

## **Rethinking Educational Purpose: The socialist challenge**

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### **Abstract**

*In this essay Malott makes a case for a Marxist reading of education's role in expanding and reproducing capitalist societies. In the process he challenges the proposition that cognitive capitalism has fundamentally transformed the way in which capitalism operates. That is, rather than being guided by an internal capitalist logic, proponents of cognitive capitalism argue it is the autonomous actions of a fragmented, global labor force that has forced capital to shift its paradigm of social relations. In making his case Malott also rejects the neo-Marxist focus on culture as the primary cite of anti-capitalist struggle. A focus on private property, Malott contends, remains the center of capitalist power and should therefore be an important aspect of anti-capitalist resistance. Ultimately, Malott argues for a socialist pedagogy designed to foster the critical, class-consciousness needed for a democratic, collective struggle against an out-of-control global capitalist system.*

Symbolized by the housing market crash in the US between 2006 and 2008, the most recent crisis of capitalist over-accumulation has had devastating effects on the *center/core* (i.e. the United States, Japan, Great Britain, Germany, Canada, Australia, etc.), the *semi-periphery* (i.e. Argentina, Indonesia, Ireland, Greece, Egypt, Mexico, Turkey, Syria, Venezuela, etc.) and the *periphery* (i.e. Haiti, Bangladesh, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Philippines, Niger, Honduras, Congo, Pakistan, etc.) (Bousquet, 2012) as workers and students are crudely hacked out of the global economy with drastic austerity policies (especially prevalent in the more developed *center* and *semi-periphery*). However, the resulting decentralized, fractured, flexible global work force (a process that has been under way for over three decades) has been

interpreted by some on the left as evidence of the rise of a deindustrialized knowledge economy with so-called *third-world* conditions becoming universalized. While neoliberal policies and information technologies have afforded capital the mobility it never had before wreaking havoc on the world's working classes, the center of capitalist power remains clearly identifiable. The significance of this position resides within the assertion that successfully defeating capitalism requires an ability to identify where the centers of corporate power are located. We might therefore note that the existence of the working classes in the *(semi)periphery* producing wealth for the capitalist classes of the *center/semi-periphery* continues to be made possible by *center* (i.e. transnational/imperialist) capitalists owning/controlling significant segments of the means of production (i.e. land) in the *periphery* and *semi-periphery*, the most influential financial institutions, such as the New York Stock Exchange, and the world financial regulatory agencies like the World Bank. Contributing significantly to manufacturing the necessary consent for this system of global capitalism is education—hence, the need for a socialist pedagogy addressed at the end of this essay.

Stated plainly and boldly, the core of the center of the global-capitalist empire is the United States. The evidence for this conclusion resides in the fact that the U.S. houses less than five percent of the world's population but consumes more than a quarter of the world's resources. Put another way, the poorest twenty percent of the world's population, concentrated in the *periphery* and *semi-periphery* where many of the world's centers of industrial production are located, account for only one point five percent of private consumption, whereas the wealthiest twenty percent consume more than seventy-five percent, largely concentrated in the *center* (Shah, 2011). Offering a deeper analysis of this relationship between the *center* and the *(semi)periphery* in the context of global capitals' most recent crisis we can look to Adam Hanieh's (2011) *Capitalism and Class in the Gulf Arab States*. That is, Hanieh (2011) notes that, "because virtually every country was linked into this chain at some level [due, in large part, to World Bank policies since WWII]—as low-wage production zones, exporters of migrant labor, or suppliers of raw materials—the crisis rapidly spread through the globe with devastating consequences" (p. 167). What we are now witnessing is a complex and at times contradictory worldwide rebellion against the neoliberal form of capitalism in the *center* and *peripheries*. In the United States, this has taken the form

of Occupy Wall Street, which was inspired by the Egyptian people's occupation of Tahir Square and the overthrow of US-supported, foreign-investor friendly President Hosni Mubarak—a class rebellion in the *peripheries* fuelled by a massive increase in food prices as demand for export commodities in the *center* dramatically declined in the wake of the crisis (Hanieh, 2011).

While I would argue that neoliberalism is part of the most recent period of capitalist development (Robinson, 2008), Roggero (2011) and others argue that this construction is flawed because it represents “a linear progression of phases of development” failing to grasp “the new paradigms that transform and rearticulate the prism of capitalist social relations” (Roggero, 2011, p. 39). For Roggero (2011) identifying this “new paradigm” represents an attempt to update Marx's project of mapping the trajectory of capitalist development. That is, Roggero (2011) argues that the autonomous actions of labor (not the internal logic of capital) have been a historic force pushing capitalists to development “new paradigms” of control leading to new “social relations” between labor and capital. While Roggero (2011) offers many important insights regarding these new forms of control and their subsequent social relations represented in the logics of what has been coined *cognitive capitalism* or the *knowledge economy* (i.e. the increasing privatization and corporatization of universities), I remain convinced that the Marxist proposition that competitive capitalism, once set in motion, operates by internal laws of competitive accumulation remains accurate. This perspective is vital for understanding that it is the internal logic of capital that leads to perpetual, cyclical crisis (i.e. 1893, 1929, 1972, 2006) creating the conditions for its own demise.

