Embourgeoisment, Immiseration, Commodification - Marxism Revisited: a Critique of Education in Capitalist Systems

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Abstract

In this paper, we explore educational inequality through a theoretical and empirical analysis. We use classical Marxian scholarship and class-based analyses to theorise the relationship between education and the inequality in society that is an inevitable feature of capitalist society/ economy. The relationship between social class and the process of capitalization of education in the USA and UK is identified, where neo-liberal drivers are working to condition the education sector more tightly to the needs of capital. The empirical evidence is utilised to show how capital accumulation is the principal objective of national and international government policy, and of global capitalist organizations such as the World Trade Organization. The key ontological claim of Marxist education theorists is that education serves to complement, regiment and replicate the dominant-subordinate nature of class relations upon which capitalism depends, the labor-capital relation. Through these arguments we show that education services the capitalist economy, helps reproduce the necessary social, political, ideological and economic conditions for capitalism, and therefore, reflects and reproduces the organic inequalities of capitalism originating in the relations of production. We also note that education is a site of cultural contestation and resistance. We conclude that, whether in terms of attainment, selection, or life chances, it is inevitable that education systems reflect and express the larger features of capitalist inequality.

Introduction

This paper examines the relationship between capitalism and educational inequality. From a Marxist perspective, inequality is a long term and inevitable consequence of the capitalist system. Education does not stand alone and remote from the practices and thought processes of society in general. It both reflects and supports the social inequalities of capitalist culture. The "education industry" is a significant state apparatus in the reproduction and replication of the capitalist social form necessary for the continuation of "surplus value" extraction and economic inequality. Hence, Marxists argue that there are material linkages between educational inequality, exploitation and capitalist inequalities in general. This has been brought into much sharper relief during the current reactionary phase of neo-liberal capitalism in such countries as Thatcherite/post-Thatcherite Britain and Reaganite/post-Reaganite USA.

The question as to whether the development of a capitalist society inevitably increases inequality in education will be explored in two ways. In Section One, the enquiry is addressed through the lens of Marxist theoretical analysis. Capitalism is a particular economic form driven by a relentless profit motive in which exploitation and inequality, for example of income, of life chances are in-built features. This section will explain why, therefore, we might expect to find evidence for a relationship between education and class inequality. In Section Two, the question of capitalism and inequality is investigated by drawing, *inter alia*, on recent empirical research and the near-universal agreement among a wide range of national, international, and comparative studies examining the impacts of neoliberal capitalist policies for education (such as pre-privatization, privatization, commercialization, commodification, and marketization of schools and universities).

The Conclusion attempts a synthesis of the empirical and theoretical concerns of the paper. As confirmation of the key substantive concern of Marxist education theorists, a distinct correlation between capitalist economic inequality and educational inequality is revealed. Our analysis is that this relationship is causal and reciprocal. Capitalism causes and increases economic and education inequalities, which then, in turn, become functional to capitalist production and culture. This effect is evident in the long term. Short term snapshots of certain instances and conjunctures (such as in the case of South Korea in this volume) do not tend to reveal the full historical

picture. (For a discussion of `termism', long and short-term policy and their impacts, see Hill, 2001, 2005a).

SECTION ONE: MARXIST ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CAPITAL AND EDUCATION — A CONCEPTUAL APPROACH

Reconnaissance of Marxist Education Theory

Marxist educational theory, research and writing reached its last peak in the late-1970s and early-1980s (Rikowski, 2006), building on the work of Althusser (1971), Bowles and Gintis (1976), Sarup (1978) and Willis (1977), and the Marxist inspired work of Bourdieu (1976). With a few historically significant exceptions (such as Callinicos, 1991, Morton and Zavarzadeh, 1991; Ahmad, 1992), the rest of the 1980s and the early-1990s witnessed a failure to develop this first wave of Marxist educational theory and research. Instead, Marxists and neo-Marxists interested in education typically found themselves shoring up and/ or critiquing the many problems and weaknesses inherent in the first wave work or giving a culturalist post-Gramscian spin on the earlier "reproductionist" analysis of Althusser, Bowles and Gintis, and Bourdieu. (Henry Giroux is an example, e.g. 1983).

However, by the mid-1990s Marxist educational theory and research re-emerged from a moribund period characterised by of internal degeneration and hyper-defensiveness in the face of external criticism (Rikowski, 1996, 1997, 2006). Works from Richard Brosio (1994) Kevin Harris (1994) Ebert (1996) and Michael Neary (1997) heralded a new period of development and experimentation in Marxist educational research and writing. In the last few years, Marxist educational theory and research and radical pedagogy have opened up a second wave of development following the mini-renaissance of the mid-1990s. Works by Paula Allman (1999, 2001), Richard Brosio (2000), Peter McLaren (2000, 2005a and 2005b); McLaren and Farahmandpur, (2005), Bertell Ollman (2001), Carmel Borg, John Buttigieg and Peter Mayo (2002), Dave Hill *et al* (2002) have gained international recognition Furthermore, many others are expanding Marxist analysis and encompassing an increasing range of education policy issues and theoretical concerns, such as lifelong learning, mentoring, the learning society, social justice, globalization, educational marketization, and many other areas. The second wave has generated renewed interest in theorizing and

researching issues of class, gender and race in education from within Marxism (see Hill, 1999; Hill and Cole, 2001; and Kelsh and Hill, 2006) and the business takeover of education (see Glenn Rikowski, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005; Kenneth Saltman and David Gabbard, 2003; and Saltman, 2005) and on public services related to education, such as libraries (Ruth Rikowski, 2005).

