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# Teaching In and Against the Empire: Critical Pedagogy as Revolutionary Praxis

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## **Comments**

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## **Teaching in and against the Empire: Critical Pedagogy as Revolutionary Praxis**

**By Peter McLaren, Gregory Martin,  
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When fascism comes to America, it will come in the name of democracy.

—Huey Long

### **Globalization, Terrorism, and the Crisis of Democracy**

All across the country, critical educators are fighting on dozens of fronts, searching in both form and content for a coherent pedagogical expression that captures their opposition to what they perceive as major developments of world-historical importance: the pandemic of economic globalization; United States geopolitical imperialism and the rabid manner in which the Bush administration crazed with success is defining and responding to the current war on terrorism; the linking of patriotism to an unquestioning and unthinking adherence to the Bush administration's anti-terrorist agenda; the neoliberal mandates of the Western capitalist countries and the international dictatorship of transnational corpora-

tions; and the ideological agenda embedded in the Bush administration's approach to educational change. Clearly, all of these fronts are interrelated and important. We do not have the space to discuss in depth all of these fronts nor the issues to which they refer. Whilst we will mention some of these fronts in our discussion, our focus will be on expanding the concept so that it addresses both the urgency and the scope of the current crisis of capitalism in relation to the crisis of educational reform, and takes as its central aim the struggle against capitalism and imperialism.

The current crisis of global capitalism and the juggernaut of privatization has spread exponentially and mutated more rapidly than the SARS virus, outmaneuvering the hastily developed defenses erected by workers whose wages and benefits continue to be decimated in the face of the rule of finance and speculative capital and the Enronization of corporate life (see McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2002). This crisis not only affects private industry, it now engulfs public schools, universities and colleges across the nation. For example, the last decade witnessed a rising tide of part-time and 'perma-temp' faculty and instructors who teach full-time at institutions of higher education but are nevertheless denied healthcare and pension benefits offered to tenure-track faculty. Conversely, universities and colleges are demanding that professors be more productive scholars. Faculty members are expected to publish more articles, books, and essays, attend conferences and seminars, and to obtain research funds by submitting grants to various public and private foundations. Heated debates have also taken place over who merits tenure. Many universities are now openly favoring faculty who produce knowledge over those who teach knowledge creating a division of labor and hierarchy among professors. What is clear is that downsizing, outsourcing, and 'flexible' methods of labor practices on production lines in factories have now trickled down to encompass universities and colleges across the United States. Contrast this scenario with the Pentagon's new 'peacetime budget' of 399.1 billion designed to keep the U.S. on a permanent war footing in its battle against 'evil doers' throughout the globe (Hellman, 2003).

And what about the unraveling and threadbare conditions of public schools today? Recent estimates put the amount of money sorely needed to fix the infrastructure of public schools in America at \$100 billion. But ever since the publication of Jonathan Kozol's classic book: *Savage Inequalities* (1991), which exposed the unequal conditions in American public schools, there has yet to be any major improvements made to the conditions of the infrastructure of public schools, in particular those in urban communities. In California, more than 47,000 uncertified teachers are teaching in its public schools, and within the next ten years there will be a demand for 300,000 new teachers. The probability that students will end up in classes with uncertified teachers is much higher for working class and minority students. To take just one example of this growing trend, in 1998 a record 47% of all entering freshmen to the California State University system were required to take remedial English and 54% enrolled in remedial math classes (Fattah, 2002).

For some time now we have been calling attention to the devastating impact of neoliberal social and economic policies on public schools and public education (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 1999, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c; McLaren & Jaramillo, in press). Self-proclaimed as the 'education president,' George W. signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, lauded as the major education reform package of the millennium. If we examine this act in light of political history, however, NCLB represents a decades old neoliberal relay race launched in the Reagan era with George W. currently bearing the flaming torch. Clearly, NCLB is the embodiment of contradictions and tensions within evolving neoliberal models of education. Whereas one of the basic premises of neoliberal market forces is 'small government,' educators and community members across the country are experiencing a relentless assault on their autonomy when it comes to participating in purported democratic decision-making processes. Federally engineered testing and accountability systems, instructional program mandates, and the forced militarization of our public high schools point towards highly regulated and controlled governing systems.

At the end of the year, every public school child in grades 3-8 will experience standardized testing that was developed with an estimated price-tag of 2.7 to 7 billion dollars (as cited in Metcalf, 2002). Based on these test scores, schools with forty percent or greater populations of poor students will face a litany of punitive measures if and when they do not demonstrate 'adequate yearly progress'—a quantifiable year-to-year increment in the percentage of students reaching an arbitrarily established testing 'proficient' benchmark. Touted as the way to hold schools and districts accountable for the perpetual 'underachievement' (achievement solely measured by invalid and unreliable aptitude tests) of the poor and students of color, sanctions in the form of alternative governance and supplemental services have widened the doors to corporate and faith-based sponsorship of school programs with federal tax dollars. The most severe consequences will undoubtedly impact communities with the greatest concentration of poverty—children dealt with the most egregious schooling conditions while confronting healthcare and living conditions that run parallel to third-world levels of poverty. On the backs of the progressively stooped and strained poor, for-profit education entities will continue to witness exponential profit margins while children succumb to the dumbing down of instruction through technocratic exercises intended to alter test score percentages.

With respect to instructional program mandates, the Bush administration has seized the moment to establish a 1-billion dollar grant funding 'scientifically valid' reading programs. To solve the 'scientifically valid' dilemma, an assembled panel of experts largely reminiscent of Bush's literacy co-patriots in Texas will evaluate and approve each state's reading programs throughout the country. Up to this point, the Bush administration has supported the findings of a previously assembled National Reading Panel to define what is considered to be 'scientifically valid,' a euphemism for phonics-based reading programs (Metcalf, 2002). Regardless of where educators stand in the literacy debate, what cannot remain undisputed is the

proliferation of corporate reading programs that support highly regimented, rote and prescriptive reading instruction endorsed by the Bush administration as 'scientifically valid.' California — to cite one example — will follow suit by funding only those schools adopting Houghton Mifflin and McGraw-Hill reading programs (California Department of Education, 2003).