It is within this context of an emerging militant labor movement that led the great American crusader for common schooling, Horrace Mann, in pleas to mill owners, citing Bartlett, a mill owner himself, that capitalists with great fortunes would be wise to invest in education as a form of “insurance on their property...thereby educating the whole mass of mind and constituting a police more effective than peace officers or prisons” (Quoted in Urban & Wagoner, 2009, p. 120) because an educated worker is malleable and controllable whereas an uneducated worker is potentially rebellious and quite dangerous. In other words, education has played a significant role in maintaining the social universe of capital because it has been designed to create within workers a

worldview and interpretative framework centered around a believe in the inevitability and ultimate goodness and rightness of capital grounded in a dependence for an authoritarian leader and social structure. Again, a socialist, anti-capitalist education here becomes an important part of the process of fostering the class-consciousness needed for the revolutionary overthrow of the basic structures of global capitalist power.

Viewing human societies as moving through stages of development challenges us to view capitalism not as a permanent fixture/relationship due to the supremacy of Western European cultural and economic life, but rather, as a stage in the development of human civilization. This consciousness poses a revolutionary challenge to the laborer (from the fast food worker to the adjunct and charter school educator) who is “nothing else, his whole life, than labor-power” and all his or her time is therefore dedicated to “the self-expansion of capital” leaving no time for “education, intellectual development, for the fulfilling of social functions and for social intercourse, for the free-play of his bodily and mental activity” (Marx, 1867/1967, p. 264) and even for the necessary time to rest and rejuvenate the body for another days’ work—that is, for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and for the abolition of class society, and eventually, the complete subversion of capitalist identities (i.e. working class, middle class, ruling class).

In other words, the labor movement or the autonomous actions of knowledge workers does not and cannot determine or alter the internal logic of capital and, therefore, because capital cannot be reformed, it must be overthrown. This conclusion, as I allude to, does not mean that workers have no agency or capacity for critical resistance. Rather, it suggests that while capitalists may continuously develop new technologies of production and control as a response to labor’s social movements, in part, the internal logic of capital and the basic capitalist property relations between labor and capital remain consistent. Again labor’s historical struggle to end capitalism by removing ourselves as a class from this negative, one-sided relationship is different from being able to transform capital’s internal logic. That logic operates independently of human intervention—we can either consent to it, or resist it. Likewise, the *bad* things capitalists do (i.e. increasingly driving down wages consuming labor power) are not necessarily the result of individuals born *evil* or *greedy*, but are the product of social actors (i.e. capitalists and CEOs) fulfilling

their institutional roles within competitive capitalism (i.e. accumulators of surplus value by any means necessary). Highlighting the destructiveness of capitalism Marx (1867/1967) observes:

The capitalistic mode of production (essentially the production of surplus value, the absorption of surplus-labor), produces thus, with the extension of the working day, not only the deterioration of human labor-power by robbing it of its normal, moral and physical, conditions of development and function. It produces also the premature exhaustion and death of this labor-power itself. It extends the laborer's time of production during a given period by shortening his actual life-time. (p. 265)

While this destructive impulse remains consistent and even intensifies through capitals' stages of expansive development (even in the adjunct/temporary/part-time heavy knowledge economy), the constant movement and restlessness of capitalism leads to technological innovations including new forms of social control as demonstrated by Roggero (2011). The capitalist, as Marx demonstrates above, driven by the internal laws of capitalist accumulation, habitually brings much suffering and harm to those who rely on a wage to survive and therefore remains responsible for his crimes against humanity and will therefore continue to be the justified target of working class *revenge* (Hill, 2012). While an understanding of the shifting nature of the "social relations" (culture/knowledge/jobs) of production is important for building anti-capitalist strategy (Roggero, 2011), the perpetually shifting and expanding nature of capitalism is driven by a consistent internal logic and *property* relations (land/means of production) irrespective of the type of work (i.e. industrial/material or cognitive/immaterial) or historical period in question.