However, Marxists find themselves once more on the defensive and increasingly fighting today a rearguard action for the maintenance of Marxism (historical materialism) against the epistemological instability caused by the intrusion of pluralist, non-essentialist (such as postmodernist) and Weberian-type schemata into the leftist debate (Rikowski, 2001; Kelsh and Hill, 2006).

Kelsh and Hill (2006), Paraskeva (2006) and Farahmandpur (2004) take as an example of "revisionist left" writers, the prominent writer Michael W. Apple. Apple writes prolifically and influentially among left educators against neo-liberal and neo-conservative ideological and political hegemony in the USA. His analysis and political objective are that there is, and should be, an alliance of political interests in which the tryptych of social class, "race" and gender have equal importance as *both* explanatory and as organizing principles (e.g. Michael W. Apple, 2001). The introduction of extra-class determinants of social inequality follows a Weberian-derived notion of class as a tool of classification useful only to describe *strata* of people, as they appear at the level of culture and in terms of status derived from various possessions, economic, political, or cultural.

However, as a tool of *class* categorization, Weberian derived classifications of social strata cannot provide reliable knowledge to guide transformative praxis - that is, a guide to action that will result in the replacement of capitalism by socialism (a system whereby the means of production, distribution and exchange, are collectively, rather than privately, owned). In Weberian classifications, there is no capitalist class, and no working class; just myriad strata. Similar assumptions surface in anti-essentialist, post-modernist approaches (for a critique, see Hill, 2001, 2005a; Hill, Sanders and Hankin, 2002; Kelsh, 2006, McLaren and Scatamburlo D'Anibale, 2004). Such classification systems substituted for Marxist class theory fuel the ideological notion that "class is dead" (Pakulski & Waters, 1996).

It is interesting, and rarely remarked upon, that arguments about "the death of class" are not advanced regarding the capitalist class. Despite their horizontal and vertical cleavages (Dumenil and Levy, 2004), they appear to know very well who they are. Nobody is denying capitalist class consciousness. They are rich. They are powerful. And they are transnational as well as national. They exercise (contested) control over the lives of worker-laborers and worker-subjects.

Marxists agree that class is not the only form of oppression in contemporary society, yet it is also a fact that class is central to the social relations of production and essential for producing and reproducing the cultural and economic activities of humans under a capitalist mode of production. Whereas the abolition of racism and sexism does not guarantee the abolition of capitalist social relations of production, the abolition of class inequalities, by definition, denotes the abolition of capitalism.

Hickey, for example, points to the functionality of various oppressions in dividing the working class and securing the reproduction of capital; constructing social conflict between men and women, or black and white, or skilled and unskilled, thereby tending to dissolve the conflict between capital and labor (Hickey, 2006:196). While Apple's "parallellist," or equivalence model of exploitation (equivalence of exploitation based on "race," class and gender, his "tryptarch**"** (or tripartite) model of inequality produces valuable data and insights into aspects of gender oppression and "race" oppression in capitalist USA, such analyses serve, as Hickey (2006), Gimenez (2001) and Kelsh and Hill (2006) suggest, to occlude the class-capital relation, the class struggle, and to obscure the essential and defining nature of capitalism, the labor-capital relation and its attendant class conflict. With respect to one aspect of structural inequalities reproduced within the education system in England and Wales, that is, educational attainment, Gillborn and Mirza (2000), themselves using the "official" (British government census classificastion) Weberian derived categorizations of social strata, show very clearly that it is the difference between social strata that is the fundamental and stark feature of the education system, rather than "race" or gender.

In sum, there is a recognised need amongst Marxists, firstly, to restate the epistemic foundation of Marxism; and, in so doing, secondly, to reclaim the authentic voice of

the left-wing critique of capitalist education practices and their ideological justification though a class-based ontology (Kelsh and Hill, 2006).

Restating Class

For Marxists, class is not an arbitrary or abstract concept. Rather, it is a verifiable feature of certain human life processes. According to *The German Ideology*, written by Marx and Engels in 1845-6, human society passed through different productive epochs and in each there were opposing groups of people defined according to the objectively different relationships they had to the means and products of material production. That is, in every epoch, economic practices structure human society into "classes" with diametrically opposed interests rooted in relations of ownership to the means of production. These relations of ownership to the means of production constitute what Marx calls the "relations of production" and this is an arena of perpetual tension and struggle (1977, p. 179). When the relations of production are combined with the "forces of production" (factories, workplaces, plant, equipment and tools, and knowledge of their use) we arrive at a "mode of production" or "economic base" (Marx, 1977, p. 161; 168). This productive "infrastructure" forms the organizational rationale and dynamic for society in general and these are reflected in the social institutions (e.g., the state) that spring up and become established in accordance with the needs of productive relations.

However, the techniques and technologies of production under capitalism always dictate new working practices which exert pressure for change. The institutions which attempt to guard the existing relations of production from crises (principally the state) then begin, precisely and contradictorily by attempting to guard those relations from crises to obstruct the further development of the forces of production and eventually the pressure of contradictions rooted in the class contradiction becomes too great and the established institutions are transformed by revolution. At that point, new social and political institutions, appropriate to new relations of production, are developed, and these must accord with the further free development of the material forces of production. *The German Ideology* constitutes Marx's attempt to depart from the metaphysical abstraction of the Hegelian idealist method and locate the motor of historical change in living, human society and its sensuous processes.

For later thinkers, such as Lenin, the significance of Marx's transformation of dialectics is the identification of the concept of 'class struggle' as the essential historical dynamic. In any era, and most certainly in the capitalist, society is locked in conflict; since the needs of a certain group in the productive process are always subordinated to another. Marxists hold that this social conflict cannot be truly reconciled with the source of its economic causation, and this perpetual tension is the seedbed of revolution.