And finally, one of the remaining staple items of the Bush administration's NCLB is the forced militarization of public high schools. Local jurisdictions with previously passed regulations against military recruitment on high school campuses face no alternative than to open their doors to a proliferation of recruitment efforts unless they would rather sacrifice funding to cover operational costs. With tight budgets and 'supplemental services' on the chopping block for upcoming fiscal years, high school counselors intended to support college-going seniors either will change positions or pay a visit to the unemployment office. With weekly in-class recruitment presentations and no other seemingly viable options made available to our youth, the U.S. government may very well refuel its military ranks—a military that is necessary for ongoing imperialist operations around the globe.

The imposition of testing and accountability regimes that depend on failing schools, the corporate and faith-based sponsorship of public education, the instructional mandates serving corporate interests rather than those of students, and the forced militarization of public high schools demonstrate that education is no longer as we once knew it. No Child Left Behind is correct in at least one regard: No child will be left behind the neoliberal autocracy of the U.S. government unless critical educators, students, and families halt the aggression. As William Tabb (2001) notes, "destroying the quality of public-sector education is necessary for the full marketization of education" and this is exactly what we are experiencing through NCLB strongholds. We would only add that in addition to a full-fledged 'marketization' of education, our most marginalized student populations will have to endure increased militarization. After all, imperial capital needs its capitalist fayadeen: the U.S. military.

### **Anti-Terrorism as American Imperialism**

In public discussions of educational reform today, it is almost impossible not to see such reforms in light of the Bush administration's permanent war against terrorism. William Bennett, former drug czar and Secretary of Education under Reagan and Bush padre as well as candidate for President in the 2000 Republican primaries, has become one of Bush's most outspoken public defenders and has assumed the mantle of 'philosopher king' of the Republican Party. He is a founding member of the right-wing think tank Project for the New American Century and its so-called 'peace through strength policy' along with the Neocons Gone Wild fraternity of Pearle, Wolfowitz, Bolton, and Cheney who not only have the President's ear on matters of foreign policy but have also harmonized his will to

power to their own political machinations. Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities and author of the bestseller, *The Book of Virtues* (1993), Bennett recently published *Why We Fight: Moral Clarity and the War on Terrorism* (2002). Determined to give revenge by carpet bombing a moral justification and 'payback' a philosophical warrant — not to mention the imprimatur of the Republican elite — Bennett's book rewrites bald imperialism as a democratic obligation to free the world from evil doers. Bennett's adolescent narcissism along with his unwavering support for the United States' war machine and its politics of preemptive or 'preventative' strikes is politically ill conceived as it is ethically misguided. Bennett's toxic screed dressed up in the philosophical diapers of Plato echoes those of many conservative and libertarian media pundits, especially the testosterone posse of FOX News that twists any struggle other than that directed by the President as being selfish and unpatriotic.

The doyen of Republican virtues and character education, Bennett has always been given over to partisan invective in the form of exercising his moral outrage against everything from 'homosexual unions' to drugs and violence in America's schools. We find it tragically hypocritical that one of Bill Clinton's most unrelenting critics during the Monica Lewinsky scandal could support an act of 'preventative' war that not only defied international law and, in fact, was perhaps the most unwanted war in world history, but also was one of the most 'transparent' wars of all time (except in the United States) in that it had the word 'oil' written all over it. We also find such hypocrisy to be standard fare with the nation's leading spokesperson on virtue, especially in light of recent revelations that he has lost more than 8 million dollars over the past decade in gambling casinos where he has operated as a high roller with limos at his disposal and tens of thousands of dollars in complimentary hotel rooms (Alter & Green, 2003; Helmore, 2003; Kinsley, 2003). His organization, Empower America, is vehemently against 'pathological gamblers' at the same time as Bennett collects \$50,000 a speech in order to cover his gambling habit (Green, 2003). We cannot think of a more appropriate example of Republican virtue.

What we find shocking as critical educators is the inability of critics of the Bush administration to get their dissenting voices into organs of the popular media. And it is certainly not the result of a lack of trying. On the one hand, distinguished publications on the left such as *Monthly Review* find documentation by the Research Unit for Political Economy that, for instance, the United States "was the sole country to vote against the 1986 Security Council statement condemning Iraq's use of mustard gas on Iranian troops — an atrocity in which it now emerges the United States was directly implicated" (2003, p. 30), or that "the U.S. administration provided 'crop-spraying' helicopters (to be used for chemical attacks in 1988), let Dow Chemicals ship its chemicals for use on humans, seconded its air force officers to work with their Iraq counterparts (from 1986), and approved technological exports to Iraq's missile procurement agency to extend the missiles' range (1988)" (2003, p. 30), or "that during the Iran-Iraq war the United States used the latter to

*make biological weapons*” (2003, p. 30, italics original), or that Saddam Hussein’s attacks on the Kurds in 1988 had the full support of the United States, or that the destruction of Iraq’s civilian infrastructure in 1991 and the continuing United Nations sanctions over eleven years amounts, in the opinion of 3 U.N. humanitarian coordinators in Iraq from 1997-2000, to deliberate “genocide” (2003, p. 43). On the other hand, the corporate media is clearly preventing these facts from being released to the public and when teachers make them available to their students, they run the risk of being labeled traitors at worst, and unpatriotic, at best. Sheldon Wolin (2003) has aptly characterized U.S. government at this time as “inverted totalitarianism” (p. 13). He notes that while conditions in the U.S. are decidedly different than in the former Nazi regime, many of the objectives are the same. Wolin warns:

Thus the elements are in place: a weak legislative body, a legal system that is both compliant and repressive, a party system in which one party, whether in opposition or in the majority, is bent upon reconstituting the existing system so as to permanently favor a ruling class of the wealthy, the well-connected and the corporate, while leaving the poorer citizens with a sense of helplessness and political despair, and, at the same time, keeping the middle classes dangling between fear of unemployment and expectations of fantastic rewards once the new economy recovers. That scheme is abetted by a sycophantic and increasingly concentrated media; by the integration of universities with their corporate benefactors; by a propaganda machine institutionalized in well-funded think tanks and conservative foundations; by the increasingly closer cooperation between local police and national law enforcement agencies aimed at identifying terrorists, suspicious aliens and domestic dissidents. (pp. 14-15)

We need to take seriously more than ever today, the reality of U.S. imperialism, both informal (as in free trade) and formal (as in the case of colonial annexations of territory) which we argue, after Lenin, is linked to the evolution of capitalist development in all of its complexity (military/political/economic) and has now arrived at its monopoly stage (Foster, 2003). As an inherent agent of capitalism, the so-called ‘new’ imperialism most closely associated with the U.S. is connected to the increased competition for control over global territories (raw materials and resources) between imperialist rivals such as the United States, Britain and France, the coming to age of ‘new mammoth’ corporations that seek competitive advantage through their own home-based nation states and the development of an entire world system of colonization that creates uneven development and economic dependencies (Foster, 2003; Lenin, 1939).