Again, in this essay I affirm the position that through capitals' stages of development the primary relationship between labor and capital remains in place rendering the need for an anti-capitalist movement more relevant now than ever (Cole, 2011; Hill, McLaren, Cole, & Rikowski, 2002; Kelsh & Hill, 2006; McLaren, & Jaramillo, 2010; Rikowski, 2006; Robinson, 2008). In the process I argue for a socialist revolution against the property relations of capitalist production enacting a socialist pedagogy as an important tactic. However, the socialism I am advocating for is one centered on building affinity with horizontal, non-hierarchical anarchists and other radicals who do not believe in party politics or any form of working-class centralization associated

with socialist revolution (which I do believe is necessary). What follows is therefore an exploration of socialist pedagogy situated in the context of critiquing its internal detractors—that is, both neo-Marxist educational theory and liberal approaches to educational purpose.

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In the U.S. neoliberalism was brought on, in part, by the decline of the post-WWII boom when US capitalist competition in Europe and Japan began to pose a competitive challenge after rebuilding their infrastructures. Simply stated, neoliberal policies are clearly designed to increase profitability for the capitalist class, while being portrayed to the general public as serving the so-called *common good*. We can begin this story noting that income in the United States (in the so-called *center*) was at an all-time high in 1972, after which it began to decline (a decline still in process). Ronald Reagan, a former movie star and governor of California, after being elected President of the United States in 1981, used this ebb in the economy as a pretext for cutting the social programs labor fought for since the second industrial revolution in the late 1800s, which further slowed growth and depressed wages. Coupled with these cuts was the dismantling of the regulation and taxation of capital. We might refer to this as the capitalist state giving tax breaks to the capitalist class. For example, in 1972 in the U.S. the capitalist class was taxed roughly seventy percent; with Reagan (1981-1989) that decreased to forty percent; today it is fifteen percent (Perlo, 2012). After running up the debt by cutting taxes on the rich (i.e. trickle-down economics) and massively increasing military spending to further expand and forcibly open markets and prevent the global spread of peoples' programs (i.e. socialism), the path was paved to say:

We have been spending too much. We are not working hard enough. We are enjoying too many entitlements. We have to cut back. We have to tighten our belts. There is not enough to go around, so we have to consume less (Perlo, 2012, <http://politicalaffairs.net/austerity-and-the-economic-crisis/>)

It is argued that this sentiment has been so thoroughly normalized that liberals do not fully reject its scarcity premise arguing that capitals' *greed just needs to be reigned in* (i.e. transaction tax) but, it seems, not overcome (instead we hear vague notions of

*social justice*). In practice, liberal critical educators tend to argue that social justice will be achieved when the *culture* of capitalist societies is *democratized* by *cultural workers*. However, the consequence here is that the abolition of class society is sidelined. As we will see below, it therefore seems clear that even much of the educational left, especially in the US, have conceded to the inevitability of capital thesis. Consequently, it is not uncommon to hear those on the left proclaim that, *the Wal-Mart's aren't going anywhere. They will always be here so we should put pressure on them to be socially and environmentally responsible*. This inevitability thesis comes from the false *end of history* assumption drawn on most recently by the West with the fall of Soviet Communism used as “evidence” against Marx (Cole, 2011; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005). Situating this shift away from the hope within an anti-capitalist Marxism in a larger global context Göran Therborn (2008) notes that, “the labor movement in capitalist countries, the socialist-feminist movement, the anticolonial liberation movements and ‘actually existing’ socialist countries, whatever their faults, were seen as carriers of a different future...of emancipation. By the 1990s, however, that belief in the future had been fundamentally shattered” (p. 125).

Understood within this hyper-capitalist context the socialist-oriented pedagogies of radical educators such as Paulo Freire have consequently been reduced to self-reflective, dialogical learning circles abandoning the class analysis of anti-global-capitalism (McLaren, 2005). The liberal understanding of educational purpose, now perhaps more than ever, therefore assumes that the social function of *schooling is to advance democracy by providing a way for the oppressed to achieve upward vertical social mobility creating greater equality within capitalism* (i.e. social justice), which, it is assumed, is *the only option in a world forever capitalist*. In the words of U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan (2009),

Whether it's in rural Alaska or inner-city Detroit, everyone everywhere shares a common belief that education is America's economic salvation.

They see education as the one true path out of poverty—the great equalizer that overcomes differences in background, culture and privilege. It's the only way to secure our common future in a competitive global economy.