The capitalist era is both typical of human history and at the same time unique. It is typical in that its production techniques involve the exploitation of one human being by another, but it is unique in history in terms of its advancing this principle to unprecedented levels of efficiency and ruthlessness. For Marx, writing in the Preface to *A Critique of Political Economy* of 1859 (known simply as the "*Preface*"), the capitalist era marks the zenith of class struggle in history and human exploitation cannot be taken further (1977, p. 390). The only redeeming feature of capitalism is its assembling its own social antithesis in the "proletariat" or "working class" which is destined to rise up against the bourgeoisie (profiteering or "ruling class") and abolish class and exploitation and thus bring "the prehistory of human society to a close" (1977, p. 390).

What, though, do Marxists mean by capitalist "exploitation"? In the first volume of *Capital*, Marx argues that workers are the primary producers of wealth due to the expenditure of their labor in the production of commodities. However, the relationship between the owners of the means of production (the employers) and the workers is fundamentally exploitative since the full value of the workers' labor power is never reflected in the wages they receive. The difference between the value of the labor expenditure and the sum the worker receives for it is known as "surplus value," and this is pocketed by the employer as profit.

Marx saw surplus value as the distinguishing characteristic and ultimate source of class and class conflict within the capitalist system (Cuneo, 1982, p. 378). However, for Marx, surplus value is not merely an undesirable side-effect of the capitalist economy; it is its motive force and the entire system would readily collapse without it. Technically, while surplus value extraction is not wholly unique, historically, to capitalist systems, all capitalist systems are characterised by it. Marx is thus able to

offer a "scientific" and objective definition of class in the capitalist epoch based on which side of the social equation of surplus value one stands and to show, moreover, that this economic arrangement is the fundamental source of all human inequality.

Class is therefore absolutely central to Marxist ontology. Ultimately, it is economically induced and it conditions and permeates all social reality in capitalist systems. Marxists are therefore largely hostile toward postmodern and post-structural arguments that class is, or ever can be, 'constructed extra-economically', or equally that it can be 'deconstructed politically' – an epistemic position which has underwritten in the previous two decades numerous so-called 'death of class' theories - arguably the most significant of which are Laclau & Mouffe (1985) and Laclau (1996).

Capital, Immiseration, Education and Ideology

Marx's views on education, rarely expressed, tend toward an articulation of its "commodifying" properties in relation to both teachers and pupils. In other words, education is assessed according to its practical or "use value" for capital. Marx writes:

> [i]f we may take an example from outside the sphere of production of material objects, a schoolmaster is a productive labourer, when, in addition to belabouring the heads of his scholars, he works like a horse to enrich the school proprietor. That the latter has laid out his capital in a teaching factory, instead of in a sausage factory, does not alter the relation. (Marx, 1867, p. 477)

As a "sausage factory" in itself, the school is unlikely to hold out much prospect that pupils could be geared for anything other than the interests of capital. Marx would certainly have scoffed at the humanist notion that education is geared to the interests of the child, although "resistance theorists" (such as Willis, Giroux, McLaren) and critical pedagogues such as Freire and McLaren assert the possibilities for teachers and students challenging the capitalist system within schools, and, in the case of Giroux, Freire and McLaren, engaging in liberatory and transformative education. However, as far as capital is concerned, education is merely instrumental in providing and setting a pupil's future "use value" in production. The importance of this is that there is no other standard in which to aspire, other than that defined by capital, for the purposes of capital.

More subtly perhaps, though no less crucially, education has a role in conditioning and institutionalizing children not only for exploitation at work but toward an acceptance of their future life conditions and expectations. This is as true of the supposedly broad liberal arts education of today in the USA, or the purportedly `broad' national curriculum for schools in England, as of more obviously utilitarian vocational models such as Soviet technical and vocational schooling. In any case, Marxists seek the explanation of this phenomenon in the processes of what Marx in the *Preface* called the "superstructure" (1977, p. 389).

The dynamics of production permeate all other activities in society such that there arises alongside concrete state institutions a vast complementary superstructure on the level of human thought or "ideology." The superstructure—consisting of all those elements widely understood as "culture" and "politics"-- becomes simultaneously a product and necessary agency of the economic base. It is the cauldron in which thoughts, opinions, biases and outlooks —rooted in class positions and interests-- are formulated and exchanged and become, due to the power and control exerted by the ruling class, broadly supportive of existing economic practices. In other words, the superstructure tends to replicate in the ideological field class differentials by either presenting these as legitimate somehow or by covering up and disguising the original source of class inequality.

The superstructure has, therefore, a vital concrete function. In a negative sense, it protects the dominant economic group by deflecting and disguising the adverse sensations of production. During the period in which Marx and Engels produced their work, capitalist superstructures were in the process of development and certainly lacked the powers of conciliation we witness today.

Of course, during the period in which Marx and Engels wrote, Europe was rife with social criticism. For example, the literary works of Charles Dickens (1812-1870) in England and Victor Hugo (1802-1885) in France are replete with moral outrage. However, much of it tended to reflect disgust that the major privileges of liberal philosophy, such as 'individual empowerment', 'self-ownership' and so forth, were contradicted by the extant material conditions of the poorest members of society. In other words, such liberal social critics tended to assume that the liberal revolutions, those that had accompanied transitions to capitalist modes of production throughout

Europe, were incomplete or that their highest ideals had been subsequently betrayed somehow.

In fact, many nineteenth century social critics exposed a fundamental internal paradox of liberal philosophy. On the one hand, freedom is sacrosanct and there should be minimal interference in individual choice and behaviour, on the one hand, the activation and preservation of freedom requires social intervention or 'big government'. We find this theme, for example, in the political theories of the Philosophic Radicals, Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and James Mill (1773-1836) who, along with their fellow critics in literature, assumed that what was required to meet dire social need was in effect more liberalism or indeed the 'right kind'.