### **Radical Teacher Education Reform**

In a series of recent articles and books, British educationalist Dave Hill (1999, 2001, 2002, 2002a) has analysed neoliberal capitalism’s challenge to teacher agency and autonomy. Hill (2002) does not pull punches and specifically warns against the current trend towards markets in education and the resulting role of



schools as a "disciplinary force of the capitalist class through the corporate managerialization of teacher education" (p. 3). He despairingly notes that the success of globalization, businessification, and militarization of social life has scarcely been contested in advanced capitalist nations. This has resulted in a considerable restructuring of teacher education, leading to a detheorization of teacher education research, a "quietist and overwhelmingly conservative set of 'standards' for student teachers," a teacher training approach that emphasizes technical and managerial skills rather than examining "the 'whys and the why nots' and the contexts of curriculum, pedagogy, educational purposes and structures and the effects these have on reproducing capitalist economy, society and politics" (p. 3).

Hill importantly defines a radical left project within teacher education for re-theorizing egalitarian education as a whole, followed by a set of principles and proposals for the teacher education curriculum. His overarching radical left principles include but do not exhaust the following: vastly increasing equality of outcome, comprehensive provision as distinct from private or selective provision of schooling, democratic community control over education, the use of the local and national state to build an egalitarian, anti-discriminatory society, rather than to reproduce an unequalitarian meritocratic focus on equal opportunities that often leads to increasingly unequal outcomes. His radical left perspective is expressed through a lengthy series of proposals for teacher education programs that include the need for macro-and micro-theory regarding teaching and learning that explicitly reveals the socio-political and economic contexts of schooling and education and that takes into account a theoretical grasp of the inter-relationship among children, schooling and society as well as alternative views and methods of classroom organization, schooling, and their economic and political relationship to the larger social totality; a rejection of labeling, under-expectation, stereotyping, and prejudice as expressed by teachers and peers; a context for enabling the formation of critical, reflective teachers who are able to decode media distortion, bias, and propaganda on falling standards in schools and institutions of teacher education; the development of effective classroom-skilled teachers who understand the relationship between theory and practice; and the formation of cadres of teachers who practice critical reflection in addition to situational and technical reflection, and who can answer the following questions: whose interests are being served?; who wins?; who loses?; who has to deny identity in order to join the winners, if this is at all possible?; and who is likely to have to continue accepting a subordinate and exploited position in society (by virtue of their membership in oppressed groups)?

The characteristics of the curriculum developed by Hill are voluminous but worth listing in full. They include the development of reflective skills in pupil/student learning, teaching, and classroom management; a commitment to developing an ethical/moral dimension of critical reflection as well as making connections between economic and social justice; utilizing data on racism, sexism, social class inequality, homophobia, and discrimination on the basis of disability and special

needs; the pursuit of educational practices beyond white, Anglo-Saxon, middle-class and heterosexual educational norms, and requiring teachers to explore the subjugated knowledges of woman, minority groups and indigenous groups; developing a holistic and social class-based approach to economic and social justice in the curriculum; requiring student teachers to explore the class-based nature of exploitation within the capitalist economic system and its educational, legal, and other apparatuses; ensuring that student teachers acquire skills in dealing with classroom incidences of racism, homophobia, sexism, and classism; creating open forums on social justice for students and faculty; enabling student teachers to develop the skills to critically examine the ideological nature of teachers' work; promoting a concurrent rather than consecutive development of critical reflection on the part of student teachers; and lastly supporting a substantially predetermined rather than primarily negotiated curriculum — a move that is necessary for the acquisition of a broad span of critical theoretical insights. At the same time, Hill argues for the model of a teacher as a transformative intellectual who does not tell students what to think but who learns to think dialectically and who develops a critical consciousness aimed at social transformation.

Hill's (2000) suggestions speak to the role of teacher educators as social agents who pursue a "democratic, anti-authoritarian, socially responsible and socially and economically just society" (p. 16). The cardinal ingredient in Hill's proposal — and the one that makes his work so radically different from his North American counterparts — is his insistence that teacher educators should be advocating education as part of a larger agenda of anti-capitalist social transformation towards a socialist alternative (see also Cole, 1998).

### **De-Sanitizing Critical Pedagogy**

As schools become increasingly financed more by corporations that function as service industries for transnational capitalism, and as bourgeois educational professionalism continues to guide educational policy and practice, educators here in the United States face a challenging educational reality. Whilst liberal educators are calling for the need for capital controls, controls in foreign exchange, a return to the old forms of financial regulation that kept investment and commercial banking separate, tougher lending on stock speculation, rules for fair play, the stimulation of growth and wages, labor rights enforcement for nations borrowing from the United States, and the removal of financial aid from banking and capital until they concede to the centrality of the wage problem and insist on labor rights, very few of them are calling for the abolition of capital itself. It is this acquiescence that distinguishes revolutionary critical pedagogy from progressive education — the former wishes to challenge capital as a social relation and replace it with a socialist alternative. The latter considers the capitalist marketplace as the only viable arena in which education can take place.