Everyone wants the best for their children and they are willing to take greater responsibility. Nobody questions our purpose. (quoted in Thomas, 2012)

Austerity (reducing deficits through cutting social programs such as education budgets), informed by a similar pro-capitalist liberal perspective, is therefore viewed as an attack on democracy. While this conclusion is somewhat true, I would argue, it does not tell the whole story. Education, from a Marxist understanding, on the other hand, was never intended to be democratic, it is (contrary to the position of capital as articulated above by Duncan) a necessary cost of production fulfilling the following functions: training to reproduce labor (changes with shifts in capital); manufacturing consent to selling ones labor power for a wage far less than the value it produces; creating new technologies and commodities to increase efficiency, create new markets, and offset the falling rate of profit within capitalist production; and to reproduce the capitalist class. From here we can observe that austerity reflects both the *changing needs of capital* and new forms of disciplining labor.

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Returning to the consequences of capitalism (i.e. poverty and growing inequality), it is perhaps telling that as the internal contradictions of capital become more obvious, rendering Marx's work more relevant, it becomes increasingly more difficult for the supporters and beneficiaries of capital to discount or deride him. That is, as the global economy began to free fall in 2008, it was becoming far too obvious that the free market economic theories of Hayek and Friedman (that support an unregulated and untaxed capitalist class as the key to general prosperity) were too flawed for even the most pro-capital economists to ignore. That is, cutting taxes on the rich and cutting spending on social programs does not free up more capital for reinvestment and stimulus, as is argued, but rather contributes to the slowing down and depression of the economy. If saving capitalism is the goal, then increasing spending on social programs such as education, health care, and so on and simultaneously increasing transaction taxes for capitalist investment, have proven far more effective.

More importantly, perhaps, in contributing to the shift, however slight, concerning the legitimacy of the work of Karl Marx, was the Arab Spring coupled with the Occupy Wall Street movements' ability to change the international discourse (especially in the extremely conservative United States) in a matter of months. Class and the very legitimacy of capitalism have become mainstream topics, which was unthinkable in



2010. So significant is this movement, Noam Chomsky (2012) has boldly called it “unprecedented” and that if you would have asked him about launching Occupy in 2010, he would have said, more or less, *it will never work so don't even bother trying*—offering some legitimacy to the Marxist observation that as the competitive drive of capital shifts more and more wealth to the capitalist classes thereby intensifying the poverty, suffering, and insecurity of the laboring classes, the possibility (not the inevitability) of rebellion also escalates.

In a few rare capitulations to the conclusion that *Marx was right*, mainstream economists, if only for a brief moment, acknowledged that the growing poverty and suffering of billions of people across the Earth cannot, with good conscious, be attributed to the deficiencies of the working-class itself, but, at some level, is the outcome of competitive capitalism, which, periodically/cyclically, goes into crisis.

For example, elite management specialist, Umair Haque (2011), writing in the *Harvard Business Review*, notes that there is, perhaps, “a tiny mote of insight or two hidden in Marx’s diagnosis of the maladies of industrial age capitalism” while offering the disclaimers that he is “a staunch believer in capitalism” and therefore does not believe that “Communism is the glorious future of humankind” (p. 1). That is, Haque makes a special point to continuously remind his readers that while Marx’s diagnosis might be somewhat accurate, his solutions were outright wrong. Apparently advocating for a reformist approach to thinking outside the “big-box store” (p. 2), Haque rejects a revolutionary approach, what he calls *overthrowing* and *communalizing*. However, because Haque does not identify what Marx refers to as the true cause of the conflict between labor and capital, private property, Haque’s dismissal, I argue, is unfounded.

That is, because of the legalized and thus institutionalized creation of private property (i.e. the Enclosure Acts in England that helped make the transition from feudalism to capitalism), there emerged a landless class of former peasants (i.e. no direct access to the means of production/land to reproduce their own existence) who, due to a lack of alternatives, found themselves in a social context where they had to sell their labor power for a wage to survive. These English and Scottish tribesmen became the basis for the original industrial, global working class. The unequal relationship between the

purchasers of labor power (i.e. capitalists) and the sellers of labor power (i.e. labor ourselves) stemming from capitalist property relations is the foundation of the capitalist mode of production. The exploitation of the working class by the capitalist class is therefore a predictable consequence of the labor/capital relationship, which, fundamentally, does not change even as the means of production expands into digital and on-line arenas.

Again, failing to identify the true cause of conflict Haque seems to be guilty of the same error Marx (1844/1988) critiques Adam Smith for. Just as Marx (1844/1988) pointed out how political economy acknowledges the consequences of capital, such as how “the worker sinks to the level of a commodity and becomes the most wretched of commodities” (as in neoliberal capitalism), but “does not demonstrate how [such conditions] arise from the very nature of private property” (Marx, 1844/1988, pp. 69-70) (i.e. the privatization and centralization of land/means of production), so too do liberal (i.e. Haque) cries against poverty fail to reveal the true cause of these material conditions.