Marx, however, raises the stakes of social criticism beyond liberalism; an ideology which he believed had largely run its course. For Marx, what was required was socialism but this was not so much an 'idea' as an entirely new social form in which capitalist economic practices and corresponding state support had been swept away by proletarian revolution.

Marx believed he had every reason to be confident. In *The Communist Manifesto* and elsewhere, and derived in part from his earlier humanist writings on alienation, Marx saw the increasing "immiseration" of the workers as a vital revolutionary factor. From a series of articles written in 1849 for the journal *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* and later in the first volumes of *Capital*, Marx's idea of immiseration is that as capitalism develops its cost in human terms would increase proportionately. Workers are singularly vulnerable since their only resource is their labor power, and they are dependent for their subsistence on selling this power to someone else, as we have seen, always for less (exchange value) than its true value. The workers have, therefore, limited material resources and ability to control the processes of capitalism and its long-term tendencies to drive workers' wages down.

In effect, the workers shoulder the cost of an inherently unstable system. For example, the uptake of labor by capital periodically falls short of labor availability. This leads to unemployment, the creation of a ("raced" and gendered) reserve army of labor, and competition for jobs. Sometimes the reserve army is over the border in *maquiladoras*, sometimes far away in colonies and neo-colonies, sometimes through the importation

of formerly subject peoples into the colonial/imperial "motherland," sometimes through the simple "free movement" of labor, as in the newly enlarged European Union, sometimes through bringing more women-laborers into the paid economy. On the other hand, the downward pressure on wages relates directly to downward pressure on commodity prices—labor being a commodity itself.

Subject to stiff market competition, capitalists act on labor as an immediate and malleable factor in the pricing of the commodity. Capitalists are compelled to reduce their overhead costs and are ever-vigilant in their bid to gain an advantage over their competitors. Many variables are beyond the capacity of the capitalist to control, such as the price of raw commodities which, Marx assumed, will be roughly the same for all capitalists, but this is not necessarily the case for the variable labor. Here, the capitalist exerts some measure of control. Indeed, the demands of competition result in the general trend for downward pressure on labor costs.

Of course, this pressure clashes fundamentally with the interests of those whose sole means of subsistence is their labor power. The capitalist's ability to compete will therefore depend upon the self-organization and interest-recognition of a given labor force. For Marx, such recognition was inevitable. For it would prove difficult to disguise from the workers the source of their misery and alienation and the appeal of socialism would thus become unstoppable. However, the growth of superstructures in terms of democratic enfranchisement, "bourgeois democracy," trade unionism and welfare states resulted in what Marxists dub the "embourgeoisement" of the working class or what Marshall (1990, p. 31) calls the pressure for "upward mobility." Rose (1960) considered, for example, how the Conservative Party in Britain was able to command a broad appeal and concluded that an important factor was the increasing association of workers with the values of the middle class. Similar, analysis can be made of other advanced capitalist countries such as the USA, France, Germany. Embourgeoisement results, subjectively, if not objectively, in a blurring of the distinction between classes and the de-radicalisation of the workers. Patently, this effect is attributable to the superstructure rather than the economy *per se*.

Analysis of the role of the superstructure in the process of de-radicalisation was initiated in large part by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937). He argued from a fascist prison cell in the 1930s that the superstructure has a constructive (rather

than exclusively negative) dimension—emphasizing an aspect of Marxist theory that had always been at its core but which, owing to the historical material conditions of the time Marx and Engels made their key arguments, remained de-emphasized in their works, as Engels was later to argue (Engels, Letter to Joseph Bloch (1890). Therefore, Marxists should take the initiative and become more positively engaged in the life of the superstructure. It is, he wrote, "the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 377). As a consequence, the idea of education in Gramsci's thinking is similar to his views on ideology. Education in the widest sense is a vital tool for the advancement of civilization to a necessary level to meet with productive need. For Gramsci, ideology becomes a force for the advancement of the interests of one class over another by its presenting its viewpoints as fair, moral, just and so forth—as just "plain common sense." Gramsci called this force "hegemony" and it represents a particular account of reality which promotes both its own advancement throughout society and the suppression of rival accounts. Of course, equally, Gramsci offers the prospect of turning the tables on the capitalist class by encouraging the proletariat to throw off its ideological subordination and to cultivate its own version of reality as the first stage in revolutionary preparation (Greaves, 2005). This is the classic task of Marxist and communist educators, to transform the working class from an objective "class in itself," into a "class for itself"—a class with class consciousness, aware of its political project to replace capitalism.

Gramsci (1971) perceived that in capitalist systems the task of permeating society with a particular version of reality is given over to the capitalist's "chiefs of staff," or dominant "intellectuals," that is, rather than capitalists themselves. School is, therefore, an obvious locus of intellectual recruitment and hegemonic exchange. As Gramsci puts it: "[s]chool is the instrument through which intellectuals of various levels are elaborated" (p. 10) "[and part of an] overall framework of a policy for forming modern intellectual cadres" (p. 26). Firstly, children learn at school the prevailing mores of society and adopt the conditions of "good citizenship." Secondly, children are selected for a future role in production either as producers themselves or as the intellectual legitimizing agents of productive logic in the superstructure.

