or non-existent. Not only does this logic lead to the wholesale rejection of historical materialism, it effectively separates 'the economy' from the superstructure and the natural world. It is worthy of note that a critical realist ontology insists that the natural world presupposes the social in a relation of vertical causality. The social is emergent from the natural or material. Here we begin to see the possible ideological impulses behind attempts to 'naturalise' social relations and to separate, for example, the 'economy' and the 'environment'. For the growing literature on Eco-Marxism, Green Socialism, and Marxist Eco-Feminism see, for example: Benton [1996], Bellamy Foster [2000], O'Connor [1998], Pepper [1993], and Salleh [1997].

[9] The problematic nature of Althusser's base and superstructure formulation derives from the addition of an 'ideological' level to that of the 'economic' and 'political' levels. This provided ideology with its own materiality and led him, as Collier insists, to attribute "misplaced concreteness to [...] various types of practices which [were not] practices, rather [...] aspects of practices" [1989: 53]. Indeed, Althusser's anti-determinism and 'misplaced concreteness' was significant in laying the "ground for the worst idealist excesses of post-structuralism" [Bhaskar 1989: 188].

[10] It is to be noted that this is, by necessity, a very brief and rather simplified presentation of arguments in and around the 'primacy theses'. For instance, the 'contribution' of the Althusserian post-Marxists is not addressed [see, for example, Callari and Ruccio 1996]. Nor is Cohen's [1988] slightly modified position - or the contribution of other Analytical Marxists [see Wright, Levine and Sober 1992].

[11] For the original, and more detailed, explication of these points see Marx [1973: 90 - 2].

[12] Soucek's argument rests on Habermasian 'communicative competence' [see Habermas 1972, 1984, and 1987] being an essential part of reclaiming a critical sensibility. An Emergent Marxist critique of policy would not reject this but insist that a 'critical sensibility' is not exhausted by 'discourse', or communicative competence. While policy is a human achievement, it is an achievement that pre-exists those agents making it.

[13] The study is an examination of the implementation and development of Enterprise Education in a cluster of public schools in a working class suburb of an Australian city. The fieldwork was conducted over a two year period (1999 - 2000) as part of the author's PhD. As an example of ethnographic research, participant observation and unstructured interviews were the primary data gathering methods. To protect the anonymity of individuals involved in the research project, all names of people and places used in this paper are pseudonyms.

[14] This is my observation drawn from knowledge of the development of Enterprise Education in Australia. It is a view I have had confirmed in conversations and interviews with professionals in the field. At this time I have no other data to support the claim.

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