Similarly, veteran critical educator and researcher, Jean Anyon (2011), in her text *Marx and Education*, argues that the very notion of revolution is outdated and irrelevant due to “historical events.” This conclusion is reached by separating the creation of private property from the exploitation of labor as two separate forms of oppression. Anyon therefore allows herself the ability to primarily focus on the consequences of capitalism, namely poverty and wealth, leaving Marx’s connection between the property relations of capital and exploitation unexplored. By not centering *the cause of conflict between labor and capital* Anyon, like others, either fail or refuse to comprehend the need for revolution and the socialist challenge. The culture of capitalist greed and consumerism are therefore portrayed as the causes of suffering, not the underlying property relations. Anyon’s neo-Marxist focus on *the culture of capitalism* is thus reformist and a betrayal of *Marx the revolutionary*.

For Anyon then, extending Marx means “working for progressive change” challenging “a small elite of investors” who have stolen “our jobs, income, homes, schools, water, pension funds, transportation systems” (p. 96). In her discussion there is no mention of abolishing private property and the relationship between labor and

capital. Critical pedagogy, in this context, means involving students in “public struggles over rights, injustice, and opportunity” (p. 97), but within, it seems, rather than against capital.

Unlike Anyon, *this* essay is based on the conclusion that a rigorous engagement with Marx does in fact demand a revolutionary program because the property relations between labor and capital at the heart of competitive capitalism will always lead to the maladies highlighted by Haque (2011), Anyon (2011), and many others—stagnation, alienation, false consciousness, commodity fetishism, and cyclical crisis—and if peace, stability, self-actualization, security, and an end of exploitation and poverty are desired, then capitalism must be abolished by organized labor—including all of us who depend on a wage to survive.

Taking up the *malady* perhaps most closely related to a socialist pedagogy, alienation, offers yet another level of reasoning connecting education to revolutionary struggle. The result of the property relations of capital making possible the capitalist appropriation of wealth created by labor, and thus increasing poverty, is, of course, the alienation of labor from all that is, self, other, and the natural world. In other words, not only poverty, but alienation as well, are both consequences of the property relations of capital. Regardless of income or relationship to consumer culture, capitalism, by definition, denies labor free control over their own labor power.

Not only is revolutionary change necessary, but during periods of crisis the possibility for working class rebellion increases dramatically (which the world today is testimony)—whether apologists and reformists like it or not (Malott, 2012). This potential is largely a result of the fact that crisis itself stems from over accumulation. That is, over accumulation is the condition when the capitalist class has appropriated so much of the wealth produced by labor that labor is left with below subsistence wages and thus nearly unable to survive, much less consume the non-food commodities produced by others. In practice, the mountainous income gaps between rich and poor make the fact that what tends to be good for labor, higher wages, tends to be bad for capital, lower profits—a fact nakedly obvious to an exploding mass of workers and students (i.e. future or hopeful workers). When poverty, even among the

employed, is widespread enough, the cycle of capitalist production begins to break down and goes into crisis.

Exacerbating the situation is the fact that during these times the costs of economic crisis are almost always externalized onto workers (i.e. austerity and budget cuts). The present moment therefore presents a potential opportunity for socialist revolution. For example, in a recent US public opinion poll it was found that while the general public's perception of socialism has remained relatively the same and negative (60% view it negatively), *for the first time* forty nine percent of young people (between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine) in the US have a positive view of socialism whereas just forty six percent of the same demographic view capitalism positively (Pew Research Center, 2011). Put another way, the youth of today in the US seem to be starting to depart from their elders' negative, Cold War view of socialism.

However, while this trend offers a sense of hope to those of us who view socialism as a positive solution to the destructiveness of capitalism, what this pole does *not* tell us is what respondents believe socialism *is*. Remember, in the US, Obama's pro-capitalist agenda has been derided as socialist and Marxist with little publicized challenge. In the conservative political and economic context of the US the recent election of Francois Hollande's anti-austerity government in France is also portrayed as the extreme, far-Left. This is not a difficult feat of propaganda when one considers the fact that Hollande has served in many positions such as the first Secretary of the French Socialist Party from 1997 to 2008.

However, Hollande is known as *Mr. Normal*, a moderate socialist whose successful campaign was based more on New Deal reformism than anti-capitalist socialism. That is, Hollande promised to increase taxes on the capitalist class seventy five percent; tax financial transactions; and stand up to Germany's Merkel on austerity in favor of growth. However, it is predicted that he will not be able to enact these progressive reforms, but rather, advance neoliberal policies by "keep[ing] faith with bond holders" rather than increasing taxes and "seek a compromise with" rather than "challenge Merkel" (Coy, 2012, p. 1). Even though Hollande is clearly focused on saving capitalism rather than subverting it, in the US he is portrayed as an *evil* socialist unjustly attacking the freedom of the wealthy. What this signifies is a larger failure to

break with the false assumption that capitalism is inevitable, which contributes to a lack of ability to even imagine an existence outside the social universe of capital and the property relations of production.