In the United States, critical pedagogy regrettably has limited itself to an essentially liberal progressive educational agenda that encourages teachers to create 'communities of learners' in classrooms, to bridge the gap between student culture and the culture of the school, to engage in cross-cultural understandings, to integrate multicultural content and teaching across the curriculum, to develop techniques for reducing racial prejudice and conflict resolution strategies, to challenge Eurocentric teaching and learning as well as the 'ideological formations' of European immigration history by which many white teachers judge African-American, Latino/a, and Asian students, to challenge the meritocratic foundation of public policy that purportedly is politically neutral and racially color-blind, to create teacher-generated narratives as a way of analyzing teaching from a 'transformative' perspective, to improve academic achievement in culturally diverse schools, to affirm and utilize multiple perspectives and ways of teaching and learning, and to de-reify the curriculum and to expose 'metanarratives of exclusion.' Lest we appear overly dismissive of these achievements, we wish to affirm that these attempts are welcomed, as far as they go, but that they do not go nearly far enough. In the face of such a contemporary intensification of global capitalist relations and permanent structural crisis (rather than a shift in the nature of capital itself), we need to develop a critical pedagogy capable of engaging all of social life and not simply life inside school classrooms. We need, in other words, to challenge capitalist social relations whilst acknowledging global capital's structurally determined inability to share power with the oppressed, its constitutive embeddedness in racist, sexist, and homophobic relations, its functional relationship to xenophobic nationalism, and its tendency towards empire. It means acknowledging the educational left's dependency on the very object of its negation: capital. It means struggling to develop a lateral, polycentric concept of anti-capitalist alliances-in-diversity in order to slow down capitalism's metabolic movement — with the eventual aim of shutting it down completely. It means developing and advancing an educational philosophy that is designed to resist the 'capitalization' of subjectivity, a pedagogy that we have called (after the British Marxist educator, Paula Allman, 2001) revolutionary critical pedagogy.

The key to resistance, in our view, is to develop a critical pedagogy that will not only enable the multi-racial, gendered working class to discover how the use-value of their labor-power is being exploited by capital but also how working class initiative, creativity and power can destroy this type of determination and force a recomposition of class relations by directly confronting capital in all of its hydra-headed dimensions. Efforts can be made to break down capital's control of the creation of new labor-power and to resist the endless subordination of life to work in the social factory of everyday life (Cleaver, 2000; see also Rikowski, 2001).

### **Revolutionary Critical Pedagogy**

Admitting that there exists no vulgate of critical pedagogy and that there are as

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many instantiations of critical pedagogy as there are theorists and practitioners, we nevertheless hold to the claim that its most political characteristics have been defanged and sterilized; crucial elements have been expurgated such that it redounds most heavily to the advantage of the liberal capitalist state and its bourgeois cadre of educational reformers. What precisely has been coarsened has been those elements dealing with critical pedagogy's critique of political economy, those aspects of it that challenge the social relations of production and class society (McLaren, 2000, 2003; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2000, 2002). Whilst there has been a concerted attempt to redress material inequality it needs to be acknowledged that, as admirable as this has been, such a move has always been undertaken within the precinct of capitalism itself. That is, even within the work of many leading exponents of critical pedagogy, there is rarely a challenge to the capitalist state, a push, if you will, to transform it into a socialist one. The viruliferous attacks on leftist academics as 'enemies of civilization' by quislings and admirers of the current Bush administration clearly have not helped to strengthen the political resolve of critical educators in potentially taking an anti-capitalist position.

We need to think about the extent of this dilemma: If the most anti-capitalist strands of critical pedagogy offer the strongest challenge to the existing status quo offered by U.S. progressive educationalists, then why does critical pedagogy not constitute a more vibrant and robust presence in schools of education, most particularly in teacher education programs? If leading education journals are reluctant to publish articles by those exponents of critical pedagogy who directly challenge the existence of capitalist social relations, then what does this tell us about the hegemony of the educational establishment as well as the state of the educational left? When teacher education programs with decidedly social justice agendas do deal with the critical educational tradition, even when they studiously prepare their teachers within the context of anti-racist and anti-sexist frameworks, they almost invariably exclude unvarnished critiques of the capitalist state by Marxist scholars. Whilst we remain depressingly exercised by this dilemma we cannot within the space of this article sufficiently explore more than a few of its ramifications.

Drawing upon our own experiences as products of teacher educational institutions as well as practitioner/scholars within them, we wish to begin by identifying the central dilemma that we have perceived with respect to critical pedagogy: its bowdlerization, vulgarization and domestication. Frankly, should we find this dilemma all that surprising in professional schools of education within the academy given that so many of them are, after all, decidedly conservative institutions? Many (but of course not all) educators who work in the field of teacher education are frequently given over to blaming teachers for the so-called decline in student achievement and within such institutions control over teachers exists in the case of teacher competency tests, certification, and exams. Too often excluded from consideration is the notion that education can be a vehicle for social transformation, as a way of addressing larger social contradictions and antagonisms. There is a

certain sense, then, in which current domesticated incarnations of critical pedagogy validate education as something that must be sensitive to the needs of the poor and exploited classes in such a way that actually precludes the possibility that those needs can be met. Resolving the challenges facing capitalist democracy can only be made more difficult when you are not even permitted to restate them in terms of class struggle. We are not saying that critical educators are silkily deft at obfuscation or deception. In most instances, critical educators are more than likely not even aware of the contractions that undercut their objectives. We are simply arguing that, despite the best intentions of critical educators, critical pedagogy can indeed serve to rehabilitate the very class hierarchies that it was originally set up to challenge, if not roundly to depose. Indeed, much of critical pedagogy has already been subsumed into pro-capitalist common sense, co-opted through a professional patronage to the state. In fact, it may serve unwittingly to defend the bourgeois state by legitimating a commitment to diversity without sufficiently affirming diversity through the necessary development of explicitly anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-imperialist curriculum. Deflecting questions about how class and racial formations are linked to current social relations of production and the interpellating strategies of the ideological state apparatus, critical pedagogy in its currently watered-down like a rum and coke in a cheap roadside bar, and depotentiated forms actually serves to delimit the debate over liberal capitalist democracy rather than expand it (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2000). This is not a call for a formulaic Marxism that is box trained and fed on a diet of dogma and doxa and deformations of Marx's dialectical theory, but an approach that centers educational reform within the reigning political antagonism of age: the contradiction between labor and capital.