Gramsci's ideas on the pedagogic and reproducing nature of the superstructure have been influential within the Marxist tradition. They are explored by Louis Althusser (1971) and Bowles and Gintis (1972; 1976; 1988). For Althusser, the needs of capital are reproduced ideologically by replicating capitalist practices and conditions at multiple social levels. Children are structuralised by education because the education system is part of a state apparatus that cannot do otherwise than work in the interests of capital. A state contrived in accordance with the dictates of a given economic form cannot be brought to perform in ways that are at odds with its structural character. One effect of this is that education systems of capitalist societies become inherently hierarchical and elitist.

This process prepares the student for passive acceptance of the inequalities in expectation and reward that will be faced in the world of capitalist production. Indeed, education is preparation for future market evaluation and the process of commodification through which capitalism assesses human value and worth. Bowles and Gintis (1988) track this analysis. They write:

> [t]he hierarchical order of the school system, admirably geared towards preparing students for their future positions in the hierarchy of production, limits the development of those personal capacities ... and reinforces social inequality by legitimating of students to inherently unequal "slots" in the social hierarchy (1988, p. 18).

Bowles and Gintis (1988) recognise that over and above the interest of the child and the free development of its faculties lies a "hidden curriculum." Education transmits a curriculum to students that is conditioned to the needs of both the forces of production (skills, techniques, know-how) and the relations of production (class, class differentials, inequality). In catering to the needs of the productive forces and the acquisition of skill, the curriculum is open in the sense that the purpose of education is fully apparent. However, Bowles and Gintis (1972) argue that a hidden message is smuggled into education alongside the dissemination of vocational know-how that serves to justify social relations.

The school is a bureaucratic order, with hierarchical authority, rule orientation, stratification by "ability" as well as by age, role differentiation by sex (physical

education) ... etc., and a system of external incentives (marks, promises of promotion, and threat of failure) much like pay and status in the sphere of work. (p. 87)

Section One has offered a synopsis of the Marxist analysis of education and its *a priori* assumptions on education in capitalist systems. We now turn to provide supporting empirical data.

SECTION TWO: CAPITAL AND EDUCATION—AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

Turning the Screw—Neo-liberalism and Fiscal Inequality

The introduction and extension of neoliberal social policies in Britain, the USA after the New Right reactionary movements of the 1980s, and more globally (notably in Chile under Pinochet, elsewhere in Latin America under an assortment of generals and "big business" control) offers fertile ground for Marxist analysis since economic inequality and class division has sharpened markedly (Dumenil and Levy, 2002; Harvey, 2005; Global Policy Forum, 2006). The immiseration of the worker that superstructures and state activities had done much to ameliorate since Marx's time might be making a comeback (Brennan, 2003; Glyn, 2006).

And so, with the economic gains of the thirty-year post–war "boom," from the 1940s to the 1970s, when (in advanced capitalist countries) real wages of the working classes and standards of living improved, (as did the "social wage" welfare and social benefits) the theory of immiseration went into decline. However, following the hidden economic depression of the 1970s ("hidden" because it was compensated for in the west by the large-scale drafting of women into the workforce), Marx's theory of immiseration has regained validity. Since 1970, especially in the case of the United States, real wages have fallen dramatically. However, real family income has remained relatively stable as women entered the workforce. Families have the same amount of money to spend as before, but a lot more hours are being worked. Recent research (Dumenil and Levy, 2002; Harvey, 2005; Hill, 2004, 2005b; Hill *et al*, 2006) testifies that the "class war from above" is in full swing, characterized by the increase in the rate of extraction of surplus value, in advanced capitalist and in developing

countries - with the rich getting richer, the poor poorer, and workers and trade union rights and liberties under attack.

Currently there is a "race to the bottom" in which worldwide wages and conditions of labor are being held down by neo-liberal national and global policies such as the structural readjustment programmes of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and the "liberalisation" of trade agenda of the World Bank's General Agreement of Trade in services (GATS) (2002, 2003; Hill, 2005b; Hill et al, 2006). Together with competition from the substantially lower-wage economies such as India and China, we see Marx's rising rate of exploitation re-emerging, a century and a half after he first predicted it (Glynn, 2006). In justifying the intensification of labor, the ideological state apparatuses such as education and the media, and of the repressive state apparatuses of the laws, army, police (Althusser, 1971, Hill, 2004)—play a full role in trying to "manage" citizens and workers into accepting the "common sense" of an individualistic, consumerist, and hierarchically stratified society.

Dumenil and Levy (2004) highlight the increasing inequality in the USA. Those in the highest tax bracket are paying tax at a tax rate around half that of the 1920s, whereas the current tax rate for those in the lowest tax bracket are more than double of what it was then. In a forerunner of George W. Bush's "trillion dollar tax giveaway to the rich," Reagan cut the top rate of personal tax from 70% to 28%. The results can be seen most starkly in CEO remuneration packages whose income soared by 25% in 2005 to $17.9 million, with six CEOs who accumulating between USD$100–$280 million that year (Strass and Hansen, 2006). This compares with the average worker in the USA gaining a meagre 3.1% increase which is below inflation. Real-term wages are in decline and the wealth of the nation is being transferred to the few in the capitalist oligarchy class (Ibid.). In addition, both the US administration and British government have also dramatically cut taxes on businesses and multinational corporations inflating profits.

Similarly, in Britain, the working class is paying more tax. The richest groups are paying a smaller proportion of their income in taxes in comparison to 1949 and to the late 1970s. These dates were both in the closing stages, at the end of two periods, of what might be termed "Old Labour," or social democratic governments (in ideological contradistinction to the primarily neo-liberal policies of "New Labour"). As a

percentage of income, middle and high earners in Britain pay less tax in 2003 than at any time for 30 years. It is the poorest, the lowest paid (1/3 of the population are paid below the EU decency threshold of the minimum wage), who are paying more despite the economy having doubled since the 1950s (Toynbee, 2003). In comparison with the late 1970s, the "fat cats" are now paying around half as much tax (income tax and insurance contribution rate). These people are paying less income tax and national insurance as a percentage of their earned income than in 1949. "As a percentage of income, middle and high earners pay less tax now than at any time in the past thirty years" (Johnson & Lynch, 2004), In contrast, the average tax rate for "the low paid" is roughly double that of the early 1970s—and nearly twice as much as in 1949 (Johnson & Lynch, 2004). The subtitle for Johnson and Lynch's article is, appropriately, "sponging off the poor."