An indication of this is the student and faculty protests against state budget cuts to public and higher education in the US and beyond. The protests seem to be informed by the idea that public education itself can lead to democracy and social justice. In this movement, I have seen little to no consciousness of the simple fact, underscored by Marx (1867/1967), that because competitive capital is in constant motion perpetually re-investing in the technologies of production to increase efficiency and thus profitability by reducing the costs of production, the major capitalist employers are able to produce with far less labor power than just 30 years ago. That is, because the value of commodities is determined by the socially necessary labor time to produce them, an important variable is the cost to produce labor power, what Marx (1867/1967) famously termed that “peculiar commodity,” which distinguishes capitalism from all other modes of production (i.e. feudalism, slavery, and socialism). According to Marx (1867/1967) then, “the value of labor-power is determined, as in the case of every other commodity, by the labor-time necessary for the production, and consequently also the reproduction, of this special article” (pp. 170-171).

Marx then notes that this entails two elements, “the value of the means of subsistence necessary for the maintenance of the laborer,” such as food, clothing, and shelter, as well as training or education so he or she can do the work required by the capitalist class. This function of education has played a central role in increasing the productivity of labor, which has been an increasing necessity of the capitalist class due to *the falling rate of profit*. For Marx (1867/1967), the falling rate of profit is one of the central laws of capitalist accumulation—a system based on perpetual growth and thus movement as capitalists, driven by sheer survival, exist in fierce competition with one another, seek ever higher returns and greater market share. This law stems from “the composition of capital” itself consisting of constant capital (i.e. the means of production such as machinery, land, and buildings) and variable capital (i.e. human labor power) (Marx, 1867/1967, p. 612).

Marx stressed the importance of understanding that these two elements are internally related. That is, when capitalists (at least the small percentage of successful and/or governmentally subsidized ones) enlarge production by reinvesting profits to expand constant capital, an equal increase in variable capital must be realized to set it in motion. If all relevant variables, such as the supply of wage-workers, in a given economy remain constant, the perpetually increasing demand for laborers by the capitalist class will reach a point when “the demand for laborers may exceed the supply, and therefore, wages may rise” (Marx, 1867/1967, p. 613). Of course, as Marx stresses, capitalists, driven by their own insatiable quest for surplus value, have been shown to withdraw their capital from circulation before investing in a situation where wages completely eliminated profitability. The economic cycle therefore ebbs and flows, correcting itself, not in the interests of society as a whole, but in the interests of the capitalist class always.

Toward these ends, capitalism has a long, complex, and often contradictory history of engaging in many practices to counter *the falling rate of profit*. Of these, we might underscore:

Increasing exploitation by driving down the standard of living through dramatically reducing benefits, such as health insurance and public education

War and other forms of wasteful production, but also war to force open markets and gain access to both constant and variable capital

Immigration has long played a central role in increasing the reserve army of workers needed to keep the supply of variable capital up and thus wages and demand down

Financialization, more recently, has played a central role in creating the appearance of growth, when no real productive growth had occurred

Finally, Marx stresses that in the historical development of capital, and even in the business cycle itself, there comes a point when increasing the productivity of labor becomes “the most powerful lever of accumulation” (Marx, 1867/1967, p. 621)—

thereby underscoring the significance of education in the historical development of capitalism.

Increasing the productivity of labor can be done in two primary ways. The method most celebrated within the dominant hegemonic culture of capitalist societies is through training the worker to be endowed with all the latest knowledges, especially those associated with computers and the so-called knowledge economy. Virtual commodities are now produced available on the internet, which drastically increases the productivity of labor by eliminating many of the material costs of production such as buildings and physical materials. What these new skills and products are often not linked to is the new computerized machines, which are the real source of the increasing profitability of variable capital. In the realm of manufacturing these new robotic machines are enabling capitalists to produce commodities such as automobiles with a fraction of the work force thereby drastically reducing the cost of labor and countering *the falling rate of profit*. However, what this means is that the global economy is contracting leaving entire regions excluded from economic activity, causing upheaval and conflict as the material basis for hegemonic consent in places such as Greece has been mortally wounded.