Critical pedagogy programs, often built around John Dewey's monistic idealism, where social change is predicated on moral reconstruction, ignore in the main the historical materialist conditions that lead to social transformation through class struggle (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2002). Such conditions begin with the question of the changing needs of civil society and the development of the productive forces and relations of exchange. Whilst teachers and students may not consider the mode of productive of society — commandeered by the capitalist elite — to be the primary engine driving the development of human consciousness as fully as do many Marxists, at least this position should be presented for consideration. Teachers need to ask: What is the relationship between the ruling "material" force of society and the ruling "intellectual" or "ideological" force? To what extent are the dominant ideas about capitalism merely or mainly the ideal expressions of the dominant material relationships within late capitalist society? To what extent do teacher education programs regulate both the production and distribution of the prevailing ideas about capitalist society? (see McLaren, 2000; Farahmandpur, 2003).

Critical pedagogy is, of course, all about revolutionary ideas. Just as we need to explore the way in which dominant ideas about capitalism are linked to their conditions of production within the context of the dominant social class, we need to

connect the revolutionary ideas of critical pedagogy to the existence of a revolutionary class of educators. These educators are preoccupied with questions such as: What are the contradictions between prevailing notions of capitalist democracy and the manner in which democracy is lived in the streets by social agents with competing class interests and who exist within vastly different social conditions? We have found that in our own classrooms, teachers from working-class backgrounds (often students of color) are the most favorably disposed to critical pedagogy.

Our work in critical pedagogy constitutes in one sense the performative register for class struggle. Whilst it sets as its goal the decolonization of subjectivity, it also emphasizes the development of critical social agency while at the same time targeting the material basis of capitalist social relations. Critical educators seek to realize in their classrooms social values and to believe in their possibilities — consequently we argue that they need to go outside of the protected precincts of their classrooms and analyze and explore the workings of capital there. Critical revolutionary pedagogy sets as its goal the reclamation of public life under the relentless assault of the corporatisation, privatization and businessification of the lifeworld (which includes the corporate-academic-complex). It seeks to make the division of labor coincident with the free vocation of each individual and the association of free producers. At first blush this may seem a paradisiacal notion in that it posits a radically eschatological and incomparably “other” endpoint for society, as we know it. Yet this is not a blueprint but a contingent utopian vision that offers direction not only in unpicking the apparatus of bourgeois illusion but also in diversifying the theoretical itinerary of the critical educator so that new questions can be generated along with new perspectives in which to raise them. Here the emphasis not only is on denouncing the manifest injustices of neo-liberal capitalism and serving as a counterforce to neoliberal ideological hegemony, but it is also on establishing the conditions for new social arrangements that transcend the false opposition between the market and the state.

In contrast to postmodern education, revolutionary pedagogy emphasizes the material dimensions of its own constitutive possibility and recognizes knowledge as implicated within the social relations of production (i.e., the relations between labor and capital). We are using the term materialism here not in its postmodernist sense as a resistance to conceptuality, a refusal of the closure of meaning, or whatever ‘excess’ cannot be subsumed within the symbol or cannot be absorbed by tropes; rather, materialism is being used in the context of material social relations, a structure of class conflict, and an effect of the social division of labor (Ebert, 2002). Historical changes in the forces of production have reached the point where the fundamental needs of people can be met — but the existing social relations of production prevent this because the logic of access to ‘need’ is ‘profit’ based on the value of people’s labor for capital. Consequently, critical revolutionary pedagogy argues that without class analysis, critical pedagogy is impeded from effecting praxiological changes (changes in social relations).

We need to learn not only how to educate, but how to be educated in terms of ripening class antagonisms. Teachers disqualify themselves from historical struggle when they fail to locate their own formation as educators within the degenerative process of contemporary capitalist society and the enduring and intractable class-driven social arrangements: to wit, within the agonistic arena of class struggle.

As the science of the inherent contradictions of capitalism, Marxism in our view enables capitalism to be uncovered in all of its protean, complex materiality and is in a singular position to uncover the ontological dimension of capitalism by beginning with the real, messy world of everyday social life. Marxism helps to critique suprahistorical theory that severs its connections to the material work of social struggle. Marxism is grounded in the contextual specificity of the global universe of capital in which we find ourselves today, where we are witnessing the internationalization of antagonism between exploiters and producers, where globalization is presided over by a ruling class of individuals with proprietary rights over the means of production; where power, wealth, and income are not allocated fairly; where the capitalist class increasingly extracts unpaid labor time from the direct producers, the workers and peasants; where neoliberalism is disarticulating the social base of the left, depotentiating it, by dividing the classes against each other.

John Holloway (2002) has made some interesting points with respect to Marxism. First, that it is not a theory of society, but a theory against society; Marxism is not in the business of providing a better social science but is mainly concerned with a critique of the bourgeois social sciences (i.e., a critique of political economy) and with locating the fault lines or weak points of the rule of capital. He notes — rightly in our minds — that Marxism is not a theory of capitalist oppression but of the contradictions of that oppression. So that Marxism is able to articulate the contradictory positions in which individuals and groups are engaged. It is also able to locate the contradictions within the oppressive social relations that are created by capitalist representatives and their organizations. Marxism begins with the premise that everyday social life within capitalist society is contradiction-ridden and Marxism highlights these contradictions and explores their origins and effects in order to free us from the oppressions of everyday social relations, and in doing so it provides us with a philosophy of praxis and a deep resolve in our participation in anti-capitalist struggles. The Open Marxism of Holloway, and others, is essentially an immanent critique, meaning that any social form of life, social relation, or institution is both in and against forms of capitalist power. It explores the various social formations that make up the unity of capitalist society, with particular attention given to those social forms suppressed in capitalist society. In this sense, labor has the power of being independent of capital, but only within non-capitalist societies. Marxists ask: What are the origins and effects of living within the contradictions of capitalist society and what are their implications for struggling against capital? Marxism provides an understanding of the concrete, empirical, conditions of class struggle by elucidating capitalist social relations within which class struggle can obtain and unfold. The contradictions within capitalism

provide a space for critique and transformation of the social relations that create the contradictions.