The encroachment of capital into state/public education has intensified because of a decline in the rate of capital accumulation. New markets outside of the traditional private sector domain were needed (Hursh & Martina, 2003), especially to take advantage of economies of scale. In order to accommodate the business imperative, the US and British governments opened up, and continue to liberalise, the public sector services including education.

In Britain, New Labour's neo-liberalizing policies aimed at deregulating educational provisions are potentially paving the way for the private sector to take a stranglehold of state services (Hill, 2006). The private sector is involved in almost every element of the British education services with activities ranging from selling services to educational institutions, to managing and owning schools and other facilities. Education ancillary services such as cleaning, catering, security and reprographics have been outsourced to private sector companies. On a national scale, functions such as inspection, student fees and loans handling, and record keeping, are increasingly run by private corporations rather than by the Local Education Authority (LEA) or the national government. And the current pre-privatization of state schooling in England and Wales (Rikowski, 2005) could well see a system of publicly funded privately controlled schooling.

The "Sausage Factory" in Action: Standardization and Centralization of Education

It should not be thought that the struggle between classes, in part, played out in education can be eradicated by state provision and such measures as standardised national curricula. For Marxists, the state can never be neutral while serving a capitalist economy, even though it can be used as a site of struggle and can effect reforms. State involvement in education represents the attempt at regulation, harmonization, and rationalization. The standardizing and centralizing powers of the state allow for a practical and ideological correlation between national educational provision and national economic need. The state turns the interests of capital into national educational strategies. Of course, the rhetoric of government policies such as that of *No Child Left Behind* in the USA and the rhetoric of the Blair government in its 2006 Education Bill for England and Wales do not solely advance a vocational or human capital rationale. (But is it remarkable how demoted or absent, relative to the 1960s, are rationales based on liberal-progressivist child-centred ideology, or social democratic redistributionist ideology). There are other rationales, such as political competitive vote-winning, considerations. There is also the legitimacy question. In societies, such as Britain, the USA and other liberal democratic polities, where economic inequality is high and growing, upward mobility between social classes has to be seen to be attainable – the message is work hard and you'll be rewarded. If these messages permeate the masses who do not enjoy much of the spoils, then they are more likely to tolerate the riches that few enjoy within that society. However, if these meritocratic messages of attainable riches, and advancement through a meritocratic education system are not widely accepted, then this poses legitimacy- and political survival problems- for political and economic elites.

As part of a strategic state objective, education is driven by the need and desire of capital for capital accumulation. Currently, in advanced capitalist countries education has a particular, distinctive economic and business orientation: it seeks a specialist workforce, whether by a dual-track system such as in Germany, or through supposedly single track, more `comprehensive' systems, as in the USA. Both types of system, and hybrid types are specialised in that they are both designed to train or educate for the purposes of capital. In both types students are differentially and

hierarchically trained and/ or educated (Hirtt, 2004) to maximise economic return in the development of a "knowledge economy." In the world-wide division of labor other education systems and the economies they serve, have different functions. In some historic-geographical spaces these include the production of raw materials and/ or low-skilled factory assembly work, together with supervisory capacity. This has the effect of stratifying children into crude (gendered and "raced") class strata categories. One result is the failure to provide a holistic educational experience aiming to enrich pupils' personal developments and talents.

The state allows for, and encourages, therefore, the harmonizing and standardizing of education provision toward the needs of capital. As McNeill (2000) observes, state standardization and centralization nevertheless replicates capitalist social relations in that it:

> creates inequities, widening the gap between the quality of education for poor and minority youth and that of more privileged students. (p. 3)

The state is a key agency for the defence of extant relations of production. Hence, Marxists would point to the anti-radicalizing effect of education through the smothering of creativity, imagination, and critical thought . By this is meant, radical political creativity, imagination and political thought. Rikowski (2001) suggests that the State needs to control the social production of labour power for two reasons. First to try to ensure that *the social production of labour-power*, equipping students with skills, competences, occurs,. Secondly, to try to ensure that modes of pedagogy that are antithetical to labour-power production *do not and cannot exist*. In particular, it becomes clear, on this analysis, that the capitalist State will seek to destroy any forms of pedagogy *that attempt to educate students regarding their real predicament - to create an awareness of themselves as future labour-powers and to underpin this awareness with critical insight that seeks to undermine the smooth running of the social production of labour-power*. This fear entails strict control, for example, of the curriculum for teacher education and training, of schooling, and of educational research. Hill (2003, 2004, 2007) argues that neoliberal capital and governments stifle critical thought-by compressing and repressing critical space in education today, with Capital and neo-liberal ideology and policy seeking to neutralise and destroy potential pockets of resistance to global corporate expansion and neo-liberal Capital.

A historic example of this is the smothering and incorporation of independent working class educational provision (such as in nineteenth century Germany and Britain). National "homogenization" given over to "task-related knowledge" approaches of capitalized education systems (Kimbell & Perry, 2001; Maisuria 2005) is a destructive, as well as in some respects constructive process because it creates robotic people less able to *think* beyond the scope of their function in society. Creativity, imagination and critical thought are, of course valued within education systems, but primarily insofar as they are constrained within a capitalist framework, focussed on the development of relatively compliant human capital. A restrictive educational experience limits cognitive emancipation and empowerment by limiting human horizons to the requirements of capital.