The amount and type of education required by capital therefore varies as technology advances making production more efficient and thus profitable for the capitalist class. Education itself has more intensely become a source of profit through privatization and on-line education. It is important to re-state that increases in efficiency do not translate into benefits for labor in capitalism but lead to greater rates of return or profits for the capitalist class. Consequently, the recent global trend in slash and burning education budgets are not just the result of greedy, evil neoconservatives (i.e. Republicans in the US), but rather, reflect the changing needs of capital. That is, as indicated above, capitalists do not need as many highly trained workers today. Reflecting this trend, the percent of the population considered *middle-class* in Western, industrialized countries has declined from roughly forty percent to twenty percent since 1972 (Pressman, 2007). In making a case for the need for a middle-class mainstream demographers tend to point to arguments that support the capitalist class such as *reducing the threat of rebellion* and *providing a large group of consumers with disposable income* needed for value realization and to prevent over production

and crisis. These arguments and this literature have nothing (or very little) to say about the wellbeing of all those middle-class families losing their homes, jobs, and tenuous security (Pressman, 2007, 2010).

If an educated citizenry with the academic skills needed to participate in a complex democratic socialist society are desired, as many protesters suggest, then resisting budget cuts by itself makes little sense. What is needed is an outright attack on the property relations of capital and a transition from production for profit to production to satisfy human needs and the needs of the living planet and its many damaged, interconnected eco-systems. If a movement against budget cuts can lead to more frontal assaults with the capitalist class, then they could play a revolutionary role—otherwise they are merely unrealistic and uninformed forms of reformism destined to fail. The challenge is therefore how to move from the state of frustration, anger, and reformism, to socialist revolutionary struggle.

The *socialist challenge* for education offers a revolutionary purpose. While this Marxist approach to education was first explored in significant detail by Bowles and Gintis (1976) in *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life*, Marxist educational research and revolutionary pedagogy experienced significant atrophy through the 1980s and 1990s, especially in the U.S., as postmodernism emerged as the dominant critical theory. It was not until roughly fifteen years ago that Peter McLaren, in collaboration with Dave Hill, Mike Cole, Glenn Rikowski, Paula Allman, Ramin Farahmandpur, and others, that Marxist educational theory and research in the U.S., the center of mega-capitalist imperialism, began regaining and breaking new ground. Before exploring this recent resurgence of socialist pedagogy, I briefly revisit Bowles and Gintis and the central arguments against *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life* (1976).

Drawing on a Marxist analysis to understand the shocking results of a series of large-scale education studies stemming from a mandate by the 1964 Civil Rights Act—that level of education is not strongly related to income level, especially for African Americans—Bowles and Gintis (1976) conclude that liberal reforms designed to increase education equality and access would not be able to reduce or combat poverty



unless sufficient jobs were available. Essentially, Bowles and Gintis realize that the liberal assumption that education creates more professional employment opportunities is false. Rejecting the assumption that the job market follows the level of education of a given workforce, Bowles and Gintis (1976) share the provocative insight that education follows capital, or that education in capitalist society is modeled after the changing needs of capital (as argued above). Consequently, liberal education reforms or greater equality in education will do nothing to create more jobs or reduce poverty beyond a very small percent of the population. If an end to poverty is desired, a socialist education focused on creating class-consciousness and building a revolutionary socialist party is unavoidable. This conclusion is based on Marx's insight that capitalism is in constant movement driven by a competitive quest for profit forcing capitalists to perpetually search for ways to reduce the cost of production, such as pushing down the cost of labor. Poverty, therefore, is a permanent feature of a capitalist economy, which education, within the social universe of capital, will never be able to overcome. These insights thus discredit the liberal assumption, dating back to at least the 1840s in the U.S. with Horace Mann, that education can create a kind, equitable capitalism. Situating these insights in a more contemporary context Sarah Knopp (2012) observes:

The following three books, written over the past thirty-five years, that look at education in an economic context and draw similar conclusions. In 1976, Herbert Bowles and Samuel Gintis wrote the paradigm-shifting *Schooling in Capitalist America*... In 2005, Jean Anyon published *Radical Possibilities: Public Policy, Urban Education and a New Social Movement*. And most recently, John Marsh's (2011) *Class Dismissed: Why We Can't Teach or Learn Our Way Out of Poverty* reviews the best and most recent statistical research available at the time they were written, and all argue that education cannot solve the problem of poverty. (p. 11)

If equality cannot be achieved within not only the United States, but within the global capitalist system in general, then why do radicals continue to advocate for education as fundamentally important? Even as far back as Marx he acknowledged that education can play a fundamental role in challenging capitalism by teaching students how to develop their critical reasoning skills and class consciousness. Bowles and Gintis (1976) contextualize and summarize this revolutionary approach to education in the following passage:

...Movements for educational reform have faltered through refusing to call into question the basic structure of property and power in economic life... We believe that the key to reform is the democratization of economic relationships: social ownership, democratic and participatory control of the production process by workers, equal sharing of socially necessary labor by all, and progressive equalization of incomes and destruction of hierarchical economic relationships. This is, of course, socialism... In this conception, education strategy is part of a revolutionary transformation of economic life... We must press for an educational environment in which youth can develop the capacity and commitment collectively to control their lives and regulate their social interactions with a sense of equality, reciprocity, and communality. Not that such an environment will of itself alter the quality of social life. Rather, that it will nurture a new generation of workers... unwilling to submit to the fragmented relationships of dominance and subordinacy prevailing in economic life. (p. 14)

Advancing the conceptualizations outlined here by Bowles and Gintis (1976), Peter McLaren and Ramin Farahmandpur (2005), argue that a socialist pedagogy takes as its starting point a consciousness of the role that education plays in reproducing the capitalist relations of production. This revolutionary pedagogy takes as its ultimate goal the socialist reconfiguration of capitalist society taking special care to avoid past mistakes, such as any element of Stalinist authoritarianism, prescriptions or attacks on freedom (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005). An education for a socialist future offers students and workers “opportunities to develop critical social skills that will assist them in gaining an awareness of—and a resolve to transform—the exploitative nature of capitalist social and economic relations of production” (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005, p. 53). In a number of recent public addresses internationally renowned Marxist geographer David Harvey argues that because of the impoverished conditions of a growing number of the earths’ population and thus the lack of political power, the vast majority are increasingly finding they have to take these skills to the streets.

McLaren and Farahmandpur (2005) keenly observe that such complex connections are best taught to students using the concept of relation. Why? It helps students and workers become class conscious (as a class for itself). It helps students understand that everyone who relies on a wage to survive has a common class interest with all workers globally helping understand nationalism as an ideological tool (as well as a source of ruling class military and judicial power). The concept of relation helps make connections between the past and the present informing analysis and tactics targeting the *true cause of conflict between labor and capital*. Again, democratic socialism is

not “a prescription for socialism, but one based on mutuality, dialogical reciprocity, humility, and self-respect” (McLaren & Farahmandpur, p. 56).

Offering some of the deepest insights on enacting our socialist pedagogy (both currently and historically) come from anarchist pedagogies. For example, Robert Haworth (2012) in his Introduction to *Anarchist Pedagogies: Collective Actions, Theories, and Critical Reflection on Education* notes that “over the last century, anarchists have made numerous attempts to create educational processes that transgress authoritative factory models and deterministic curriculum of the state and corporate entities” (p. 2). While I value the horizontal, radically democratic anti-capitalist anarchist pedagogies celebrated in Haworth’s (2012) *Anarchist Pedagogies*, a volume I myself, an international Marxist, contributed to, I do not agree with some anarchists and autonomous Marxists who argue that capitalism is undergoing a shift from a material to an immaterial *knowledge economy* (industrial output has continued to expand within the globally integrated system of capitalist production) or that the on-going development of capitalism has fundamentally transformed the basic nature of accumulation and the relationship between the buyers and sellers of labor power.

Pedagogically, however, *Anarchist Pedagogies* (Haworth, 2012) includes fundamentally important essays on free schools and workers’ colleges as well as pedagogical explorations surrounding more recent manifestations such as street medics. Situated in a slightly larger context we might observe that in the religiously anti-socialist/Marxist/communist atmosphere of the United States in particular, anarchist activists, revolutionaries, and pedagogues have been most visible in the anti-capitalist movements from the anti-globalization Seattle demonstrations of 1999 to the more recent Occupy Wall Street phenomenon. At the end of the day it seems reasonable to observe that there is a whole range of theoretical and practical issues Marxist and anarchist critical pedagogues must collectively find the humility to engage each other in order to move the anti-capitalist movement in education forward. This endeavor is well beyond the scope of this short essay, but it is a topic that needs more attention.

In conclusion, regardless of what form consciousness raising takes, a revolutionary ideology must be adopted. As Lenin (1902/1975) reminded us, *without revolutionary*

*theory there can be no revolution* (although I have more confidence in the working class' ability to develop an independent ideology and revolutionary program than Lenin did). Situated in the context of the current global anti-capitalist movement in "embryo" (an embryo perhaps more developed in Greece than anywhere else in Europe at the present moment), the international occupy movement and the "Arab Spring" can be characterized by what Lenin (1902/1975) called "spontaneous" uprisings and thus the "embryo" of an anti-capitalist movement. What we venture to do to see this embryo reach a healthy, revolutionary maturity remains the core of this *socialist challenge* and our collective, unwritten future.

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