In these current times of deep divisions between the classes, when the acerbity and virulence of the antagonisms between them has not grown less intense, especially in recent years, we cannot afford to demote class struggle to the category of 'socio-economic status,' which drains the concept of class struggle of its history within capitalist society and turns it into a synonym for a 'natural state' in a necessarily imperfect society underlain by principles of meritocracy. True, calling for the abolition of capitalism in the United States is not realistic in the short term given the current outlook and psychology of the working class. Only deluded sectarians could possibly imagine that the road ahead is straight and narrow. But at the very least such calls can expose the injustices of capitalism and help to galvanize the fresh forces of the low paid, youth, and the growing ranks of the unemployed who are increasingly being cast into the pit of pauperism.

## **Reform or Transformation?**

### **Beyond the Either/Or Impasse**

We want to make it clear that educational reforms are important, but we believe they should be allied to a constant desire for the advancement of socialist democracy. The idea of reform and revolutionary transformation has often been erroneously contraposed in critical pedagogy. We do not crudely juxtapose these terms as much as we 'mediate' them — pushing reform further and further to the edges of bourgeois social and economic relations. We do not consider reform efforts incompatible with the larger anti-capitalist struggle. We believe that reform and transformation have to be approached dialectically and here critical pedagogy can become an artifact of mediation: working toward reform while at the same time exercising a praxis that has as its larger goal the advancement of socialism and the creation of a society free of class divisions. Whilst each development within critical pedagogy will bear the stamp of its own particularity we believe that it can formulate principles of solidarity with new networks of organs of popular participation, including social movements that advocate anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-homophobic practices while at the same time deepening its anti-capitalist agenda.

Of course, the problem goes well beyond the crony capitalism of corporate insiders and the CEOs of Enron or WorldCom. Like the ACEs (Armoured Combat Earth movers) that the U.S. army employed in the last Gulf War to sever the arms, legs, and heads of Iraqi soldiers protruding from the sand after being buried alive by bulldozers attached to tanks, capitalism today tries to sanitize its crimes so that the body count seems lower and less dramatic to American citizens, many of whom get their political education from the likes of CNN, FOX News or their local newspapers. The victims of capitalism are rendered faceless and soul-less by transforming them into unemployment statistics, or by demonizing the poor in



media reports of urban violence and crime. Our prosaic odyssey through the charnel house of global capitalism is not the result of mistakes made by the higher echelon of the corporate world, or by desperate measures taken by the powerless and poor, but is a prior defined by the antagonism between capital and labor. Our position, which we have time to rehearse only briefly here, is that capital grounds all social mediation as a form of value, and that the substance of labor itself must be interrogated because doing so brings us closer to understanding the nature of capital's social universe out of which our subjectivities are created. Because the logic of capitalist work has invaded all forms of human sociability, society can be considered to be a totality of different types of labor. We stress that it is urgently necessary for educators to examine the particular forms that labor takes within capitalism. In other words, value needs to be approached as a social relation, not as some kind of accounting device to measure rates of exploitation or domination. As a result, educators should not take value as simply as a 'given' category, but should render it an *object of critique*, and examine it as an abstract social structure. We need to remember here that the production of value is not the same as the production of wealth. The production of value is historically specific and emerges whenever labor assumes its dual character. This is most clearly explicated in Marx's discussion of the contradictory nature of the commodity form and the expansive capacity of the commodity known as labor-power. In this sense, labor power becomes the supreme commodity, the source of all value (see Rikowski, 2002). For Marx, the commodity is highly unstable, and non-identical. Its concrete particularity (use value) is subsumed by its existence as value-in-motion or by what we have come to know as 'capital' (value is always in motion because of the increase in capital's productivity that is required to maintain expansion). Abstract universal labor linked to a certain organization of society under capitalism is the type of labor that creates value. The dual aspect of labor within the commodity (use value and exchange value) enables one single commodity — money — to act as the value measure of the commodity. Money becomes the representative of labor in its abstract form. Thus, the commodity must not be considered a thing, but a social relationship. Capitalist production in this sense involves the extraction from living labor of all the unpaid hours of labor that amounts to surplus value or profit. If this is the case, and we have argued elsewhere that it is (see McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2001, 2002), we realize that capitalism is not something that can be fixed, or humanized, because its very 'value form' is premised on the exploitation of human labor. We are, in a way, tied to the mast like Ulysses as the sirens of consumption beckon us to a fool's paradise. Yet, even in progressive circles, scholars on the parochial Anglo-American left have dismissed Marxist educators calling for a socialist democracy as extremists or juvenile leftists. Consequently, critical revolutionary educators need to pose to their progressive liberal counterparts questions that include the following: Can liberal reformers — even World Bank dissenters such as Jeff Sachs, George Soros and former Senior Vice President and chief economist of the World Bank and Nobel

Prize recipient, Joseph Stiglitz (2002) — rebuild and redirect the capitalist financial system in the interests of the poor and powerless? Can they prevent the rationality of financial capital — which is more interested in short term profits than investing in fixed capital and long-term technological progress — from prevailing over what is rational from the standpoint of society as a whole? Can they prevent the suffering of workers due to the dismantling of protectionist trade barriers? Can they stop privatization from resulting in oligopolies and monopolies? Can they stop the IMF from bailing out international investors and granting elites the opportunity to protect their financial assets by massive capital flight, while placing the burden of repaying loans, in the words of Tony Smith (2002), “on the very group that benefited least from them, working men and women”? Do they have the power to prevent the gangster capitalists of Russia, for instance, from buying up most of the privatized assets and natural resources of the country? Can they stop the multilateral agencies from advancing the particular interests of the United States? Can they prevent new nation state-driven racisms that follow in the wake of the new U.S. phallomilitary warrior nationalism currently providing ideological ballast for its practices of primitive accumulation via cluster bombing Iraq? Can they transcend the creation of plutocratic political subjectivities from above in order to combat the uneven development of epidemics such as AIS and SARS in the equal opportunity inevitability of death? Can they reverse the damage to the poor that is a result of financial market liberalization accompanied by high interest rates? Can they reverse the systematic tendencies to crises of over-accumulation and financial collapse or the structural mechanisms generating uneven development? Can they prevent speculative bubbles from expanding and bursting? Can the balance of power in capital/wage labor relations shift in favor of labor? Can the fundamental dynamic of capitalist property relations be challenged? Questions such as these cut to the roots of the capitalist system. From the perspective of our analysis, honest answers to these questions will lead to a resounding “no.” Liberal capitalist reformers in the main fail to comprehend “that money is the alien form of appearance of abstract labor” and they refuse to challenge the money fetish as the master trope of capitalist social relations (Smith, 2002). Of course, liberal reform efforts to make global capitalism more ‘humane’ are welcomed — such as debt relief and a more balanced trade agenda, adequate laws enforcing competition, the creation of adequate safety nets and job creation programs, state expenditures to stimulate the economy, appropriate regulatory structures for trade liberalization, making loans available to countries to buy insurance against fluctuations in the international capital markets, cutting back on the bailout packages by the I.M.F., government oversight committees to ensure monopoly powers are not abused, restrictions on speculative real estate lending — but it still remains the case that in the last instance they cannot prevent financial disaster from being visited upon developing countries or the poor in general because these problems are inherent in the system of property and productive relations that constitute the very blood and gristle of the capitalist system (Smith, 2002).