Of course, there are some differences between capitalist countries. Social democratic countries have a low Gini coefficient—i.e., relatively lower levels of inequality resulting from decades of social democratic rule and reforms. This is exemplified by Sweden, a country with a large state, impressive welfarist policies, and nationalised public services.

2000, and the UK increased to 0.345 in 1999 from 0.270 in 1979 (Ibid.). Sweden's levels of inequality has barely increased (from a relatively low baseline) in the last 30 years. In addition, Sweden in the 21 century is significantly more equal than the UK was 30 years ago (*ibid.*). However, whether social democratic, redistributionist governments will continue to limit the intrusion of capitalist interests into state provision, against the backdrop of increasingly globalised neo-liberalism, remains to be seen. Where in "the balance of class forces," the class struggle, is sufficiently strong- with millions poring onto the streets in defence of their pensions, public utilities and services, labor-rights, then neoliberal capital can be thwarted. And, with a rise in class consciousness nationally and globally, be replaced.

Choice and Inequality

In the UK, while in government from 1979 to 1997, the Conservatives established a *competitive market* for consumers (children and their parents) by setting up new types of schools in addition to the local (State, i.e., public) primary school or the local secondary comprehensive school.

Empirical evidence by Hoxby (2000, 2003a, 2003b) shows that the result of this "school choice" is that inequalities between schools increased because in many cases the "parental choice" of schools has become the "schools choice" of the most desirable parents and children—and rejection of others. In the UK, parental social class and income is the most important factor affecting educational attainment (Rueda & Vignoles, 2003).

Choice means that so-called "sink schools" have become more "sink-like" as more favoured schools have picked the children they think are likely to be successful. Where selection exists the sink schools just sink further and the privileged schools just become more privileged (this is particularly pertinent in England and Wales, in the wake of the 2006 Education Bill by the New Labour government, which proposes to permit increased selection "by aptitude" in schools). The Association of Teachers and Lecturers lamblasts marketization in education: "The trouble with choice is that those least able to choose find that, if the market rules, it tends to prioritise those customers which do not take up too much of its resources" (Bousted, 2006, p. XX) .

Teachers in these "ghetto schools for the underclass" (p. XX) are publicly pilloried, and, under New Labour the schools "named and shamed" as "Failing Schools," and, in some cases either re-opened with a new "Superhead" as a "Fresh Start School" (with dismissals of "failing" teachers), or shut down (see, for example, Hill, 1997; Whitty, Power & Halpin, 1998). Similar policies and effects are seen in the US as a result of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation of the American congress (Hursh, 2003).

Hierarchical differentiation is the consequence of experiments with choice. This is so of the tripartite system in the US—private, suburban, and urban schooling—and in Britain, with the tripartite system of private fee-paying schools, schools (such as Academies) opted out of local authority/school district control, and working class local council and authority schools. Further differentiation is spurred on by the publication of various test results such as SATS.

Differentiation is being formally replicated in higher education (Machin and Vignoles, 2006). This is easily understood in the US where elite universities charge student fees many times those of lower status universities. In the USA university fees are assessed on a need/income basis for each student, with many poor and needs-based students

paying little or nothing for fees at institutions like Harvard, Yale. This has, however led to comments such as `in order to attend an expensive university, one has to be "either very rich, or very poor." Overall, the correlation between size of fees and size of working class attendance at universities in the USA is marked. In the UK, the turn-of-the-millennium differentiation between Oxbridge and the elite "Russell Group" of universities, the other "old" universities; the "new" (i.e., ex-Polytechnic) universities and the institutes/colleges of higher education is formalized. It is widely expected that elitist universities will be permitted to charge higher fees. (Until 2006 all universities in Britain charged the same fees, indeed, until the late 1990s the government paid all fees for all citizens). Now there is the further development of a ("racialized") class-based hierarchicalization of universities entry, essentially pricing the poor out of the system, or at least into the lower divisions of higher education.

Research by the Centre for Economics of Education at the London School of Economics found that "poorer students are [in 2006] more likely to go to higher education than they were in the past, [however] the likelihood of them doing so relative to their richer peers is actually lower than it was the case in earlier decades" (Machin & Vignoles, 2006, p.14).

Markets have exacerbated existing inequalities in education. There is considerable data, most notably Whitty, Power, and Halpin (1998) and Machin and Vignoles (2006), on how poor schools have become poorer (in terms of relative education results, retention of students, and in terms of total income) and how elitist rich schools (in the same terms) have got richer through marketization in the US, Sweden, England and Wales, Australia, and New Zealand.

In order to foresee the future, there is some worth in looking at diktats and structural readjustment programmes of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and other agencies of international capital, `often push highly controversial economic policy reforms on poor countries, like trade liberalization and privatisation of essential services' (Eurodad, 2006. See also Shugurensky and Davidson-Harden, 2004; Hill, 2005b; Hill et al 2006; Rosskam, 2006; Tomasevski, 2006a, 2006b). The 2006 Eurodad report continues,

> Our research found that 18 out of the 20 poor countries we assessed had privatization related conditions attached to their development finance from the World Bank or IMF. And the number of 'aggregate' privatisation-related conditions that the World Bank and IMF impose on developing countries has risen between 2002 and 2006. For many countries privatisation-related conditions make up a substantial part of their overall conditions from the World Bank and IMF (p.3).