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The key point here is that liberal capitalist democracy sustains the alibi that the corrupt behavior of corporate bosses is an aberration and not the 'spectral double' of law abiding business leaders; it sustains the myth that the 'real' American corporate leader is a church-going philanthropist who wants to contribute to making the United States a better place for working men and women. Liberal democracy occludes the fact that violence (of corporate leaders, police, criminals) is a symptom of liberal democracy's failure to respond to the suffering of others (Zizek, 2002). If we see liberal democracy as a totality then we can recognize it as a dialectical unity of itself and its other. The notion that we live in a meritocracy is the form of appearance of its very opposite: the absence of equality in a society divided by race and class. Liberal democracy, as a master signifier of 'America' constitutes an imaginary supplement or, in Lacanian terms, a 'big Other' that acts on behalf of all citizens, an excess that serves ideologically to justify all acts in its name on the basis that it is ultimately for the common good of humanity. This 'supplement' enables U.S. citizens to endure America's unbearable contradictions such as its lack of medical insurance for the poor, its growing homeless population, its corporate scandals, its institutionalized forms of racism, its torture training center at the School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia, past support of a long list of fascist dictatorships in Guatemala, El Salvador, Iran, Indonesia and Chile, its past funding and training of the Contra terrorists, its invasions of Panama and Grenada, and its recent role in the coup attempt in Venezuela, not to mention its massive financial and military aid to the ruthless Colombian military regime. Drawing attention to these horrors has attracted the condemnation of conservative 'patriots' who feel that this is tantamount to anti-Americanism. Far from justifying the terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2002, it is meant to signal how we should be in solidarity with all victims of terror. As Slavoj Zizek (2002) writes:

We do not yet know all the consequences this event will have for the economy, ideology, politics, warfare, but one thing is certain: The USA — which, hitherto, perceived itself as an island exempt from this kind of violence, witnessing this kind of thing only from the safe distance of the TV screen — is now directly involved. So the alternative is: will the Americans decide to fortify their sphere further, or will they risk stepping out of it? Either America will persist in — even strengthen — the deeply *immoral* attitude of "Why should this happen to us? Things like this just don't happen *here!*," leading to more aggressivity towards the threatening Outside — in short: to a paranoid acting-out. Or America will finally risk stepping through the fantasmatic screen separating it from the Outside World, accepting its arrival in the Real world, making the long overdue move from "A thing like this shouldn't happen *here!*" to "A thing like this shouldn't happen *anywhere!*" That is the true lesson of the attacks: the only way to ensure that it will not happen *here* again is to prevent it happening *anywhere else*. In short, America should learn humbly to accept its own vulnerability as part of this world, enacting the punishment of those responsible as a sad duty, not as an exhilarating retaliation. (pp. 243-244)

If we refuse to endorse the “blatantly ideological position of American innocence under attack by Third World Evil” (Zizek, 2002, p. 244), we must be careful that we do not fall into the trap of blaming the victim. To do this, we can follow Zizek’s (2000) advice and adopt the category of totality and refuse to support both Arab terrorism and U.S. innocence simultaneously, which draws us up against the limit of moral reasoning: “from the moral standpoint, the victims are innocent, the act was an abominable crime; however, this very innocence is not innocent — to adopt such an ‘innocent’ position in today’s global capitalist universe is in itself a false abstraction” (Zizek, 2002, p. 244).

### **Critical Pedagogy and Anti-War Efforts**

The following characterization of the United States by John Bellamy Foster (2001) may be unsettling to some, but it is certainly not far-fetched to anyone acquainted with the United States Cold War history over the past half century: “By any objective standard, the United States is the most destructive nation on earth. It has killed and terrorized more populations around the globe than any other nation since the Second World War” (p. 8). It is precisely this question that critical educators need to engage, as morally repellent as it may be to some. As U.S. tanks roll over the dead and dying in Baghdad and other Iraq cities, we assert that one of the principle contradictions today is between the criminal ruling class of U.S. imperialism, along with its international coalition of big (Britain) and little imperialists (Australia) on the one side, and the exploited and oppressed peoples, nations around the world, on the other. Regardless of the recent so-called Shock and Awe ‘victory’ of Bush and his quislings in Iraq, we argue that the working out of this contradiction constitutes one of the major forms of motion that will eventually determine human history and geography.

Admittedly, the sobering truth is that following the mass slaughter in Iraq a cloud of pessimism will no doubt temporarily engulf the Arab world (do not forget, the Gaza strip is already littered with bodies and ruins) as well as hope-deprived workers in oppressed nations around the world. That is the bad news. The good news is that we are already beginning to see the moral and political limits of the United States ‘old fashioned’ use of imperialist power in its bloody territorial struggles. Even before the invasion of Iraq, a massive anti-war movement developed internationally both in the neo-colonies as well as in the home citadels of imperialism such as the United States and Britain. Whilst the outcome of the anti-war movement is much too difficult to determine in advance, it is clear that in distributing an Old Testament form of moral retribution and imperialist aggression in defiance of international law, Bush has shocked and enraged a broad array of social forces including a whole new generation of youth who are now bristling with militancy and taking the first steps to becoming politically active. Although some of the more politically conscious and active youth already had a profound loathing of U.S.

imperialism and its cruelties (e.g., the anti-sweatshop movement), many more young people including students are now for the first time looking not only for an explanation of what has taken place, but also a program to fight for and a strategy to win (Martin, 2002). They are asking: "What can we do to stop the United States?" This is a question of special importance to those of us living in the homeland of U.S. imperialism, especially given its long history of violent expansionism, gunboat diplomacy and racist oppression that has provided the perks and comforts everyone here gets to enjoy (most people on this planet earn under \$2.00 per day). Recognizing that our political representatives (including those in the 'lesser evil' Democrat party) respond primarily to the commands of a tiny, corrupt and unaccountable cabal, we argue that the only historic force that can put an end to U.S. imperialism is the multi-racial, gendered working class and radical youth in the United States, who increasingly have nothing left to lose. Let us be clear. We are not advocating the overthrow of the government or encouraging anyone to engage in illegal activities. But we do believe that the effects of the anti-war movement are just one indication of the latent but explosive potential to create broad opposition to imperialism in the United States. Events like this provide a glimpse of how a mass uprising of people might be developed to weaken U.S. imperialism and to get rid of production for profit along with its attendant antagonisms including patriarchy, national oppression (e.g., Black, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Native American, Hawaiian and other oppressed and indigenous peoples), and white supremacy. It was, after all, the genocide of indigenous peoples and the theft of their lands that provided the material foundation for U.S. empire.

Our starting point is that socialism is not a discredited dream. It is a current that runs through periods such as the menacing present and is animated by and in struggle against all forms of oppression and exploitation. Whilst the anti-war movement will undoubtedly have to overcome certain internal problems to grow much larger and to curb future wars in Syria, Iran or Venezuela, what we are seeing today is the emergence of a completely new quality of social consciousness that could provide the concrete basis for an internationalist political movement (Bloom, 2003). What matters here is that against the backdrop of U.S. imperialism, the only way students are ever going to win lasting 'peace' or the right to a decent education or job is through the linking of their struggles with all the victims of the vicious ruling class, including workers whose blood, sweat and toil is the living fuel that makes the economy run (Bloom, 2003; Rikowski, 2002).

In creating the conditions for social change, then, the best pedagogy recognizes the limits of traditional 'pragmatist' reformist pedagogical practice by prioritizing the need to question the deeper problems, particularly the violent contradictions (e.g., the gap between racism and the American Dream), under which students are forced to live. This means confronting the anti-intellectual thuggery that pervades teacher education programs, particularly the kind that "rejects 'theory' (the knowledge of totality)" (Zavarzadeh & Morton, 1994, p. 3). Acknowledging that

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capitalist education acts as a drag on the development of 'critical' or 'class' consciousness by presenting a lifeless world empty of contradictions, we argue for a Marxist theory of the 'big picture,' which enables people to translate their daily free-floating frustrations with the 'system' into a set of ideas, beliefs and practices that provide the basis not only for coherence and explanation but also action (Zavarzadeh & Morton, 1994, p. 3).

Against tremendous odds, the challenge over the last several decades has been to humanize the classroom environment and to create pedagogical spaces for linking education to the praxiological dimensions of social justice initiatives and to that end we are indebted to critical pedagogy. Yet, faced with the urgency for change, approaching social transformation through the optic of revolutionary critical pedagogy ratchets up the struggle ahead. Revolutionary critical pedagogy dilates the aperture that critical pedagogy has struggled to provide teachers and students over the last several decades by further opening up the pedagogical encounter to its embeddedness in globalized social relations of exploitation and also to the revolutionary potential of a transnational, gender-balanced, multiracial, anti-imperialist struggle. A revolutionary critical pedagogy raises the following questions for consideration by teachers, students, and other cultural workers: How can we liberate the use value of human beings from their subordination to exchange-value? How can we convert what is least functional about ourselves as far as the abstract utilitarian logic of capitalist society is concerned — our self-realizing, sensuous, species-being — into our major instrument of self-definition? How can we make what we represent to capital — replaceable commodities — subordinate to who we have also become as critical social agents of history? How can we make critical self-reflexivity a demarcating principle of who we are and critical global citizenship the substance of what we want to become? How can we make the cultivation of a politics of hope and possibility a radical end in itself? How can we de-commodify our subjectivities? How can we materialize our self-activity as a revolutionary force and struggle for the self-determination of free and equal citizens in a just system of appropriation and distribution of social wealth? How can we make and remake our own nature within historically specific conventions of capitalist society such that we can make this self-activity a revolutionary force to dismantle capitalism itself and create the conditions for the development of our full human potential? How can we confront our 'producers' (i.e., social relations of production, the corporate media, cultural formations and institutional structures) as an independent power?

Completely revolutionizing education does not depend upon the great white men that capitalist education teaches us are our presidents, heroes and role models. It relies upon the broad masses of people recognizing that the whole system is worthless and must be transformed to reflect their interests. This is the strength of a revolutionary critical pedagogy, that it is an orientation of fighting for the interests of the multi-racial, gendered working class and indigenous peoples all the way

through. It seeks to transform schools into political and cultural centers, where crucial questions — from international affairs to education policy — are debated and struggled over openly. It is a pedagogy that not only conjures up the audacious urges of the oppressed but also enables them to fight back against the system's repeated attacks by raising people's understanding of their political opponents and developing their organization and fighting position. It is a call to battle, a challenge to change this monstrous system that wages permanent warfare against the world and the planet, from cost-effectiveness state terror in the 'homeland,' to the dumping of toxic chemicals on Native American lands and communities of color and the devastating bombing campaigns against sovereign nations. It is a pedagogy of hope that is grounded in the unfashionable 'reality,' history, and optimism of oppressed peoples and nations inside and outside of this country. It is a pedagogy against empire. Because of this, we will settle for nothing less.

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