Increasing the role of the private sector (including *for*-profit) organizations at primary, secondary and tertiary levels create unequal access to schooling based on social class, despite compensatory measures, such as subsidies, intended to limit the stratifying effects of capitalization. Private schools cherry-pick, or "cream off" the children of wealthier families who are more equipped to succeed at school, leaving the public school system to admit more challenging students with greater needs. Furthermore, state schools generally have fewer resources than private schools, and therefore need the "investments" from pupils from wealthier backgrounds to replenish books, furniture, and materials.

Ironically, but not unexpectedly, the World Bank's corporate lending arm, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) (2001), has claimed that fee-paying educational institutions can "improve" equity:

> [p]rivate education can indirectly benefit the lowest socio-economic groups by attracting families who can afford some level of fee away from the public system, thereby increasing capacity and per student spending for the students who remain in the public system. Similarly, the emergence of private tertiary institutions allows governments to reduce funding in such institutions and instead to invest in lower levels of education, thus improving distributive efficiency. (p. 5)

The idea that the siphoning off "education investments" from wealthier pupils away from the public system actually increases equity is based on a highly contestable argument. Reimers (2000) notes that:

> [t]he poor have less access to preschool, secondary, and tertiary education; they also attend schools of lower quality where they are socially segregated. Poor parents have fewer resources to support the education of their children, and they have less financial, cultural, and social capital to transmit. Only policies that explicitly address inequality, with a major redistributive purpose, therefore, could make education an equalizing force in social opportunity. (p. 55).

Indeed, principles of universal access, for example, as enshrined in international covenants such as the United Nations convention on economic, social and cultural rights, reflect a quite different notion of educational equity than that based on "choice" promoted by the World Bank and the IFC (Schugurensky & Davidson-Harden, 2003) and subscribed to by successive governments in the US and Britain. The argument about inequality in this section is succinctly articulated by a Council's Director of Education in the North-East of England:

> Everything is to be done to keep middle England happy, to give them their choice of school—so they don't have to pay for private schools—to guarantee them the places that other children ought to have and, worst of all, to give their schools the powers to keep out those other children they don't want their own children to mix with (Mitchell, 2006).

CONCLUSION: HOW CAPITALISM (EXAGGERATED BY NEO-LIBERALISM) INEVITABLY INCREASES EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY

In Section One, it was suggested that class should remain central to the leftist critique of capitalist education systems and that Karl Marx and subsequent Marxist thinkers possess the epistemic and explanatory upper hand over pluralist, Weberian, and deconstructionist (such as postmodernist) accounts of society.

Section Two reinforced the theoretical claim that education is functional to capitalism in two essential ways. Firstly, education imposes division amongst children in preparation for the stratification of labor within the labor process. Suitably selected for tasks in production, the child is then educated and skilled to the level deemed suitable by capital for work. The child's individual needs are, despite the best will and effort of many teachers, deemed secondary to the needs of production by capital and the governments funded and supported by capital. Secondly, education conditions the child for a career of exploitation, inequality and differentials, conformity and passivity. For the majority, education, despite the best will and efforts of many teachers, lowers expectation, and confines and fragments outlooks into myriad specialist skills that block the attainment of the bigger life picture. In short, education prepares and cultivates future workers to become both useful and productive and obedient and docile.

Section Two located empirically the actual linkage between the capitalist economy and educational outcome by examining neoliberal policy, the role of the state and the effect of the commodification of education by its increasing exposure to market ethics and practices. The evidence tended to support the Marxist claim that in capitalism a sector such as education is tightly controlled in the interests of capital, despite the resistant and counter-hegemonic efforts of students, teachers and communities. Education is embedded in class relations and reflects, reinforces and replicates the tendency of capital to produce and reproduce inequality.

Capital leads to capitalization of education, and the principal capitalist objective then is to accumulate value and surplus-value in order to make profits. Capitalism is ambivalent to the obvious inequalities, disadvantage, and discrimination they perpetuate, for them the end (profit making) justifies the means. The upshot is clear then: in the long-term and in macro-political terms, capitalism does indeed lead to increasing education inequality.

In many countries, capitalism has been fairly successfully regulated, the Gini co-efficient depicting levels of inequality in the distribution of education in the labor force, diminished. But, when the crunch comes of declining capital accumulation, then capitalists do not abolish themselves. They turn to Nazism or Fascism, or to a permanent "war on terror," taking away rights of protest and dissent. Or, as in the UK, the party that was formerly the party of the working class, the Labour Party, that did, through most of the twentieth century, pursue social democratic policies, along with pro-capitalist policies, has become transformed, under "New Labour," into another capitalist party, no longer even with a mass working class membership, adopting neoliberal policies that lead to greater inequalities.

The inequalities documented in this paper can be eradicated. Working class consciousness, and class struggles, can and do resist. This can be through resistance by parliamentary reformist means. For example in the social democratic states of northwest Europe. These are not socialist, in the sense that socialism wishes to replace capitalism. Social democrats, however, wish to make capitalism more benign. Social democracy is a contradictory form of resistance to capital—or at least to its wider and wilder depredations—and educational inequalities. Social Democrats seek to advance workers' rights and to reduce inequality—but also to maintain capitalism. As Rosa

Luxemburg (1899/1970) explained, the core aim of the revisionist left is the "bettering of the situation of the workers and . . . the conservation of the middle classes" (p. 60).

In contrast to social democracy, socialist forms of resistance to capitalism take either revolutionary means (as seen in Russia, Cuba, and China) or evolutionary means, such as through the parliamentary/democratic processes as witnessed in Nicaragua in the 1980s or Venezuela under Hugo Chavez. Both are responses to the increasing inequalities under capitalism. Both are responses to the choice offered by Rosa Luxemburg, the choice between (capitalist) barbarism on the one hand, or, on the other, socialism.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thanks Deborah Kelsh for her comments on this paper

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